

GOSPEL SERMONS

Volume 2



by
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"The Hearing Of The Heart"

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Let's turn to this parable this evening. Matthew 13 is our portion of Scripture, and as I've said it's one of the most important Scriptures relating to Gospel preaching and Gospel listening, listening to the message of the good news, especially in this modern age. The irony is that you seldom hear it preached on, especially in a meeting like this on a Sunday night where the gospel is meant to be expounded. I think the reason for that is perhaps because there are so many different understandings of the passage, or even understandings of what a Christian is. Even if you're not terribly religious or haven't been around too long, you'll know that there's even a dispute on regarding what a Christian is. Some people will tell you: 'Well, it's just someone who goes to church, to a Christian church, whatever denomination it may be, Protestant or Catholic does not matter'. Others will tell you: 'Well, no, you have to be baptised and catechised, and on the roll, and be a communicant and all the rest of it'. Then there are those who say: 'Well, the Bible teaches that, no, you need to be born-again by the Spirit of God' - and we believe that that's what the Scriptures do teach.

The sad fact of the matter is that there's a dispute on not just in the world regarding what a Christian is, but this modern age that we live in has witnessed another phenomenon which is a subtle difference of opinion or emphasis among so-called evangelicals regarding the question of what makes you a Christian. Even evangelicals are debating and fighting among themselves - now what am I talking about? Well, let me sum it all up in the words of a man called A.W. Tozer, he said this: 'A whole generation of Christians has come up believing that it is possible to accept Christ without forsaking the world'. Let me read that to you again: 'A whole generation of Christians has come up believing that it is possible to accept Christ without forsaking the world'.

I believe that this is one of the greatest curses of our age, especially in Northern Ireland. Let me be more specific and give an example of what I'm talking to you about. This is the type of person who thinks they are a Christian because they agree with the message of the gospel. They believe it's true, and maybe one night at a meeting like this they have put their hand in the air in response to an invitation, or maybe they have prayed a prayer that's been written on the back of a gospel leaflet, or that someone has led them to pray - and like a mantra or a magic spell, they feel that because they have responded in whatever way it might be, coming down an aisle or whatever, that God is obliged to save them. Maybe they have been quoted verses like Acts 16:31: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved', and they say: 'There it is, I believe, I agree that Jesus came into the world, He was the Son of God, He bled and died for my sins, He rose again, I agree with that and I want this salvation, so God must give it to me!'.

This is particularly prevalent and common in those who have been reared in Christian families. Children grow up, and they have no argument with the message of the gospel, and they sort of naturally fall into line with their parents, and they intellectually give assent to everything that the gospel is - but the question I'm asking tonight is: are all of them really saved just because they agree with the Gospel? We even get evangelists, and if a person is concerned about their soul they will open the Bible to them, and they will pray a prayer with them, and after they pray that prayer they will assure them: 'Now, you're saved now, because you prayed that prayer and God has promised to listen to the sinner's prayer, so you're saved' - and they give the sinner the assurance of salvation.

Now what is the fruit of this type of preaching and this type of evangelisation? Well, I believe the fruit of it can be openly seen around us in Ulster: people running around, professing Christ with their lips, and their lives are a complete contradiction to their claims. It's not just the young people now! Young and old alike, because at some time in their past they prayed a prayer, they did a deed, they believe that they are saved - yet in the present they have no desire to be among God's people, they maybe

even scorn and laugh at Christians, they have no thirst to read God's word, they have no yearning to pray to God or at least to learn to pray. There is no holiness in their life whatsoever. To put it bluntly, they're no different than everybody else in the whole wide world.

My friends, I want to say to you tonight: that is not what a Christian is. I don't care what bill of goods you have been sold, or the preaching you have heard, that is not a child of God. Now please don't misunderstand what I'm saying: I'm not saying you're saved by good works - you're far from it! You can only be saved, not by your own righteousness, but the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. That's why Christ came into the world: He is the only one able to live up to God's standard, for He is God's Son, and He came to live a righteous life among men, He went to the cross, and the Bible says that there He took your sin, and in taking your sin He was exchanging your sin for His righteousness to give you His holiness that you may come into the presence of God - not in your own strength, but in His goodness. The Bible says that on the third day He rose again, and He is alive tonight, and He is able to save men - and it's simply by faith that we are saved, not by works - not by works of righteousness which we have done, the Bible says. Therefore texts like Acts 16:31 are true - praise God: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved'. Romans 10 and 13: 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved'. The Lord Jesus said Himself in John 6:37: 'Them that the Father give me will come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out' - all of those verses are gloriously true! But I say to you tonight: they're not little Gospels on their own. They are from a bigger Bible, and this bigger Bible has many other verses, and many of these other verses tell us how we can know that we are truly Christians.

You see, coming to Christ alone can never be evidence of being truly saved. Jesus Himself said in Matthew 7:22: 'Many will say to me on that day of judgment, Lord, Lord, did we not cast out devils in thy name? Do many wonderful works in thy name?', and He will say 'Depart from me, I never knew you'. In fact, in the life of the Lord Jesus it says in John's gospel that many believed in His name when they saw the miracles that He did. When they saw, the people saw what Jesus could do for them, O they all believed in Him - but the Bible says Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because he knew all men. Now whoever you are, what I'm encouraging you to ask yourself tonight is: am I sure I am a Christian? Whatever you've done, wherever you've been, whatever you've prayed, whatever you said I don't care - just ask yourself: are you sure you're a Christian? Or ask yourself: where is the evidence that I am a Christian? If you were to stand in a court of law and be convicted for being a child of God, what evidence could be brought for your cause?

Now some people might say: 'Boy, you're off the mark tonight, you should never cause people to doubt their salvation!'. I'll tell you, that is wrong - the most biblical thing I can do tonight is do what Peter said: 'Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure'. Paul put it in 2 Corinthians: 'Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves'. Now if you wish to know how you can be sure that you're really saved, the parable has the answer. The Lord Jesus who knows all men's hearts, knows how men's hearts respond to this message of the gospel. As the preacher, that's who's going forth here in the parable, sowing the seed, as he goes forth preaching the word of God, Jesus says that there are four different responses to the good news of the gospel that men can have in their hearts. You're one of them - maybe you think you're one and you're not - well, let's see and diagnose what you are this evening.

Incidentally, before we do that, let me say that one of the first lessons in this parable, as a side issue, is a lesson to preachers. The Lord Jesus Christ shows this farmer, and he's sowing the good seed of the word of God. He doesn't invent his own modern counterfeits, there are no clever gimmicks here, because it is only the word of God that will make the difference, will save the sinner. We are born-again not by corruptible seed, but by the incorruptible seed of the word of God which liveth and abideth forever. Here is the lesson to every preacher, and indeed every church: give people the pure word of God! That's what they need!

But the next lesson is how to listen to the word of God, and these are the responses, and indeed they are in every congregation in the land tonight: these four hearts are in residence even in this place. I wonder what your heart condition is. Let's look at the first, it's found in verse 4, it is the hard heart, the interpretation is given in verse 19. Verse 4: 'And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and

the fowls came and devoured them up', and then when we turn to verse 19 the Lord Jesus gives the interpretation, 'When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the evil one', the wicked one, the devil, 'and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side'.

Now let me explain this to you - maybe James, a farmer, could explain it better! The wayside here in Palestine was very hard ground, it was not stone as such, but it was so hard that the seed, as the sower sows it, cannot penetrate into the ground. In fact, it was like a pathway that was a right of way, and because people had trodden across the ground it had got hard - so hard that it couldn't receive God's word. Now what Jesus is saying is that when people hear the gospel, and they hear about the love of Jesus, and how Jesus suffered on the cross for them and bore their sin, people with hearts like this ground, they're so hard that it is nothing to them! It doesn't figure with them, they don't shed a tear, their heartstrings aren't pulled, they just don't feel anything. They have a wilful conscious rejection of Christ and His gospel. It is characterised in a lack of urgency within these people, and maybe you're one of them this evening. You could take or leave this stuff, but you don't feel urgency. James talked about how he was kept awake at night under conviction of sin, he couldn't get peace or satisfaction, and that was because his heart at that point was not hard, God had started to break up the fallow ground. But are you here tonight, and you just don't really care about all this Christian stuff? Maybe you even dispute that conversion is not necessary. You don't have to be antagonistic, you don't have to be hostile, you just need to be indifferent and apathetic, and it wouldn't be hard because that's the spirit of the age - particularly in our land - regarding the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sometimes people's hearts become hard because not only have they closed their hearts to the gospel, but they have opened their hearts to all sorts of other influences of the devil that is continually plucking the seed of the word of God away from them. It could be other faiths or cults, it could even be the occult, people who have dabbled in Satanism or Spiritism, and they have allowed Satan to have a stronghold, a foothold in their lives so that they cannot respond and hear the gospel as they ought. But there's a principle here regarding the hard heart, it is this: if you harden your heart against the gospel, you will develop an unresponsive heart. You might choose at one point in your life not to respond, but there will come a day, if you keep on reacting like that, that you will not be able to respond. Oh, I pray to God this evening that there'll be no one like this in our meeting. You see, you have a responsibility as soon as you hear God speaking to you, to listen and to receive God's Word. That's why Jesus said as He even told this parable: 'Let him that has ears to hear, hear'. In verse 12 He tells us that to whom is given and they receive it, more will be given; but if you're given something and you won't receive it, what you already have will be taken away. There is a depreciating factor here.

In other words, if you don't use the knowledge that God's word gives you, you'll lose it. Sure it's the same with your muscles, if you don't use it you'll lose it. It's the same with your mind, if you don't use it you'll lose it. Well, it's the same with God's word, and I pray and plead with you tonight that if you hear an inkling of God's voice this evening, if He starts to stir up your heart towards the things of God: fan those flames, don't douse them, preserve them! You see, you could be too busy - I think some people with these hard hearts are too busy to be saved. Someone has said, like the pathway, your life is beat hard asphalt with the frantic feet of your to-ing and fro-ing everywhere you go. You have room for pleasure, room for business, but for Christ the crucified not a place that He can enter in the heart for which He died. Could it be that the only way that God can save you is to break your hardened heart? He doesn't choose to break everybody's hard heart, He's not obliged to. But please, I beg of you tonight, do not tempt the Lord to break your heart: I don't know how He'll do it, I don't know what means He'll use to do it, but if He does it, He will break you completely! The better option would be to plead tonight: 'O Lord, chasten me not in Thine hot displeasure, rebuke me not in Thine anger, but have mercy upon me; according to Thy lovingkindness blot out my transgressions, forgive my sin'.

That's the hard heart, but we've got to move on. The second is the shallow heart, it's found in verse 5: 'Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away'. Jesus gives the interpretation in verse 20: 'He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but continues for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word,

by and by he is offended'.

Well, let's go back to Palestine, because the stony ground was not ground full of stones, it was a narrow skin of earth that was a shelf of soil above a plate of limestone. So you've got a couple of inches maybe of the earth, but below it there is this hard rock, so the earth is shallow. Much of Galilee was like that, and when the seed fell into the ground it germinated alright, but because the soil was so shallow there was little nourishment in the soil for the seed, there was little moisture, the heat of the sun would beat down - and soon that little sprout would be withered away, it would die! Here we have the shallow heart, who is this? It's the person who receives the word of God, it even says with joy! Oh, they rejoice! 'God loves me, Christ died for me, my sins can be forgiven', and they are easily convinced - but they are equally easily put off.

The shallow heart is the emotional response to Jesus Christ. It is joy! You see, your soul is made up of three things: it is made up of the emotion, it is made up of the intellect, and it is made up of your will. The emotion says in the shallow heart: 'I will have Christ, I want everything that Christ gives to me', but this seed of God's word has not penetrated their intellect. They don't understand what it will cost them to be a Christian - that it's everything, it's their life, they must leave their sin. It hasn't penetrated their will, so that they are repentant and say: 'I'm finished with sin, with God's help I will not return to it'. You see what happens, doesn't it? This superficial experience where they have tasted God's power at a meeting, and made an emotional decision, but they don't mentally realise the cost, and they don't exercise a willingness to pay the cost - when troubles comes and persecution arises, they fall away. They fail, and you'll hear them round these doors - what do they say? 'Och, I tried that, it didn't work for me' - like a bottle of medicine! 'It didn't work for me, I tried it' - my friend, they did not taste of eternal life at all, what they had was an impulsive response to the gospel.

I'll tell you, many of the enemies of the faith who come into the church and sow the seeds of false doctrine arise within the church originally in this way - an emotional response to the gospel. Let me say to every preacher tonight, that we must never adopt the approach of the recruitment sergeant when we're preaching the gospel. What is that? You talk of the proud uniform, you talk of the privilege of serving the country, you talk of the row of medals that you'll get for great victory, the prestige and the respect in family and society - but you don't tell them of the bloody realities of the battlefield, the cost of war. You see, Jesus taught, if He taught anything, that the Christian life will cost you everything.

Now please don't misunderstand what I'm saying: the Christian life is the greatest life, it is a life of joy, it's a life of peace. Jesus said: 'Come unto me all ye that labour with the world's weight and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. I will give you my peace, my yoke is easy and light'. But friend, it'll cost you your sin. You can't come into the kingdom with your sin intact. It will cost you yourself, it'll maybe cost you your friends, and this is the message of the gospel: whatever it costs you, you must be willing to pay it, otherwise you have a shallow heart. Jesus said: 'If needs be that you have to forsake father or mother, husband and wife, children and parents for my sake and the gospel, you must do it'. You see, the shallow heart is someone who doesn't think the thing through - and we all know it's easier to start a thing than it is to finish it.

How do you know if you've a shallow heart tonight? Well, let me ask you: are you attracted to Christianity? Are you interested in the Bible? Do you love the doctrines of prophecy, or all the controversial things? Maybe you've been reading 'The Da Vinci Code', or other books that talk about the Bible. Maybe you're interested in the Lord's return, maybe you're interested in Armageddon, maybe you're in the Orange or the Black and you're interested in Protestantism, maybe you're even interested in Christ! You have an emotional embrace about it all, you love being among Christians, you love going to meetings like this, but the fact of the matter is: the Saviour has never got beyond the circumference of your life.

You see, it's either all or nothing. Oh, only a little faith in Christ will save you, there's no doubt about that, I believe that reading the Bible - even childlike faith will save a man, but it must be the faith of the whole man!

'Is there a thing beneath the sun,

That strives with thee my heart to share?
Ah! Tear it thence, and reign alone,
The Lord of every motion there!

Let us make certain that our response to Jesus Christ has not been an impulsive, purely emotional one. That could be why you're in the difficulty that you're in: you've come to the Lord and asked Him to save you over and over again and again, and you can't get rid of the shackles of the sin that you're living in!

Well, let's look at the third heart, the crowded heart. We'll read the interpretation in verse 22: 'He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful'. It's full of thorns. Now farmers can be lazy, present company excepted! At times what they used to do was they cut the heads off these weeds, maybe even down to the very layer of the ground, some of them even went as far as to burn the evidence that there were weeds there - but the fact of the matter was, deep down under the surface there was still the roots. In time, what happens? They all grow up in their strength, and in among those weeds there have been sown the flowers and the crops, and when they come up the weeds grow around them and choke the life that's in them.

This is the crowded heart, a heart that's preoccupied with the things of this world. In other words, a double-sighted heart - a heart that sees Christ and everything that's in Him, but also sees the world and the attractions that are there, and the pleasures of sin. It's a divided heart, in other words it's someone who wants the best of both worlds. They want to have one foot in heaven and one foot on the earth. My friend, I want to tell you tonight on the authority of God's word - I don't care what anybody else says, whatever preacher or church or evangelist - that won't do Christ. That won't do Christ! Jesus said no man can serve two masters, for either he will love the one and hate the other. The book of 1 John, I encourage you to read it, says that him that sins and continues to live in sin, and says that he's a child of God, is deceiving himself and lying to his own heart and those around him! You can't have your sin and have Christ!

This is an experience of the crowded heart, who is a person who has emotionally embraced the gospel, maybe it has also affected their intellect because they have understood it, but it has never affected their will - they have never been able to give up their sin! Now people will say to me: 'Ah, well, you're not preaching faith alone now, you see. You're saying that somebody has to do something before they're saved'. Maybe you're not a saved person here, and you're saying: 'I can't repent, you're telling me to do something I can't do. I can't let go of my sin' - praise God that you have that realisation, because you can't do it, and I'm not asking you to do something that you can do. Repentance is a change of mind, I know you can't repent of your sin - you need God to repent of your sin, and repentance, I believe, is a gift of God - but you've got to be willing to leave your sin if you want the power to leave it. Sure that's common sense, if nothing else. If you're not willing to leave your sin, why should God give you the power to do it? God has power to achieve repentance in your life, even tonight, but you must be willing!

Let me tell you a story quickly about a rich young man, and do you know something? He kept all the commandments - I have no reason to believe that externally, outwardly, he wasn't blameless. We read that the apostle Paul was blameless in the keeping of the laws, so there's no reason why this rich young man wasn't as well. He came to Jesus, and Jesus knew about this man, because Jesus was God, the Lord and Christ. He could see into his heart, just as He can see into yours tonight. The young man said: 'What do I need to do to inherit eternal life?'. Jesus said: 'Keep the commandments', and He rhymed them all off, and the man said 'I've kept them from my youth'. Then Jesus knew 'This is a religious man, this is a moral man, here's a man who has grasped the gospel truth of the law in his mind, here is a man who emotionally has embraced My truth and My law' - but there was something that was holding that man from coming to Christ: he was very rich. So Jesus told him: 'Sell all that you have, and give it to the poor', and that young man's face dropped, and it says that he went away sad. Jesus began to tell His disciples and the crowd how it was easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to get into heaven, for a man that loves things as much or more than Christ - whatever those things may be, legitimate or illegitimate. Maybe you're sitting here and saying: 'That's why there's no hope for me!'. Well, Jesus didn't finish there, because at the end of this story He said:

'But what is impossible with men is possible for God'.

This young man thought he had to do it all himself. He just had to be willing, it was God who had the power. The question I'm asking you tonight is: if you're in danger of being or becoming a crowded heart, are you willing to give up your sin? Now listen carefully: because if you're not willing to give up your sin, you're not saved! Strong stuff.

Then finally there is the fruitful heart, verse 23: 'He that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty'. Here's the clean soil, the prepared heart. God has prepared it, and it's deep soil that the seed may plummet into the depths of and take root, and flourish and change and draw nutrients, and add to. You see that the seed doesn't just bounce off this heart like the hard heart. It's not a momentary thing that goes on for a couple of weeks in the emotion of it all, that they flourish and then when the heat comes they are scorched and die. It's not destroyed by the competing desires and influences of the world and the flesh and the devil. Here is a heart that truly believes and receives deep rooted into the heart, and the proof of it is that they bear fruit to the glory of God - a harvest character!

Do you have a harvest character? God's word says that the fruit of the Spirit is joy, love, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, temperance, meekness. Then it produces a harvest of good works, Paul says: 'We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them'. My friend, this is a fruitful heart. This is a verse I'm about to quote to you now which you will very seldom hear at a Sunday night meeting like this anywhere, Hebrews 12:14: 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord'. Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord! I saw a title of a book on one occasion, and it was this 'No Holiness, No Heaven'. Holiness won't take you to heaven, holiness is the proof that you're going to heaven. Do you have it, my friend? It's not your own righteousness, it's the righteousness of Christ that's manifest in you through your life as Christ has changed you. You see, if you're saved by the word of God, the word of God will produce fruit in your heart - the fruit of a changed life! Jesus said: 'By their fruits ye shall know them'. James said: 'Faith without works is dead'.

Oh, I know that all do not produce to the same degree, the same frequency, but nevertheless all produce. I know that all of us at one time or another, at least most of us, have backslidden - but I have to tell you tonight, I fear that I cannot see in the Bible the type of backsliding that we have invented in some places in Ulster! You sing 'Just as I am', and then go away and live as a reprobate! Jesus said: 'No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'. You must have a fruitful heart.

Can I ask you in closing tonight: which heart are you? Which are you? The hard heart, the shallow heart, the crowded heart, or the fruitful heart? Jeremiah said: 'The heart is deceitful', so be careful that you're sure which heart you have tonight. You might say: 'Are you trying to get people to doubt their salvation?' - I'd rather cause some of you to doubt your salvation and be sure of it, than make false Christians by leading you down the garden path and whispering in your ear 'Peace, peace', when there is no peace. It's a good thing to doubt your salvation, if you have a salvation that ought to be doubted! It's better to doubt and go to heaven, than never doubt and go to hell.

Let us pray. I don't know what your circumstances are, I've just preached the word that I feel the Lord has given me. If you've heard and understood it, and believe it's true that Jesus died for you, and through Him and Him alone, not your own righteousness, but His righteousness and His blood you can be saved - you must believe that gospel, and you must be willing to forsake your sin. He will give you the power to become a son of God. You will diagnose your own heart this evening as a fruitful one, good ground, if you can bring yourself both to believe Jesus Christ and to repent of your sin.

For everyone: maybe you're a child or a young person in this meeting, and you think that you've been saved, maybe you're not sure now. Make sure! How many of us that have grown up the Christian homes have not had to, at some time, make a rededication to know that we were sure that we were saved? You do it, and be sure. But please don't leave tonight with a hard or a shallow or a crowded

heart.

Father, help those who are in our meeting tonight, whatever their heart condition, to know as they go away tonight the assurance that they're saved. Oh, dear God, let no one here be under an illusion, and let none have the seed of the word of God snatched as they depart from our meeting tonight. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

"Losing Christ"

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That was good singing, let's turn to Luke's Gospel chapter 2 to our portion that we're considering this evening under this title 'Losing Christ'. It may seem an obscure title to many of you but, Lord willing, as we go through these verses tonight you'll get the gist of the message that I believe the Lord has laid on my heart to you all this evening.

If you've any children and you're in the gathering this evening, one thing will be sure: your children will be precious to you. Of course, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in God's sight, and all should be precious in all our sights. None of us should ever seek to harm them or condone any harm towards them. But the fact of the matter is: there are no children like your own children - isn't that a fact?

Well, I want you to consider tonight what it must have been to have been the parent, or the guardian, of the Lord Jesus Christ. What must it have been to have had a child like the Christ child? All of us who are parents recognise in our children unique and lovable traits, but what must Joseph and Mary have recognised when they looked at their little boy? What would they have observed in Him? Well, Luke gives us a bit of a glimpse into their home life in verse 40, where we read: 'The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him'. Then in verse 52: 'And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man'. Most parents will have, somewhere along the way, discipline problems. They'll struggle with how to deal with certain idiosyncrasies in their particular child, whatever they may be, but those are problems - whilst so familiar to parents, all of us who are parents, all of us who can remember being children, how we at times riled our parents - this is something that was foreign and unknown to Joseph and Mary.

Could you ponder just for a moment what the memories must have been like, for Joseph and Mary, of the Christ child? Sacred memories of His birth, for you remember that His birth was miraculous. The Lord Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Ghost in the virgin womb of Mary before she was even married to Joseph. You remember, after His birth, the mighty deliverance that came from the wicked hand of Herod, who wanted to wipe out all the children under two years of age in order to put to death the Christ child - but how God delivered Christ from Herod's infanticide. Can you imagine, as they looked as parents at the Christ child, what hopes must have been in their breast? You look at your own children, or your parents look at you, and the hopes that they have for your achievement, and they fear for you, and they perhaps will even fight for you in order to get your goals and your dreams and desires realised. But how different it was for Joseph and Mary, because as they looked at the Lord Jesus Christ as a lad, they could remember angelic salutations.

In fact, in chapter 1, if you look at it, Luke chapter 1 verse 32, we read: 'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end'. In verse 35 again: 'And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God'. As we go through Luke's narrative we find a woman, Anna, and as Christ is brought by his parents into the temple this old prophetess, as she sees the Lord Christ and Messiah, the Saviour of the world, rejoices in her heart and sings praise unto God, and tells all the people who she comes in contact with that Christ has been born.

Then how can we forget Simeon's reaction, in chapter 2 of Luke and verse 34 we read: 'And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy

own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed'. What a beginning this child had on the earth. What memories His earthly guardians had of His inception into humanity, salutation by angelic hosts, by angelic declarations from God, rejoiced by prophetesses and great men like Simeon. They looked at this Christ child, and just as we look at our children and see all our hopes and fears wrapped into one, she could see all the prophecies of the men of God and the patriarchs of the past in that one child - as far as they were concerned, their child.

It's indescribable, isn't it, the hopes and dreams that Joseph and Mary saw wrapped up in that little boy? What's even more indescribable must be how they cherished Him, how they must have treasured Him. Yet what I want you to consider tonight is that, though they would have cherished and treasured Him, I would say more than any of us could cherish our children, or than our parents cherished us, the tragedy of the story tonight that we have before us is: one day they lost Him! Now I have to be honest with you tonight, that as I have read this record many many times, it amazes me to absolution: how they could have lost such a child as the Lord Jesus Christ. Now I have to be cautious here, because many preachers and expositors are always guilty of criticising saints in the past, unfairly so - but I have to be honest with you: how could they have let such a lad out of their sight as the Christ child? Especially when you consider what a busy place Jerusalem was, and what a busy place Jerusalem was during the Passover feast. All the pilgrims from all around were coming together, and furthermore what never ceases to amaze me is that it took them a day to realise that their son had disappeared!

Now we almost feel like charging them with gross irresponsibility, or dereliction of their parental duties. But while I censure, for a moment, Mary and Joseph in their neglect, it would seem, of their child - right away I feel condemned in my own heart. Why should I feel condemned? Simply because, with a million other people upon this globe, I have been guilty of the self same thing. There are times in my life that I have lost the company of the Lord Jesus Christ as well. I'll be speaking a little bit to some Christians in our meeting this evening, and I ask you the question: have you ever had the experience of losing Christ in your life? The hymn writer put it like this:

'Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I 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
This world can never fill'.

The first thing that I want to bring your attention to from these texts is how easy it is to lose Jesus. I want to speak to Christians for just a moment, because many Christians, for most of their lives, have had a testimony with the Lord Jesus. They have walked their life and have guarded the presence of Christ in their life. They have guarded the presence of Christ from the Herods of this world, those things that have tried to take Christ away from you, temptation and sin that have tried to entice you, and have tried to get you to sell Him for 30 pieces of silver. Yet through all your life you have cherished Christ, and maybe up to recently you have cherished Him and guarded your testimony before Him. Yet, like Mary and Joseph, maybe oblivious to it, a day or two passes and you find that you yourself are estranged from Christ. You have lost Him.

Now please don't misunderstand what I'm saying: I believe in the doctrine of eternal security. I believe that once you are truly saved, and genuinely saved of course, you're always saved for time and eternity - you cannot fall from grace, if it is true grace, at all. But one thing you can do as a child of God is fall out of fellowship with the Saviour, you can lose the sense of His presence, you can lose His company in your home, in your family, in your church, in your individual personal life. Maybe you're sitting here in the meeting tonight, and you call yourself a Christian, and you've made sure, perhaps, almost all of your life that you've guarded His presence and you've tried to keep as close to the Saviour as possible, but you're here tonight and you don't know really how it happened or when it happened, but you know full well that the Lord is not in your life the way He used to be and the way He ought to be.

You may not know the reason, maybe you do know the reason: the particular sin that has sent Him away from you. But I say, and I believe every child of God must confess, that there are often days in our lives when quite happily we are without the presence of the Saviour. We let days pass into oblivion, and oh that tonight everyone in this building, saint and sinner alike, would consider that enough time has passed and enough distance has traversed without Christ in your life, without communion with Him. Oh that tonight you would exhort the example of Joseph and Mary, and swiftly you would seek Him.

Of course, what is true of the Christian in another sense is true of the unbeliever. This Christ child was not just given to Mary and Joseph, this child was not just given to the nation of Israel, it was not just given to the church of Jesus Christ, but this Christ child was given to the world - 'for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son'. Titus 2 verse 11 tells us: 'For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men'. The Lord Jesus Christ, in a sense, has been given to you to be your Saviour, for He has been given to all men upon the face of this globe - whatever creed or culture or religion they belong to. Yet the tragedy of the story of the Christ child in John 1 and verse 11 is that: 'He came unto his own', in Israel, 'and his own received him not'. Effectively there has been a mass rejection by all of humanity of this Christ child.

In Mark's gospel chapter 5 and verse 17 there is a story of the demoniac of Gadara, and the Lord Jesus came and miraculously delivered him of the legions of demons - so much so that everybody could look in the town around, and see the man sitting, clothed and in his right mind. Some were astonished, several believed, but we read this tragic statement in verse 17 of Mark 5: 'Then some of them began to pray him to depart out of their coasts'. They didn't understand the power that this man displayed, and for fear of Him and fear of what He would do if He encroached upon their lives, they sent Him away. They began to plead with Him to depart out of their coasts.

When Peter and John were praying in Acts chapter 4, we read these words: 'For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together'. Rome and Israel, for the first time in their history, were together against the Christ child. The Bible teaches that one day all the nations of the world will gather together against Israel and against her Christ. Though the Saviour has been given to the whole wide world, Christ has been lost to it, for this world has rejected Christ. My friend tonight, if you are person who has never in your life repented of your sin, and by personal faith embraced the Saviour's grace in the gift of the gospel - in other words, if you've never been converted, if you've never been born again - you are among the Christ-rejecting world. How easy it is to lose Jesus.

The second thing I want you to notice is: often the most unexpected people lose Jesus. It wasn't a character like Simeon who lost the Christ, Simeon only nursed the child in his arms once, he had that child close to his breast. But think about this for a moment: it was the very bosom that nurtured and nourished Him in His infancy that lost Him. It was perhaps, arguably the one on earth who loved Him the most, and in an earthly sense the one that the Saviour loved more than she loved Him - and yet they lost Him! With all their appreciation, with all their affection toward Him, they lost Him! I ask you tonight: how many great saints of God, preachers and theologians, and even missionaries and pastors and ministers, have fallen into a pit where they can no longer see Christ's gentle face. They can no longer here His whispering voice, still and small; they can no longer feel the touch of His nail-pierced hands - they have lost Him! They haven't lost their salvation, but they have lost the sense of the company and the presence of the Lord Jesus.

Are you in that position tonight? Can I give you two suggestions of why you may be there, what the reason is? First of all it may be the chastening of the Lord. Like any loving parent that does not spare the rod to spoil the child, God's word teaches us that whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. Whatever you're going through tonight, the fact of the matter is: there are times when we see that God's presence has been withdrawn from us, we may even feel that we're God-forsaken. You know as parents, or as a child, that parents don't always smile upon us, yet they still love us, they're still our parents. Christians go through chastening experiences, disciplining from the very hand of God. The fact of the matter is: if you're truly a child of God, no

matter how dark your days may be, no matter how overcast the clouds are at this present time, God will bring you through! His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour; the bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Take courage, my friend, God's promise still is true. Wherever you are tonight He has said: 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. I will be with thee, even unto the end of the age'. Though you be a disciplined child, rejoice tonight that you're still a child of God, and from your breast wells up that adoption cry: 'Abba, Father'.

The other reason why a Christian in this place tonight may have lost the presence of Jesus is because of deliberate conscious sin. This is so elementary, yet so profound. Isaiah 59 verse 2: 'Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you'. You can't sin and have fellowship with God, I don't care who you are. I don't care whether you assess your sin to be a little white one: you can't sin and not lose the presence and company of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But maybe you don't have Christ tonight? Maybe you're not in a cold or apathetic state that I've been talking about? Maybe you have never been converted? Maybe you've never met the Saviour? Well, a general gospel principle is this truth as well, and it's this: often the most acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ are those that ultimately lose Him. First Peter 4 says: 'If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?'. You remember Adam, the first man, and God made Adam in His own image. God made him the superintendent of the whole of creation, and we read in that paradise, before sin entered, that Adam walked with God and talked with God in the cool of the day. There was a communion that we can only imagine and conjecture about - but God's presence was lost that day in the garden because of sin.

Friend this evening, that is the same reason why Jesus is lost in the lives of men ever since. It doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter who your family is, it doesn't matter your church affiliation, it doesn't matter how many sacraments you have taken and entered into. The fact of the matter is: even the most acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ, even those growing up in Christian homes, and even those who have professed faith in the Lord Jesus, know nothing of His life in their bosom - eternal life, the new life from heaven! How easy it is to lose Jesus, often the most unexpected people lose Him.

Thirdly I want you to notice that this can happen in the most unlikely places. Where did they lose the Lord Jesus? Well, they lost Him first of all at a feast, it was the feast of the Passover. Of course, feasts are often times of happy memories, and I'm sure that you have happy memories of childhood and parenthood and so on, and you cherish them. It's not my wish tonight to be morbid, though I may be accused of being so, but I have to confess to you this evening that I prefer preaching at a funeral rather than a feast. I don't want to offend anybody by saying that, but I mean it. The word of God clarifies what I mean when it says in Ecclesiastes 7: 'It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart'. You see, it's hard to lose Christ at a funeral, but it's easy to lose Christ at a feast.

What am I talking about? Well, when you're kneeling beside a man who is dying, or a woman who is dying, that scenario is more real than attending the FA Cup Final or watching it on television. It's more real than the frivolities of this life. Whilst weddings are lovely occasions, everyone at a wedding is taken up at times with superficial, skin deep beauty and material frill or frivolity. But at a funeral there is a lone figure of a coffin, and there is an open grave, and those items give us a glimpse into the midst of death's cold sobriety, the realities of life and the certainties of eternity. My friend, could it be, and it's only a suggestion, that in the midst of all this feast of the Passover, the frivolity, everything that was going on around them, that they lost Christ?

I believe this is the reason why, in our technology crazed world, God is not in men's thoughts. We've got all the mod cons, all the luxuries and affluence that we would like, technology that blows our mind. I think this is the reason why many young people, because they are so successful, miss Christ. Maybe you're one of those people tonight, and I challenge you: everything is going for you, and that's tremendous, you're living a happy life at present, you've got health, maybe you've got a bit of wealth, maybe your business or your career or your job or your relationship is successful - and all the things in this world, that this world values, are going for you. But the fact of the matter is, as you look out with hope onto your horizon, Christ the Lord is not upon it. He doesn't figure.

Well, I want you to pause for a moment tonight and consider that perhaps this, your most happy moment, could be your most dangerous. I'm sorry, I don't want to shatter your dreams, what I want to do is shatter your illusions and fix your eternity for there is nothing more important than this matter in your life. Now I'm not saying - please don't misunderstand - that we can't enjoy our lives as Christians. If anyone should enjoy their life it should be a child of God, but here is a warning for all of us: let us not lose Christ in our feasts!

Not only did it happen in the most unlikely place, a feast; it happened in the holy city of Jerusalem. I want you to notice please that it mattered not the sacred ground on which they stood, nor the great congregation of pilgrims among whom they travelled. It mattered not the relatives of the Lord Jesus that were round about them, nor the religious label, nor the heritage that they owned, because none of those things prevented them from losing Him. In fact, can I go a step further and say: perhaps those things, in and of themselves, distracted Joseph and Mary; and those sights and sounds of the feast and festival distracted them to such an extent that they forgot about the Saviour! Before they knew it He was gone! That's what people are doing today. They perhaps are in the midst of deep religion, yet they lose Christ. They are among people in our family and their friends who are religious, maybe even Christians, but they have lost Christ themselves. They have Christian associations, they know Christian teachings; maybe they've seen religious hypocrites, and because of that they've been distracted and say: 'I don't want Christ' - and because of religious people they have lost Him.

My friend, this can happen in the most unlikely places. How easy it is to lose Jesus. Often the most unexpected people lose Him. It can happen in the most unlikely places, but I want you to see gloriously tonight: His company can be recovered. His company can be recovered! Look at this couple: they sought Him! How did they seek Him? First of all they sought Him where they lost Him. When they came out of Jerusalem they realised, after a day had passed, that they had lost Him. Not finding Him they went back to Jerusalem, and they went to the place where they lost Him in order to find Him. My friend tonight, you know what it's like when you lose your car keys or your wallet or something like that. You trace back in your mind and try to remember the last time you had it, and the last place that you had it in. The fact of the matter is: usually, if you can remember it, when you visit that place again, you find what you've lost.

Some of you Christians here tonight know where you lost the presence of the Saviour. You know why you lost the presence of the Saviour. Can I exhort you tonight to go and retrace your steps, and go to that place again, and before God repent of that sin and confess it, and find Christ? In fact, I assure you that if you do that you'll find the Saviour! Not only did they seek Him where they lost Him, but they sought Him persistently. They didn't give up after one day looking for the Lord. It says that three days they looked for Him, and then they found Him.

Oh, that people would count their soul precious enough to search, to seek and to find the Saviour in their lives today. We live in an instant society, and if a man thinks that he'll have to inconvenience himself in order to save his soul, he'll lose his soul and he'll lose the Saviour! Maybe you're here tonight and you've put your hand up in a meeting, or you've prayed the sinner's prayer, or you've read something at the back a booklet, and you feel that you're still not saved - in fact, maybe you know you're not saved. Well, if you're not saved, seek the Lord till He saves you! Oh, they persistently sought Him. There's very few people in our world tonight that are persistently, incessantly seeking the Saviour.

Then they sought Him, and I want you to see this, sorrowfully. Mary came to the Christ child, and said in verse 48: 'Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing'. Are you sorrowing because you've lost Christ, and He's lost to you in your life? Well, you need to be, you ought to be! For without Christ you're without hope, and you're lost in eternity! But if you can find godly sorrow for your sin and for your estrangement from the Saviour, the Bible says that godly sorrow worketh repentance not to be repented of. Will you come with tears in your eyes, with a piercing in your heart for your sin, for your iniquity before God? Will you fall on your knees before the Holy One of heaven, and will you confess that you're a sinner, that you're undone, that you're unclean, that you're worthy of judgment and nothing but hell?

If we were to ask the question: where did they find Him? What would the answer be? Was it the place of entertainment? Many are running there to find satisfaction, sadly even Christians. Did they find the Saviour in an inn? Did they find Him in a tavern? Did they find Him playing games in the streets with the other children? Did they find Him in a place of secular education and academic esteem? No! They found Him in the same place as you and I can find Him today: the place where God met men. They found Him at the temple around those discussing the word of God! Where can we find Christ today? In the same place - not a temple, not a church, but the place where Christ is doing the Father's will. 'Where is that?', you say. Jesus said to His disciples: 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish the work that He gave me to do'. One day they led Him up Calvary's mountain, one day they laid Him upon the tree, and they stripped Him, and they spat upon Him. Though men, by wicked hands, took Him, it was God who delivered Him up by His determined counsel to be a sacrifice for men's sins. Though that struggle in the garden brought birth to Calvary love, for love of men He said: 'Not my will, but Thine be done' - and He went to Calvary, and He bled and died to do the will of the Father. Did He finish the work? Three hours after the darkness, when God's wrath was laid upon Him, He cried: 'Tetelestai, It is finished!'. Then they took Him off the cross and they led Him in a tomb. Three days later, so that God would show men that the work was finished, He raised Him from the grave.

That is where Christ is to be found tonight: at the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light; where the burden of my heart rolled away. It was there by faith I received my sight - have you been to the cross? Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power, are you washed in the blood of the Lamb? How will you leave this place tonight? Will you lose Christ again? Will you lose the opportunity to trust Him, to find Him? Will you search for Him where you are? Will you run to Him? Come to Calvary! My friend, better than just saying that He is at Calvary, as if it was something that happened 2,000 years ago, I say tonight in the gospel: He is here! He is here to save you. Will you lose Him again?

Now this message was for everyone tonight, and I trust that all will take it to heart. Has your heart been cold and silent, Christian? Do you know what it is to be estranged from the Saviour? Will you not come to Him again tonight? You know you don't have to be in the pubs and the clubs and in the bookies to be away from the Saviour. Are you not saved tonight, and you have never met the Master? Will you not come this evening and embrace Him? Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near.

Just where you are, if you cry out to God for mercy, there is mercy with the Lord.

Father, we thank Thee for the presence of Christ in this place tonight. We thank Thee that He is no longer a child, He is no longer a corpse hanging upon a cross, He is no longer in a tomb - but He is exalted and ascended, and seated at Thy right hand, a Prince and a Saviour. Lord, we pray that folk, saint and sinner alike, will bow the knee in this place now. I afresh acknowledge Thee as Lord, Lord may we all do so tonight - and may some, for the first time, embrace Him as Saviour. We pray that the Saviour, the Father, and the Spirit, the triune God, will receive all the glory tonight - now and evermore. Amen.

"Good But Guilty"

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Mark's Gospel chapter 10, Mark chapter 10, and I want to read the introductory verses before the story because they are important to the understanding of why this story is here.

Verse 13 of chapter 10: "And they brought young children to the Lord Jesus, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them. And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions" - and we end our reading at verse 22.

Let's bow in prayer now, and really pray and implore the Lord that He may move in our gathering tonight: Lord Jesus, we pray this evening that someone in this place may come to understand, perhaps for the first time ever, the love that You have towards them, the love that was expressed in such a complete and full way when You went to the cross to die for us, and shared Your most precious sinless blood, taking our sins and our sorrows and making them Your very own, bearing our burden to Calvary, suffering and dying alone. Lord, make them understand that, we pray, and draw them out in response by putting their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation. This is something that we cannot make anyone do, it must come from Thy Spirit, and so we pray: do it Lord, now, for the glory of Your name we pray, Amen.

Many of you will have probably sung some of Charles Wesley's hymns, and if you're under the persuasion of that denomination which is called 'Methodist', you'll be familiar with not only Charles Wesley, but probably more so John Wesley. He is famed as the founder of Methodism, and he is probably - along with a man called George Whitefield - one of the greatest evangelists and Gospel preachers that has ever lived. He was born in a place called Epworth on June 28th 1703. His father was a man by the name of Samuel Wesley, he married John's mother Susanna. Susanna happened to be the twenty fifth child of a Dr. Samuel Annesley - imagine that! Twenty five children, or worse: twenty four brothers and sisters! She became the mother of nineteen - so she was a child of twenty five, but Susanna became the mother of nineteen children herself. Samuel Wesley, her husband, John's father, was a graduate of Oxford University, and he eventually became a minister in the Church of England - a very reputable man. But Susannah was the one who undertook responsibility of teaching all of her nineteen children the word of God, explaining to them God's commandments and God's law, and presenting to them the Christ of God who is the Saviour of the world. Eventually at the age of 10, John Wesley was taken from his mother's knee and instruction there, and was admitted to the Charterhouse School in London. Then after that he entered into Christ Church College in Oxford, and years later he was ordained himself as a Church of England minister in 1725. Then, because of his success, he was elected as a fellow of Lincoln College in the following year, and then he was given a Degree of the Master of Arts in 1727. After that he left the university, and he served his father in his particular church as a curate for two years. Then he returned to Oxford in 1729 to fulfil his functions as a fellow of the College.

It was that same year that he began a movement that was called, and is still called, 'Methodism' - that year was the rise of men who sought after God. It used to be called 'The Holy Club', 'The Enthusiasts', perhaps today we would call them 'The Bible Thumpers' - and there in that particular year of his life, he founded Methodism. It included Charles Wesley, it included George Whitefield, and the nickname was given to all its members: 'Methodists', because of their self-discipline and their methodical habits religiously. You would know right away from that biographical description that at this point in John's life, he was an extremely, deeply religious young man. He was trying as far as was in his being to follow after God as he knew best. After that year in that 'Holy Club', he gave himself more fervently to a strict and abstentious lifestyle. He even responded to missionary needs in Georgia in the United States of America, where he felt a certain burden for the Indian population there - the American Indians.

What I want you to note this evening, with such an esteemed biographical account that you've heard this evening of a man of God, we might think, a man who is truly following after God - he decided that he was going to go to the mission field himself. He was going to join the group that he aspired to and admired called the Moravian movement, and before commencing his missionary work with the Moravians, he was interviewed by a man called Mr Spangenberg. He was a Moravian minister, and the first question Mr Spangenberg asked John Wesley was this, listen carefully: 'Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?'. Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God? Now you might say: 'What on earth does that mean?', and you'd be right in thinking that, because John Wesley thought the same thing and he didn't know how to reply. Then he was asked the question more simply, and this is what I want to put to you tonight, Mr Spangenberg said this: 'Do you know Jesus Christ?' - that's what that previous question meant. Are you acquainted, are you related to Jesus Christ?

Now John Wesley replied in a way that many people today reply when they are asked such a question. He said: 'Well, I know He is the Saviour of the world'. I imagine that you know that tonight as well. Mr Spangenberg replied: 'Yes, that's true', but then he asked again persistently, 'But do you know that He, the Saviour of the world, has saved you?'. That's a different question, isn't it? It's a more personal question. So Wesley answered as many people answer today, maybe you're even answering now: 'I hope He has died to save me, I hope, I don't know for sure, but I hope it'. Now if I was to ask you this evening: do you know that Jesus has died for you, and Jesus has saved you? No matter how religious you might be, unless you know it, it's no good just hoping! You're not saved! You're not right with God!

Many years later John Wesley was to write these words: 'I, who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God'. A man who was born into the church, baptised into the church, grew up in a home where his godly mother taught the Scriptures to him, he looked up to the example of his ministerial father, he was sent to the greatest ministerial training colleges in the land in Oxford University. He got all the achievements that a man could want in his particular age and era, he was even going to the mission field, sending all his money, living in poverty and starvation because there were those who needed to hear the Gospel - yet he could say: 'I, who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God'. How many are like him?

Maybe you're like him tonight? Well, it was at a Moravian meeting at Aldersgate Street in London on May 24th 1738, as he listened to the reading of Martin Luther's preface of his commentary on the epistle to the Romans, Wesley said he came to experience saving faith, true faith in God. He says that it happened to him as suddenly that he saw and understood that God receives men by faith, and not by works. I give you his own words describing the experience: 'I felt that my heart was strangely warmed, I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation - and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death'. Hallelujah! Can you say that tonight? Have you had such an experience as John Wesley? Do you know that Jesus died to save you? Do you know Jesus Christ personally as your Saviour? Have you had what is called 'the conversion experience', where the light dawns on your mind and spirit, and you realise that yes, you are sinner, and yes, the loving Saviour died for you and took your shame - and all that is needed is for you to embrace Him in faith alone, and you receive there and then the assurance that your sins are forgiven, and that you're saved.

Now mark what I'm not asking you this evening: I'm not asking you 'are you religious', I'm asking you are you converted? Are you saved? That word 'saved' is a Bible word. Wesley was converted, Wesley was saved. He was religious at one point in his life and he wasn't saved, he had to be saved. He was good, there was no doubt about that, but although he was good he was guilty in the sight of God because he had never freely admitted and confessed his sins, he had never embraced the Christ of God that was sent to save him and died for him - and you know there's millions upon millions of people who call themselves Christians in this world, and they're exactly the same. They're good, but they're guilty! Guilty of rejecting Christ, guilty of rejecting the genuine Gospel that says you don't get into heaven because you're good, or because you're religious, or you're this denomination or that denomination; but you get into heaven because of Christ and Christ alone!

There are other people in the Bible who were good but guilty. There was a man in John chapter 3 called Nicodemus. He was a Rabbi, a member of the Sanhedrin - that is the religious council, as it were, of the day. The Bible says that he was so embarrassed at approaching the Lord Jesus that he came by night, nevertheless he came, and that's the important thing. He said to the Lord Jesus, basically: 'How are You doing these things that You're doing, these great miracles? We believe that You are come from God, because no man can do these things that you do except God is with him'. He recognised that much, that's probably as much as you recognise tonight - that this Gospel we preach is true, that Jesus is the true and only Saviour. The Lord Jesus explained to Nicodemus: 'Look, you need to know something, you've got some of the message, you understand there's something special about Me, Jesus Christ, and the power that is in Me is the power of God - but you must understand that you must be born again!'

Now Nicodemus didn't understand, in fact Jesus went further: not only must you be born again, but except you're born again, you will never see the Kingdom of God. A religious man like Nicodemus! He was astounded, he did not understand, so Jesus began to explain it to him - and Jesus, as it were, very gently rebuked him, and said to Nicodemus: 'Are you a master in Israel and you do not know these things?'. Can I put that into modern day terms? Are you a religious person that has read the Old Testament back to front, and you don't understand that you need to be born again? You need to be converted! It's not enough to be good, because all of us, no matter how good or bad we are, are guilty in the eyes of a holy God.

Paul the apostle was a man that was good, but he was guilty. In Philippians 3 we read that he was an extremely religious Jew, he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and touching the law - that is, the commandments of God - he claimed he was blameless! That's some claim to make, but yet in 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 15 he says these words: 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I', Paul the apostle, the Pharisee of the Pharisees, the one who was blameless in keeping the law, 'of whom I am chief'. He was good, but he was guilty in the sight of God.

Now another, tonight, that I want to show you who was good but guilty is this young man that we read about from Mark's Gospel chapter 10. Here's the first thing that I want to show you from his story, and it's this: he thought that men could be good. He thought that men could be good enough in the eyes of God to inherit eternal life. Now I want you to look at this man very carefully: he's a young man, he is a self-assured, successful young man, if ever there was one. Matthew's Gospel says of him that he had great wealth, that's why we commonly know him as 'the rich young ruler'. Luke's Gospel identifies him as a ruler, he was in charge of other men, he was probably looked up to in the community in which he lived. Therefore he was rich, and he was a ruler, he was an affluent young man and he was a powerful young man. Now, what do most young people today seek after and thirst after? In fact, more than just young people: it is power and it is wealth - wealth and power! Political power, business power, and the wealth that is accrued through that power, the status, the influence that you have. Here is a man at the very threshold of his young life, and it's all at his feet.

We can see from the encounter that he had with the Lord Jesus that he was a self-confident young man. He was a very determined man, that's probably how he got his power and how he got his wealth, but nevertheless we see that in this regard of spiritual matters he saw Jesus, he knew he had a

spiritual question, and he saw what he wanted, so he went! Now we have to commend this young man, because as he came to the Lord Jesus it says that he flung himself at the feet of Christ in a reverent manner. Here is a young man who had both manners and morals. I hope that you're beginning to see the picture that I'm painting tonight: this is a young man that we probably would call today 'an achiever'. During the 80s you probably would have called him a 'yuppie' - he is an exemplary upstanding citizen, that you could point to your little child or grandchild and say: 'Do you see that young man? If you grow up like him, I'll be pleased, I'll be proud of you, son'. But more than that, here was a young man who was not ignorant of spiritual need - he knew that there was something missing within him, he had a need in his life and he felt it!

Evidently, like many people in Palestine of his day, he had either heard or been personally listening to the Lord Jesus Christ. He saw and recognised One greater than himself. He was dazzled, he was amazed and impressed by the wisdom of the words of the Lord Jesus, by the power that the Lord Jesus Christ had, by the riches that were not earthly but heavenly, and that contented this Man and Prophet and Teacher and Rabbi. He was absolutely astounded at the moral excellence that this Man portrayed before men. He was probably intrigued by the teaching that we read in verse 13 down to 16, where the Lord Jesus took the children on His knee and said: 'Look, if you're going to enter into the Kingdom of God, you're going to have to be as simple and as humble as this little child'. He probably stood with his jaw hitting his boots, saying: 'Wow! What a Teacher! What words, what spiritual thoughts and philosophies!'

Therefore this man could wait no longer, he felt that he saw in Christ what he wanted, and in verse 17 we read that he went and he knelt down to Him, and he asked the Lord Jesus: 'Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?'. Can you see him? I want you to notice this: the New Testament is written in Greek, and there are different tenses in the Greek language than we have in the English language, they are more detailed and deep and specific. We know that this phrase 'What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?' is in what is called the Aorist tense, and that means something to be done once and for all that needs not to be repeated or added to. So what this young man was asking for from the Lord Jesus, and expecting to receive from Jesus, was that the Lord Jesus would take out some kind of spiritual, legal pen and write a description of a great deed that this young man should do so he could be sure that it would settle things with God once and for all. Feed the poor, go on a pilgrimage, memorise the whole of the book of Genesis, something like that - he felt that the Lord Jesus was going to say to him: 'Go away and do this, and this will sort out any spiritual problems that you have'.

Here's the other thing that I want you to notice: by asking this question, this young man was inferring that he was able to do, and expected to be able to do whatever the Lord Jesus asked him. Can you see this? It's as if he was saying: 'Lord, I know I can do whatever is required of me by You'. This was a young man who was so successful that he felt his own ability to do whatever was required of him. Probably his reasoning in the back of his mind was: 'Well, I've always been able to do whatever has been asked of me'. How do we know that? Well, we know it in the answer that the Lord Jesus Christ gave him. If you look at it in verse 18, you see that it was like an electric shock, it's like a pail of cold water in his face. Jesus said to him: 'Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God'.

Now why did the Lord Jesus say this? This is one of the most confusing verses in the Bible. Well, please remember this first of all: this young man did not know what we know - that the Lord Jesus Christ is God of very God, He is God's Son. This young man did not know that, so he wasn't asking a question to do with this; and the Lord Jesus, I believe, was not trying to teach him this fact. I believe what is in the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ here is that by calling the Lord Jesus 'a good man', this young man was betraying the fact that he had faith in the goodness of humanity, that it could rise morally to the highest heights without God. What do I mean? Well, the rabbis did not, even in this day, allow you to call them 'good'. It was their line that 'There is none good but God'. So here is a young man that sees in this Man every epitome of righteousness and morality, and power and dignity, and majesty that he could imagine - and he comes running to His feet, and he says: 'Good Master' - and the Lord Jesus checks him: 'There is none good but God'.

Of course, we know that the Lord Jesus Christ is God, but I believe what the Lord was teaching was

that in mere humanity - that's all he regarded Christ as, a mere teacher, a mere master and Rabbi - in mere humanity there is not the goodness of God. Do you see this tonight, my friend? The Lord Jesus turned the tables on him, and told him what he could do in order to inherit eternal life. He starts recounting the commandments to him in verse 19: 'You know the commandments, Don't commit adultery, do not steal, do not kill, do not bear false witness' - that means lying - 'do not defraud', steal or cheat, 'honour thy father and thy mother'. 'And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth'.

Now we're beginning to get a picture of the psychology of this young man just now. He has called the Lord Jesus, who he thinks is only a good man, 'Good Master'. He comes and asks Him this question: 'What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?', and then after the Lord recites to him these commandments, he says: 'All these have I observed from my youth up'. Now here's the question: had he? Could he observe them and had he? Well, I believe that he assessed his heart honestly, and he believed in his heart of hearts that he had done this from his youth up, from his bar mitzvah at the age of 12 or 13 thereabouts. He believed that he'd tried his best, that's what he's saying, to keep these commandments. I can imagine his heart started to beat even faster, more rapidly, the adrenalin flowed through his system with excitement, because do you know what was happening now in his psyche? He was beginning to reason: 'Jesus is now asking something of me that I can do, and that I have already done!'.

This is how the religious mindset thinks: 'I must have made it! I've kept these commandments!'. Now probably he had kept them externally, just like the apostle Paul said he was blameless in the law, he hadn't committed adultery on his wife, he hadn't, literally, stolen from his youth - but what he had ignored was what Paul came into contact with in Romans chapter 7, that he realised in all his years as a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and as a man who didn't break the law, blameless in the law, that there was something within him, a law of sin that he couldn't check, that the law couldn't kill, that overcame the external laws. Things like hate, things like lust, he talks in Romans 7 about covetousness, internal things. This is the common mistake people make in our land who are religious: 'I've never killed, I've never cheated, I have never stolen, I have never committed adultery' - what is your heart like, my friend!? Only you and God knows.

It's easy to keep the external rules when there hides in the heart all sorts of sin and iniquity. What about your temper? What about your passions and your fantasies? What about the grudges that you hold towards others? He knows your heart, and I believe in verse 21 that because of that the Lord saw in this young man both earnestness and ignorance, and He looked down upon him with compassionate eyes, and the Bible says: 'He beheld him, and He loved him'. He didn't love him because of his ignorance, I think the sense is that He pitied him. Peter must have told Mark the look that was on the Saviour's face that day - do you see the loving eye contact between the Saviour and that young man, the pity, the compassion as He looked at him? I can almost, please forgive me saying this, but I can almost imagine the Saviour sighing as He loves him. It's as if, in that look, He's saying: 'You don't see it, do you? You don't see it, that I have come not to give you external righteousness to the law, I've come to change your heart. You can't see past yourself to see Me'. 'It's all about Me', the Lord Jesus is saying.

Now please note this: the Saviour didn't condemn him, the Saviour didn't send him away, the Saviour told him what he needed to do. He said: 'One thing you lack: go away and sell all your possessions, and give the money to the poor'. Is that what you've got to do to be saved? No, it's not, that's not what Jesus is saying. Why did He tell him to sell all his wealth and give it away? Because despite his outward religiosity, his wealth was the god of his heart! He had conveniently ignored the first commandment, which says: 'You shall have no other gods before Me'. In his heart, his wealth, his materialism occupied the place that God should have in his life.

My friend this evening, can I tell you that the Lord Jesus Christ loves you? He loves you with a passion that you could not imagine, because He died and bled in agony and in all the torments of hell on the cross for you - but this is the question that I must ask you in the light of Calvary: what do you love more than Him? What is it that's taking His place in your heart? What is it that is preventing you, like this young man, becoming like a little child, and stripping yourself of whatever it is that prevents you

getting into the Kingdom of God? What is stopping you being saved this evening? You've to put away your gods, for Jesus Christ will have no other gods before Him - and if your god is your possessions, you must put it away; if your god is your position, you must put it away; if your god is your power, you must put it away; if your god is a person, you must put him or her away; if your god is a passion, you must quench it and put it away!

This was this young man's great decision. 'What did he do?', you might say. What did he do as the loving eyes of the Saviour were piercing down into his very soul upon him? The eyes of Christ were upon him in love, the word of Christ was in his ears and in his heart, what would he do? Look at verse 22: 'And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions'. Do you know how that verse 22 should be translated? 'At this the man's face fell'. Matthew uses the same word in his gospel to describe the sky becoming overcast before the storm approaches. This young man's countenance that had been radiant, that had been insatiable after spiritual truth - he had such a spiritual optimism, such an aspiration, but gradually it darkened and darkened and darkened until his great decision became a great refusal. From that moment on, as far as we know, all that young man could remember about that encounter with Christ was what might have been, but never was.

How sad are all men without Christ this evening. True life is in Christ, do you realise that? How sad, especially, are those people who are religious - do you know why? Because they never reach their goal! They never achieve what their religion sets down, because it sets up at that height the unachievable for mere humanity - only Christ can give that by His grace. Jesus used the incident with this young man to teach the power of wealth. Wealth was specific to this young man, but I'm asking you tonight: what is it that's specific to you? What is it that is hindering you coming to the Lord Jesus? He thought that men could be good on their own, but do you know what the truth of God's word is tonight that you need to see? Christ wasn't looking for his goodness, but He was looking for his badness. Christ wanted this man's badness - what I mean is this: your goodness isn't good enough, and neither was this man's, and what God wants is for us to admit that our badness in His eyes is filth, but our goodness is as well. Isaiah says that 'our righteousnesses are like filthy rags' in the sight of God. The Jews made the mistake in Jesus day, but people are still making it today - they came to Jesus in John 6 and said: 'What must we do to work the works of God?'. Jesus said: 'The work of God is that you believe in the One who God has sent'.

Humanists need to know that evolution will not save us. Equally religionists need to know that you cannot save yourself. The only thing that can save you is God's revelation, and that is God's Son. At this man, this religious good man's best moment, do you know what he did? He had a superficial view of the Saviour. He saw Him as a mere moral man, when He was God the Son. That's all religion can do for you, that what religions are saying about Christ today: 'He's just another good prophet, a son of God' - but it takes the revelation of who He really is, to see Him as God of very God, my Lord and my God, Thomas said.

Not only had he a superficial view of the Saviour, he had a superficial view of God's salvation. He didn't realise that he couldn't get to heaven on his own steam, but as the little chorus says: 'There was none other good enough to pay the price of sin, He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in'. My friend, if you could get to heaven on your own, with your own righteousness, and your own religiosity, and your own neighbourliness, and whatever else you have to be a credit, you think, in the eyes of God - what was the point of Jesus going to Calvary? My God is a sadistic God if He would let His Son go all the way to Calvary, if you could get there your own way! But there He was nailed to that tree, there He took the spear in His side, there He bore that crown of thorns, there He let the spittle run, and there He allowed His Father to pour upon Him the iniquity of us all - and He went through your hell that you might go free. He did it because you couldn't do it, he completed the work because what is impossible with men is possible with God.

The disciples heard this, and they said: 'Who then can be saved?'. Jesus says: 'Those who recognise they can't save themselves!' - God can save those! My friend, He looks down in love on you this very moment - what will you do? Isn't it amazing that of all the people who came to the feet of Jesus, this man was probably the best, morally speaking, in a religious sense - yet this man was the only one who went away worse than when he came. Isn't that tragic? This man walked out of the sunshine into the

storm, because he wanted salvation on his own terms. That's not an option, even if you're good you're guilty, and you need God's grace, and you need it now.

Let's bow our heads. Has the Lord been speaking to your heart? Now listen, please, if He is whispering into your soul, and this has been a stumbling block to you - your own goodness - 'I don't need to be saved, or at least I don't need to be saved yet. I'm as good as the next man, I'm better than some of these Christians' - you probably are! But if you're not cleansed in a spiritual sense, you're guilty because you're rejecting Christ's gift - the only one He's giving, the only one He died for. Now friend, listen, all you must do tonight is from your heart just now, say: 'Lord, I'm a sinner, I confess I am. I am guilty, and I thank you that the Lord Jesus died for my guilt and took it as His own. I trust that that was enough to save me, and that's the only work that can take my sin away. I ask the risen Saviour to save me now and take me as His own child'. Will you do that now? That's all that's required, faith not in yourself but in the Saviour.

I'll be at the door tonight to speak to anyone who would like to inquire, I'll have booklets, we'll be praying for upstairs - but please do not go without trusting the Lord Jesus.

Our Father, whoever in this place needs Your Son as their Saviour, only Thy grace can help. Meet them, we pray, by the Spirit, with that quickening power. May they to the bosom of Christ, who loves them and looks upon them in compassion tonight, may they fly. Amen.

"Weeping Over Spilt Water"

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Second Samuel 14 and verse 14 is the passage that we want to look at - just one verse somewhat, admittedly, taken out of context, or at least I won't be dealing with the context tonight. Second Samuel 14 verse 14: "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him".

It's the first half of the verse that I want you to notice, please: "For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again". I'm sure probably all of you have heard the expression and the cliché: 'Don't cry over spilt milk'. Really, I suppose, the motto behind that is simply: 'Don't cry about something that you can't change'. Once something happens and it is irreversible and irretrievable, well, there's no point in getting upset about it - don't cry over spilt milk!

But the water spilt in verse 14 of 2 Samuel 14 is something that we should weep over, because what the word of God is talking about is our lives - your life and my life. The Holy Spirit has inspired these words to tell us that we must die, and our lives are like water spilt on the ground. Do you realise that your life is like that? Do you realise that your life is brief? Do you realise that there's a day coming very soon when your life will be over? Does that ever cause you grief, distress, or even a single thought?

I wonder have you ever wept over your life? I'm sure if I was to ask most of you that question, you would say 'Sure, I have. I have had bereavement in my life, I've experienced sickness and my loved ones have gone through pain. I have faced various problems, I've been on the sharp end of many hurts. I have known in my mind and in my heart grievous fears, continual anxieties. I have known torment of body, soul and mind. I know what you're talking about when you speak about weeping!'. Life is full of tears, there's no doubt about that, and it's wonderful to know that the word of God tells us that there is a Saviour who loves us, and a Saviour who knows and understands our tears. He is not ignorant to our problems, to our pains, to our trials and our tribulations.

Let me rephrase the question, 'Have you ever wept over your life?', to this one: 'Have you ever wept over your death?'. How many times around an open grave have we heard a clergyman read from the prayer book: 'In life we are in the midst of death', but it's a fact, isn't it? In fact, death is intrinsic to life because every life ends with a death. Don't tell me this evening that you have never thought about it! Maybe you have even experienced in recent days lying awake upon your bed for fear of death, fear of going unconscious and not waking up in this world in time. Maybe you're someone who doesn't really fear death, or at least you don't show it, but you joke about death - it's all a jest to you. Of course, we laugh, ourselves, at death, and tell jokes and quips about it because we tend to joke about the things that we fear most and don't really understand. It a way whereby we cope - we put up a mask because we really can't face eyeball to eyeball the certainty that one day we will pass into eternity, and our life on earth here will be finished.

Now please don't think that I'm being morbid this evening. It is a solemn and a sober subject, but the fact of the matter is: God's word and commonsense tells us that it is wise to think about death. It is wise to stop in the humdrum of the activity of our lives here on earth, and think about our end - how it will be, perhaps where will be, in what circumstances it will be - but more importantly than all of that, where we will be after death. One of the wisest men that ever lived, Solomon, in his book called Ecclesiastes chapter 7 verse 2 testifies of the fact that it's good to think about death. He said: 'It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart'. You'll learn something if you go to a house of mourning. It's not filled with all the frivolities of materialism and foolish pleasure that is here for a moment and

passes away with the fashion of this world, but you will be faced with one of the greatest certainties that humanity has ever known: that one day all of us, no matter who we are, will die.

I'm not telling you anything that a doctor won't tell you, when I am encouraging you tonight that death is a certainty and you must be prepared for it. That's what the undertaker would tell you, and there are some undertakers here tonight. It's what an insurance broker will assure you of, that's why you need to take out a policy. It's what a solicitor will convince you of, to take out a will so that your remains after you, financially, will be left to those whom you love and not be absorbed by the government or someone else who it doesn't belong to. But what I'm wanting you to notice tonight is more important than all of these ramifications, materially and temporally, if you would die tonight or in a day that is yet to be: I want you to think about the things not that you will leave behind you, but the thing that you will take with you - that is your soul.

Now please do not think of your soul as a possession, it is not. Your soul is your self, it is who you are tonight. Just as you came into this world with nothing, you will exit this world without anything but yourself, who you are and what you have become. You've heard the famous saying, and it's so true, that there are no pockets in a shroud. I heard another one recently: 'There are no tow bars on a hearse'. You can take nothing with you. Just as you have brought nothing into this world, you take nothing out of it. The Lord Jesus Christ told men over and over again that they needed to prepare for eternity, not to be so absorbed with down here that they build up treasures and kingdoms and empires on the earth, but rather build up treasures in heaven where moth and rust doth not corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal. Did He not say: 'For what shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, yet lose his own soul?'

Now friend, as I talk to you tonight about weeping over this spilt water that one day will be your life that will be spent and not be able to be bought back or redeemed again, I want you to realise that I'm talking about the most important thing in all the universe - and that is the eternal destination of your soul. This vivid illustration that the Holy Spirit gives us, of the brevity of life and the necessity of numbering our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom, is so graphic, isn't it? It's piercing, 'For we must all needs die, and we are like water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again'. You know, there are so many other illustrations in the word of God of the brevity of life and the necessity of trusting the Lord. One Old Testament writer says our life is like a messenger on horseback, it darts as an express, it is spent so quickly. The Psalmist says that our life is like the span of a man's hand, it is so brief. Another says that our life is like the turn of the weaver's shuttle, it turns around once and it is gone. What did James say? He says our lives are like a vapour, in fact he used the illustration of a businessman who decided that tomorrow he would go into such a city and buy and sell and there get gain. James reprimands him, he says: 'You don't know what a day will bring forth, you can only say 'If the Lord wills' we will do this or that', because your life is like a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away!

What does this illustration that we read of tonight tell us, that we are as water spilt on the ground which cannot be gathered up again? There are three very simple truths that I want you to understand from this illustration tonight. Here's the first: death is certain, death is certain. Of course, I'm talking in the exclusion of the second coming of the Lord Jesus that we believe in as Christians, I'm talking in a general sense that if the Lord does not come death is certain. 'We must needs die', this verse says. Do you know something? It takes vivid illustrations like these to alert us to this fact that we are going to die. Do you realise this, my friend? As sure as you are in this building tonight, sitting on your seat, one day you will die. Your body will be in the soil, or if you choose to be cremated your ashes will be blown in the wind. Though your body rot and decay in earth or sea or sky, your soul will live on in eternity. Do you believe that?

Whether you believe it or not is irrelevant, because it is certain. The weight of evidence is in every tombstone and graveyard all around this land: that you will die, I will die if the Saviour doesn't come before it - and this is a certainty that you must face up to tonight, the reality of death and the assurance of eternity. In fact, in the inscription at the exit of the cemetery beneath the Santa Maria church on the Via Veneto in Rome it reads these words: 'To all those who go in and go out, what you are we used to be, what we are you will be'. Every time that you have gathered around a graveside you

have thought about another's death, another's life that has flitted past, gone like a vapour; another's life that has been spilt on the ground and is not able to be gathered up again - but I'm asking you this evening: have you ever confronted your own mortality? That we all must needs die, that you will die, that I will die - God's word says in Hebrews 9:27: 'It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment'.

An Arab awoke one evening very hungry, and he lit the candle beside his bed and began to eat the dates that were sitting there. But before he ate the first one, he shone it beside the light and he saw that there was a worm wriggling in the middle of it, and so he threw it out of the tent. He lifted the second and he did the same, put it up to the light, and there was another worm - he threw it away too. He did it a third time, and then the fourth time he blew the light out and he shoved all the dates in his mouth and ate them all. Friend, that's what you're doing concerning death, isn't it? You don't want to think about it! You want to blow out the light! You don't want to listen to what people are telling you: that there is an eternity and you need to be prepared for it, and that Christ has provided the way whereby you may be saved - you're not wanting to face reality! Death is certain: 'We must needs die'.

The second truth in this illustration is that death is a surprise. It says that the water is spilt on the ground. Our lives, as it were, are spilt - and that word 'spilt' has the sense of the accidental, the unexpected. Now it's not talking from God's perspective, because God has made it very clear that we will die, and He has told us that fact. He made us, He knows that we have sinned and that sin principle in us will cause us to die. He knows, I believe, the very day that we will die. This surprise is not on God's side, but believe it or not it is on our side! Now it ought not to be so, but the fact of the matter is: most people are surprised by death. Why should they be surprised by death if it is as certain as life? Yet they are. Why should they be surprised by death when the process is already working straight after their birth, and at this very moment is working in you - death, corruption, decay? Yet it is a fact, and I hope you will agree with me, that no one is expecting to die today. No one is not expecting to live tomorrow. Yet the fact of the matter is, although you don't expect it today or tomorrow, your death must come one day - for 'we must needs die'! Yet it takes so many, perhaps all people, by surprise.

I'm not just talking about accidents. When you're given that bad news of a terminal illness, who expects that? You may fear it, but you hear it in the lives of other people, and you believe, perhaps deep down, that it can never happen to you, it can never touch your family. Then there are the young, they never expect to die. Do the old expect to die? I could take you tonight in this district, not very far from here, to an 84-year-old who is on the threshold of eternity and does not realise her need of trusting Christ. She thinks she's got enough time. You would think, wouldn't you, that when old age approaches you'd begin to think about eternity and eternal matters would become more real - but the fact of the matter is: many people, if not most people, do not think about it at all. They're so taken up with this world, with their family, with their business, with their occupation, with their daily mundane routine that they cannot see beyond death!

John Bacon was an eminent 18th century English sculptor, and he said on his deathbed these words: 'What I was as an artist seemed to be of some importance while I lived, but what I really am as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is the only thing of importance to me'. He realised that all that really matters in this life is being prepared for the next life, being ready to die. We don't know when we will die, we don't know where, we don't know how, but for the believer in Christ it ought not to be a surprise, that we are not prepared when we die. Are you prepared? That's why you would be lost this evening if God was to take your last breath, because you're not prepared. You're not expecting death, eternity is not a reality to you. You know of others who are sick, you know of others who are at the very step of heaven or hell, but to you it does not seem real. My friend, beware, because one day - perhaps sooner than you think - you must needs die! Your life will be spilt, you won't have expected it. You may, in those dying minutes, try to prevent it and catch what is falling.

Death is certain. Death, to many, is a surprise. Thirdly, you need to know that death is irreversible. Look at the verse: 'We must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again'. You can't turn the clock back on your life, you know that, many people have told you that - but do you know something? Do you realise that you cannot, after death, retrieve the opportunities that you have had in your life? It's the same philosophy, but people don't see it! Once you're dead,

that's it, your opportunities of coming to Christ and gaining heaven are gone! How many, I wonder, are in eternity tonight and wish they were in time? They wish, perhaps, that they were in a meeting like this one - yet through all their lifetime they detested meetings such as this; but oh, they wish they were in this one this very evening. How they long to hear the stories that once they plugged their ears to in Sunday School, in Gospel meetings and missions, in the workplace where a Christian friend was witnessing and testifying to them. Maybe they're even singing tonight that hymn that they learnt in their childhood:

'Tell me the stories of Jesus,
Write on my heart every word.
Tell me the story most precious,
Sweetest that ever was heard'.

Maybe they're remembering that there was a Saviour who died for them, who tasted death for every man, who endured their hell and their fires and their torment that they are now in. Maybe they're singing:

'Tell of the cross where they nailed Him,
Writhing in anguish and pain.
Tell of the grave where they laid Him,
And tell how He liveth again'.

But do you know the problem? There is no one to tell them, because they have died and their death is irreversible! That's why God's word says: 'Today is the day of salvation'. You see, they have lost today, in fact they have lost time and they are in eternity - they've even lost tomorrow. There are no more days or hours or minutes in the eternal realm, and because they have lost today, they have lost their soul! My friend, have you no time on earth to be saved? Now, literally, there are thousands, yea, millions in eternity and there is no time in which to be saved for them - because time is spent, death has come, their life has been spilt like water on the ground and it cannot be retrieved. It is irreversible! No second chances! That is why it is imperative that you are saved now!

I wonder is there someone here tonight who will die an atheist. You don't believe in God, you don't believe in heaven, you don't believe in hell, you don't believe in the Son of God, you don't believe in His precious blood that is able to save us from sin. Or maybe you're just an agnostic: you wouldn't write off God like that, but you would say 'I just don't know, I don't understand all these things and so I draw a line under it and say, 'Well, someone knows somewhere, but not me''. A newspaper article referred to a striking story in an anonymous book of memoirs published not so long ago. The writer met the woman who nursed the great agnostic, Professor J. H. Huxley, through his last days of illness. She said that as he lay dying the great sceptic suddenly looked up at some sight in the mortal sky, it was as if he could see something that no one else could see. Staring for a little while, he whispered at last: 'So it's true, it's true'. Will you wait until then to find out it is true that there is a God, it's true that there is a heaven, it is true that there is a hell, it is true that you have a soul, it is true that you need to be saved and Jesus died and bore your sin in order that you might be saved?

Now listen: I don't want to take the dying gasps of these men as proof that there is life after death, God's word testifies to it! Jesus, the Son of God, told us that there is a heaven, there is a hell, there is a great eternity. Why should you take my word for it? Take His! He said: 'If it were not so, I would have told you' - but it is so! You can trust Christ's consciousness. Do you know why He knew it was so? Because He is the one who died for sin, who was buried and the third day rose again, and has ascended into heaven - people say no one has ever come back to tell us: Christ came back to tell us! He is conscious of eternity, but you can trust as well His candour: if you should believe anybody about eternity, should it not be the Lord Jesus Christ, who even those who wanted to kill Him could say they found no fault in Him, and no accusation could stick to Him. He said of Himself: 'I am the truth' - do you think He would tell us a lie?

He was conscious of eternity, He had candour in His teaching; but more than that, I want you to see tonight: He has compassion upon your soul, and He wants men and women to go to heaven. That's

why He came to this earth, that's why He has gone, He went to Calvary, He bled and died, He took upon Himself your sin. He suffered the contradiction of sinners who spat upon Him, who bruised Him, who plucked the beard from His cheeks, who did all manner of cruelty to Him - but God, His Father, laid your sin upon Him. Why? So that He might have you in heaven! Oh, what love, what boundless love, the Father's love to me. That's why Jesus said: 'No man comes to the Father but by me'. This is the wonderful good news - people say: 'How can I get to heaven? What do I need to do? What church do I need to join?'. Here's what Jesus says: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me'.

Do you want to go to heaven? You must come to Christ. It's as simple as that: you must come to the One who died for you and bore your sins Himself on the tree. You must come to the One who rose again from the grave, you must come to Him - but here's the tragedy that everybody seems to miss these days: if you don't come to Him, you will be lost! Jesus said in John 8:21: 'I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come'. My friend, I don't have time, nor do I have the ability, to describe to you what the place called hell is like - a place of outer darkness, a place where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched, a place where there is great thirst but no water, a place where there is separation from God and separation from man, a place where the fires torment day and night, and the smoke ascends forever and ever and ever and ever.

Where will you be? Do you not think it's time that you wept over the spilt water of your life that, perhaps one day very soon, will keel over and will be absolutely irretrievable, never to be gathered again? During World War II a London church group gave a farewell party to some soldiers who were returning to combat on the continent of Europe. At the conclusion a young officer, known for his wise choice of words, was appointed as the spokesman for the group of soldiers to thank the people for their send off. After expressing the men's appreciation: 'To say in closing', he added, 'We're leaving for France, the trenches, and maybe to die'. He hadn't intended to say that, and he was somewhat embarrassed after saying it - but then he blurted out in emotion: 'Can anyone here tell us how to die?'. There was an awkward silence, and then someone walked to the piano and began to sing the aria from Elijah: 'Oh, rest in the Lord'. That was the answer - that's still the answer!

Do you want to know how to die? Repent of your sins, believe the gospel, and you shall have life now and the life which is to come.

Let's all bow our heads: is the Lord speaking to your heart tonight? Harden not your heart to Him, listen to Him. You do know, don't you, that one day you will die? The way you are tonight, it would be without Christ and without hope in eternity - but it need not be so, my friend, surely you know that now. A loving Saviour has provided salvation through His sacrifice, and offers it to you tonight for the taking, if you'll only turn from your sin and put your faith in Him and in Him alone. Ask Him, even now, 'Lord Jesus, I confess I am a sinner. I deserve death and hell, but I thank You that You died in my place, and You took my sin. I thank You and I ask You to save me now, and make me Your child'. Will you pray that prayer? Please do not leave without having this certainty that eternity is sure for you.

Let's close our meeting in a word of prayer: Father, we give thanks for the Saviour that You sent, the Lord Jesus, who is our surety to know that because He has gone within the veil, that one day we will be in heaven in the very presence of God Almighty. Lord, it's nothing to do with us or our works, we freely confess it is all of grace - but Lord, help them to see that tonight. Oh Lord, let them flee for refuge to the Saviour, and be saved from their sins now; and their life from this world, the flesh, and the devil, and saved from hell in eternity unto eternal life. Oh God, strive with sinners in this place tonight; and Lord Jesus Christ, take the victory, we pray. To Thy glory we ask it, Amen.

"Recorded In Heaven"

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We're turning to our text in Luke's gospel chapter 10, and let's remind ourselves of the one verse that we want to consider this evening under the title 'Recorded in Heaven'. Luke chapter 10, remembering the context as we read it together earlier, and the Lord Jesus says in Luke 10 and verse 20: 'Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven'.

Now as I was thinking and preparing for this message this evening, I could think of an awful lot of reasons why a Christian can rejoice. I just haven't got time to go through them all this evening, but not least is the fact that through the Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, He has given the Christian victory over not only the prince of darkness, but all the powers of darkness that exist in our universe. We were singing in our first hymn one verse that is a kind of paraphrase of Genesis 3:15, which is a prophecy, that there would come one day a seed born into humanity that would be the Son of God who would crush Satan's head. Of course, the context of that promise was the Garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve were made in perfection of Paradise. God said that the whole of creation was good, but they fell because the serpent, Satan in the Garden, tempted them to fall. They fell into sin and death came upon all men, because death is the wages of sin. But yet right there at the very beginning, at the time of their fall, God gave them a promise of a Saviour, God prophesied that He was going to send a Deliverer who would crush the prince of darkness and all his powers.

When we travel from the very first book of the Bible to the last book of the Bible, we find out that what was promised way back in Genesis comes to fulfilment and perfection in the book of Revelation. We read there in chapter 20 and verse 10 that: 'the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, and there he shall be tormented for ever and ever'. That is a reason for Christians to rejoice - you wouldn't think it if you were standing where I am, looking at you, but nevertheless that's a reason. Jesus Christ, our great Saviour, has conquered our greatest enemy that we have ever had. Jesus Himself, when He was on the earth, in John 8 told us that the devil was a murderer from the beginning, and he abode not in the truth, for there is no truth in him.

When you think of history, right from creation, and history which is yet to be lived in the future, you can think of how in the interim period between God's promise that He would defeat Satan until the absolute perfection and consummation of that, how many lives he has destroyed. He is a murderer from the beginning, he has abode not in the truth, and he is not only the arch enemy of heaven - but, whether people care to admit it or not, he has been the arch enemy of all humanity. Jesus said in John 10 that he is a thief, and he has come to this world to steal, to kill and to destroy. I don't know who you are tonight, I don't know what mess or shape your life may be in, but I know myself that I have allowed Satan to steal, to kill and to destroy through the influence of sin in my life - and I imagine that you're no different.

I don't know what sins are binding you or holding you in habit. I don't know how your life is being wrecked as we speak, but one thing I do know this evening that is more than equal to the power of the devil in any man or woman's life is the power of God in Christ. Indeed, as 1 John 3 tells us: 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil'. That is why God sent the Son into this world, as Hebrews says: 'That through death', His death on the cross, 'He might destroy him that has the power over death, that is the devil'. What a story we have to proclaim tonight: it is the name of Jesus, the name high over all in hell and earth and sky; angels and men before Him fall, and devils fear and fly. He is the eternal Christ, He is God's Son, and God the Son. In fact in this passage we have that for us, in verse 18, He told the seventy: 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven'. This is the One who was with God, the One who was God before the worlds were made.

Now, dying on Calvary and rising again the third day from the grave, He has perfected and caused the final collapse of Satan's kingdom. One day soon, as we have read from Revelation 20, one day soon there will be the decree of condemnation upon the devil. He, the Antichrist and the false prophet will be cast into the lake of fire. So the point of this passage is to tell us many things, but it is also to tell us that the Christian, if anyone, the Christian has victory over the devil and his works. It's not in his own strength, we cannot rebuke the devil, we have no power over the kingdom of darkness - in fact, the very angel Michael had no power over the devil, he dared not bring a railing accusation against the devil, but he rebuked the devil in God's name. Praise God tonight, we have victory in Christ. Revelation 12 verse 11 tells us of a day when they will overcome the devil by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.

Now before I go on to talk about what it means to have your name recorded in heaven, can I ask you tonight: do you know God's power over the devil in your life? What are you dabbling in? Is it run-of-the-mill sin? I don't know exactly what your private personal type of sin is, and where your tastes lie in the realm of iniquity, but could it be that I'm actually talking to someone tonight, and you have gone into the kingdom of darkness a little bit more than others through the occult. Maybe you have tampered, as a young person, in the Ouija board, or been involved in tarot cards to tell the future, or just a simple reading of a horoscope in the daily newspaper? Maybe you've gone to a fortune-teller or a medium? Maybe you've been involved in transcendental meditation, or yoga, or reiki, things that are seen today as innocent, but yet come from the kingdom of darkness?

Well, I declare to you tonight that though those individual things may have a bind upon you that you feel is unbreakable: Jesus Christ, through His blood, through His resurrection, through the virtue of His person can break that power tonight. None other can, but He can. Oh, there are powers in the kingdom of darkness that you could not imagine if you've never dabbled in it, but praise God His power is greater. I was reading this week about Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones, who was the minister of Westminster Chapel in London, and he remembered a time when a woman who was a spiritist came into his meeting. She lived not too far away from his congregation then, presently in South Wales, and she was a medium. She actually was employed by the Spiritist Society for quite a hefty wage. She came into his meeting and, praise God, she was converted by the gospel of God's grace. Later on in her life, and she stayed there many years in that church, Dr Lloyd Jones asked her what she felt in that first visit when she came into his congregation. This is what she said: 'The moment I entered your chapel and sat down on a seat amongst people I was conscious of a power. It was the same sort of power that I was accustomed to in our spiritist meetings, but there was one big difference: I had the feeling that the power in your chapel was a clean power'. Isn't that remarkable? As the little chorus says: 'Jesus is stronger than Satan, and Satan to Jesus must bow'.

Isn't it wonderful tonight, those of you who are believers, that we have a gospel to preach tonight that is able to face the greatest occultic, the darkest demonic powers that exist in this whole universe. In a practical sense, Christ in this portion of Scripture gave His early disciples power, practical power, over the forces of evil. Look at verse 17, they rejoiced that even the devils were subject to them through Jesus' name. Verse 19, Jesus commissioned them: 'Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you'. In some measure that same power is given to us today over the kingdom of darkness. Paul says in Ephesians 6:11: 'Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil'. James 4 and verse 7 tells us: 'Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you'. It's exhilarating, isn't it? It's exciting to know that Christ has given us the power over the kingdom of darkness and the prince thereof.

Just as many people in our world today are fascinated with the supernatural, I think these seventy disciples can be forgiven for being a little bit fantastical to know that the Christian has a certain God-given power over the realm of the supernatural. What I want you to chiefly notice tonight is the caution of the Lord Jesus Christ with regard to rejoicing. He says in verse 20: 'You're rejoicing that the devils are subject to you in my name. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven'. He says to the seventy: 'Your greatest cause for rejoicing is not that you've got supernatural power over demons, but rather that

your name is recorded in the courts of heaven'. Rather than being so enthralled with extraordinary manifestations, they should have realised that the greatest wonder of all is the reality of salvation.

In John 1 verse 12 Jesus the Christ said: 'To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name'. So I'm asking you tonight: is your name written there, on that page bright and fair? Is your name written in the Book of Life? I'm going to ask three questions about this book tonight, where names are recorded in heaven. The first is: why does such a book exist? Well, the simple reason why such a book exists is because man, just like Satan, is a fallen creature. Man has fallen from God's glory. Romans 3:23 tells us: 'For all have sinned, and come short', or fallen short, 'of the glory of God'.

If you want proof to consult that man has fallen, all you need to do is look at the ten commandments. I'm sure you're familiar with some of them, like the commandment not to steal, or not to lie or not to bear false witness, or not to take the name of the Lord God in vain, not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to worship idols and put other gods before the living God. When you look down that list you will come up with a number of them, if not all of them, that you have committed at some time in your life.

In fact, the book of James tells us that if we're only guilty of breaking one of those commandments, we're guilty of them all because they come as a package! If you still don't believe the fact that you're a fallen creature, well then you need to move from visiting the ten commandments to visit a cemetery or a hospital in our land today - for the wages of sin is death. The reason, ultimately, why sickness has come upon all men, generally speaking, and why people die is because we are sinners, and the wages of sin is death. God's word declares, and the evidence is all around us, that man is a sinner. Because man is a sinner, man is excluded from this book in heaven. But the good news of the Gospel tonight is that whilst man's sin excludes him, God's glorious grace in the person of His Son and the message of the good news would include him.

Now let me air a statement of caution for a moment, because those who are included in this book are not people - as is often thought - who have achieved a standard. They are not people who have earned their name's inclusion, but the opposite: they are people who admit that they are not worthy to be in God's book. They are not worthy of the least of God's mercy, in fact they are people who display attributes that are the exact opposite. They feel that they are sinners before a holy God, they're unworthy of God's forgiveness, and they come to God knowing that they don't deserve a place in God's heaven - and God's grace lifts these humble souls and places them in His book.

Now let me say that this is a stumbling block for many getting into the book. This is why some are never ever saved, because some people actually think that everybody is in God's book in heaven. But when you think about this just for a moment or two, you realise how ridiculous that assertion is: because if everybody's name was in the book in heaven, there'd be no need for a book at all to record anything, because nothing would be worth recording for everybody would be in anyway. Such a book would be incidental, of no consequence, it would be absolutely meaningless. Apart from that, Christ made a distinction in this very passage, He made a discrimination, He told His disciples: 'Rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven'.

Then there are other people who also find that this book is a stumbling block to them, because they feel that you must earn your way into this book. But friends, it is the exact opposite, as we will see tonight from this passage of Scripture. It is only those who are unworthy, and they who count themselves as such - not to be found in this book - who God actually, by grace, places there. Another thing we need to note concerning this book is: this book exists to show that God is precise in His dealings with man. You see a number of people, in fact very many people that I talk to, are uncertain about their soul's salvation - if you talk to them and ask them: 'Are you sure of heaven? Are you sure that when you die you will go to be with God? Are you sure that your sins are forgiven?'. But here we see, because of the existence of this book, that whatever uncertainty exists with mankind regarding their salvation, there is no uncertainty with God.

Whilst men say: 'Well, I'm not sure whether I'm going there, I hope so', or, 'No one can really know for sure, and it would be arrogance and presumption to say so', God says the opposite: 'I am sure, for those who are going to heaven are written in heaven'. Those who are going to heaven are in the book in heaven, as if they were already in heaven before they've got there. This is the foundation of God that standeth sure - what is that? 'The Lord knoweth them that are His'. The Lord knows, you might not know tonight my friend: that's a sad reflection on your own state before God. Jesus said in John 10: '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, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand'. You need to know, and the Bible was written - 1 John 5:13: 'that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God'.

Yet, Jesus also said in Matthew 7: 'Many will say to me in that day', on the last day, when the world is being judged, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in thy name? Did we not cast out demons in thy name? Did we not do many mighty miracles in thy name? And I will profess unto them, I never knew you'. Here is even a group of people, and they're displaying these mighty miraculous works. Christ doesn't know them for they don't belong to Him. Can I just say to Christians and non-Christians alike this evening: we do well to remember ourselves that these powers mean little regarding our spirituality. I'll say that again: supernatural powers, whoever is displaying them, mean nothing regarding our spirituality. If you were to go to chapter 9, before our chapter that we're looking at tonight, you would see that nine of the apostles actually tried to cast a demon out of a child, and they were unable. Yet the seventy came back to the Lord Jesus rejoicing that they had been given power over devils in His name. Now are we going to say that the conclave of the apostles were lesser than the seventy disciples? Of course they were not in spiritual terms, this means nothing. In fact, we have to say that it is possible for those who manifest these powers not even to be saved at all. Matthew 7 that we quoted, these people knocking on the door of heaven when the judgment of God's wrath and floods had fallen, they will say: 'Lord, we cast out devils, we prophesied, we did miracles!', and the Lord will say 'I never knew you'.

What the Lord is saying for us tonight is that the most important matter of all is your soul's salvation. You could have everything right, you could even have the exercising of supernatural powers correct, and not know that your name is written in heaven. Now you might think this is a bit far-fetched, but in the Old Testament we have a prophet called Baalam. Baalam had eyes to see visions of God, his eyes were open to marvellous things regarding the future, and even prophesying about the Lord Jesus Christ. His tongue was inspired to other deep things, prophetically, by God. Yet the Bible records that he was among the accursed because he ran greedily after reward. All you have to do is look back to Luke 9, and we read in verse 1 of Luke 9: 'Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases'. You'll notice that it doesn't say He called the eleven together except Judas, the likelihood is that the one who betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ Himself had been given those selfsame powers over the demons - yet he is one who is not saved. In fact the Bible says he went to his own place!

We read in Acts chapter 8 that Simon Magus had great spiritual powers before his conversion. In fact he bewitched so many people that people said: 'This is the great power of God'. Then we read in Acts 8 that he believed, we don't know how deep his belief was, I believe it was very superficial: he was baptised, which means nothing, and then we read that when he saw the apostles laying hands on people, and they received the Holy Spirit, that he thought to himself 'What a great gift this is'. He came to the apostles and he wanted to purchase with money the ability to do this great thing, and the apostle Peter said to him: 'Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money'. He wasn't even saved: 'Thy money perish with thee'.

What do all these Scriptures teach us? Just what the Lord Jesus is teaching us tonight: the gifts in the church, whatever gifts you may have, are nothing if you do not know the grace of God in salvation. That's why such a book exists, that the Lord should know them that are saved. The second question I want to answer is: how is your name added to this book? Well, the Lord Jesus says it's simply written. This word 'written' was used of the signing of a will or a marriage document, or a peace treaty, or ancient towns and cities had a roll and the citizens of that city or town were added and recorded in the

public roll. There is this roll in heaven, metaphorically speaking, where God has a record in His almighty omnipotent omniscient knowledge to know all who are genuinely saved.

Now this word 'written' is in the perfect tense, which means 'it stands written'. That simply means it is a statement of assurance that it has been written once and it will stay there forever, it has indelibly been graven in this book in heaven so that we can know that we have eternal life. Well, how do you get your name in that book? Well, let me say first of all the way that you won't be added to that book. Revelation 21 tells us that: 'there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life'.

If you're living for sin this evening, your name is not in that book. I don't care how many times you've prayed the sinner's prayer, I don't care how many times you've put your hand up in a meeting, I don't care if you've signed a card, because God's word says that if you're living in a life of habitual sin you cannot be saved. Jeremiah 17:13 tells us that unbelievers names will be written on the earth - believers names are written in heaven, unbelievers names are written on the earth. What does that mean? Simply this: those who live for heaven will have their names written in heaven; those who live for the earth will have their names written on earth.

You know what's written about you in heaven by what's written in you on earth - if you have the marks of God's grace in your life, that means if old things have passed away and all things have become new. You're saying: 'I don't know that! I know sin in my life, I'm living in habitual iniquity and transgression. How do I start for heaven? How do I make sure that my name is recorded there?'. Let me say again in caution: the way of pride will not take you to heaven, it'll take you to hell. The Lord Jesus said: 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven'. There was pride that welled up in his heart, and he wanted to be like God, and God cast him down. If you're religious tonight or think you're worthy of heaven, think that you've done enough to earn heaven, you're righteous enough, you're good enough, charitable - you will not get there.

In fact, of the moral teachers in Jesus' day, the Lord Jesus said that their towns felt as if they were exalted to heaven, not only through their religiosity, but through the very presence of the Lord Jesus Christ with them. They viewed and witnessed Christ and all of His miracles and wonderful powers and glorious teachings, yet the Lord Jesus said that they would be brought down to hell because of their pride. It is humility and repentant faith that will take you to heaven. Jesus says that in verse 21: 'In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight'. It is the humble.

Malachi tells us that there is a book opened, whilst prophetically it speaks of a remnant in Israel, but there is a book opened for those who fear the Lord. Their name shall be written therein, and they shall be called God's jewels. What does it mean to fear the Lord? I'll tell you this: that's how you get your name in God's book. I fear the Lord, it doesn't just mean being terrified of the Lord: to fear the Lord, I think the New Testament equivalent of the fear of the Lord is the Greek word 'pistis' which means 'faith' - to have an awe and a dependence, practically and personally on the Lord. So I'm asking you tonight: if you have faith in the Lord Jesus, a repentant faith that is willing to leave your sin and venture your all on the Lord Jesus Christ, your name will be recorded in heaven.

Romans 10:9: 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved'. That's what really matters! That's how you gain your name recorded in heaven, that's how you can rejoice tonight to know that your name is in heaven, and so one day you will be there: through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, when you're dying it'll not matter how many demons you've cast out, or how many miracles you've performed, or how many successes you've had in the church, maybe you have held office in the church - all those things will not matter, because true joy in that hour when death's cold dew is on your brow, is that your name is written in heaven.

Even those with little to rejoice in in this earth, Christians who are ill and aren't healed, Christians who

cannot see, cannot hear, cannot speak, disease of cancer is eating up their very flesh: they can rejoice, Jesus says, whilst there is nothing around them to rejoice in, they rejoice that their names are written in heaven.

'When I can read my title
Clear to mansions in the skies,
I bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes'.

Are you resting on faith tonight or are you resting on sight? Don't rest on the sight of looking for miracles and waiting for the lightning to strike before you get saved, or seeing the bright lights. People say this to me: 'I was waiting to see a bright light, or for God to reveal something to me in a vision, or to let me see a scripture verse plastered across the sky'. Jesus says: 'A perverse generation seeketh after a sign'. He told the Pharisees and the Jews: 'This is the sign that I will give you: the sign of Jonah the prophet, that just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the belly of the earth'. He was talking about the sign of the cross: that He would die and be buried, and rise again for men's sins. Romans 5:8 says here is how God has demonstrated to you what He wants you to know: 'While you were yet a sinner, Christ died for you'. He bore your sin, He carried your shame, He took your hell on the cross, He shed His precious blood, the Father laid on Him the iniquity of us all and put Him through that holy wrath that was your due, that you deserved, that you might be free. Those who embrace that gift of salvation God calls His jewels, paid for not by money but by the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

I must be honest with you tonight and answer a final question: what if your name is not found in this book? Can I say to you very soberly this evening: whatever you have in this world, whatever you're rejoicing in at this present moment in time, if your name is not written in heaven you have nothing. In fact, you should actually be trembling where you sit this evening, because Revelation 20:15 says: 'Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire'. Can I say to you this evening, if you're rich, or you're a bit well-off: do not rejoice in your wealth! You've got a good physique, you don't have any illnesses or ailments: do not rejoice in your health! You have a good marriage, you've lovely children, you're from a good highbrow family: don't rejoice in your kith or kin! Don't rejoice in your position or your career, or in your success, for if your name is not written in heaven it all means nothing!

I urge you tonight to look around your life, all that your hand has gotten to you, and all you feel life has dished to you, and remember this: naked came you into this world, and naked you will depart, but God will destroy both body and soul in hell. Friend, that is what will happen if your name is not to be found in this book. But I don't want to end on that note, I want to end on the rejoicing of what a blessing it is to be a child of God - hallelujah! Your name may not be in the Who's Who of society, or the Who's Who of the ecclesia in the church, but if your name is written in heaven - rejoice! You may not be rich, you may not be famous, but if your name is written in heaven you've got cause to rejoice. You mightn't be clever, you mightn't be accomplished, you might have few gifts or abilities, but if your name is written in heaven - rejoice! You may be poor, you may even be despised: but praise God, when it comes to that day when you will die, though there be few around your grave and no monument in your memory, you can rejoice for your name is in heaven.

You may have everything in this life, but is your name in heaven? May every soul in this place be sure now that your name is there.

Isn't the Gospel invitation of love wonderful? Wesley when he wrote his hymn did rightly read the heart of the Saviour: 'Thou art all compassion'. He is compassionate and loving towards you this evening. Will you embrace Him by faith? Leave your sin and yourself, venture your all upon His claims and His sacrifice, and know for sure tonight - the guarantee is not mine, it is in the Scriptures - that your name is recorded in heaven, and you will go away rejoicing in the knowledge of sins forgiven.

Father, give Thy grace tonight, the grace that saves the deepest darkest sinner. Lord, many of us could say: 'Depth of mercy, can there be mercy still reserved for me?'. We thank Thee that this grace is

amazing grace that can save a wretch like me. We can say tonight, and thank God: 'Chief of sinners, though I be, Jesus died for even me'. Lord, may someone come to the knowledge this evening of what it is to have their name written in heaven. May they go away rejoicing, walking, and leaping, and praising God for the great things that He has done. Amen.

"Getting Past The Crowd To Christ"

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I want us to turn in the Scriptures for our reading just now to Mark's gospel chapter 2. As I have been announcing, I'm going to speak tonight on the subject of 'Getting Past the Crowd to Christ'. This is a very well-known story, certainly to Christians, but I'm not sure that Christians really understand the full import to them of this story. We'll not just be touching unbelievers, but we will all be getting a touch, hopefully, from the Spirit of God from this account.

Mark chapter 2 and beginning at verse 1: "And again he", that is the Lord Jesus Christ, "entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne", or carried, "of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. But there was certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion" - and we end our reading at verse 12.

So let's look at how this man got past the crowd to Christ. Let's just bow in a word of prayer: Father, we thank Thee that the Lord Jesus Christ has come near to men. He could not have come nearer, for He came in the likeness of sinful flesh. He gave up the riches and splendour of glory, and came as a servant. Lord, we thank Thee that He went all the way to Calvary and died in our place that He might bring us to Himself. Lord, we ask tonight that by the Holy Spirit He may draw another soul, and other person paralysed by the disease of sin, may they be liberated tonight through the Gospel - the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the same yesterday, today and forever - glory to His name. Amen.

It's commonly held that Mark's Gospel is the gospel of the Servant of the Lord - that is the theme: the servanthood in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapters 1 through to 3, you get another sub-theme: the Servant of the Lord and His power, as He served the Lord in His service, the power of God that He displayed in His ministry. In verses 21 to 28 of chapter 1, if you look down at it, you will see the power that the Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ, had over a demon. Then in verses 40 through to 45, you see the power that He had over disease in general. Then in chapter 2 verses 1 to 12, our reading this evening, you see how He had power over a specific disease, one of the scourges of the present-day, leprosy. Then in chapter 3 verses 7 through to 12, you see that He also had power over demons - plural - principalities and powers, rulers of this wicked darkness that we cannot see.

I'm sure that you can imagine that word spread rather quickly of this miracle Man, the self-proclaimed Servant of God, who seemed to prove His God-given choosing and ministry by the power that He demonstrated in these great miraculous works. I imagine the conversation of the day, particularly in Capernaum, was: 'Where can we see Him? Where can we go to witness one of these great supernatural works? Where can this Man be found?'. Eventually, as we find in chapter 2, the Capernaum communication network had located His whereabouts. They found the exact home where He was; where He was about, they thought, to perform another great miracle. So the word went around: 'He's in so-and-so's house!'. As we read in verse 1, it was noised abroad that the Lord was in this specific

house. Before long we read in the chapter that immediately a great crowd gathered, and they were packed out to the door, coming to see the Lord Jesus, to hear His mighty words.

The house now is bursting at the seams with people who have a sense of expectation that something unusual, something supernatural is going to happen. I want you to try and feel what it was like in that room: the atmosphere is charged, it's electric, everybody is just waiting for what Jesus is going to do. On another occasion, in Luke's Gospel chapter 5, it says that the power of the Lord was present to heal those who were diseased in the place where Jesus was. That's exactly what it was like here! The atmosphere in this little room of this house, jam-packed with people in need, was charged!

I want to say to you all tonight that that is the same today. What I mean is: what was true in that house is true today, in the sense that wherever God moves, even in the 21st-century, people are attracted to that place. If they think the power of God is being displayed, they will come to that place, because people are intrigued with what they don't understand. They say to themselves: 'What kind of power is this?'. In verse 12 of our reading we found that this is exactly what they said: 'We never saw anything like this before!'.

Now maybe you're intrigued by the power of God in some shape or form. Maybe you're here tonight and you're intrigued by the power of God in another person's life. What I'm talking about is, perhaps, what we call 'a conversion experience' - and you have witnessed a friend or a relative, or a loved one or work colleague, and they had been bound by many habits and iniquitous practices, and all of a sudden one day they came into work or rang you on the phone, or wrote a letter to tell you that they had met Jesus Christ, they had been saved, born-again - and you have witnessed, you don't understand what's going on, but you can see that they're changed! There's something different about them. You've never experienced it yourself, but you're curious about these things. Maybe that's even why you're here tonight, you've come with a friend who this has happened to, and you maybe don't want to swallow it all at once - but you're intrigued, you're curious.

Now that's very good, but what I want you to notice tonight is that Jesus didn't immediately give these people what their curiosity demanded. Everybody wants to see a miracle, don't they? We all would love to see something supernatural happening before our eyes - it would help our faith to have a bit of sight. But the fact of the matter is: the Lord Jesus didn't give them what their intrigue and curiosity demanded, He gave them what their humanity needed. Now please see that distinction, because we read right away that once those people were gathered into the door, in verse 2 at the very end, 'He preached the word unto them'. The people that were in that house had many diseases, maybe some were demon-possessed, they had many perplexities, troubles, needs that they needed to be met by Jesus in their life - but here's a lesson for us all tonight, whether saint or sinner alike: Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gave them the word of God.

Now here's a lesson for the church today, may I say in passing, for the Lord Jesus Christ was the greatest miracle worker of all, that has ever lived - yet He felt that the primary responsibility, where He was in that house with a crowd of sinners around Him, was to preach God's word! That's why we preach the word tonight, and we don't make apology for it. But you might say: 'What words of God did He preach?'. Well, if you turn to chapter 1 and verse 14, you see that Mark tells us that the Servant of the Lord began His ministry, 'John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel'. Now, in its essential elements, that's no different than the message that you'll hear tonight: that you need to repent of your sins, and the Gospel tonight is the good news that Jesus died for your sins, paid the debt to wash your sins away, and all that is required of you because of the grace of God is that you put your faith and trust in that salvation that God has provided for you.

Now, that must be what we preach. I'm talking to Christians now, I'm talking to the Iron Hall: take the lesson from the Lord. There's a whole lot of things we can be doing, but if the time comes, as it has come in many churches and denominations, where we are not primarily preaching the word to reach the lost - we're in trouble! Sinner and saint, whoever you are tonight, do you know your greatest need is the word of God? You see, a miracle may heal your body, maybe you need a miracle tonight, but Hebrews tells us in chapter 4 that the word of God is quick, powerful, it is like a two-edged sword that

can divide the very soul and the spirit, the bone and marrow, and it is God's word that will heal us spiritually - and that is what we need most of all! You see, God's word will spiritually diagnose your greatest illness, that is your sin-sickness. It is God's word, as a two-edged scalpel, that will surgically remove the cancer of sin from your soul. It is only God's word that will apply the Gospel medicine of the good news, the sacrifice that Jesus paid for you on Calvary in order to take your sins away. You'll only find that in God's word!

I don't know who you are tonight, but it could be that you're running to meetings like this to be healed, physically healed. People do that, they run to crusades, charismatic leaders that claim all sorts of things - and they want to have a supernatural experience, where God touches their body and they're healed - and God can heal, we believe that tonight. Maybe you're running around listening to health and wealth preachers, who tell you that God wants you to be rich; and if you give tenfold, God will give you back a hundredfold - and that makes you and energises you to go to meetings like this. Maybe you're just tantalised by facts about the future - it's amazing, when you preach on the second coming how many unbelievers, who don't trust in Christ, will come along to hear what's going to happen in the future! But friend, you maybe are here with one of those motivations, but you've never had the healing of your soul through the word of God.

Maybe the obstacle to your conversion has been that you feel that God hasn't met your demands. You've been coming out to meetings like this for years, or maybe you've been praying to God and God just won't answer your prayer - whether it's for healing, whether it's for wealth, whether it's for a problem in your family or whatever. Could it be that the reason why God is not giving you your demand, is because you haven't put first things first? You have not obeyed the Gospel in the word of God, to repent and to believe the Gospel.

Well, the next characters that we encounter in Capernaum are a concerned quartet - four friends of this palsied man, concerned companions of this handicapped gentleman. Like the rest, they heard about the commotion that was caused by Jesus being in this house, by the power of God that had been displayed and the reputation of this Man. They immediately, when they heard of it, thought of their poor friend. Suddenly they thought: 'Here is someone, perhaps, that can help our friend!'. May I address the Christians just for a moment? Here was a man in need, a palsied man in need, and this man in need was hindered from getting help from Jesus by the crowd that was around Jesus. Are you getting the representative language that I'm using? I'm really asking the question: Are we as Christians ever a hindrance to needy people getting to the Lord Jesus Christ to get the help that they need from Him? Here's the question, the antithesis, the other side of the coin: do we help, as Christians, other people getting near to Jesus? Or do we expect unbelievers to do spiritual gymnastics to get near to us, let alone get near to the Lord Jesus Christ? Do we bring Christ near to people?

Well, praise God, there are still people who are concerned souls who will improvise and overcome the hindrances of the crowd, and their faith is ingenious enough to seek to bring people to the Lord Jesus Christ. Here are four concerned companions - now, Christian tonight, how concerned were you to bring someone to this meeting this evening? Did you even try? Did you make a phone call? Did you ask a neighbour? If you did, and they didn't come, that's good - keep on asking - but I fear that many of us are not even concerned!

Well, these four had ingenious faith, and they climbed the outside stairs of that house up to the roof. They uncovered a portion of the roofing, and they lowered that man to the ground, bringing him near to the Son of God. How many, lately, have you brought near to the Son of God? How many have you brought into the vicinity where the word of the Son of God is preached? What would you or I think if our houses were vandalised by those who were trying to bring people to Christ?

Someone has nicknamed these concerned friends, all four of them - one: sympathy; two: cooperation; three: originality; four: persistence. I think that's good, because if we're going to bring people to Christ we need sympathy. We need to sympathise with those who are lost, but it could be tonight that we as Christians are cold to the plight of those who are not redeemed. We need to cooperate together like the four carrying together did. We need to have originality, it's not easy to get people to Christ in these days - and in a Biblical way, we must by all means save some. We must have persistence - if ever we

needed persistence it's in these days, to keep on, in season and out of season, preaching the word till God blesses the word and saves some. They needed all of these qualities to overcome the hindrances, and so do you - so do we!

Let me talk to those who are not saved in our meeting tonight: you may have been hindered by the crowd in coming to Jesus. What am I talking about? Well, so-called 'Christians' that hang around Jesus, hang around the place where Jesus is preached and His word is spoken, but they have a bad reputation. You know exactly what I'm talking about, don't you? Christians that have put you off Christianity because their life does not measure up to what they say. Their walk and their talk don't meet. If you're here tonight, and that's the reason why you're not saved - you say: 'I'm as good as the next man, and I'm a good sight better than some of those people that call themselves born-again'; well, you wouldn't be the first to think that and say that.

Mark Twain, who you will know was a famous American author, turned away from Christianity because he heard Christians condoning slavery and using foul language and engaging in shady business deals. I've experienced all of those in so-called 'Christians'. I don't indulge in DIY too much, as you can probably suspect, but on one occasion in doing so I was working along with a man who swore like a trooper - and then, when I got round to telling him to stop taking the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in vain because I was a Christian, he proceeded to tell me how he was a Christian too. He belonged to the 'Church of Christ', that cult, and he told me that I wasn't saved because I wasn't baptised. It's amazing how we can delude people, but it's amazing how so-called 'Christians' can put people off by their lives. Some scholars believe that Mohammed, the prophet, agreed with the Jews and Christians - yes, that there was one God - but he was turned off their religion, Judaism and Christianity, because of the lives of Christians and Jews that he knew. Brian Goodwin comments: 'A little more love to Christ and to others might have changed the course of history for what is now the Muslim world'.

Bad testimonies! It's reported that Gandhi once said: 'If it weren't for the Christians, I would have become one'. Well, I sympathise with you tonight. If you have experienced a bad testimony in the life of a so-called believer and it has put you off. I'll be honest with you, it is this hypocritical, plastic, TV evangelist image that puts me off as well - people, in a pharisaical way, who appear so pious and so squeaky-clean, yet often when what is behind the scenes is exposed, all you find is a life of lies, immorality, fraud, extortion, covetousness, cheating - all sorts of sins! Christians: we are meant to be Bibles, epistles written unto men, but so often we are libels to the name of Christ and to the testimony of the Gospel! It's not hard to find examples of what I'm talking about in our world today, that the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel are misrepresented by those who are not worthy of it.

William MacDonald once saw a pickup truck with two bumper stickers on the back. One said: 'I love Jesus', and then when his eye glanced to the other one it was written in an Italian font, and it said 'You toucha my car, I breaka your face'. 'I love Jesus'...'You toucha my car, I breaka your face' - that's sometimes the strange contradiction that we find in the lives of some believers. They talk one way, they behave another. On one occasion a soldier ran into the court of Alexander the Great. He was sent there for disobeying orders, and Alexander said: 'What is your name?'. The young man replied: 'Alexander'. 'Alexander?', Alexander the Great said to him, 'Then either change your name or change your ways!'. Maybe you're here tonight and you're a so-called 'backslider', and you think it's alright in evangelical Ulster to make a profession and live like a reprobate - change your name or change your ways! Do not call yourself a follower of Christ if you're not prepared to follow Christ.

But I beg those who, perhaps in the meeting tonight, have been put off by the bad testimony of a so-called 'believer'. What I want to do for you tonight is to take the place of one of these four concerned companions, and try to get you past the crowd of followers around Christ, to see Christ Himself. I want to do what they did: carry you to the heavenly heights, and break you through the roof, and bring you to the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ, the lowly Saviour of men. Do you see Christ tonight? Don't tell me what Tom, Dick, or Harry has done, who belong to this meeting, that meeting or the other meeting. Will you consider Christ? Will you look at Him, His lovely person, His principles, His perfect life, the word that He preached? Will you come with me just for a moment, and see first of all that He sees you and He knows you?

Verse 5 tells us that: 'When Jesus saw [the faith of these four], he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee'. Now that tells us that Jesus knows about us, and He sees us. He knew everything that there was to know about this paralysed man. Now whatever this man felt was his primary need, which was probably physical, it didn't matter to Jesus: Jesus knew his greatest need was forgiveness! I know that you've maybe got problems tonight, and I sympathise with you, but what I want to ask you is: do you realise the greatest problem of all that you have is your need of forgiveness? Because, as Jesus looks down on you tonight, and I assure you He's doing exactly that, He sees all your sin - all the wrong that you've ever committed in your life! He knows everything about you, He sees everything that you have done, thought, said, felt - and yet the miracle of the good news of Jesus Christ is this: even though He knows everything about you, He still loves you!

He is willing, just like this man, to forgive you. You can be certain tonight that He sees your sin, no matter how much to heaven it may mount, no matter how many sins you've committed in the last hour, the last 24, the last 7 days, the last 4 weeks, the last 12 months, the last decade of your life. It doesn't matter, Jesus sees them all - but I want to tell you something else: He looks for faith in every heart. Every heart is sinful, every heart has fallen short of God's glory and sinned against God, but what Christ is looking for in this age of grace when the Gospel is preached is that sinners will have faith in who He is and what He has done. Do you have faith tonight in who He is? This man had, his four friends had, they knew that this was this man's only hope to be healed - and they brought him to Jesus.

Do you know who Jesus is? That He is the Son of God, that He is God the Son, that He left heaven - He didn't begin in Bethlehem's manger, He was the Creator of the world, the Son of God who came into the world to be the Saviour. He died on the cross to take your sins upon Him, to bear the punishment and the shame that you deserve to be punished for; and He rose again the third day after dying in order to be able to save you tonight. Have you reached an end in yourself like this man, to realise that He is the only way? Mohammed isn't the way, Buddha isn't the way, Joseph Smith isn't the way, Mary is not the way, no church or denomination or creed is the way - Jesus is the only way. As He looks down on you tonight, yes He sees your sin, but I'm asking you: does He see faith in your heart to believe in who He is, to believe in what He has done, to believe He is the only way for you to have your sins forgiven? Because if He cannot see faith in your heart, do you know what He sees? He sees unbelief there!

The real paralytics in this story were men who were called Scribes and Pharisees. If you look at verse 6 you will see that: 'there was certain of the scribes sitting there' - isn't that interesting? Sitting there in their long robes with their long beards and all their religious pious splendour, 'and reasoning in their hearts'. Everybody else was sitting on the edge of their seats, knowing the reputation of this Man Jesus, waiting for Him to do something wonderful that they had heard about - but these men sceptically sitting there, stroking their beards, theologising over these things. Yet these men had unbelief in their hearts - religious leaders who should have been leading the traffic to Jesus - they were sitting there with unbelief, do you know why? Because they couldn't see their own sin, and they couldn't see who the Son of God was. They would not believe, they simply failed to acknowledge that Jesus was anything other than a mere man!

If you don't believe in Christ tonight, if you're not born-again and converted, you're as guilty as they are of unbelief! You might say: 'I believe He's the Son of God' - but if you've never believed on Him, if you've never been converted, you're as good as saying 'I don't believe He's anything special, other than a mere man'. My friend, the second thing I want you to see about Him is not only that He sees you and knows you, but He is much more than a mere man. In verses 6 to 8 the Pharisees couldn't see this, that He was more than a mere man. When Jesus pronounced to this man sick of the palsy, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee', this led the Scribes and Pharisees into a trap because it made them confront the implications of the healing miracle that Jesus was about to perform. He turned to them, knowing what was in their hearts - I ask you the question: how could He know what was in their hearts if He did not have the all-knowledge of God in Himself? Of course He did.

He perceived what was in their hearts, because they said: 'Who can forgive sins but God? This is blasphemy!' - and they were right in the first fact! Only God can forgive sins, but it was not blasphemy

because this was God in human flesh! They couldn't see it. To prove it to them, the Lord Jesus asked them a question - I love the questions of Jesus, for often He answers a question with a question. 'Who can forgive sins but God?', they say, and then He answers like this: 'Which is easier, to say to this man sick of the palsy, Thy sins are forgiven thee; or to say to him, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?'. What would your answer to that question be? Which is easier to say? 'Your sins are forgiven you', or 'Arise and walk'? Well, the easier one to say, believe it or not, is 'Your sins are forgiven you'. You say, 'Surely not, if only God can forgive sins!'. It's the easiest thing to say - priests this morning gave absolution at mass, even Protestant ministers can tell people that their sins are forgiven them. It's one thing to say something, it's another thing to prove it.

You see, you can't see into the heart of a person to know if their sins are forgiven. What Jesus was saying is: 'I have said that his sins are forgiven, but I'm going to prove to you that I have forgiven his sins, because the harder thing to do is say 'Arise and walk' - and it happened! I'm going to show you this, and by raising this man from off his bed I'm going to show you that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins'. Oh, I wish I could bring you to the scene to show you that the Lord Jesus proved why His words of forgiveness were not empty, because He is God. He proved that He has the power to forgive sins, and this man got up and walked. He lifted his bed! He went out of the house! He went home rejoicing!

Now you might say, and I think you're forgiven in saying it: 'How could anyone doubt after this then? If He did such a wonderful miracle, how could anyone doubt? I mean, if I saw something like that, I would believe in Christ'. Can I tell you, my friend this evening, this crowd in this house never saw what you have seen. 'What do you mean? I've never seen a miracle. I've never seen Jesus'. Friend, these people experienced this before Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was taken and was nailed to a cross, and bled and died. They had not seen this yet, but you know about it! You have heard about Jesus dying for you, His precious blood being shed for you because He loved you, and the mercy, the grace and the forgiveness of God expressed to you - you have heard that He died for your sins, and was judged for your sins, and was buried for your sins, and rose again the third day to give you new life. You know all that! You have the Bible, whether you read it or not!

They hadn't the privilege you have. God hadn't yet demonstrated to them His love in that while they were yet sinners, Christ died for them. Before your very eyes you have pictured, have you not, Christ on His cross evidently set forth, crucified? Yet that hasn't made a difference for you, has it? But my friend, if you would believe just like these men believed, your experience would be their experience. Can you see him tonight? Can you see him after Jesus tells him to take up his bed and walk? He puts perhaps, I imagine, his right foot out first and tentatively steps to the glory of God. Then his left foot follows suit to the glory of God, then his torso manoeuvres, and his whole body sways with the movement that it has never known. He starts to walk a little faster, and then he starts to bounce - and I can see him, do you think he was dancing? Probably! Dancing around that room, taking his bed on his head and dancing out of the house! Did the crowd follow him as he waltzed down the road home in the joy of the Lord, to the glory of God? I think they probably did. He skipped out the door a different man.

Friend this evening, what I want you to see is that there was more than a bed he carried out of the house that day. It was more than a new body he carried with him. That man was born again. The old life of sin, his greatest problem, was taken away. Yes, he was healed in his body, but the most important thing was that he was healed in his soul - because ultimately, one day, his body was going to decay again. In a day, perhaps soon for him, he would find himself lying perhaps on the same bed readying his spirit to leave from a decayed, decrepit body. But what that man took out in that dance that day was a well of living water, springing up unto eternal life in his heart! The promise of God that his sins were forgiven, that when he died - yes, his body would rot, but his soul would be with Jesus.

My friend, you can go out of this house tonight with the same. Do you know why? Because the same Jesus is in this house, the same power is in this house, for Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever - and that same joy is available that this man had, the same peace, the same life; and it is purchased by the same way: faith.

Let's all bow our heads. I wonder is there someone here tonight who hasn't been able to get to Jesus

because you've been hindered by the crowd? Maybe it has been a Christian, or maybe it has been someone with a bad testimony, or maybe it's just the crowd that are trying to keep you from Christ, pulling you into sin further. I don't know what it is, but surely, surely tonight have you not seen the Lord Jesus? Have you not seen that He sees you, your sin, He sees if there's faith in your heart, He sees if there's unbelief in your heart? He is more than a mere man, He is God's Son, and He has proven that He has power on earth to forgive sins tonight. You don't have to wait to the judgment day till your good and bad is weighed up, it's now - He can forgive your sins now.

If you've seen that, you have a duty to respond. 'What must I do?', you say. Let me make it as simple as I can: you need to turn from your sin, that means repent, be willing to leave it. You say, 'I don't have power to do that' - God will give you power if you're willing, He will make you able. So if you say to the Lord: 'Lord, I confess that I am a sinner, and I'm willing to turn from my sin', He will give you His Holy Spirit to do that. The second thing you need to be willing to do is believe that Jesus alone can save you, the Lord Jesus who died for your sin, that His sacrifice was enough to take away, that He rose again the third day to give you new life. Say: 'Lord Jesus, I turn from my sin and I accept Your sacrifice, the gift of salvation purchased for me on the cross. Save me, cleanse me from my sin in Your precious blood'. The third thing is you need to confess Him as Lord and give your whole life to Him. Be willing for Him to take full control, and say: 'Lord, save me and make me Your child. Help me to follow You all the days of my life, whatever it costs'.

If you have prayed a prayer like that, would you speak to me on the way out? I have some literature I'd love to give to you to help you. Please don't leave without sorting this matter out, of your salvation. Tonight, for the first, get beyond the crowd to the Christ.

Father, we must unite in saying 'Glory to the name of Jesus; Jesus, the name that charms our fears, that bids our sorrows cease - 'Tis music in the sinners ears, 'tis life and health and peace'. Lord, may it be such to some lost soul under the sound of the preached word tonight. Draw people to Thyself, Lord, draw us all to the Saviour's side. In His lovely name we pray, and for His glory, the never-changing Jesus in whose name we pray, Amen.

"Jesus, Friend Of Children"

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by David Legge

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I want you to turn in your Bibles for our scripture reading to Mark's Gospel chapter 10, Mark chapter 10, and I want to speak to you later on in our meeting on the subject 'Jesus, Friend Of Children'. It's not a message specifically directed towards children, although a large amount of what I will have to say will be directed towards the children, but it is applicable to all of us as we will see clearly from the text.

Mark chapter 10 verse 13: "And they brought young children to him", that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, "that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children", or "Let the little children come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them".

We're just going to pray now that the Lord will bless what is said upon the Scriptures, and those who haven't already anchored their soul to Jesus will do so tonight by faith. So do unite your heart with me now as we pray together before we hear God's word. Let us pray: Father, we thank Thee that the Lord Jesus Christ had a special place in His heart for children. Lord, we do pray tonight that young and old may be able to grasp in their minds and hearts what it means to trust Christ, the friend of sinners - whether they be children or adults. Give them the grace, we pray, to understand and to believe. For we ask these things in the precious name of our Lord, Amen.

Now I'm sure it's no surprise to most of you here this evening that most people are converted in childhood. That is, those who call themselves Christians, in the Bible-believing sense, become Christians as children, or at least in their teenage years. Just to illustrate this - I hope this doesn't fall flat on its face - I want you to put your hand up if you were saved under the age of 16 years. Take a good look around you - that's probably most people. What about under 20 years of age, under-sixteen's included? Almost everyone in the place, which bears out an illustration of that fact. In fact, I'm led to believe - I don't know who took these statistics, or how they reached them - that 90% of Christians become Christians as children.

Now we may ask the question: why is that? Psychologists and sceptics in our world, particularly child psychologists, will say: 'Well, you're just taking advantage of simple minds. Sunday Schools, and children's meetings, and child evangelism in general is polluting', they would say, 'brainwashing children at their most vulnerable and impressionable stage of human development'. We need to ask the question: is that the case? Many of you who were converted as children - is that what happened to you? You were taken advantage of and brainwashed? Well, I think if that were the case then it would follow that when we grew up, and when all these children grew up and gained intelligence, they would dispense with their Christian faith in the same way as they dispense of other childhood fantasies.

I want you to understand categorically that when a child trusts Christ, if he or she really trusts Christ it's not the same belief that they have in fairies or the bogeyman - it is true faith that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, accepts. Now I know that the apostle Paul said that when he was a child he spake as a child, and understood as a child, and thought as a child; but when he became a man he put away childish things. We do, when we grow up, put away childish things - but Paul the apostle never put Christ away. He never gave up his faith, and it was in adulthood that he came to a full measure of belief in the gospel. The witness of most of this congregation here this evening of those who are still trusting Christ is that Christ and faith in Him is not a childish thing.

Christ, in this passage of Scripture that we read together this evening, is not talking about childish faith, the faith of fairytales and fantasies; but He's talking about childlike faith. There's a difference between childish and childlike faith, and I want to explain to you tonight as simply as I possibly can what childlike faith is. Here's the first definition of it: childlike faith is trusting Christ early. Childlike faith is trusting Christ early. Now that means whatever age you are, I'm not just talking about trusting Christ early in life, though it does mean that, but I'm talking about trusting Christ as soon as you know that He is true - whatever your age, whether you're young or old. When you realise who He is, what He says is true, what He did for you on the cross was out of love and it is able to take away your sins forever - trust Him early, right away: that is childlike faith.

Now in our story the disciples, like many today, tried to shoo the children away from Jesus when their parents brought them to the Lord to be blessed. We see the reaction of the Lord Jesus Christ - the Saviour was displeased with such an attitude! I believe He is displeased today with such an attitude - those who would keep children from the Lord Jesus Christ - because the Lord Jesus, in this incident, shows His love for the children. In fact, He goes as far to say that theirs is the kingdom of God, the kingdom of God belongs to these little children!

Now we're going to look at the children tonight, but before we look at the children I want you to see first of all that there were other people there who brought the children. We sang about the 'Mothers of Salem', the parents. They perhaps weren't all mothers, probably fathers and guardians, maybe older brothers and sisters - and they brought the children to Jesus. Now I want to ask the question of all the parents and the adults in this place tonight: are you doing that? Are you doing that? Are you bringing your children to Jesus? Now I know you bring them to school, perhaps every morning. Maybe you bring them to the playing fields. Maybe you bring them to music practice once or twice a week. You bring them to the swimming pool, you bring them to the shops, maybe in the future you hope to bring them into your business or onto the farm or into your trade, or maybe you want to send them to university or college? But do you realise tonight that, according to the Lord Jesus Christ, the most important thing that you can do for your boy or girl is bring them to Jesus?

Also that means bringing them to the place where they may receive the Gospel of Jesus. These parents brought their children to where Jesus was, that they may receive an eternal blessing from Him - but we see that there were men who hindered the mothers bringing the children to Jesus. Now I don't know if I'm hitting any sore points here tonight or not, but I think that it is often the same in homes around our district and around our land and world. Because the story is often the same: the mothers want to bring the children to Jesus, whether it's Sunday School, or a children's meeting, or Gospel Church - but there are often strong, arrogant, sometimes violent and abusive men that stop the mothers bringing the children to Jesus. Am I speaking to someone here tonight that's maybe being cruel to children in another way - not just depriving them of Christ's love, but perhaps depriving them of parental love? Many a parent is quick tempered. I've heard it myself: the violent language, the abusive behaviour. What this does is it creates seeds of insecurities in these children that will come to light in adulthood. We need to be warned: one, if we're keeping the Gospel from our children; and two, if in any way we're harming the children - the Son of God loves children! So much so that He has pronounced a judgment upon anyone who will harm children!

In Matthew 18 He said: "But whosoever shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea". We see from this instance and His words in Matthew 18, that nothing makes the Son of God more angry than cruelty to boys and girls. In fact, the word here for 'angry' is 'indignant', it's made up of two Greek words 'much grief'. It means He was much grieved by the fact that the disciples were shooing the children away from their presence. I can almost see them - Jesus has been so busy, He's healing the sick, He's feeding hungry people, He's making blind eyes to see, all sorts of demoniacs and paralysed people are coming for healing - and all of a sudden, as if it wasn't enough with all that, these mothers are coming to get hands laid on their little children and blessed. The disciples say: 'They're only children, send them all home! Jesus hasn't got time for them!' - and Jesus was much grieved.

Do you know the greatest cruelty that you can have towards a child is hindering one child believing or

coming to the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you know what parents say today? 'I want to let them make their own mind up. I want to allow them the space, I'm not going to shove my religion down their throat in order that they make up their own mind, and they'll choose from the commercial religious supermarket of life later on'. Well, if that's your philosophy my friend, I say to you: well then, give them the choice! Because if you don't give them the Gospel early in life, what choice do they have? They'll go with the rest of the flow and inevitably they will reject the Lord Jesus Christ. Others conclude: 'They're just children, what can children understand about the type of message that you're preaching tonight?'. Well, here's what the Son of God says: 'These children have the potential to be members of the kingdom of God, just like any man or woman'. The children's hymn goes like this, and I think it's profound:

I'm not too young to sin,
I'm not too young to die,
I'm not too young to begin
A life of faith and joy.

I'm not too young to know
The Saviour's love to me
In coming down to earth below
To die upon the tree'.

I believe, if we would only let the children see the Lord Jesus, they would run after Him! What Jesus did and said tells us volumes about Him. Believers tonight, if you're wanting to be like the Saviour, you will love the children too. George MacDonald, that old preacher, used to say that he didn't believe in a man's Christianity if boys and girls were never to be found playing around his door. The boys and girls, I believe, would be playing around the carpenter's shop of the Lord Jesus Christ. They followed Him in procession, like the Pied Piper, everywhere He went. Here in this scene we see fathers and mothers, perhaps older children, bringing young children - many of whom, Luke tells us, were little babies. Proud parents handing their precious bundles into Christ's everlasting arms! Can you see the little bundle of flesh snuggling into His bosom as He places His holy hand upon their warm rosy heads, and lifts His eyes heavenward and blesses them in the name of His holy Father? You see, Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world; red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in His sight.

Now children, I want to address you this evening, because maybe your parents couldn't have encouraged you more to trust the Lord Jesus. I think, perhaps, that that's more the case for many of you here this evening - the fault lies with yourself, you've never trusted Christ. You've been brought up, perhaps, in this church, you've gone to Sunday School, been to the children's meetings, maybe you're now in the Youth Fellowship - but you can't point to a time in your life when you realised that you were a sinner, and you actually trusted Christ, you took that step of faith. Well, I'm saying to you tonight: I beg you, have that childlike faith now. In other words, trust Him early, trust Him while you're young, trust Him before you meet many of life's temptations to sin, before the difficult days of your teens come. I don't want to be too depressive for you, but before those struggles come, those problems of exams and moral choices, ethical issues, strange emotions, somersaulting hormones.

Maybe you're saying: 'Well, I'm experiencing all that now! I am a teenager' - and you probably think things couldn't get any worse than they are now. But I'm telling you that they will get worse, worse and worse - there will be greater temptations, more challenges, greater strains and stresses of life that will increase as you exit adolescence and enter into adulthood. I want to tell you tonight on the authority of God's word, from my experience and the experience of all the Christians here tonight, it makes all the difference in the world entering into adulthood with Jesus at your side! Maybe you're changing schools soon - will you determine to make your mark right from the first day as a Christian? I remember when I was in Primary 7, I wasn't living the way I ought to have done as a Christian. I professed the name of Christ, but I wasn't living up to my profession. I had a decision to make as I was going to the next school: was I going to go in naming myself as a Christian but not living as one? I decided there and then: 'I'm going to nail my colours to the mast'. The way I did it may not be the way you do it, but I just stuck a 'Jesus Saves' badge on my blazer. Maybe it was a coward's way, rather than using my mouth I used a badge - but nevertheless, I was taking the decision - will you take that decision tonight?

Maybe you've never truly been saved, you've never really stepped out and made a mark for Christ yourself, you're resting on your parents' profession or in the experience of this church. I ask you tonight: will you give your whole life to Christ now, early, a fresh life, a whole life, a future prospect before you? D. L. Moody once preached a gospel message like this, and afterwards he told a man that he had two and a half conversions. The man says: 'I suppose you mean two adults and a child?'. He said, 'No, two children and one adult'. The adult's life was half over, but those two children had all their lives ahead of them! I implore you, child tonight, young person, give your mind to Jesus Christ, give your energies, your passions, your wills to Christ. Before you grow to love someone or something else, learn to love Christ, and that love for Christ will shape who you love and what you love in your future. Before you make your own nest - maybe it will be at university, maybe you'll just leave home - make your dwelling place with Christ, and He will build your whole life on the solid ground. Before you make any plans for whatever future you wish, do what Jesus said: seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things will be added unto you.

Whatever your experience of childhood has been - a non-Christian home that dissuaded you from Christianity, or a Christian home that encouraged you to trust Christ. Whatever your experience of adolescence has been - difficult with or without Christ. I tell everyone here tonight, young, old: Christ is for you! Irenaeus, that great old Christian, said: 'Jesus came to save all by means of Himself: infants, and children, and boys, and youth. He therefore passed through every age, becoming an infant for infants, a child for children, a youth for youths'. Do you know that Jesus was a child, just like you? Do you know that the Lord Jesus was a teenager, just like you? He experienced the testings, the temptations that you've experienced, yet without any sin - and that means He's got the power to get you through too, however young or old you may be.

But here's the miracle of miracles: He took your sin for you, He was nailed to a cross for you, He bled and died - and although you're young and a child, the sins that you have committed are enough to put the Son of God on the cross to have to die in order to bring a child like you to heaven. We sang this morning:

'It is a thing most wonderful,
Almost too wonderful to be,
That's God's own Son came down to earth
To die to save a child like me!'

Maybe some people, as I'm talking to the young people tonight, feel an ache within their heart. You were once a child, you once grew up in a Christian atmosphere, and just now as I'm touching some of these points you feel an ache in your heart, you feel the pain of the past. You were brought up with the Gospel, yet you scorned it and squandered those opportunities - and your life has told the tale of the prodigal. You've wasted your youth on riotous living and you've nothing to show for it! You've sown a harvest of missed opportunities in your youth, and now you're reaping the rewards. All you can look back on is a wasted life, shattered dreams, a vacuous empty space in your heart. Your character has been irrevocably soiled, your reputation has been irretrievably sullied - you wish you could go back and change the past. You know that you chose the wrong road, you wish that you could rub it out and start again.

If there's ever a lesson to some of you young people here tonight, about how important it is to trust Christ early as soon as you know He's true, it's that one. Don't live your life a wasted life because you shunned the Gospel! But I say to you older folk: if you feel tonight, afresh, the tug of Christ's love upon your heart as you did when you were a little child, trust Christ now! You can have childlike faith now! What is that childlike faith? Only a faith that is early, a faith that responds as soon as it feels the tug of divine compassion. I urge you to trust Christ early. Trust Christ tonight: one, because of the law of nature. If a man will not do a thing, the time is bound to come when he cannot - that's the law of nature. That means if you stop your leg up and don't use it for long enough, there will come a day when you can't use it. You can do it with your arm; you can do it with your eye, cover it up with a patch and there will come a day that, because the light is not entering, the use of your eye will diminish. The same with your ear, it's a law of nature - but it's also the law of the heart. If your heart

feels the love of Christ in your youth but you shun it, if your heart feels it even now, whatever age you are, and you do not respond to Jesus, you do not come to Him like these little boys and girls - there will come a day when you won't feel it anymore, when it won't make a difference!

The law of metaphysics - I know that's a big word, but it simply teaches this, I'll explain it: it would implore us to come to Christ early. It teaches that the first thought that you have on any subject, whatever that subject may be, the first thought that you have on it is the thought that will come to your mind first when you think about that issue again. That means that if you said 'No' the first time to the Gospel, the first thought that will come to your mind the next time you hear the Gospel is the thought of refusal. That's why you should trust Christ early: because the first rejection you ever made of the Gospel is registered on your brain cells, and the more you repeat it the harder it will be to say 'Yes' to Christ.

The law of nature teaches you to come, like a child, early. The law of metaphysics, and then there's the law of psychology. What is that? In relation to coming to Christ early, it's simply this: age hardens the soul, age hardens your soul! It prevents you coming to Christ. When the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to you again and again and again, you don't feel it any more. My friend, I ask the question to you: is it so strange, then, that few old men are saved when we consider these things? It would be a surprise if an old man was saved! Occasionally an old man does snuffle and whine for mercy on his deathbed, but that is the exception rather than the rule. I hear some people saying: 'I'll wait till I die. I'll get an opportunity, these deathbed conversions, I hear about them all the time!'. I hear about them all the time, but statistics tell me that only 3 out of 60 elderly people get the opportunity to cry out to Christ. You can only have a deathbed conversion if you've got the time to have one, if your death is not accidental. You can only have a deathbed conversion if you're not drugged and sedated and doped with anaesthetic and painkillers. You can only have a deathbed conversion if you haven't entered into the demise of dementia and senility. That is why childlike faith is what Christ longs for in every man and woman, an early trusting of Christ!

What else does this childlike faith speak of? Well, I think it is likened to a child...it could be for its trustworthiness - a child trusts you, perhaps, like adults wouldn't. A child has receptiveness: it receives things, it believes things that others wouldn't. A child has a simplicity, it doesn't complicate matters the way we as adults do. A child has wonder, it wonders at the snowflake outside its frosty window. But you know, I don't think that's the main thought that the Lord Jesus is trying to get across to us tonight, I think it is this: a child is helpless. A child is helpless, every child born into this world today is completely, totally, absolutely emotionally, spiritually, intellectually helpless and dependent upon others. Jesus said: 'So is everyone born into the kingdom of God'. Now I'm asking you tonight: have you come into the kingdom of God utterly helpless? Jesus says if you don't, come like this little child, utterly and completely useless of yourself, saying that there's:

'Nothing in my hands that I can bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling,
Naked come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace,
Foul, I to the Fountain fly,
Wash me, Saviour, or I die'.

It's got to be grace plus nothing! God's salvation without yourself, without your righteousness! It's got to be Christ and Christ alone, that's all these children had - but that's how they got in! Childlike faith is not just trusting Christ early, it's trusting Christ completely. The world is obsessed tonight with self-respect, it's just a euphemism for sinful pride and independence from God. Self-image seems to be one of the most important things that you have to try and form in your life, but that's not what God's word says. God's word says that the first step is: 'Blessed are those that are poor in spirit' - that means blessed are those who realise that they have nothing to commend themselves to God. There's nothing in you that can save yourself or can even make God smile on you, but if you can be like a child and admit you're helpless and hopeless without Him, He will receive you.

John Ruskin said: 'What a man needs is not so much to graduate, but to backslide into the simplicity of

childhood' - those are the type of backsliders we want in this place! You can't graduate to eternal life, you can't climb some kind of moral high ladder and reach God's standards, but you must backslide - backslide from yourself, backslide from your ethical code that you think is going to get you into heaven. You need to have childlike humility, that which the Lord Jesus spoke of in Matthew 18: 'Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Truly I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven'.

Have you got that humility tonight? Do you see how the Lord Jesus Christ responds to such humility? What did He do for them? He came lowly, down to their level, and He lifted them up. He took them in His arms, and He blessed them eternally. I ask you tonight: do you not long, do not desire to be held in the arms of Jesus Christ and be blessed by Him? Well if you do, my friend, you must humble yourself. You must put yourself down in order that one day He might lift you up to the glory and heights of heaven - because, think of it for a moment, it was He from the heights of heaven who was lowered to your hell. Whoever you are, children, teenagers, adults - Jesus said to His apostles, to the disciples, religious men: 'If you want to enter the kingdom, you must join the children'.

Will you say tonight, in simple, childlike, early, complete faith: 'Jesus, friend of little children, be a friend to me'. Let us pray. It doesn't matter what age you are, I was converted at 8 years of age - there's people here tonight that were converted younger than that. Most people here tonight were converted as a child, just like you, if you're one of them. There's teenagers here, there's adults here, and I'm going to challenge you all - every head bowed, please. When did you trust Christ? I'm not asking you when your father and mother came to the Iron Hall, I'm not asking you when you started Sunday School or you got first prize. I'm asking you not if you're baptised, but I'm asking you: when did you step out yourself, turn from your sin, and trust the Lord Jesus as your own? For if you can't answer me, it means you haven't - but the good news is: you can do it just now. You don't need to complicate it, I might complicate it for you, just say: 'Lord Jesus, save me. Come into my heart, Lord Jesus, come in today, come in to stay. Come into my heart Lord Jesus'. Is there an adult here tonight, oh and I've plucked a few chords on your heartstrings? The memories of your childhood that sin has diluted, and almost caused to be cast into a sea of forgetfulness - but yet, tonight, those embers of your Sunday School days, the days at your mother's knee, have been fanned to flame again. Will you not come tonight early, right away, before that flame goes out?

Father, we have read together the old story how Jesus received the children that came to Him. We pray that all those tonight who would come in childlike faith, young or old, that Jesus would receive them again. We believe He will, for He has said: 'Him that comes to me, I will no way cast out'. Lord, may they come tonight, boys and girls, young men and young women, grown men, old men, women, everyone - may they come tonight, Lord. To the glory of the Saviour, who still has power to lay His hands on all men and bless them unto eternity, in whose name we pray. Amen.

"What The Gospel Is"

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I want us to turn in our Bibles to the book of Titus - 1 and 2 Timothy, and then Titus. Again we are coming, somewhat, to that place the Bible calls 'Calvary', 'the place of the skull', the place where Jesus suffered and died for sin. Titus and chapter 2, and I want to speak to you later on on the subject 'What the Gospel Is'. Titus 2, and we'll take time to read the whole chapter, but really our concentration will be on verses 11 through to 14.

Beginning to read at verse 1, Paul writes to Titus: "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; 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, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" - the Lord will bless the reading of His truth.

The book of Titus comes along with 1 and 2 Timothy under the New Testament categorisation of the 'pastoral epistles', because both Timothy and Titus were young pastors. The apostle Paul actually viewed them as his own sons in the faith, we see that from chapter 1 and verse 4: 'To Titus, mine own son after the common faith'; and he refers to Timothy in the same light. Probably Titus, just like Timothy, was literally his son in the faith in the sense that he was converted through the ministry and the Gospel preaching of the apostle Paul. After his conversion through the Gospel, he not only was a Christian that Paul led to Christ, but he became a great helper in the Gospel ministry of the apostle. We read as we go through scripture that, after serving with Paul a while on the Isle of Crete, which was one of the largest islands in the Mediterranean, Paul actually asked him to stay on in Crete and to strengthen and to continue the work of God there. We see this in this book in verse 5 of chapter 1: 'For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee'.

This little letter of three chapters, the epistle to Titus, was probably in response to a report that Titus had written previously to the apostle Paul as to how the work was going on in the Isle of Crete. As we read through it, it's not long until we find out that it is chiefly a letter of encouragement to this young pastor. He has been left by the great apostle to lead the church of God in Crete, to set elders in place, to see that the testimony of Jesus Christ goes on from strength to strength. This evangelism in the early church was not dropping 'gospel bombs' and leaving people to their own devices, they stayed with the people, they settled there and the new converts made up a church. They put elders in place, they formed an assembly. Titus was given the responsibility of discipling these young Christians, and eventually developing other godly leaders that would take the testimony of Jesus Christ on to the next generation.

But another chief responsibility that Titus had was also to win the lost, to preach the evangel, the

Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to see people saved thereafter. The major thrust of this book was to equip the people in Crete to evangelise the people round about them in their neighbourhoods, in their workplace, in their family. We see this: six times God and our Lord Jesus Christ are referred to in this book as being 'Saviour'. That is the emphasis of this little epistle: that there is a Saviour for the world, a Saviour for those who are lost in sin and nature's night. The Gospel themes of the portion we read together, if you were just to take verses 11 through to 14 of chapter 2, you see the Gospel theme is coming through very definitely, the theme of God's grace: 'For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men'.

We see in verse 13 the subject of the second advent, the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, that the Gospel is not only a message of the first coming when Jesus came to Bethlehem, and the Gospel records that we have of Him in Matthew to John; but there is a second coming, Jesus is going to appear a second time without sin unto salvation. Then we see in verse 14 the intrinsic crux, literally speaking, of the Gospel - 'crux' means 'cross'. The cross is the central axis of everything that we believe and preach, verse 14: this One, this Christ 'gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works'. The substitutionary sacrifice that Jesus made for our sins on the cross.

Now before I go on any further, what is very interesting - at least I think - to note, is the definition of what the church is. Have you ever wondered about that? Why the church exists at all? Well, along with worshipping God, which I would say is the primary reason for the church of Jesus Christ in the world today, the second, the next best reason why it is here and now in the 21st-century is to preach the good news, to herald forth the Gospel, the good tidings that a Saviour has come, and a Saviour who is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him - 'Seeing He ever liveth', He died and He is alive again through His glorious resurrection. But that is not often the answer that you get from people. If you were to ask them casually, maybe stop them in the street or even in a meeting like this: 'What's the church for?' - you would get a plethora of answers.

Some would say: 'Well, the church exists for social good. It ought to be a charitable institution, helping the poor and the sick, the orphan and the widow'. There is a measure of truth in that, we ought to be doing all those things, but does the Bible teach that that is the reason for the existence of the church? Others will say: 'Well, the church should give political leadership to whatever nationality it belongs to, whatever state and society and entity it is found within'. Others say that the church should give a sense of community to a neighbourhood or to people who are at a loose end. There are so many lonely people around today, they need a sense of belonging and the church is where they can find that. Others say: 'Well, the church ought to preserve our national or ecclesiastical heritage'. Whether your church is the Roman Catholic Church or a Protestant denomination, perhaps you feel that it is the 'defence of the faith'. People around this district talk the nonsense of 'For God and for Ulster' - that's what many believe the church is for, to defend your particular national or political allegiance.

But I say to you this evening, from the word of God, that the church is in existence for none of those things. Apart from worshipping God, which is the chief end of man, the church exists to herald forth the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. I would go as far as to say on the authority of Scripture that if a church does not evangelise, that is preach the Gospel, it is not a church at all in the New Testament sense. All you have to do is look to the very origins of the church. In Acts chapter 2, the birthday of the church, when it became an actual organism - it had been a mystery hitherto, and now God was revealing what He was going to do in saving Gentiles as well as Jews - what happened on that very origination day of the church? Almost or about 3000 souls were saved! The church exists to see people won for the Lord Jesus Christ in salvation.

Now when we come to that conclusion we face another disputed point, because once we agree that the church exists to preach the Gospel, the question that obviously hangs in the air is: what is this Gospel that the church ought to be preaching? You would think by 2000 or so years of history that the church, in general, would have come to some kind of consensus as to what the Gospel is, but it hasn't! If you ask many people in Christendom today, some will say: 'Well, the church exists to continue to teach the traditions and the dogmas of the church - its own dogmas, its own traditions, its own teaching - to keep those going'. There's a measure of truth in that, depending on what those traditions and dogmas are,

as long as they are based on the word of God - but others will say: 'Well, the church exists to follow the example of Christ, to follow Jesus, to do as He did, to say as He said'. Others pick up on the commandment in the New Testament to 'Love thy neighbour'. You often hear this in Christian churches, so-called, that the Gospel is 'Loving your neighbour and loving God'. Others say the Gospel is to live by the ten commandments, God's law that He has given to us. Others turn to the New Testament and see Christ as the new Lawgiver after Moses in the Sermon on the Mount, and to obey the Beatitudes and all the laws and principles that Christ laid down. One of the most popular is the 'golden rule': 'Live out the golden rule! - 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' - that is the Gospel'.

Well, if you really want to know what the Gospel is tonight you've come to the right place - I don't mean the Iron Hall, I mean this little epistle of Titus. Titus is a young pastor, and you would expect that when the apostle is trying to encourage and instruct this young man in how to make the church grow and to preach the Gospel, he would make absolutely clear in remembrance to him what that Gospel is that he ought to be preaching. He does just that in verse 11: 'For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men'.

Let's look tonight at what the Gospel is. The first thing I want to say on this text is that the Gospel is a gospel of grace, the Gospel is a gospel of grace. Now you might be like most people in our world thinking that 'grace' is something that Torvill and Dean display when they're on the ice rink - but that is not grace. The theological definition of 'grace' is 'unmerited favour', something that you do not deserve but you're getting it anyway - not because you've earned it, but through a free gift, a gift of grace. But you will note in this verse 'the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men'. Now that's very strange, because we never think of a concept appearing. We can talk about it, we can debate about it, we can analyse and dissect a concept, even a theological one - but we don't ever think of it appearing. There is a personification here of grace - grace has appeared!

So we see that what Paul is speaking to Titus about is not a mere philosophy, it is not a body of ethics, it is not just a doctrine - though doctrine is involved - but Paul is chiefly speaking of a Person. Grace is a Person. You see, the New Testament message that has come to us and agrees right from Matthew to Revelation, is that God's supreme gift to fallen man throughout all of history has been His Son. At the beginning of the Gospel of John, chapter 1 and verse 14, we read that John says God's expression of Himself was manifest in human flesh. John, on behalf of all the disciples, said: 'And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth'. The Lord Jesus Christ is the personification of grace.

This word 'appeared' in Titus could be translated 'manifested'. The grace of God has been manifested, or shone forth to us. God's gift of grace to fallen mankind is none other than His Son! Paul described the Saviour as God's unspeakable gift, or God's indescribable gift. One indescribable element of His grace is what theologians and Bible teachers and scholars call 'His condescension'. He condescended to come from heaven to earth. Or you could put it like this: 'His humiliation' - you read about it in Philippians chapter 2, that He humbled himself. He came to this earth, He took upon himself human flesh; but also the form of a Servant, to serve God, to bring the way of salvation to fruition. He went to the extent of humbling and condescending, to going to the cross and dying even the death of the cross.

Do you know this evening that our Gospel is a gospel of grace? Do you know that that grace is the personification and manifestation of none other than the Lord Jesus? That's why Paul says in 2 Corinthians: 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich'. The King of heaven, the Creator of the universe, the One who set the rolling spheres in orbit, He came to be a man, He came to where men were out of grace.

Now many people mistake salvation to be found in religion. If you like, religion is men trying to get where God is - but religion is determined by itself, not by how you're related to Jesus Christ, and that's what salvation is determined by. Not by what religion you are, or how many steps of the ladder you've got, ethically speaking, to God! But religion is false - what really matters is a relationship with Jesus Christ, how we come to God through Him and Him alone. 'Christ', Titus says, 'hath appeared to all men', irrespective of religion. This is beyond class or creed, culture or whatever you believe or have

believed - this grace has appeared to all men! Now that does not mean that all men are saved, the Bible nowhere teaches a doctrine of universal salvation - that everybody will be all right in the end. We see that from John 1, when this Christ of God came into the world, verse 11 tells us: 'He came unto his own, and his own received him not', but the next verse, verse 12 says, 'But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name'.

This is why the Gospel must be preached: Christ must be preached because He is the only hope for men. He must be preached to all men, every creature, and this is why Paul tells Titus: 'Preach this Gospel, that the grace of God has appeared to all men'. Paul said in Romans: 'How shall they believe in whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?'. You see, this grace is not something that you come into through baptism. You see, some churches - and we've been thinking about this on a recent Monday night - talk about grace being given at baptism, as an infant. Then other denominations talk about grace being given into you by confirmation or by church membership, but that grace that men define is not the grace of the Bible. The grace of the Bible is a gift of God, and it is accepted only by faith. That's what verse 1 of chapter 1 of Titus says: 'Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect'. Faith is how he has received the gift of salvation.

The Gospel is a gospel of grace, but can I say very personally to you this evening that the Gospel is also a very personal thing. The Gospel has appeared to all men, but what I'm asking you tonight is: have you, by faith, received the gift of this gracious Gospel as your own? Just received it, and believed it? This is why the Gospel makes a lot of people uncomfortable, because it is a very personal affair. That's why evangelical preaching is so unpopular today. People don't like, in general in our society, feeling that their privacy is invaded. They like to keep themselves to themselves - next-door neighbours hardly even speak to one another in the day and age in which we live. So when you get so personal as to come close to talk about individual faith, acceptance of the Gospel, people become uncomfortable.

I wonder are you uncomfortable tonight in this place hearing the Gospel? Or have you ever been uncomfortable listening to words like these? Well, I would vouch to say that if you have never ever been uncomfortable listening to the Gospel, you've never ever heard the Gospel. Now you might say: 'How can you say that?'. Well, simply because the Gospel is not only a gospel of grace, it is a Gospel that confronts our sin. You can't get more personal than sin! Some of our sins are only known between ourselves and God, that's why people get uncomfortable - because the Gospel uncovers our sin and calls it what it is, an abomination in the sight of Almighty God!

These Cretians were described by one of their own countrymen, a prophet, you will see in verse 12 of chapter 1, as: 'alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellied'. The poet, probably Epimenides, was describing these people in Crete as the dregs of Greek culture and society. How our culture today needs a message, but the message that it needs is the message that it does not want! It is the message of God's gospel, yes that there is a gift of grace, but that sin must be dealt with. You might say: 'Well, you couldn't call people in Ulster 'always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies''. Well, this, of course, was an exaggeration on his part. You can't tar all with the one brush, even though Epimenides does it. But I ask the question of you tonight: who of us does not have a problem with the things described for us in verse 12? 'Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world'.

Ungodliness! Have you never had a problem with ungodliness? 'What is that?', you say. Well, it's unrighteousness. Let me be more specific: it is breaking the law of God. You know, or at least I hope and assume you know, the ten commandments. It is to break those, that is ungodliness - and surely I don't need to explain to you in the 21st-century what worldly lusts are? Sensual passions, incontinence, not being able to control yourself! Do you have problems with those types of sins in your life? Well, you're not a human being if you don't, that's a fact! But really the question tonight in the face of the Gospel is: are you being honest with yourself about your ungodliness, about your worldly lusts, and are you being honest before a holy God?

You see, that is the starting place of conversion - not only to admit that you do wrong, but that you are

wrong. That you are sinner by nature, and that you can't help sinning. Even when you want to do that which is right, you can't bring yourself to do it. You're a sinner, the Bible says! Now you might find that uncomfortable, friend, but that's what the Bible says about us all. 'There is none righteous, no not one, there is none that seeketh after God. There is none that doeth good' - we are born that way, we live that way, and we will die that way. I urge you to overcome that uncomfortableness in thinking of yourself as a sinner.

But then there are people who admit to this fact, and they freely accept: 'Well, I am a sinner' - but they go a step further than God does, and they say, 'Well, if I'm disobedient to God's law, I must then become obedient to it. I must try and do better. I must try and stop sinning, I must attempt to do good'. Many make this mistake after coming to terms with their own sinnership, they devise some personal way or some institutional religious way of overcoming their sin - but sin cannot be overcome, and that is not the Gospel way to overcome it!

'What is it?', you say. Well, here is our third definition of the Gospel: it is a Gospel of grace, it is a Gospel that confronts our sin, but thirdly it is a Gospel that changes lives. Verse 12 says that this Gospel of grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world. That word 'teaching us' could be translated 'disciplining us'. The word 'denying' is in the aorist tense in Greek, which means 'once and for all denying'. This does not mean that the Gospel is saying: 'Look, if you stop these things, well then you're a Christian'. This is not a Gospel of good works, but this is telling us that this Gospel of grace actually has the power within it to make us stop sinning in ungodliness and worldly lusts. This Gospel of grace has the power of Christ in it!

Paul could say in Romans 1:16: 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power', the word is 'dynamus', 'the dynamite of God unto salvation to every one that believeth'. What am I saying? This Gospel can make you good. This Gospel changes lives. As Mrs Alexander put it, and we sang it:

'He died that we may be forgiven' - some people change this verse, and they are wrong to change it -
 'He died to make us good,
 That we might go at last to heaven,
 Saved by His precious blood'.

This is a message that can make you good. You don't have to be good to get it, but when you get it makes you good! The reason being, God's Gospel delivers you from three things: one, from the penalty of sin. Verse 11: 'the grace of God that bringeth salvation' - that means deliverance from hell and our judgment upon our sins. It is also a Gospel that delivers us from the power of sin, verse 12, all these passions and habits that constrain us and control us. Then in verse 13 the believer, then, in Christ looks for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Eventually this Gospel will deliver us from the very presence of sin! This is a Gospel that deals with your past, that deals with your present problems, that deals with your future prospect. It is a transforming thing, Paul could say that after you are converted 'old things pass away, behold all things are made new' - because this new birth in Christ gives you a new start, a new life in which the power of sin is broken! How many people put the cart before the horse, they think that you need to do good to be a Christian. They fail to see that a Christian is made, by God, to do good.

'How is such a change possible?', you might say. The answer is found in verse 14, that our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ - note, please, one definite article, the Lord Jesus here is the God who is the Saviour, He is God's Son, Deity, God of very God - but this Saviour, God manifest in flesh: 'gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify a people unto himself'. How is such a change possible in the life of any man, woman, boy or girl? It is possible because Christ can redeem men's lives!

What does it mean to redeem? Well, you should know that, it means simply to free a captive on the payment of a ransom. You pay the price, the prisoner is set free! God's justice, because He is a holy God, demands satisfaction for sin. You see, God must judge sin, He can't just sweep it under the carpet. We are sinners, and that means we are sure to be judged, but the Gospel is that God sent His

only Son to give His life a ransom for many. Because:

'There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin,
Because He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven and let us in'.

There, hanging between heaven and earth, He paid in the currency of His own blood - the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without blemish and without spot. We may not know, we cannot tell what pain He had to bear, but we believe it was for us He hung and suffer there. He gave himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil world, that He might have a people, a peculiar people, that means a special people, zealous of good works for Himself. Maybe you're saying tonight where you sit: 'I would long to be a person like that, a special person, a person that no longer lives for sin, but lives for the Saviour and lives for God. I long that I might know this Gospel of grace, this Gospel that really once and for all confronts my sin, a Gospel that changes my life!'.

Would you be free from the sins that bind you this very evening? Would you live righteously for God in this present evil world with all its temptations that seem to be greater than they have ever been, though they are far from it? Well, if you would my friend, it's very simple: this grace has been given, and you must embrace it by faith. The Scottish Catechism - and I love to quote this - puts it like this: 'Embrace Christ as He is freely offered in the Gospel'.

I warn you: there is another appearing. If you do not have Christ as Saviour from the first appearing, you will face Him as Judge at the second. I'm sure some of you have heard of John Newton. John Newton was the author of that famous hymn 'Amazing Grace' and many others, and when he was a young man he used to dream of following in his father's footsteps. His father was a sea captain. At the age of 11 young John realised his dream, he was on the crew of his father's ship - but it was far from plain sailing from then on in, because with that crew John learned the ways of wickedness, ungodliness, worldly lusts. He began to fight with his father, he began to rebel and clash with his employers - eventually he was flogged for desertion, and finally he ended up in jail!

When he got out of jail, his imprisonment hadn't changed him one iota. When he was released he just continued on in his old immoral, godless life in unrestrained debauchery - the greatest sin and abominations you could ever imagine. Eventually his downward spiral led him into the most despicable of all trades in those days, and that was the slavery trade. What a wretch and what a sinner young John Newton had become. We might well ask the question: could God do something with a man like this? Can God change a life like this? Well, in his autobiography which was entitled 'Out of the Depths', he wrote these words, I quote: 'March 21st is the day to be remembered by me. I have never suffered it to pass wholly unnoticed since the year 1748. On that day the Lord sent from on high and delivered me from deep waters'. The story goes that he was caught in a raging storm in his boat off the north-west of Ireland, and as the waves thundered against the vessel, as the water filled the decks, the ship was about to break into pieces - and Newton and the crew did everything to pump the water, and with buckets to throw it out of the boat. When he could do no more, fearing that he was going to die, he cried: 'If this will not do, then may the Lord have mercy on us!'. Then the thought came to him: 'What mercy can there be for me?'. Miraculously the storm abated, and more miraculously John Newton was converted. He wrote with his pen that hymn:

'Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see'.

Towards the end of his life, he used to say to audiences: 'My memory is nearly gone, but I can remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour'. He died on December 21st 1807, having served his Lord 60 years in one particular parish in London. On the tombstone in the graveyard of his former parish at Olney are these words inscribed, listen carefully dear soul: 'John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the

rich mercy of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long laboured to destroy'.

It is truly an amazing Gospel, for it is a Gospel of amazing grace. Have you believed it?

Now if the Lord has spoken to you in the Gospel tonight, I have some booklets: a Gospel of John with seven steps to knowing God at the front of it, and a booklet on 'Pardon For Sin and Assurance of Peace with God', and you're very welcome to either of those or both of them on your way out. But the question that remains hanging tonight for you is: do I know that grace of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus in my life?

Father, we pray tonight that someone or some folk in this place would come to know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor. We thank Thee for the Saviour, for His condescending love, for His agony and blood on the cross, and for His willingness to receive repentant sinners - only those who class themselves as sinners, but who will cast themselves on the mercy of God by faith. Lord, may someone take that step tonight, young or old, and we will be careful to give Thee all the praise and all the glory. Those of us who are saved by this amazing grace, we want to say 'Thank You Lord, for saving my soul'. Amen.

"Right Or Wrong Christianity"

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I want you to turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew's Gospel chapter 7. Douglas was singing to us about the fact that the Lord Jesus is Lord, He is Lord of all the earth; and one day when He comes again in judgement, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord - even those who have not recognised Him as Lord presently. The sad truth is: there are many people in the world that think that He's their Lord - but there's going to be a day of rude awakening, when they will find out that they have not really made Him Lord and Saviour of their lives as they thought. You might want to call them 'Christians' - there are so many 'Christians' in our world, but it would be very foolish and very naive, and certainly unbiblical as we'll see from the scriptures tonight, to say that all 'Christians', so-called, will be in heaven.

The Lord Jesus bears this out in Matthew chapter 7. We'll begin to read at verse 21, just three verses down to verse 23. Jesus is speaking in His famous Sermon on the Mount, and He says: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" - and we end our reading at verse 23.

What is right or wrong Christianity? Now please don't fear: I'm not going to bash any particular denominations or religious persuasions in Christendom or outside Christendom - that's not my job tonight. Besides all that, even if I was to try to do a critique of religions or denominations, or cults or persuasions in Christendom individually, well, I'd have you here for a long, long time there are so many of them! I'm not even going to begin reciting them.

Besides all that, the Bible pre-dates all of these systems and organisations. Christianity began with the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore He was before the Presbyterians, the Methodists, and the Episcopalians, and the Mormons, and the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Roman Catholics and Protestants - He was before them all! So ignoring all present-day labels and tags that people might put on Christians to name them and categorise them, I want to ask the more important question this evening: what does the Bible teach real Christianity is? What does the Bible, specifically the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, say that Christianity is not? But I want to be even more personal than that, because I'm not wanting to talk about Christianity as a system or an institution, and wanting rather to ask the question: what a true Christian is? I want to speak personally into your life, because there's a lot of confusion about what a Christian is.

If you would ask some people in Belfast who even call themselves Christian, they would say 'Well, you're born a Christian'. Just like you're born into another land, another nation, with another culture or religion, we are born in the West in countries who call themselves Christian - and whether your persuasion is Catholic or Protestant or whatever, you're born into a Christian country, and that is what makes you a Christian. That's what some people understand a Christian to be. Then there are others who say: 'Well, you have to be baptised to be a Christian'. Whether it's sprinkled as a little child in a particular church, or whether it is as an adult being baptised in total immersion, that is what makes you a Christian. Certainly we believe that the Lord Jesus baptised people. Others will say: 'Well, you have to come to the age about 12, the rite of passage, and you are confirmed'. After you're baptised as an infant, well then you realise as you grow up if you really want this Christian faith or not, and you decide to be confirmed in your particular denomination. That's what some people understand as being what it is to have a Christian conversion.

Then there are others, and you might have heard people describing Christians as being 'good living'. They think that being a Christian is following some kind of ethical, moral code. Maybe it's the ten commandments, maybe it's even the Sermon on the Mount - Matthew 5,6 and 7 - you've all heard the 'golden rule': 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. People think that if you try that, and you succeed, that God in some way will call you a Christian and let you into heaven when the final day comes. Others think that it is more literal than that: following Jesus Christ, whatever that means. Not just rules and regulations, but following the way He lived, following His teaching, and trying to be like the Lord Jesus in your life and in your conduct.

Now we want to ask the most important question, because if you were to take a survey perhaps of 10 people in Belfast, or wider, further afield in Northern Ireland or even the United Kingdom, you would probably get ten - or at least five - different answers as to what a Christian is. Where are we going to look for the real answer? Well, we're going to look not only to the Bible, but we're going to look to Jesus Christ Himself. What does He say? Well, this is perhaps, arguably, the greatest sermon - if you could say that for the Lord Jesus - that He ever preached. It's certainly got the most details for us of any of the sermons that He gave to mankind, and He, of course, was the greatest preacher that preached the greatest sermon. Here in this particular sermon, He makes what I think is perhaps the greatest heart-piercing application of all the truth that He ever left with men when He was on the earth. In His sermon He has turned from talking about false teachers to talking about false professors.

I'm not talking about a professor in a university, I'm talking about someone who professes faith in Christ, someone who says: 'I'm a Christian' - but Jesus says they're not really a Christian, they don't fulfil what the Lord Jesus Christ, what God's word says a Christian really is. In other words, He's moving now away from talking about unsound teachers who teach a false message of the gospel, to talking about unsound hearers - people who take up the message, as we say it here, 'the wrong end of the stick'. They misunderstand what it is to be a true Christian. Now you might say: 'Well, what's the importance of all this anyway? If you just take the name of Christ, and you just follow Christ in some shape or form, surely He'll have pity on you and you'll get into heaven in the end?'. Well, the reason why it's so important is that Jesus actually teaches in the passage that we read together this evening: if you get this thing wrong, what a Christian really is, if you get it wrong now, you will have to be put right then. That's what these verses say. If you get what a Christian is wrong now, you will have to be put right then.

'When?', you might ask. 'On that day', Jesus says in verse 22. He says: 'Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?'. 'That day', Jesus says, if you get what a Christian is wrong today, on that day you will have to be put right and it will be to your loss and your detriment. What day is it? The Bible tells us that there is a day coming that is called 'the day of judgment'. Revelation chapter 20 outlines that day, when all the dead, small and great, will rise from the grave; and they will stand before God, and the Bible says that the books will be opened - that is the book of your life - and you will be judged according to what you have done that has displeased God. On that day those who don't fulfil what it is to be a true Christian, as Christ meant it, the Bible says - and these are tragic words - that whosoever was not found in another book, the Lamb's Book of Life, was cast into a lake of fire.

What an awful day that will be. The day, Jesus says, when the secrets of all men's hearts will be disclosed. In Luke chapter 12 He said: 'For there is nothing covered', or hidden, 'that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known'. On that day there will be many a surprise. Can you not even hear it in the tone of the words of the people Jesus is talking about in verse 22? 'Lord, Lord, have we not...', they're surprised! 'Lord, Lord, it's us, You know us! We're the Christians! We're the ones who followed You! We're the ones who took Your name! We did mighty works in Your name'. But the sad thing is, Jesus says on that day many will be surprised, because people who thought that they were great Christians, and perhaps people who the whole world thought was a great Christian, will be utterly confounded. They will find out on that day that they were not a Christian at all. The rottenness of their religion will be exposed and put to shame before the whole world, but the most tragic thing of all will be this: they will be lost, and lost forever! Jesus says to these people: 'I never knew you', and in another place He's actually quoted as saying, 'Depart from me, ye that work iniquity, into everlasting fire'.

These are serious things, and I hope you're asking yourself just now: 'Well, how can I be sure that I don't get that shock then? How can I know now that I'm really a Christian?'. Well, the simple answer to that is: take the painful verdict of God's word now. Judge yourself now so that you may not be judged. What am I talking about? Jesus is saying that it doesn't matter what you say about being a Christian, it doesn't matter what you've done in the name of Christ, it doesn't matter even what you've been for Christ - or at least you think you've been for Christ - what matters is what He will say about you on that day.

Now here's what the Lord Jesus prophesied that He would say of many who call themselves Christians on that day. Here's the first thing I want to leave with you: He will say to them, 'You may have the right terminology, but I don't know you'. 'You might have the right terminology, but I don't know you' - what am I talking about? Well they say the right words: 'Lord, Lord', they use this word 'prophesy' which is a tremendously spiritual and religious word. They claim to have cast out demons in Jesus' name, they claim to have done many mighty works - the literal word means 'miracles', and is actually used of the miracles that Jesus performed in His life. So here's a group of people who are using all the right language - but Jesus was so familiar with people like that in His life, because there were those who tried to trip Him up on occasion, called the Pharisees and the Scribes, the religious leaders of the day. Jesus spoke of them: 'This people draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They honour me with their language, but their hearts are far away from me'.

One paraphrase of this verse, verse 22, goes like this: 'Not all who sound religious are really godly people!' 'Not all who sound religious are really godly people. They may refer to me as 'Lord', but they still won't get heaven'. Now don't you think for one moment that everybody in Ulster who calls themselves a Christian is a Christian. Sure everybody that dies, if you look down the obituaries in the Belfast Telegraph, has died in Christ - 'God's garden smells sweeter for the roses that have now ascended to Him'. Everybody's saved if you were to believe people's words! If you believed everything that was prayed or said in a church in Northern Ireland today as to be proof that those people were Christians, well we all would be confounded and proved wrong - terminology does not make you a Christian.

A preacher on one occasion called Jack van Empe was preaching the gospel and staying in a very, very humble home. The man who was looking after him was a man who had been on skid row, and he was converted by the grace of God, he found Christ. He brought the preacher into his home, and he showed him the little humble room where he'd be staying, and he told them that he could spend time with the Lord there and get the messages for each night as he would preach the good news of the Gospel. So Jack van Empe began to pray, seeking God for what to preach each night, and then suddenly he heard a little voice from behind him, and it went like this: 'You must be born again'. He turned round only to see a parrot, and this parrot was repeating what this man that had been on skid row and had been gloriously converted had been going around the house saying: 'You must be born again', quoting verses, and this parrot began to repeat it. Jack van Empe, all of a sudden, got the message for that particular evening. He said: 'This is what I'm going to preach on, I'm going to preach on 'Parakeet Christianity' - people who have all the language, say all the right things, but haven't got the life. How many people are like that? Have a form of godliness, but deny the power thereof - they say their prayers, they know how to answer the minister when the minister asks them do they have faith in God. Maybe the minister is evangelical enough to say: 'Are you saved? Do you know you're going to heaven?', and they know all the right words and the right phrases, they just trot off their tongue because they've known them from Sunday School - but Jesus says that knowing the right terminology does not mean that you will be in heaven!

He goes on and he says that to have the right theology does not mean that you will be in heaven. You know what theology is, the study of God and doctrine, and what people believe. Well, if you look at what these people will say on that day of judgment, you see that they're very orthodox and sound in what they believe. They believe in the deity of Christ - you see, to call Jesus 'Lord' as they do, means that you believe that He is not only the Son of God, but God manifest in flesh, God the Son. Not everybody believes that, but they should, because that's what Jesus claimed, that's what the Bible teaches - these people believed that. They talk about prophesying, they talk about casting out devils,

they talk about miracles, these people not only believe that Jesus is God's Son and God the Son, but they believe in the supernatural, they believe in miracles! These aren't dead liberals, these are people that believe that God can still do mighty things. But do you know something? Their right theology did not save their soul.

Now don't misunderstand me, it's important to believe the right thing, and it is important to use the right terminology - Romans 10:9 and 10 tell us: 'If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved'. But you've got to understand that when the Bible talks about confessing with your mouth and believing in your heart, it's not talking about a mere intellectual assent or a verbal confession. Theological truths, and ticking down a list of boxes about what you believe and what you don't believe will get no one into heaven! The right terminology will not save you, the right theology will not save you. Theological truths will save no one!

We did a study on world religions, and each religion has its confession. We studied Islam on one particular evening, and to become a Muslim one of the first steps is to recite what is called the Sha'hadda, which says there is one God who is Allah, and he has only one prophet that is Mohammed. If you recite that, meaning it in your heart intellectually, and meaning it in belief and faith, you become a Muslim. Well, Christianity is not like that, Christianity is more than just vainly repeating something, Jesus warned in this sermon about 'using vain repetitions as the heathen do'. There's something more to it than praying the Lord's Prayer that Christians do in many of our churches. Maybe you recite the Apostles' Creed, or the Nicene Creed - and those are great orthodox doctrinal creeds of the Christian church, but they will not save you reciting them! Saying the 'Hail Mary' or the 'Our Father' will not make any difference to you getting into heaven if they're only words, and if it's only right theology.

Now I don't want any confessions as to who watched the wedding yesterday on television, but yesterday at the wedding of Charles and Camilla they recited this prayer - and there was a big thing made of it, that they were going to pray a prayer of penitence. They didn't tell you that all Anglicans pray this prayer practically every Sunday, I think, I stand to be corrected - but they quoted this: 'We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, by thought, word and deed, against thy Divine Majesty, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable'. Now if every Anglican, including Charles and Camilla, find it intolerable and repent - though there is a lack of restitution, it would seem - the fact of the matter is they would all be saved. Every Anglican communicant would be in heaven! But they are only words, sadly, to many folk. They lack meaning.

You see, correct terminology and correct theology mean nothing if that's all it is. In the book of James the apostle said this: 'Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble'. Did you catch that? You believe there's one God, you maybe believe in Jesus Christ - that's very good, James says, but the devils even believe that and they tremble. You're not going to suggest, his inference is, that those devils are going to heaven? Sure, when the Lord Jesus was going around performing His miracles, the devils also came out of many people crying out and saying: 'Thou art Christ, the Son of God', for they knew the He was Christ. Those devils weren't saved, were they?

You say: 'Well then, what makes it real? I believe in my head that Jesus is who He said He was. I believe He can save me and died for me, and I want to enter into this salvation. What does it mean to really be saved, to get beyond terminology and theology to conversion, and to know that I'm on my way to heaven?'. Well, it's simple, it's in 1 Corinthians 12:3, where Paul says: 'No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost', the Holy Spirit. Now what does that mean? You might say: 'These people said Jesus was Lord, but they didn't get to heaven', but they didn't really own Him as Lord. That's what Paul is saying: no man can own Jesus as Lord and Saviour of their life, except the Holy Spirit does that work within them. The missing element in these people's lives was that they professed faith in Christ, but the Holy Spirit had never done a regenerating, renewing, life-giving work in their heart.

Now you say: 'What is that?'. It is simply the change that Christ makes when He comes into your life.

Paul described it as 'old things passing away'. Those things in your life that you can't get a hold of, a grip of, those habitual sins, those things that you wish, perhaps, you couldn't do or wouldn't do, but you always fall into that trap of doing them - those things can be taken away, and you can be given a new nature that is actually the nature of God in Christ, and you can be changed! That happens at every true conversion! At least, that's what the Bible teaches. Yes, you must come as you are, you can't change yourself now by yourself, you can't strip yourself of all your sin and unrighteousness, you must come as you are - but the Bible teaches that if you come as you are and the Spirit of God does that work in your heart as you put your faith and trust in Him alone, you will not stay as you are. You will be changed.

You might say: 'How do I know? How do I know that what I'm experiencing just now is more than terminology, is more than mere theology? How do I know that the Holy Spirit is working with me like that?'. Here are two ways: one, conviction, that you feel that you're a sinner, and you can't stand being a sinner any longer, and you want something to happen to change you from a life of sin to a life of righteousness before God. That will move from a conviction to a repentance, for the Bible says that type of godly sorrow leads to repentance not to be repented of - what does that mean? You turn from your sin and you don't turn back to it!

Do you start to loathe and hate your sin? Do you start to realise - and maybe it's you at this very point - that you have no hope in this life, or in the life to come? You've no assurance, you just want rid of this awful feeling of guilt in your heart and life, this empty void that is there - you want it to be filled by some meaning, something that really satisfies. My friend, that is a good sign that the Spirit of God is working with you, and if you are obedient to God's word you will be saved - but make sure it's not just lip service, make sure it's not some kind of intellectual assent to a doctrine. It must be with your whole life, you're coming to Christ with your sin and allowing Him to change you, and you're making Him your Lord!

You can have right terminology and not be saved. You can have right theology and not be saved. You can have a right amount of sincerity and not be saved. These people said 'Lord, Lord' - they said 'Lord' twice. You might say: 'So what?'. Well, that repetition suggests to me that they really felt genuine about Him as Lord: 'Lord, Lord!'. It even shows fervency and an urgency, they were expecting the Lord to reply to their cry, because it was them that were crying. But all the evidence here in these verses is that all the sincerity in the world amounts to nothing!

Let me illustrate it to you like this: I could sincerely believe that I'm Spiderman, and I could try and climb up that wall, but it wouldn't be long till not only did I sincerely believe and be sincerely wrong, but I'd be sincerely sore as I fell to the ground - and maybe other people in the congregation would be able to testify to that fact as I landed on them. It doesn't matter what I sincerely believe, the fact is I am not Spiderman - and let me go a step further: I wonder, if I did climb the wall, would you believe me then that I was Spiderman? Maybe some of you would! But the fact of the matter is: these people effectively climbed the wall - they prophesied, they cast out demons, they did mighty works, they showed a demonstration of some power or other, but yet they weren't converted Jesus said. They were sincere to the point of being able to do mighty works, but Jesus is saying that sincerity for truth is all that really matters.

They thought their sincerity could be attested by their preaching, by the delivering of demons from people, by the displaying of God's power in miracles - and the Lord didn't deny that they actually did these things, and even did them in His own name. It wouldn't be the first time that had happened! The Egyptians in the Old Testament counterfeited the miracles of Moses. In Acts 19 we find the sons of Sceva trying to cast out devils in Jesus' name, and the devils overcame them because they weren't converted themselves. In the book of the Revelation we read of a false prophet who will come into this world, and he will mimic the power of God in great signs and wonders - but none of them will be in heaven, because a display of supernatural power is not proof of Christianity!

A right use of terminology doesn't make you a Christian. A right understanding of theology doesn't make you a Christian. A right sincerity, and showing that sincerity in great works, does not make you a Christian. You say: 'What makes me a Christian?'. Verse 21: 'but he that doeth the will of my Father

which is in heaven'. Notice Jesus didn't say: 'He that does the work of my Father which is in heaven', and they were caught up in the works, in the preaching, in the miracles, in the casting out of demons. They were caught up in the works they did for God, and the words they spoke for God, but they didn't realise that they weren't doing the will of God. 'What is the will of God?', you say - it's not just calling yourself a Christian, or using Christian words, it's not just understanding or assenting to Christian theology, it's not just doing Christian works, whether they even be supernatural works if that be possible.

On one occasion some of these religious people came to the Lord Jesus in John 6 and said: 'What shall we do that we might work the works of God?'. In other words, you could put it: 'What is the will of my Father which is in heaven?'. Jesus answered and said unto them: 'This is the work of God: that ye believe on him who he has sent' - that ye believe on Him who He has sent. Who did God send? God sent Jesus. What's the great work that God wants all of us to do? It's not prophesying, it's not casting out demons, it's not doing miracles, it's not doing anything in the name of Christ or for Christ, it is actually to trust Christ and Christ alone for your salvation, to believe on Him! Augustus Montague Toplady, a hymn writer, put it like this in that famous, it's called the Cowboy hymn, 'Rock of Ages':

'Not the labours of my hands
 Could fulfil Thy law's demands;
 Could my zeal no respite know,
 Could my tears forever flow,
 All for sin could not atone;
 Thou must save, and Thou alone'.

He went on in the third verse to say:

'Nothing in my hands I bring,
 Simply to the cross I cling;
 Naked, come to Thee for dress;
 Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
 Foul, I to the fountain fly;
 Wash me, Saviour, or I die'.

To do the will of Christ's Father which is in heaven is to realise that you can't save yourself, to realise that - whatever terminology you use, even if it be right, whatever theology you believe in, whatever sincerity you display, even if it's in great works - it doesn't mean anything in the sight of God, because a Bible Christian is a Christian according to Jesus, and a Christian according to Jesus is a person who comes as a little child with nothing, just looking for God's forgiveness and God's mercy. Ephesians 2:8 and 9 says: 'By grace are ye saved through faith', that means it's a gift, it's not something you can earn, it's not something you can buy, it's not something you can work for or work up in your heart - it's something that you must receive by simple faith. The sad thing is this: because, although they had the right terminology, the right theology, a right display of sincerity, they had a wrong testimony before the Lord Jesus Christ. He spoke to them on this last day and said: 'I never knew you'. Do you know what that means? Many who profess to have Christ now will be cast into hell then!

So what is important is not what you profess about Christ here and now, but what He will testify of you on that day. What would He testify of you? I don't care what your language is, what your beliefs are, how sincere you are - Jesus says, it literally means: 'I will say to them publicly, 'You have never been mine". Just as you have maybe professed Christ publicly, He is going to profess one day of those who have talked about Him, thought about Him, maybe even in some type of belief held onto Him, but have never really been converted by the grace and the Spirit of God, He will disown them publicly! Those who have used His name freely, yet imagine this awful thought: your name will be unknown to Him.

'I don't know you', and on that day you will be found to have broken the third commandment: 'Thou shalt not take the name of thy Lord God in vain'. We think of that as swearing, and it is partly, but it means taking the name of God and Christ and not really being a believer - and God says that the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain. If you have called him 'Lord', and never

submitted to His Lordship, if it has been all lip and no life, you will be lost! You will have the wrong testimony of Christ, He will say: 'I never knew you'. You will also have the wrong destiny, He will say: 'Depart from me', and that is that lake of fire that is eternal torment for all those who will not believe in Christ, the Way.

Finally He tells us that the reason for this is because these people have the wrong security, they have the wrong security. Jesus says: 'Depart from me, ye that work iniquity'. You say: 'How could you call prophesying and casting out devils and doing miracles iniquity?'. Here's how you can: God says all the right things that we do, if we are without Christ, in His sight they are filthy rags. We have no righteousness of our own, God is the only holy one, and if we are to be holy in His sight we must have His holiness. That's why He sent His Son, that's why Jesus died on the cross, took our sin, your sin as well, bled and died and was punished for it - why? So that He might give you the righteousness of God, so that you might go to be with God one day.

What's your security in? Is it in your works? Is it in your words? Is it in your beliefs in the mind? My friend, at the end of this sermon the Lord Jesus told the parable of a wise man and a foolish man. Both of them built houses, the foolish man built his house on the sand, but the wise man built his house on the rock. Jesus said: 'The man that built his house on a rock is the one who built his life on what I said, my will and the will of my Father. The one who built his house on the sand is the one who ignored my will, and perhaps built their life on works, their own righteousness, what they are, what they say, what they do'. Jesus said that all of a sudden one day the storms came, and it was the house on the rock that stood fast. The other house was destroyed, and the storm speaks of judgment My friend, the judgment day is coming! Only those who have built their life on Christ will stand firm.

These people rested in their mighty works, whereas they needed to rest in the mighty work, the work that the Lord Jesus Christ did at Calvary, the work when He rose again from the dead. My friend, He can do a work in your heart tonight.

Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf in the 1700s was a Count of Saxony in Germany, and one evening he visited the public gallery in Dusseldorf, and he saw Steinberg's great painting of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. At that moment he was confronted with life's great crisis: what will I do with this Man, Christ? His heart was pierced by the words of the inscription underneath the picture, they burned into his very soul. They went like this: 'All this I did for thee, what hast thou done for me?'. He was overcome by the love of Christ, and straightaway he resolved in his heart to serve only Christ. After that his life's motto was to be: 'I have but one passion, that is He, and only He!'. Nicolaus von Zinzendorf served the Lord mightily and was the beginning of the modern missionary movement in the whole of the world - but do you know something? No matter what great works he did for Christ, no matter what great words he said about Christ, no matter what intellectual beliefs and ideas he had about Christ, he knew that his security was not in those things. So he wrote this hymn, it goes like this, I want you to listen very carefully - this is where his eternal salvation rested:

'Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress' - talking of the judgement day:
'Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed
With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through these I am,
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

When from the dust of death I rise
To claim my mansion in the skies,
E'en then, this shall be all my plea:
Jesus hath lived and died for me.

Jesus, be endless praise to Thee,

Whose boundless mercy hath for me,
For me, and all Thy hands have made,
An everlasting ransom paid.

O, let the dead now hear His voice,
Now bid Thy banished ones rejoice,
Their beauty this, their glorious dress:
Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness'.

He knew that the only way to get into heaven was putting faith, nothing more, nothing less, in the Saviour that died for him, the Saviour that rose for him, and the Saviour who has promised: 'To those who receive me, I will give you the power to become a child of God' - not the words, or the thoughts, or the works, but the power to change and transform your life! Do you know that power?

Jesus has died, He's alive, He's able to save those who come to Him by faith. All you need to do, from your heart, is say: 'Lord, I forsake my sin, I'm willing to turn from it, give me the power to leave it. I'm willing to turn from it, save me now. I know that Jesus died for me, and that's all that will get me to heaven and take my sins away. Save me now, be my Lord, change my life, fit me with Your righteousness'. If you do that from your own heart sincerely to the Lord, by faith, He will hear you.

Let us pray, but please, I ask you, don't leave tonight especially if God has been speaking to your heart, don't leave without sorting this matter out. Father, we thank Thee for the wonderful provision the Lord Jesus has made for us all at Calvary, the precious blood that cleanses every stain, the deepest dyed sin that any of us could ever commit can be washed away white as snow in that precious blood. Lord, would You bring some soul to the realisation that terminology, theology and sincerity won't matter - all that matters is the testimony of Christ of us. We pray that none will ever lift their eyes in that awful destination of hell, because their security was not in Christ but in themselves, or in the church, or in a religious system. Lord, we pray tonight, may someone build their life this evening on the Rock, the Rock of ages cleft for me, and may they hide themselves in Thee. Amen.

"Something More Fearful Than Death"

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Now we're turning to our text, which comprises of two verses in Luke's Gospel chapter 12, where we read from this evening. The verses are verse 4 and verse 5, and our title as I have said is 'Something More Fearful Than Death'. These are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him".

This verse is found in another form in Matthew chapter 10 and verse 28, where Jesus again says: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell". What powerful words!

The interesting thing about these words is that they are found within the context where the Lord Jesus is teaching how worthless it is for us as human beings to store wealth, to store riches and treasures on the earth, and then proceed to expend our energies worrying, and being anxious and fearful that we will lose them or have them stolen. Of course that teaching is summarised in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we ought to 'build up treasures in heaven, where moth and rust does not corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal'.

The thoughts of the sermon, where we read in Luke chapter 12 the words of the Sermon on the Mount, are similar to those which we find in Matthew 6:25 where Jesus says: 'I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?'. The child of God, the person who fears God and has put their faith in Christ, having repented of their sin, has no need to worry about these temporal things in life - food, drink, and clothing and all the rest. Because what the Lord Jesus is saying is that the same God that feeds the birds of the air, the sparrows and the ravens, He will feed you. The same God that clothes the lily of the valley, and the flower of the field, is the God who will clothe you if you commit your life to His trust. If you turn from your sin, from your selfishness, from your own way, and seek first the kingdom of God, committing your life to His trust, He will care for you.

Sure, this God even numbers the hairs of our head, that's what Jesus says. In this portion that we read, He tells us that 'your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things'. He knows our need before we even ask it. You say: 'Well then, why does He wait until we ask for it?' - the reason being, He wants to know that we are trusting Him, we are fearing Him, we are committing our lives into His hand. Yet how many in our age today not only worry about the depletion and corrosion of their possessions and their wealth, but they worry about their failing health, and even losing their lives. Their present existence is destroyed and warped, compromised because they're worrying about death, or disease, or loss of wealth.

Now, of course, we must submit that it is a natural inbuilt mechanism, a safety mechanism if you like, in human beings to flee from mortal danger. God has made us to preserve life in ourselves, that's why we run from busses and men with guns, it's natural to us - we even have natural, knee-jerk reactions away from things like heat, and sharp knives and so forth. We naturally flinch away from them because of this inbuilt mechanism that looks after our own lives. But in society today there is an unhealthy anxiety about sickness and death that I think has reached, perhaps, epidemic proportions. Nearly every day now, or at least every week, as you read your newspaper, if you do so, you're faced constantly with health scares. The media is continually bringing to us new scares about this food, about this practice, about the ozone layer, and additives and preservatives that might be in our food. Of course, the latest that you've probably heard of is that eating too much red meat is said to, perhaps, cause bowel cancer.

It seems to be never ending, and whether there is a measure of truth in it is not the point: it breeds an epidemic of fear and anxiety in society, where people can hardly enjoy their lives for fear of warping them or losing them at worst. In fact, I read about a woman on one occasion who worried 40 years that she would die of cancer, and finally she died of pneumonia at 70 years of age. In effect, she wasted 40 years of her life worrying about the wrong thing. That is the lunacy of worry and fear, and of course that doesn't stop us from doing it. In fact, fear in the United Kingdom has shot to an unprecedented proportion recently in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in London, and now across the world in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Sharm el Sheik in Egypt. There's no doubt about it that worry and anxiety and fearfulness, nervousness, is perhaps public enemy number one in our modern age.

In the last decade the National Anxiety Centre in Maplewood, New Jersey, gave a list of the top ten anxieties for the 1990s. Number one was the fear of AIDS, number two drug abuse, number three nuclear waste, number four the ozone layer, number five famine, number six homelessness, number seven the national deficit, number eight air pollution, number nine water pollution, number ten rubbish. All of these things generally could be categorised under what the Lord Jesus Christ calls: 'Eating, drinking, and putting on' - the things of this life. The irony of our world is this: worrying is the greatest contributor to death in our society. Whilst I imagine you've never seen a gravestone with the epitaph 'Died of worry' on it, many gravestones are worthy to read such an epitaph. Our physicians tell us that anxiety and worry contribute to many of the diseases, many of the disorders that we suffer both physically and mentally in our world today. So in worrying, and being anxious, and trying to save his life, mankind is actually adding, increasing his fatality.

But what I want you to see this evening in the light of our text is that these symptoms of anxiety and fear are symptomatic of a society that has given up with God, a people or even an individual who has given up faith in a providential and in a sovereign deity. Men and women generally, at least in our Western society, don't fear God. Because they don't fear God, they fear everything else, and their lives are wracked and destroyed by worry and anxiousness - because as far as they are concerned, they are in the driving seat of their life, they are in control, and the ultimate result of their life and fulfilment is in their hands, they will determine by their life's choices what will happen to them. That is why, in a very general sense, this world is filled with unhappiness: because they have not made God their God, they have not given God the steering wheel of their lives, the control panel to do as He pleases, and to trust Him that He knows best. They do not fear God. It's put very well in the verse that many of you will know:

'Said the robin to the sparrow:
'I really do not know
Why these human beings
Rush around and worry so?

Said the sparrow to the Robin:
'I think that it must be
That they have no heavenly Father
Such as cares for you and me'.

That is the reason: men and women do not have our heavenly Father to commit their lives to every day, and because of that their lives are wracked by anxiety. The Bible says that as the return of the Lord Jesus Christ comes nearer, and all the events that will precede that coming, men's hearts increasingly will fail them for fear. Let me take you on a step further, because when a man or a society gives up faith in a sovereign God to provide for him in the things of time for his life and for his welfare, for those things, eating, drinking and what he will put on - the fact of the matter is, if he does not trust God for the things of time, the likelihood is that he loses focus of eternal realities. In other words, if you don't look to God for your livelihood, the likelihood is you're not looking to God to provide for your eternity.

What do I mean? Well, let me put it in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ what He means, for in verses

13 and 15 after He had spoken the words of our text, it says that a man came to him and said: 'Would You speak to my brother that he may divide his inheritance with me?'. They were fighting over the will, which is common even in our own day. The Lord Jesus said in verse 14: 'Who made me a judge or a divider over you? Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth'. So, into this real-life situation, where a man was not trusting God for things on earth, but was putting his faith in those things and therefore was fearing for loss of those things, Jesus spoke this tremendous parable of the rich fool. He told of this rich farmer, his fields yielded plentifully so that he hadn't any longer the stores to hold his goods. He said: 'I must pull down my barns and build bigger', and out of that success he said to his own soul, taking God out of the equation of his life, 'Soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry' - but God said to that man one night: 'Thou fool, this evening thy soul shall be required of thee, and then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?'

The Lord Jesus gives us a living personal illustration of a man who was concerned more for the welfare of his body, than for the eternal destiny of his soul - and God says a man like that, or a woman like that, or a boy or girl like that, is a fool! Man, what it is for God to call you a fool! Why was he a fool? Because he did not realise that your life consists of more than physical, material things! As He said at the end of this parable: 'So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God'. Maybe you're wealthy tonight, or maybe you don't have much wealth, but what you do have you're trying to conserve, you're trying to invest, you're trying to inflate - but you're here this evening, and your life is wracked by what you will do with those things, what you have or what you don't have, or to whom you will leave it to. Your whole anxiety and nervous tension in your life is because of things, the things of this life, and you don't even realise that you are a pauper before God.

Worldly wise friends will tell you where to travel for a once-in-a-lifetime holiday. They'll tell you the best seaside resorts to retire to. They'll tell you what your next car should be. They'll tell you where to invest your money, and what stocks and shares to buy. The doctor, the fitness instructor, the dietician will advise you how to look after your health, and how you can live a wee bit longer - but only Christ is the true friend, the true friend of your soul who will give you wisdom concerning what really matters. 'Friends', He says - will you listen to Him tonight? - 'Friends, fear Him, I say fear Him', He says it a third time, 'Fear Him, that after the body is killed, can destroy both soul and body in hell' - the true reality of eternity! Fear God who has power to kill, and afterward cast into hell.

The message is simply that those who are not trusting in God for life and in life, need to fear God in death. The Bible is clear from the very front cover to the back cover that those who live a godless life, a life filled with sin and selfishness where God is absent, they will be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God. I acknowledge to you that this is not a popular subject in our modern day and age, to preach on hell - it antagonises people, for people generally do not consider themselves to be sinners, and certainly do not consider themselves to be worthy of eternal damnation. It antagonises people, it gets their back up - but I need to tell you this evening that whether you believe in hell or not, whether you're comfortable with the concept of it, that does not diminish the reality that it exists, that God's word has declared and revealed to us the things that to us in time are unseen. Whatever the particular spirit of the age is, or what preachers and ministers are saying from their pulpits, or theologians are writing in their books, it matters little. As the poet said:

'In a day of illusions,
And other confusions,
Upon their delusions
They based their conclusions'.

Your conclusion tonight, if it is that there is no hell, is based on a delusion - you're confused about eternal realities. If you're an atheist, or you're an agnostic, or you're an annihilationist - an atheist is one who does not believe in God, an agnostic is one who says 'I do not know about God, heaven and hell, and eternal realities, whether they are true or not', an annihilationist even might call himself a Christian, but says that once you are judged for your sin you disappear, your life is extinguished and gone. There are no atheists, agnostics, or annihilationists in hell - for those in hell, it is an awful reality. It doesn't give me pleasure to preach on this subject, it never does. Vance Havner on one occasion, a

great gospel preacher, was ministering in his first charge in North Carolina. A farmer didn't like him preaching about hell, and the farmer said to him on the way out: 'Why don't you preach something about the meek and lowly Jesus?'. Havner replied: 'That's where I got all my information on hell from'.

My friend, we need to sit up and listen that the One here who is speaking about this awful real place is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Would He not tell you the truth? In fact, did He not on one occasion in John 14:2 say: 'If it were not so, I would have told you'. If eternity was not a reality, if you just died like a dog and were done for, your life was blown out like a candle, do you not think the Truth and the Life, the One who said He was the way to God, would have told us that? But He told us the opposite: He told us that there is a heaven, but there is a hell. I want you to notice tonight that as He addresses us on this subject, He calls us 'friends'. Do you know what that tells me? His tenderness and His gentle meekness and His love are not compromised as He preaches fervently on the harsh realities of hell. My friend, I'm not trying to offend you, I'm not trying to turn you off the Gospel, I'm not condemning you of myself - I am, just as the Lord Jesus Christ, opening up, if you like, eternity; to show you that there is such a place as hell, and Jesus testified of it.

There is something more fearful than death, and that is what is after death for those who do not trust Christ in life. Not only did Jesus teach hell more than anything else, but do you know why the Lord Jesus Christ has supreme authority to tell us about something more fearful than death? Because the Saviour experienced hell more than anyone else. He told about it more than any, but He experienced it more than any, because if you go from cover to cover of this book, and take a pen and a piece of paper and note down all the graphic metaphors and similes and illustrations and representations of hell, you will see that those things are characteristics of the cross of Jesus Christ! For we read that when He was nailed to that tree for our offences and for our sins, everything that is hell was endured by Him.

I want you to see this very clearly, and I want you to mount with me Calvary's hill, where it says: 'Sitting down, they watched Him there'. I want you to watch Him there, and I want you to see that there is on that cross, weeping, there is wailing, there is gnashing of teeth. It may not be audible, but He is experiencing what the Bible describes as 'torment'. In Luke 16 we know that there is no water in hell, and there is a continual perpetual thirst - did not the Lord Jesus Christ, as He hung there between heaven and earth, say 'I thirst'? Prophetically, was it not said in Psalm 22 that His tongue cleaved to the roof of His mouth? Thirst! There He is experiencing it. Hell is described by the Saviour as outer darkness, and we read that when those three hours of judgment came upon the Lord Jesus, when He was becoming the substitute of humanity - that means taking your place - and while He was being punished for your sin, that you deserved to go to hell for all eternity for, darkness came upon it. It is insinuated, perhaps, that it was a supernatural darkness. Is that not what hell is? Supernatural darkness - how could it be anything else when there is fire in hell, yet there is darkness in hell? These are not natural things.

As Christ is tormented for our sins, there are flames there - not literal flames, but He says in Isaiah 53 that His soul was made an offering for sin. As the lamb was taken, and after it was slain, and the blood shed, and the fire consumed it; the Lord Jesus Christ, hanging on that tree, has the very fire of God's wrath in His bosom, and He is consuming, He is exhausting the flames of hell for sinners whom He will save. Do you not see hell at Calvary? If you want to know that Christ can save you from hell, you need to see Him crucified. He is enduring the wrath of God for you, but the other side of that awesome wonderful reality is that if you want to see what you will endure for all eternity in some measure if you reject Christ, look at Calvary! No man could ever endure what He endured for the sins of the world, and because He was the holy Son of God - but you will one day be in a place where there will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, an eternal darkness, torment, flames.

Jesus says: 'Fear not him that can kill the body'. Man has a certain power over us, I know, he can wound our body, can't he? He can wound our spirit, perhaps that's the deepest wound: 'A wounded spirit, who can bear?', the proverb says. Perhaps a worse thing than those two is that he can wound us by tempting us to sin, but man's power is limited for man cannot follow us after death into eternity, the unseen realm - only God can do that! Therefore God ought to be feared, because He can cast us into hell after we die. Sometimes I'm astounded that even Christians who, when they're talking about people who are not believers but have suffered a great deal at the end of their lives with some awful

disease, they say: 'Ah well, it's better for them'. Better for them? There's a person who is not living in the realities of eternity.

The word for 'hell' here is 'gehenna', which literally means 'the valley of Hinnon'. That was a valley that was situated around the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and originally it was infamous because when the idolatrous kings were reigning in Judah they worshipped the god of Molech, and they sacrificed their children to the fire, they burnt their own children as human sacrifices. When good King Josiah came and reigned, he was so abhorred by that awful idolatry that he defiled that place of pagan worship by dead corpses, and he burnt the corpses in order to get rid of the putrefying bodies. That awful place around Jerusalem became a figure, a metaphor for hell, and what an awful picture it conjures up for our minds, doesn't it? Can I ask you: what is conjured up in your mind when I say the word 'hell'? What does it communicate to you? Well, I say to you this evening: multiply that by a millionfold, and your conception of what hell is is still milder and colder than it will be as a reality.

Jesus said that this hell is not just for the soul as many perceive, but it is for the body. In Matthew He says God will destroy both body and soul in hell. The sufferings of hell will be adapted to both physical and spiritual entities. The body will not escape hell, and why should the body escape when the sins which we have committed and earned hell with were committed in the body? Who is living in the light of these eternal realities? The message of Jesus today, as it was then, is: fear men less, and fear God more! Is it the fear of man that is keeping you from Christ? Three times He says: 'Fear Him! Fear Him! Fear Him!' - what does it mean? It means shrink from the disfavour of the One who has power not only to kill your body, but to destroy both body and soul in hell, the One who can punish you according to your sins, and will - fear Him.

'Ye sinners, seek His grace
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Fly to the shelter of His cross
And find salvation there'.

Bishop Hooper, just before he was burned at the stake for his belief in the gospel of grace by faith alone, was asked by a Roman Catholic to recant of his Protestant beliefs. Do you know what he was heard to say? 'Life is sweet, and death is better, but eternal life is more sweet, and eternal death more bitter'. As Paul said: 'Knowing the terror of the Lord', that's why we seek to persuade you this evening to be reconciled to God.

In a closing point I would like to say to you that as well as fearing this One, you should seek His friendship. He calls you 'Friend' tonight. I know He was speaking initially to the disciples, but He still is the Friend of publicans and sinners. He does not desire to be your judge, he does not desire to condemn you to hell. He said: 'I came not into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through me might be saved'. He longs to be your Saviour and your Friend. He wishes to show you favour and love. He says: 'Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you'.

Person tonight, whoever you are, like millions before - if you make Him your friend, you will find Him a friend indeed, a friend in whom you may implicitly confide like none other, a friend who will stick with you when mother and father, and husband and wife, and children forsake you. Every day you grow with Him in grace, you will love Him the more as you see His beauty revealed in His word. You will know Him beside you as your guard and your guide, He will keep you from all fear, for He will be with you as you run the race to glory and to heaven and home!

People who have friends in high places, they say, don't need to fear. The highest place that heaven affords is His by sovereign right. If you commit your life to Him, trust everything in life to Him, repent of your sin and yourself and your waywardness, and say: 'Lord, I know that Jesus died for me, and His sacrifice alone can purchase my redemption', and ask Him to save you and submit to His rule in your life, and fear God, you will fear nothing else - not even death or hell!

I love the story of how one day Vice President Calvin Coolidge in the States was presiding over the Senate, and one senator said to another - a bit like Belfast City Council perhaps - 'Go straight to hell!'.

Of course, there was an uproar about it, and the offender had offended the senator, and the offended Senator complained to the Vice President who was also the presiding officer of course. He brought the both of them into the Vice President's office and sat them down, and they both brought their accusations and their offences. Calvin Coolidge was seen to be flicking through a book, and unbeknown to those two men it was the word of God. As he leafed through the book and listened to the debate, he said this: 'I've been looking through the rulebook, and you don't have to go' - go to hell. 'I've been looking through the rule book, and you don't have to go'.

My friend, if Jesus endured your hell on Calvary, why should you? Oh, my friend, this is a sobering message. We had a funeral service here in the church not so long ago, and the preacher on that occasion said in the course of his message that there would be someone in that gathering who would be the next to be called into eternity. The following week a woman in her 40s who was at that funeral, without Christ, dropped dead without any warning. My friend, this is serious. Do not gamble with eternity! What if God should say: 'This night thy soul shall be required of thee'. Where would you spend eternity?

Oh Father, win souls tonight for the glory of Jesus, the Lord and Christ who suffered for our sins, was raised again the third day, and now is seated at Thy right hand - for His glory and none other, save the lost, we pray. Amen.

"A Sinful Certainty"

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Now we're turning in our Bibles to Numbers chapter 32, Numbers chapter 32, and this is a very well-known word of Scripture, and I want us to read from verse 20 of chapter 32 tonight. The title of my message is: 'A Sinful Certainty'.

"And Moses said unto them, If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the LORD to war, And will go all of you armed over Jordan before the LORD, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him, And the land be subdued before the LORD: then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless before the LORD, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the LORD. But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: and be sure your sin will find you out"

Let's bow in a word of prayer together: Our Father, we come before Thee tonight and many have been praying already for this meeting, and indeed are praying at this moment. We come afresh to Thee to bathe this effort in prayer, and we ask Thee that Thou mayest come by Thy Holy Spirit and make this the message of God to some sinner's heart, and Lord we pray that You will save them tonight, that You will bring them from darkness into the light of Your glorious gospel; and we pray that You will emancipate them from sin, that You will deliver them and give them the grace to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. We pray that they may ask the question of themselves: 'What will I do with Jesus, that is called the Christ?'. I pray that You will anoint me with the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel now, in the Saviour's name we pray, Amen.

'A Sinful Certainty' - maybe you've learnt this verse at Sunday School, or you've heard it repeated to you as some kind of proverbial statement in life: 'Be sure your sin will find you out'. You know as you read Israel's history - and that's the book that we're reading from tonight, the book of Numbers, and from Genesis right through to the book of Deuteronomy - you get a real picture of the early days of the nation of Israel's history. The nation of Israel were chosen by God to be His people, to be a light among the world, to show forth God's glory in the darkness of paganism and heathenism. As you look at the history of Israel you find a cycle in their spiritual life - what I mean by that is this: God called them in His grace, God made them a people, and God blessed them with all the blessings that they could have imagined in Himself with one condition - that they followed God, that they obeyed His commands and kept His precepts. But as you read the Old Testament Scriptures, you can never fail to see that there is a cycle and it keeps repeating itself over and over again. You find that there is a cycle of blessing from God, God blesses His people; but then His people return God's blessing with sin. After they sin against God, you find God warning them not to sin, otherwise He will take from them all the blessings that He has given them. Then you find in that great cycle, not only blessing, then sin, then warning, but because the people continue to sin God sends judgments upon them - yet still all He receives from His people is more sin.

So you find this cycle: God blesses them, yet they sin; God warns them 'Don't sin', yet they sin all the more; God brings judgment upon them through other nations, through pestilence and disease and all kinds of famine, yet still they sin against their God again. But the miracle of our God is this: that our God is a God of grace, a God who is merciful, a God who is long-suffering in all His compassion and loving-kindness, and a God whose mercy is always longer than the sinner's stubbornness and obstinacy. Although as you read Israel's history God sent them into slavery in the land of Egypt because of their sin, yet God delivered them out of Egypt because He loved them, because He wanted them to love Him in the way that He loved them. He brought them across the Red Sea, He brought them into a land that He called the Promised Land, flowing with milk and honey, and God warned the people: 'This is the land that I have promised you since your father Abraham; but my people, my people, if you want to stay in the land - don't sin!'.

Again came the warning: 'If you want to stay in the land of promise, if you want to enjoy the blessings of the fruit of this place of milk and honey and of sustenance and riches, you must obey me, obey my commands, honour my laws and my precepts'. But - surprise, surprise - again the people of God forfeit the blessing of God because of their sin. God told them: 'If you sin, you'll not remain in the land', and as you read Israelite history you find that they were put out of the land. He said to them: 'If you think that you can sin, and that you can be saved, you've another think coming! If you think you can hide from your sin, I'm telling you now in the land that I have given you: be sure your sin will find you out! Be sure you cannot hide it from me!'.

Now I believe, and I think I'm right in thinking that the Israelites believed that they would get away with their sin - of course they did! Because if they didn't believe that they wouldn't have sinned! If they thought that God would put them out of the land, then they wouldn't have sinned - but they, somewhere in their subconscious sinful psyche, they believed that they could get away with sinning against their God. I think that that is identical to our situation today, for when we are tempted - and if you're honest with yourself, when you are tempted to sin, you mentally maybe decide to sin, and you make that commitment to that act or thought or feeling in your heart. When you actually do that and use this process of reasoning: there is the temptation, it looks good so I'm going to sin, and by your will you determine to do that thing - you never ever contemplate the outcome of it when you are tempted, sure you don't? You see sin as sugar-coated, as glistening with jewels, promising giving you, it's pregnant with all the things that you've always wanted for that particular moment of pleasure - but after you commit the sin, then you get the guilt, you get the shame, you get the heartache, you get the consequences and the fruit of your sin. But you never think about that when you're contemplating it, do you?

We never really fully appreciate the way we will feel after we sin, and the long-term consequences of it. I would say that if we thought we were going to get caught, and ultimately if we thought we were going to go to hell for our sin, it might be a different thing - maybe it wouldn't, but I think if we really believed deep down in our hearts that God was going to judge us for our sin, that our sin was going to be found out, I think it would make a difference! Do you not? I never cease to be amused with great diamond robbers - you know, you see the films, or you read the books, or you see it in papers. They always try to steal the biggest diamond of them all, don't they? Maybe it's a bank robber, and he never goes - well, some of them do, in Ulster, go into the small banks - but most of them will want to get the big money, they want to be the 'Great Train Robber', they want to get away with millions upon millions of pounds and go to Brazil and live it up for the rest of their days. Now why do they do it? It never ceases to amaze me that they, all of them, every single one, think they're going to get away with it - they believe: 'Though everybody has been caught trying to do what I'm going to do now, I believe I'll be the one to get away with it!'.

Sadly there are many broken marriages in our world today, and one of the reasons is that many men - not just men, but women - have illicit sexual adulterous relationships with other married men and women, or unmarried men and women. I'm sure if you quizzed a man that has committed that sin against God and against his wife, after he has been found out and caught, he would tell you: 'Yes, I know it was foolish, I know I shouldn't have done it, I know I should have seen it coming, but you see when I was in the middle of that temptation? I thought I could get away with it! I thought I would be the first one never to be caught!'.

It's like the church robber trying to escape up the rope, and he finds that the church bell is on the end of it. That's what our sin is like - or like the fugitive I heard of recently who was standing that long in the Post Office admiring his own photograph on the wanted poster that he got caught! That's sometimes the way it happens in our own land - when I was in Portadown, I'll tell you this wee story, I lived in a place called Killicomaine. It's a very very staunch Loyalist community, and there was a little Post Office, and there was a hold-up one day in the Post Office. The man came in with a balaclava and with a gun, and leather gear from his motorbike, and walked in and pointed the gun at the Post Office man behind the counter. He demanded all the money and went away. The next day the police came round to his door, knocked the door, picked him up and took him away - simple as that...because he was the only black man in Killicomaine, and he didn't put gloves on! His sin found him out!

That's the deception of sin - we can laugh at those things, but really they illustrate to us the deceptiveness of our sin. We delude ourselves, we become self-deluded that we can get away with it. I read a story this week about a tourist in Egypt, and he had his purse stolen. The Arab guide that was with him one night said: 'I'll get it back for you' - now I want you to mark the shrewd steps of this Arab. He called everybody in the camp neighbourhood before him, and asked: 'Who stole the money?'. All of them denied it, so he left them to stew a little bit, and go alone and think solemnly for an hour who really did it - but the same result of denial came forth., only the guilty man among the company was getting more guilty and more restless all the while he was waiting. The Arab guide says: 'I'll get you your money', and he got a mule, and he put the mule in a tent, and he ordered everybody in that community to go into the tent, and he told them to pull on the tail of the mule - and when they pulled on the tail of the mule, the mule would make a yelp for the man that was guilty.

So one by one they all went into the tent, took their time, and pulled the mule's tail, and there was no yelp - not one of them. He said: 'I'll still get your money Sir', he said, 'Everybody that went into the tent, I want you to come up to me, and I want you to put your hands on my cheeks, and when you put your hands on my cheeks I'll tell you who the guilty man is'. One by one they all came up and put their hands on his cheeks, and after not so long a time - after about ten people - one man put his hand on his cheeks, and he said: 'You're the guilty man'. He owned up to it, the police came and prosecuted him, took him away to prison, and the man got his purse back - but how did he know? Well, he had put perfume on the donkey's tail, and the one that was guilty didn't pull the tail of the donkey, and he got caught!

All these stories tell us and illustrate to us that even in everyday life we can try to do everything to try to hide our sin, the wrong things that we do, even in a secular capacity - yet much of the time, if not all the time, we get found out because our hands are different! I want to tell you tonight, the message that God has put on my heart is that you will be found out in your sin. First of all: you will be found out in the hardships of your sin. Solomon, the great wise man, in Proverbs 13 and verse 15 said: 'The way of the transgressor is hard'. There are men and women here tonight who could stand up and testify of the life that they lived before they were converted, and they would tell you - and I've heard some of them say - the way of the transgressor is hard. Now come on, let's be honest to ourselves: do you not find it hard being a sinner? Be honest! Do you not find it difficult? Now, I know that there is the common perception that sin is seen as fun, it's exciting, it's exhilarating and rewarding and gives you everything that you want in life - and for a large extent of the time those are the immediate results of sin. Often you do get pleasure, you do get excitement and exhilaration, but let me tell you this - you'll know this, any of you that have been sinning for any length of time - that the way of the transgressor is hard! It's alright the first drink, it's alright the first trip, it's alright the first pleasure, the first illicit relationship - it gives you the buzz. But when you find yourself living a life of sin, you find that it's hard.

It's hard because there's the guilt of past sins, there are the skeletons that haunt your quiet moments, there are the piercing thoughts that wound your peace of mind - and how much you would long to put the clock back, and pull back time, and undo some of the things that were done, and rub out some of the sins that you have committed - but you can't! The guilt of past sins haunts you, and will haunt you until the day you die - that's why it's hard to be a sinner! It's hard because of the guilt of your past, it's hard because of the guilt of deception today. What was it Kipling said? 'O what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive'. How true! If you're deceiving someone, and maybe even deceiving yourself, you ought to know that it's a hard thing to deceive: when you deceive a wife about adultery, when you deceive your family about the addictive habits that you have - because the more you lie about it, the more you find you have to lie about it to keep the first lie going. It gets harder, and harder, and harder, and it takes its toll on you - and you find through your hardships that your sin is being found out!

There's the guilt of past sins, there's the guilt of deception, there's the fruit of a misspent youth - those memories, bad memories; those broken relationships, the ruined virginity; the bad habits that have plagued you for a lifetime that were formed in your youth, your first drink that has you where you are here and now, the first bet that has spawned a habit of waste in your life - we could go on and on and on. You could retrace your sinful steps right back to the original seed and act in your youth - is it not

hard? Does it not torture you when you remember those things, past sins; when you have the guilt of deceiving people and yourself; when you remember the fruit of a misspent youth; when you remember the trophies - and you look, actually tonight, where you are - you look at the trophies of a life spent in sin? What do you have to show for your sin? Come on, what can you show me for it? Can you show me true happiness, real joy, real satisfaction? I tell you, and you know, that all you have is hardship; all you know is a wife's tears; all you have is a tortured memory, broken dreams and ambitions. Maybe you're actually watching your own children, here and now, carrying out and making the mistakes that you made - and they learnt them from you!

You might be sitting here tonight and saying: 'Well, that's not my sin'. Well, you know there's religious sin - for not everybody has the same taste for sin, we all like different sins. For some people, religious sin turns them on, some prefer to be moral, some prefer to be good to their neighbour - but that's a sin also in the eyes of God if you do not have Christ. Many men and women all over our world, they choose a religion with high moral ethics. They practice that religion in its rituals and its ordinances, and they try to be like those saints who have arrived in their religion, who are special men and women of God - the great heroes of the faith - but in their life they testify as to how they are wrecked with frustration, wrecked with guilt, because they can't live morally, they can't overcome their sin. There is even religious transgression that is hard! It's hard because it's fruitless, but perhaps its most deadly in the fact that it gives birth in the human breast to a pride that this world has never seen before, the pride of a religious man, a moral man, an ethical man; a good man who will not repent of his sin, who will not come to Christ, who has a standard of morals and holiness in this world's eyes, and says: 'I am good with God, and if I come to God, God must accept me because of my achievements'.

I wonder are you being found out in your hardships? Are you being found out in the hardship of the guilt of the past, of the guilt of deception that you're living in now, of the fruit of a misspent youth that comes after your footsteps moment by moment in your life and reminds you of the way you were and the way you have become? Those trophies of sin that are looking and staring you in the face, that testify that the way of the transgressor is hard! You may be found out in your hardships, but you may be found out also in death. Ezekiel said, and the hymn that we sang together phrased that in the third verse: 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die'. Do you know what Paul says in Romans? 'The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ the Lord'. Now, if you're an expert sinner - and what I mean by that is if you know how to sin, and I think we all know how to do that - maybe you're on the road a long time, and you've got a bit of expertise at it, you will know that your sin brings the hardship of death. Ultimately, of course, we all die, if the Lord doesn't come - but that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about sin working death in your body - in other words, when you live a life of sin you feel like you're dead on the inside. You feel like that, don't you? You feel like there's death and decomposition in your soul. The sinful human race are the walking dead of the universe today - they live but they are dead; and the more they live, because of their sin, the more they die!

Way back in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2 and 3 we find there that God commanded man and woman, Adam and Eve, not to eat of that fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil - and they ate of it, and in the day that they ate thereof they died. Spiritual death came into their heart, physical death began to work on their body, and indeed on the whole universe - and we are living today, because of what they did, we are dying because they died, because of that first sin. James comments on it, and he says: 'Every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed, then when lust has conceived it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it has finished, bringeth forth death'. You lust, you see a thing you want that's sinful. You think about it, you commit yourself to it in your mind and your heart. You take it, and the moment you take it you find death working in your own heart.

You know what I'm talking about - and because Adam and Eve did that, Paul says: 'As by one man, Adam, sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men; for that all have sinned' - all! Could there be one person here, and they're sitting in this meeting saying: 'He's not talking about me!'. Well, there isn't one, maybe you think you're the one, but there isn't one - for all have sinned! We all have the hardship of sin, we all have the death of sin in us if we're not in Christ - all have sinned!

Billy Sunday, the great evangelist in America, before he took one of his gospel campaigns in one of those great American cities, he wrote to the mayor of the city and asked him to give him a list of all the people in the city that needed help, that needed counselling, that needed prayer and care. You can imagine how surprised Billy Sunday was when he received a city directory in the post, with every single name and address of everybody in the city. Everybody, all of us, there's not one of us who isn't a sinner. We all are sinners, and we all need Christ.

There's a tradition to the effect that Noel Coward sent identical notes to twenty of the most prominent men in the City of London, and do you know what he wrote on it? 'All is discovered, escape while you can' - and all twenty men disappeared from London! He was only doing it for a laugh, and all twenty of them disappeared because all twenty of them had something to hide! There's not one of us would be in this building if our sins were written up here for all to see - not one of us - I wouldn't be here, I'd be away for dust I can tell you. You wouldn't be here, for we're all sinners - and the sooner you come to that realisation, my friend, the better; and it will be to the saving of your soul if you do.

You can be found out in the hardships and in the death that sin brings, but let me tell you this: you can be found out in your sin at Calvary. You can be found out in your sin at Calvary - and if there's a place you can be certain and sure that your sin can be found out, it's at Golgotha's Hill. Peter said: 'The Lord Jesus Christ in His own body bare our sins on the tree; that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness - by His stripes we are healed'. Paul said: 'For He, God, has made Christ to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him'. Do you see the picture? Jesus Christ, the Son of God, hanging on a tree being crucified, being sacrificed for a Jewish Sanhedrin, for a Roman government - but there was more than all that going on! For there at Calvary's cross, in Christ's body, His soul, and His spirit your sin - your sin - was being found out. Your sin was being placed in His bosom, and He was suffering for it. Paul says He became your sin, and God laid your sin on Him - your sin was found out there! He suffered in your place, and He died in your position as a hell-worthy sinner.

Zaleucus, a lawgiver of Locrians once made a law, this is what it was: if you committed adultery you were to be punished. The way you were to be punished was that the offender's eyes were to be plucked out. You can imagine the sorrow of a man who made that law, when he realised and found out to his horror that his only son was the one who was the first to commit that sin of adultery. Do you know what that father did? 'It's my son, and although I made that law, I'll pluck one of his eyes out, and I'll pluck one of my own out for him' - that's some love, isn't it? I'll tell you a greater love than that: because of your sin and because of my sin, God the Father plucked the two eyes of Jesus Christ out for you - not literally, but what He did do was He made Him pay for your sins! He didn't make Him go half way, and you've to go the other half way - that was love for that father, but God, for God this was amazing, this is grace, this is the greatness of God's forgiveness - He went all the way to Calvary, He went and He bore your sin, He stood in your place, and He cried before He died: 'It is finished!', so that we all might know that we're forgiven if we trust Him.

Oh, this is the gospel: that your sin can be found out at Calvary, that's the simple plan of salvation. Do you see if I ever stop preaching the simple plan of salvation, would somebody please tell me? All have sinned, not one of us is righteous before God; sin brings death; but Christ suffered the penalty of sin at Calvary - and when we believe in Him, we are saved. 'For God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us'. Oh, my friend, your sin might have been found out in the hardship that you bear; your sin might have been found out in death that is working in your very members, soul and spirit, at this minute; but oh tonight that you would get to Calvary! That you would see the bleeding Lamb of God dying for you, and that you would be found out there - for there's no better place to be found out than at His feet, and where His blood is shed.

Can I say that if you're not found out at Calvary, you'll be found out at the judgment. John says in the book of Revelation: 'I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works'. My friend, that is a day that is coming, and you can as surely put it in your

diary that it's going to happen to you if you haven't trusted Christ. Jesus the Son of God, the Lord, the Christ said that there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested, neither is anything kept secret but that it shall come abroad. On that day all the books of your sin, your secret sins and hidden sins, your private sins, your mental sins, your emotional sins, your literal actual physical deeds will all be opened and be declared in the judicial halls of God Almighty! There'll be a judgment, and what an awful thing to think that you can be religious, you can be moral, you can be an awful reprobate sinner - but yet to have hid a lifetime of sin from God, at that moment as you stand before the all-white pure throne of the Almighty, you will be outed - your sin will find you out!

Oh the shame of it, the sins that brought your Saviour from glory to die - that you should have to answer for them because you have not His blood upon your soul. The shame of it, that you never accepted Christ, and that you're standing in eternity without His blood even though His blood was shed for your soul - and you're found out at the judgment! But it gets worse: for if you don't find out your sin at Calvary, you'll be found out at the judgment, and then you'll be found out in hell! For John goes on in his book to say: 'And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire'. Oh please don't deceive yourself that it doesn't exist - do you know what I read in the paper this week? John Travolta, the great film actor of Hollywood, he said: 'If my body is going to hell, I will eat caviar going' - if my body is going to hell, I'll eat caviar going! He'll not be eating caviar going to hell, let me tell you, there's no caviar in hell! There's no alcohol in hell. There's no horses or dogs in hell. There's no rosary beads in hell. There's no churches in hell. There's no people to do morals with in hell. My friend, hell is a place of torment, it's a place of separation from God. He will answer for his sin because he doesn't believe that he will answer for his sin - if he believed that he would answer for his sin, and his sin would find him out, he would never utter those things from his lips.

Oh the finality of it, the absolute tragedy of it - all lost! Why? Because you would not uncover your sin, so that the Christ of Calvary could cover it with His precious blood. All because you wanted to hide it, all because you want to save face, all because you didn't want to admit to it to God. We're not asking you to stand up here and tell everybody what you did, but we are wanting you to admit to God who knows everything you did anyway! The foolishness of it, that you would forfeit eternity for your own sinful pride! Can I assure you tonight of a sinful certainty: you will be found out one way or another. Maybe you are ignorant to the hardships that sin is bringing into your life at this moment, you won't admit that. Maybe you think you're living it up, and you're having a ball, and your life is just full of everything that you ever hoped for, of ambition and success, and wealth and fame - I don't know. But my friend, if you bypass those hardships of sin and the death of sin, and most of all if you ignore your sin at Calvary being led on Christ, can I reassure you that your sin will be found out at the judgment seat, and your sin will be found out in hell! I plead with you, I beg you: don't wait until then! For there'll be no grace, there'll be no mercy, there'll be no bleeding Lamb of God to cleanse your sin, there'll be no Holy Spirit to emancipate your spirit; and then repentance and faith will be all in vain. Heaven will be a dead opportunity, and hell will be at present reality - oh don't wait! Why do you wait?

Oh my friend, if I could grab you by the spiritual scruff of the neck and pull you into God's kingdom I'd do it, but I cannot. Will you not come? Why would you wait another gospel meeting? Why would you wait another year when you can't be sure of another year? Why would you wait even another minute? Why don't you come to Christ now? Come to Him who is not willing that you perish! If you, my friend, are one day found out for your sin it'll be because you never took God's amnesty for sin, it'll be because you never were saved. At this very moment He'll grant you pardon from guilt, He'll grant you peace with His kingdom, He will give you citizenship to live in His kingdom and to live the fullest life absolutely possible - will you not come?

Pardon freely offered, all who will believe, Jesus says that whosoever - whosoever. The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come, and let him that hears say 'Come', and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely, and come'. Jesus says: 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'. Jesus says: 'Whosoever cometh unto me, I will in nowise cast out' - will you come? Will you find out your sin before God finds it out for you, and will you plunge it by faith beneath the crimson flood of Calvary, and will you come and find eternal life, forgiveness, emancipation and pardon. Oh, will you come, my friend? Come believing, come receiving, come to Jesus, look and live! For be sure your sin will find you out.

Let's have every head bowed, and if you know the Lord please pray with us, and if you don't know the Lord will you ask Him to save you now? Ask Him to save you, young or old, it doesn't matter - He is able and willing to save you - will you come to Him now by faith? Confess your sin, tell Him: 'Lord, I know I'm a sinner, and the wages of my sin is death and hell - but I thank You that the Lord Jesus took my sin at Calvary, and I ask You to save me upon that'. My friend, He can't not do it if you plead Calvary - will you ask Him? I'll be at the door, I have some literature on the literature rack. I'll be there to speak to you, and if you want to speak to me in private I'll be more than glad if you want to get saved - but please, if the Lord has been speaking to you, would you trust Him tonight?

Our Father, we thank Thee for this hour, we thank Thee for Thy help. We thank Thee for those in our gathering that are not saved, and we pray that tonight - O tonight - that their sins would be found out at Calvary, and that they would confess them, that they would believe the gospel, and that they would be saved. Part us now with Thy blessing, and bless us until we meet again, for Christ's sake, Amen.

"Thank God For Jesus!"

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We're turning to 2 Corinthians chapter 9 - now you may seem a bit bemused by why I'm reading a portion of scripture like this at a Gospel meeting, but it hopefully will become evidently clear as I begin to preach. There's really only one verse that I want to concentrate on, but it's found in a strange context. We'll read from verse 6, a couple of verses, and then we'll jump right to the verse that we want to consider this evening.

Second Corinthians chapter 9, beginning to read at verse 6. Paul is writing to Christians in the church at Corinth, and he says: "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work". Then the last verse, verse 15: "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift".

Father, from the very beginning of all time we read that God spake, the world came into being. Then when we come to the New Testament, we read that in the beginning was God, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. We thank You that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. Lord, we are going to present to these people tonight, whatever their spiritual condition may be, the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, Your only begotten Son. We pray that if they hear the Word, and see the Word, that they will respond; and that no one will be guilty of squandering or stifling God's final call today. Lord we need Your help, and we need the endowment of power from on-high. In the Saviour's name and for His sake we pray, Amen.

I want to preach to you from 2 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 15 on the subject 'Thank God For Jesus! - thank God for Jesus, 'Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift'. Now the reason why I said it's perhaps a strange portion of scripture to choose to preach at a meeting like this tonight, is because Paul the apostle is instructing the believers in Corinth on their giving to the work of God - how they should lay aside certain financial resources and give it to the church, so that they might spread the gospel. On this occasion, as on other occasions, the apostle Paul, because he was a man so inspired with the love of Christ and a devotion to Christ, his attention very swiftly shifts from the practicalities of what it is to give financially to God's work to the great thrill that he has in knowing Christ as his Lord and Saviour. So immediately, at the end of this portion in verse 15, he shifts our attention away from the practical financial gift of the church, to reflect on the greatest Giver that there has ever been - God Almighty - and to bring our attention not only to the greatest Giver, but the greatest Gift that has ever been given, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Now this is characteristic of Paul, as you read his epistles - sometimes spontaneously he'll just exclaim, almost out of tone to what he's already been saying, a great appreciation and exclamation of the capacity he has in his heart and mind to love and devote himself to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is exactly what we have here. He's talking to this church about giving resources to Gospel ministry, and then he says: 'And thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift'. Some might say: 'Well, it's very strange, is it not, that Paul should attempt to motivate our financial giving by recalling something as sacred as the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ to the world?'. It's not really, because we find that he does this on other occasions. In the chapter before this one, chapter 8 and verse 9, he is talking about how the Macedonians were so liberal in their giving to the work of the church, and he says to the believers there: 'Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich'.

He's exhorting the Corinthians by the example of the Macedonians, but the motivation he gives is that:

'Your Lord was one who was immeasurably rich in heaven, and then He came in human flesh and became poor, that you might be rich through His marvellous, matchless grace'. Not long after writing the epistle to the Corinthians, Paul, addressing the Romans in chapter 8 and 32, uses the same motivation - he says: 'He', God, 'who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?'. So Paul does this on several occasions, even when he's talking about practical financial giving to others who are in need, and what he's doing is: by bringing the Lord Jesus Christ, as the gift of God, as an illustration to us, he wants to impress upon us the divine gift of God's Son that should inspire every gift. The divine gift which inspires all gifts.

In other words, he's saying: 'Can you Christians who have received so generously, and been treated so favourably by God, be anything else but generous to your fellow men?'. It's like He said to those disciples in Matthew chapter 10, when He told them to go and preach that the kingdom of God was at hand, He said: 'Freely you have received, freely give'. But Paul's thought here is not only that we should give to others because God so loved the world that He give His only begotten Son, but the thought is also here that we should be filled, as he was, with a thankfulness when we consider the immensity of God's gift in His own Son. What he's telling us is that this gift that God has given to us is infinitely transcendent above all human gifts that have ever been given. The hymn writer put it like this:

'Was e'er a gift like the Saviour given?
No, not one! no, not one!'

So my question to you this evening as I come with this message is very personal, I want to ask you: are you thankful, as Paul was, for the Lord Jesus? How thankful are you for God's gift? Now, thankfulness logically requires a measure of appreciation. You can't be thankful for something or someone if you don't appreciate them, and so the question could very well be: do you appreciate Christ? What is your appreciation of Him? Let me say this: we could talk on a lot of themes tonight from the word of God relating to your soul's eternal destiny, but I don't think there's a more important question in the whole of the world - whether it's the religious world or just everyday mundane life, Monday to Friday - than this one. It is a question that Christ asked the religious Pharisees in His own day, listen: 'What do you think of Christ?'

So, what do you think of Him? You see, that is the question that determines the great spiritual divide in our world today in the eyes of God. The divide in humanity that God sees is not what man sees, it's not black and white, it's not between classes of rich and poor, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Loyalist, Republican, Unionist, Nationalist - it's not even the division between Muslim, Christian and Jew. The division that God sees in our world is between two types of people, and it is determined upon their estimation of His beloved Son, and how they have allowed that estimation and appreciation to affect their life, and indeed their eternal destiny. That was the division in the day of Christ when He walked upon the earth, and that is the same division - and the only division, can I say - that God sees our world.

Indeed, when the Lord Jesus was among men it says in John 7 that there was a division among the people because of Him. How true that is of our own day. There is still a division among the people because of Christ, and their esteem or their lack of it concerning Him. But what we see here in Paul's words is that he appreciated Christ so much, and was so thankful, that he described the Saviour as 'God's unspeakable gift'. That word 'unspeakable' in the original Greek language that the New Testament is written in cannot be found anywhere else in the whole of the Bible. It actually means this is something that cannot be related. It's a similar word to one Peter used when he talked about the experience that those who trust in Christ have: 'Whom having not seen', the Lord Jesus, we've never seen Him, 'ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory'. The Christian experience is indescribable, because the Christian's Lord and Saviour is unspeakable. The Amplified New Testament puts it very well when it says: 'Thanks be unto God for His gift, precious beyond telling, His indescribable, inexpressible free gift'.

Let me share with you this evening why Paul esteemed Christ as the unspeakable gift and why, by faith, if you have not done already, you should embrace Him as such this evening - as God's

indescribable gift. Here is the first reason: His birth, as we look at the New Testament, was indescribable. When we look at Luke's gospel chapter 1 and verse 34-35, we read these words - you know them well from Christmas time - 'Then said Mary unto the angel', who had announced the birth of Jesus to her, 'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God'. Now that was something unique, a virgin conception - and it was so unique and so indescribable that Mary had difficulty understanding what the angel was pronouncing to her. Not only had she a difficulty understanding it, but I believe that the angel had a difficulty in articulating it, because he called the Lord Jesus Christ in the womb as a foetus 'that holy thing'. A strange description of the Saviour, but how can you describe the indescribable? The first ever Being in which the two worlds were blended of both heaven and earth, the Man who was very man, yet very God as His only begotten Son. The angel couldn't even describe it with words that would really grasp what was the reality.

His virgin conception was indescribable, but then we see that the whole general incarnation was indescribable. What's that? That's simply God becoming flesh. You see Christ did not begin to exist at Bethlehem, He is the pre-existent Son of God, who was with God before the world was, who created the worlds with Him as His only Son. We read in Timothy's epistle: 'Great is the mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory'. This is a mystery, it is indescribable, it is unspeakable - to imagine how God could become a man, God could take human flesh - but this is the message that Paul is so excited about: 'Thanks be unto God for the gift of giving to man His Son as a man in human flesh'.

Does that not blow your mind? The gift that God has given to humankind - it is the greatest gift that has ever been, I believe the greatest miracle that God has ever performed was the incarnation of His own Son. As Wesley put it: 'God contracted to a span, incomprehensibly made man'. He put it in his carol: 'Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see'.

His birth was indescribable, but secondly we see that His life was indescribable. Oh, there are so many occurrences and examples of His indescribable life in the gospels that I would have you here for weeks! But if I can concentrate on four: first of all, there's the indescribable nature of His words. In fact, on one occasion the Pharisees and the High Priest actually sent out guards and officers to arrest the Lord Jesus Christ, and when they went to arrest Him His words arrested them! They came back to the religious authorities, and they said: 'Where is He? You were to bring Him to us!', and the officers answered 'Never a man spake like this man'. His words were indescribable.

His works were indescribable also. The disciples are out in the middle of the lake, and the squall erupts, and there's a great storm. They think that the Lord Jesus is ignorant of their plight, and they go and waken Him, and they say: 'Lord, save us'. We read this wonderfully dramatic account, He stands in the boat, and He puts His arms out, and He stills the storm: 'Peace, be still!' - and they marvel, and say 'What manner, what kind of man is this? Even the wind and the sea obey Him!'. That was only one of His works, but it was indescribable.

Then there is His worthiness, the worthiness of His life - because the Lord Jesus lived 33 years before men, and three years in His ministry. Then when He came before Pontius Pilate we find that He was examined for any faults, whether it was concerning the law of Moses or the law of the land, and people, religious people came and others were paid to come and bring false accusations against the Lord Jesus Christ - and Pilate, who was no friend of Jesus, said: 'I find no fault in this man'. His worthiness - and if I was to sum up His whole life in a fourth point, it would just simply be: His wonder. Isaiah chapter 9 says that His name shall be called 'Wonderful', He is Wonderful - how else could you describe Him?

Nicodemus came, one of these religious crowd, at night - but he realised there was something in this Jesus man, and he went to Him and under the cover of darkness he said: 'We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that you do, except God be with him'. The wonder of Christ, His words, His work, His worth - do you see it? A blind man was given his sight, and they started to cross question him, the theologians and the doctors of the synagogue. They said: 'Who

did this? How did He do it? When did He do it? Where did He do it?', and the man just stopped all their cross-questioning and said, 'Look, I don't know an awful lot, but one thing I know is this - once I was blind, but now I see'. The wonder of the Lord Jesus Christ, the wonder of His life - do you see it?

Paul saw it. This was a man, remember, in His lifetime who didn't have any time for Christ, in Christ's lifetime - because when Christ died and rose again and even ascended to heaven, the apostle Paul who is writing these words was not converted, he was still persecuting Christ's church. Yet here, because God reached him and he began to hear the indescribable words of Christ, and he began to revel in His works, see His worth, and be overtaken by His wonder, he could say: 'Thanks be to God, thank God for Jesus'.

Then thirdly there is His death which was indescribable. Who could describe the death of the Son of God? On a mere political and legal level it was greatest miscarriage of justice that has ever occurred: trumped up charges under illegal conditions during the night and so on and so forth. The greatest crime that has ever been committed in all of human history. But, my friend, I want you to see something that is more indescribable than that, because Christ in His death, the Bible declares - and this is the Gospel - was the substitute for sinners. You see Him going up the Via Delarosa, and you see all the blasphemy and the sacrilege and the spittle that drips from His blessed face. You see Him as the Roman soldiers pummel Him with their fists, and beat Him, and strip Him, and mock Him putting a crown of thorns on Him, putting a reed in His right hand and a scarlet robe. Whilst you see all that, and you see the deep bedded scars in His hands and His feet and His side, because of their abuse of Him, as they lift Him high between heaven and earth - but friend, see more - that all can be described and has been...what is indescribable is how He became the sinner's substitute. God brought a darkness over this whole world as He was making His Son an offering for sin - that is indescribable. What God did to His Son there as a punishment, in order that you might go free - God did it willingly, His Son did it willingly, and all of it was done out of great love for you. Is it any wonder Paul could say 'Thank God for Jesus!'. The hymn puts it like this:

'But none of the ransomed', the saved, 'ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost'.

Indescribable was His death, because He died as a substitute - but also He endured the wrath of God as our substitute, this God who is almighty, who can do anything, who will punish sinners for all eternity. In three short hours He compressed the chastisement, the punishment of all men's sins, and placed it in His wrath upon His own Son - the almighty, the eternal wrath of God. Isaiah said: 'He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. 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'. Indescribable, is it not?

Then the motivation for it all as He died was the love that He displayed. That's why He did it, for love of you and love of me. In Ephesians Paul tries to communicate to the church and says he prays for them that one day they may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and the length, and the depth, and the height, and to know more and more the love of Christ - as you were singing - which passes knowledge. It is indescribable! The greatest artist with the greatest oil and the greatest brush cannot portray it. The greatest director on the greatest celluloid screen, with the greatest amount of money cannot portray it. The greatest poet, the greatest novelist, the greatest hymn writer, the greatest preacher cannot grasp the reality, the unspeakable nature of God's love in Christ at Calvary. F.M. Lehman tried to do it one day in a hymn, and he basically expired and gave up, but he did leave us with this verse:

'The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell'.

Do you appreciate the love of God for you, my friend? Does His indescribable death not cause you to exclaim, as another at the side of the cross, the Centurion, when he saw all that was happening - the rocks rending, the darkness in the sky, the cry of the Lord Jesus 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do. Tetelistai, it is finished' - he said: 'Surely this must be, all these indescribable things must mean that this Man is the Son of God'.

Fourthly, His resurrection was indescribable. Some people will say: 'Well, He wasn't the first person to be raised from the dead' - and, of course, He wasn't. You have a number of occasions in the Old Testament, and even the Lord Jesus Himself raised Lazarus, the widow of Nain's son, and so on from the dead - but none of those ever were raised in the power of an endless life. What do I mean? They all were raised, but they died again. Lazarus had another grave one day, the widow of Nain's son had another funeral and another coffin, but never Jesus Christ! He was the firstborn of all creation, a new race who would never die, indescribable! Science hasn't got a formula for it, neither will they. History tries to blot it out, yet it is the most historically proven fact of all that Christ, when He rose again, defeated death, the grave, hell, and sin forever - so that we can say: 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?'. We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us - but not only has Christ defeated much, but He has gained much for us because He has said to us: 'I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live'.

Is that not indescribable? One day there's going to be a resurrection of the dead, some unto life, some unto damnation - and what will determine which crowd you're in is your appreciation of Christ and what you have done with Him. Fifthly, His grace is indescribable. In the Greek language this word 'thanks' that Paul uses is actually the word 'charis', which some people are given as a name, and it is the Greek word for 'grace'. In 2 Corinthians 8:9 that we've quoted, Paul said: 'You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor'. Paul is using this word here to describe the indescribable grace of God in giving us His Son.

'What's grace?', you say. A lot of people think it's what the ballet dancers do, or the ice skaters, gracious movements - that's not what it is. Grace, in a biblical sense, is God's unmerited favour, God's free gift. Paul put it in Romans 6:23: 'The gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ'. What we have in the gospel is God burying His Son, just like a seed in the ground, and from His death and His resurrection He has reaped an abundant harvest for all those who believe in Him - a harvest of grace! Newton put it like this: 'Amazing grace' - forgiveness, the slate being wiped clean, God's favour. Not earned, you can't buy it, you can't work it, you can't pray it, you can't live for it, it is just freely received from God with empty hands.

John Newton, who wrote that famous hymn, 'Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me' - he had a very godly mother who prayed for him and instructed him in the things of God, but at seven years of age she died. He was turned over to relatives who soon forgot to teach him the Scriptures. He went on to become an apprentice seaman, and later joined the British Navy. After joining the Navy it wasn't long until he earned the reputation of being able, listen, 'to curse for two solid hours without repeating one word'. Because he couldn't stand the Navy's discipline, eventually he deserted and fled to Africa so that, in his own words: 'I might sin my fill'. 'I might sin my fill' - is that the way you live? Get as much enjoyment out of life, but it's through sin that will leave an indelible, fatal mark upon your soul. He did that, he went to Africa, and among the slaves he sinned his fill. He got so debauched and distant from God, that eventually he fell into the hands of a Portuguese slave trader, and for months the chief foreman of the traders treated him like an animal. He beat him, and forced him to grovel in the dirt for his every meal. By that time he was a skilled navigator, and eventually he earned the position of a first mate, but while the captain was ashore on one occasion Newton broke into the ship's rum and got the entire crew drunk. When the captain of the ship came back, the captain punched him and knocked him over into the water, and he would have been drowned if a sailor hadn't jumped in and saved his life. Do you know how they pulled him out of the water? They threw a boot hook over the side, and pulled him out like a fish - and there was a gash left in his leg big enough to put your fist into.

Then, one day, as the ship some weeks later was off the coast of Scotland, it sailed into a storm and almost sank. Newton manned the pumps, trying to get the water out of the deck of the boat and the

bowels of it. At that point he thought to himself: 'What would God do with someone like me if I were to die?'. Then and there he cried to God as a helpless wretched sinner, and God heard his cry. You say: 'That's not fair!' - that's what a lot of people say today: 'That's not fair that a man as wicked as that should be forgiven by God' - that is the grace of God, my friend. It's not about being fair, or what you earn, it's about a free gift that Christ has earned at the cross for you. That's why he could write: 'Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me' - that's what grace is, if you could earn it it wouldn't be grace!

He later became a chaplain to the English Parliament. He preached one day before the King. This vile blasphemer wrote the wonderful hymn, as we have said, because to his ears there was nothing sweeter, there was nothing more unspeakable and indescribable than the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Newton could say: 'Thank God for Jesus! He saved me!' - has He saved you from a life of sin, a life of degradation, a life that will eventually accrue the judgemental wrath of God?

Sixthly and finally: His return will be indescribable. His birth is indescribable, His life is indescribable, His death is indescribable, His resurrection is indescribable, His grace that He offers freely in the Gospel this evening is indescribable - but one day very soon His return will be indescribable. It will be indescribable for every child of God, every member of the church. The Bible says that is a day that we look forward to, we will be caught up to be with the Lord in the air. Paul described one time being caught up into Paradise, he didn't know whether he was in the body or out of the body, but he said that while he looked upon heaven that he heard unspeakable words, which it's not lawful for a man to utter. What he saw, what he heard was indescribable! God's word says it has not entered into the heart of men, eye hasn't seen, ear hasn't heard, the heart has not conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.

Is that what you look forward to? The prospect of glory, being one of the redeemed children of God? Can I say to you this evening that the alternative is indescribable, for the Bible teaches that it will not be glory, but it will be torment for those who are lost. The opposite to heaven is not purgatory, there is no such thing in God's word - it is hell, and it is an indescribable place, that is described even with conflicting metaphors that don't make sense; because we can't describe it. It's described as a place of fire, yet it's also described as a place of darkness. It is so awful that we cannot imagine it! Revelation says that the smoke of the torment of those that are there ascends for ever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night. Indescribable!

Which place will you be in? You could be saved from hell and judgment this evening, and your exclamation - would it not be: 'Thank God for Jesus!?' Is it any surprise that Paul burst into thanksgiving. Horatious Bonar exclaimed Paul's sentiment in the verse of a hymn that he wrote that went like this:

'Blessed be God, our God!
Who gave for us His well-beloved Son,
The gift of gifts, all other gifts in one -
Blessed be God, our God!'

Do you appreciate Christ? If you appreciate Him in His birth, and in His life, His death, His resurrection, His grace, His return - there's one more step that you need to take, and that is to appreciate Him by accepting Him by faith, repenting of your sin, leaving it, being willing. You say 'I can't' - I know you can't, but if you're willing to turn from it, God will give you the power to leave those things and turn to Him and accept His grace, which is free. Just say: 'Lord, I confess I am a sinner, and I thank You that the Lord Jesus died for me to be my Saviour. Save me now, make me Your child' - and I'll tell you, what will result is indescribable.

Will you say: 'Because of this, I will give my life, my all, to love and follow Him'? He gave His all for you, my friend.

Lord, we thank You for Jesus, the Lord and Christ, the Saviour of the world - 'all the glorious names of wisdom, love, and power: all are too mean to speak His worth, too mean to set my Saviour forth'. Lord,

we don't appreciate Him as we should, but we want to thank You for the Saviour this evening; and we want others here tonight, by Thy Spirit, to see the wonder of Him and what He can do for them if they will repent and submit to Him, and believe in Him for eternal life. Lord, strive this evening with those who are lost, with those without an appreciation and a thankfulness for the Lord. Bring them into the fold this evening, as we return thanks for our salvation and, more than that, for our Saviour. Thank God for Jesus, Amen.

"The Call Of The Master's Voice"

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Now perhaps we could turn in our Bibles to our reading for this evening, John chapter 11 is the portion of scripture that we would like to turn to, John chapter 11. Here we have the account of the sickness, and the subsequent death of Lazarus - who was a friend of the Lord Jesus, along with his two sisters Mary and Martha. This is a very, very poignant passage of scripture, detailing many of the problems that we face in life that cause us great pain - but thank God, the passage also gives us the answer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's begin by reading verse 1, and we'll read right through the whole of this narrative story: "Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was. Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again. His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him. Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellowdisciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him. Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already. Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off: And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him. Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met him. The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled. And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank

thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go. Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done". Amen.

We read in John 11 and verse 28: "And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee". Sometimes I hear folk saying: 'God has never spoken to me'. Maybe they hear Christian testimonies, or perhaps they're in a conversation with a Christian and they hear the Christian talking about 'Well, God said this, God said that, and God guided me here, there and everywhere' - and they think to themselves: 'What is this guidance? Is it a red telephone straight to heaven?'. People perceive in their minds, I think at least, that if God is going to speak to them it will be in an audible voice, they will hear from heaven actual words, thundering words of God Almighty. Or perhaps they think that some evening, whilst they're asleep, they will see a vision and God will communicate to them very definitely through that. Perhaps they think, or maybe even claim to have had an out of body experience, whether on the operating table or having taken some intoxicating substances or something or other, they think that they have seen themselves in another light, and God has given them some kind of revelation about themselves or about their future.

They feel that they have to have some kind of sensual experience, whether it's through hearing or through seeing or through feeling, and unless they have that they feel that God has not communicated with them. Now, whilst God has spoken in some of these ways in the past, scripture nowhere in Old or New Testament indicates to us that these are how God always speaks to men - indeed, nowhere is it indicated that we should expect God to speak to us in these veins. In fact, here's what the Bible teaches regarding how God communicates to this world. The first thing we see God communicating to us through is the medium of creation. Now God is not in creation, in the sense of God being in the animals, and in the vegetation, and in the planet earth as some people believe - but Psalm 19 tells us very clearly that the heavens, the sky, the solar system declares the glory of God, and the earth shows forth His handiwork. 'Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge', in other words: as we look around us as witnesses to creation, we can see God's handiwork, and intelligently - without any other revelation - we can come to the rational and reasonable conclusion that there is a creative intelligence behind all that we see around us. You only need to look at the night sky to see the wonder of all of God's universe. It is a language in itself that testifies to our Creator.

God speaks in His creation, He also speaks through conscience. In the book of Romans we read in chapter 1 and chapter 2 that God has written upon the hearts of all men His law, His law being the ten commandments - some of which you're very familiar with: not to steal, not to kill, not to commit adultery, not to covet, not to bear false witness and so on and so forth. You might not realise this, you may not even have any evidence of it in your own particular heart, but God has written on all men's hearts His law. Now I'll grant it to you that men suppress that knowledge, they dilute it, and they even suffocate it, and Romans tells us that some have even seared their conscience to such an extent that God has given them up. Yet nevertheless, when you were born into this world, God had His law written on your heart so that you ought to have known what is right or wrong - which path you choose is your own decision, and it will finally dictate how much of that law will be left on your heart at the end of your life. But nevertheless, it is an undeniable fact that God's law is there.

You see creation, God speaks to you through it - have you heard His voice? You have a conscience, whatever state it may be in matters not, you've got one and surely you know some things that are clearly right and wrong? Thirdly God also speaks through circumstances. The Bible teaches of a sovereign God, it tells us that God is revealed as the one who, even when the dice is cast, knows and determines the falling of that dice. That is not fatalism, but it simply shows that as Proverbs 16 and verse 9 tells us: 'A man devises plans in his heart, but it is the Lord God of heaven who directs his steps'. It's not as if God takes free will away from us, makes us robots, but we believe we are making our own choices, and we are in human sense, but there is a God of heaven who is reigning over all these things - working them together for His purposes.

It was once illustrated to me like this: it's like a deep sea liner that's crossing, say, the Atlantic, and it's going in one particular direction, but people on the boat are milling to and fro and doing all sorts of things. Some are sleeping, some are dancing, some are drinking, some are eating, some are going north, some are going south, east and west - but ultimately all of them are being taken in one direction. That is how God guides our circumstances, even if we are ignorant to it. He also speaks to us, the Bible says, through Christians. Paul, on one occasion, said to the Corinthians that they were epistles, letters written on their hearts to other men. In other words, they were walking Bibles - not everybody in this world has a Bible, let alone that they may not read it - and so Christians are meant to be witnesses to others in their lives and in their character. As the little quip says: 'You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day, by the things that you do and the words that you say'. Christians are meant to speak to others of the love of God.

Then added to creation, conscience, circumstances and Christians, there is the canon of Scripture. 'Canon' simply means 'the rule', 'the standard' that God has given us - that is found in the Scriptures, the Bible, Old and New Testament. It is God's word, therefore self-defined, it is the way God speaks to us, it's how He communicates to us: through His word. Then sixthly, Christ Himself as God's final and fullest revelation. He is the way God has chosen, chiefly and uniquely, to communicate to humanity. John 1:1 says He is the Word, who was with God, and who was God; that Word became flesh and dwelt among us. In John 1:18, we read: 'No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him'.

I quoted in my prayer Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 2, that: 'God has chosen in these last days, to communicate to us through His Son'. Now that is the way that God communicated to Mary of Bethany, through the Lord Jesus in this verse 28: 'The Master is come, and calleth for thee'. Before I expound that verse to you, can I ask the question: do you not hear God? Don't ever say that God has never communicated to you! He communicates every day in the wonder of creation - and what a night this evening is to prove that, the glory of the sunshine! He communicates through your conscience, through your circumstances, through Christians witnessing around you, through the word of God if you've been privy to it in any shape or form, and chiefly He has communicated to you through the Lord Jesus Christ what He wants you to do, what He wants you to be, what He wants you to have.

Do you hear Him calling to you through His word? The Bible says that God has spoken to all men through His Son. The chief message that He has given is found in Romans 5 and verse 8: 'For God commendeth', demonstrates, shows, 'his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us'. In this particular age in which we live, the chief message that God wants people to know is the call and invitation of the cross. God has communicated to men by saying: 'I have sent My Son to die for your sin, to take your place, to be punished with my wrath instead of you, so that you might have eternal life. That is my message to you, and I want you to respond to that message in repentance and faith to my revelation'.

So the message we find in scripture is: God now commandeth all men to repent. The call of the gospel in the New Testament is: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved'. Have you heard this call? That's God message to you this evening, His specific personal message. There's few ever really hear it - do you hear it? The book of Job tells us 'God speaks once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not'. God is speaking in so many ways to men, yet so many of them passively sit in denial, and say: 'God never came to me, God never spoke to me, God never approached or came near to me'. Yet God has spoken volumes to men - but man still seems not to hear!

Well, Mary heard Christ's call to her. Let me share with you a number of ways that she heard the Master's call. She heard it first of all in a familiar voice. If you look at verse 28, you will see: 'And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary' - that is Martha, her sister. Mary's sister was the first to receive this message from the Lord Jesus Christ. Now we're not told specifically what the message was, but like every true Christian: Martha couldn't keep the message to herself. She had good news, she wanted to share the good news with her sister Mary. She couldn't enjoy it herself on her own, Mary must hear it! So, one sister went to the other and called her to Jesus. Isn't that lovely? Do you know what the added beauty to this particular verse is? There's one point in Martha's life when

she's trying to keep Mary away from Jesus, but what a change is in her life: she has allowed Christ to transform her to such an extent that she wants to bring the message afresh to Mary who is dejected, depressed and downcast over the death of her brother Lazarus.

Look at the verse again, it says that Martha came to Mary secretly with this message. I feel that there could be an indication here that sometimes, when public preaching doesn't affect a sinner and bring them nearer to God, and they don't want to hear the message any more in a church vicinity or through the medium of the preached word, a secret, quiet, holy example of a family member can be what really makes the difference. That's what made the difference here. I don't know who you are, maybe you're sick of all this preaching stuff and gospel meetings, and you really can't take it any more, and it doesn't affect you - well, I pity you, because it's the entrance of God's word that brings life. But could I encourage you, perhaps, to look around your family - maybe they're deceased, but maybe you can remember a father who told you as a boy or a girl the stories of Jesus - a godly example that you looked up to. Maybe it's your mother at whose knee you learned the Lord's prayer, or the ten commandments. I know that many children are turned off Christianity, maybe by the bad witness of a parent or a family member, or a loud-mouthed, Bible-quoting father who beats them into submission, or a mother who is so pious that she's distant and cold, and starves her children of affection and love - and those examples are travesties of true biblical Christianity.

What I'm saying to you this evening is that we must never underestimate the influence of a quiet, holy, godly life that is lived before family and friends. I wonder is there someone here this evening and a relative has spoken to you about Christ? Or maybe that relative hasn't spoken to you about Christ, but their unspoken witness has spoken volumes to your heart. You can't pinpoint it or put your finger on it, but they've impressed you, they've maybe really rattled you. I think the other reason why Martha came to Mary with this invitation secretly was because of the Jews who were mourning the loss of Lazarus, and these Jews were particularly opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps you do not have encouragement towards Christ from those around you, but the opposite: discouragement. The thing that keeps you from Christ is the fact that you know the opposition that you will receive if you take that step of faith. Well, the message is the same to you and it's this: Christ will vindicate your confession of Him, just like He did with Mary and Martha. He rose their brother from the dead before everyone, and if you listen to the secret call of Christ - though others do not understand in their hearts what you're doing, or what you're confessing - Christ will prove Himself to you if you obey Him. Are you hearing God's voice in a familiar voice? A mother, a father, a son, a daughter, a husband, a wife, a grandparent, an aunt or an uncle?

Secondly, she heard the call of the Master in a trial of life. Her brother had died. First of all he had fallen sick, and the request went forth that Jesus would come, the Great Physician, and heal - but He didn't come. He stayed away, Lazarus died, and what a trial this was in the life of Mary and Martha. Let's face it: who in this building tonight doesn't have any? The book of Job tells us: 'Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward' - but the big question is: what do you attribute your problems to? People say: 'Ach, bad luck if that happens to you, bad fortune'. It's fashionable now today to use Eastern mysticism, and say: 'Oh, it's your bad karma, you must have done something in a previous life to earn this, or you must have done something even in this life'. But our lives are not determined by blind fate or chance, the message of the Bible is that God is sovereign, God is the one who is leading our human path, guiding our way. If the goodness of God in our lives - which all of us have, even to a small extent if we can't see it or admit it - if that does not lead us to repentance, often God will send trials to bring us to His side. God often is communicating to man in his problems, through his pain. It was C. S. Lewis who said: 'Pain is God's megaphone'. After all, many of the problems that we have are because we do not have God in our lives, and we won't let Him take control of our present and our future.

Well, Martha came to Mary in one of the greatest, if not the greatest, trials of her life and said: 'The Master is come, and calleth for thee'. Martha calls the Lord Jesus Christ 'Master'. I think this must have been a personal name that they used for Him in Bethany, but the original Greek literally means 'Teacher': 'The Teacher is come, and calleth for thee'. Here's a great lesson: this Teacher from Nazareth was attempting to teach Mary something, and she needed to learn through her trial that Christ was in control - even when He seemed not to be. The thing that He was trying to teach them

was that we cannot survive without Him.

My friend, are you hearing this? Becoming a Christian will not mean that you're without problems, far from it, they may even get more numerous and be multiplied. It will mean that in our problems we will have the presence of Christ, and we will be able to understand a little more of His purpose in our lives - as Jesus said that this particular trial in her life was there for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified. But if we are without Christ, we will despair - like Mary as she came and said: 'Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died'. The message that Christ is trying to teach Mary and Martha is that without Him we will not survive in time, and without Christ we cannot survive in eternity.

Have you learnt that lesson? The voice of God came in a familiar voice to Mary, it spoke in the trial of her life, and thirdly: it spoke in the torment of her doubt. She had questions, and she had good reason to have them. Perhaps they went like this: why did the Saviour delay two days before He came to help us? Maybe that question led rationally to the question: does He really care for us as we think He does? Of course, if you look at verse 3: 'Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick'. Were they starting to doubt this? Let's face it: what was she to think when Lazarus is now dead? What hope is there now? He's gone! The life has gone from his body. Perhaps the circumstances that you find yourself in tonight, the only conclusion that you can come to is that God either doesn't care about you, or God just isn't there at all!

What brought Mary out of her temptation to doubt? Very simple: the personal call of the Master. 'The Master is come, and calleth for thee' - and we read in verse 29 that: 'As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him'. The reason she rises and comes so quickly is because she doesn't hear just that He has come, but that He has come and called personally for her - that's what sets wings to her feet, 'He has called for me! His heart is towards me! He has had compassion on me!'. The Gospel writer John assures us of His love towards them in verse 5: 'Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus' - praise God, the same gospel writer assures us of Christ's love for all. What does John 3:16 say? 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life'. I love that story about Richard Baxter, the puritan, I think it was him at least, who said concerning John 3:16 and that word 'whosoever', he says: 'I'm glad it doesn't say Richard Baxter, because I know that this Richard Baxter is so great a sinner, that I might think that there was another better Richard Baxter - but it just says 'whosoever believeth in him should not perish'".

The Master spoke to her in the torment of her doubt, and then He spoke to her fourthly in the tragedy of death. We aren't told what this message was that Martha needed to bring to Mary, but I feel very strongly that it's verse 25 and 26: 'Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?'. This is what Mary needed to hear, and Martha knew that. That's why, when she heard it, Mary rose so quickly: because this was Lazarus' only hope, and Mary's only hope to dispel the darkness. I don't know if you have had a recent bereavement of late - has God been speaking to you through the reality of eternity, through the necessity of being prepared for heaven, rather than entering into hell? Can I ask you: do you not hear the Lord Jesus Christ giving you hope in these verses, as if a voice from beyond eternity is speaking and saying: 'I am the resurrection and the life, and even though you die physically, you will never die spiritually because you are in me'. The only hope for eternity is Jesus, the only hope for Lazarus was Jesus, and it is your only hope!

On one occasion people started to leave the Lord because His sayings were so hard to fulfil. Jesus turned to Simon Peter and said: 'Will you also leave me, and flee and go away?'. Peter said: 'Lord, to whom shall we go, for thou hast the words of eternal life'. Heaven can only be had through the Lord Jesus.

The Master spoke to Mary in a familiar voice, in the trial of life, in the torment of her doubt, in the tragedy of death - and finally through the tenderness of Jesus. Jesus saw Mary weeping, saw the Jews weeping, and when He went and saw the tomb, Jesus wept. The people said: 'Behold how he loved him!'. The tenderness of Jesus spoke to Mary, because He was flesh of her flesh, bone of her bone, apart from sin. He was a man, and the reason why He partook of the same flesh and blood as we have,

is that He might be touched with the feelings of our infirmities, and be our Saviour! Do you know that?

'There's not a friend like the lowly Jesus,
No not one, no not one.
None else could heal all our souls diseases,
No not one, no not one'.

My friend this evening, do you hear the call of the Master through the gospel this very evening? The message that Martha brought to Mary is the message of the church from the Bible to every generation: the character of Christ, the Master, He is the Lord. Though Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus had Him as a good friend, Martha did not say to Mary: 'Our good friend calls thee to come', she said 'The Master'. He is the Son of God, and He has come - His condescension is that message: that He came from the Father's right-hand into this world, and took upon Himself flesh. He went to the cross and humbled Himself, and bore your sin, and bled and died - that One, the Master, the Son of God, the Lord of heaven and earth, He is come, He has condescended, that's how God is speaking to you! Literally the Greek means: 'The Master is present, He is actually here and calls for you'. My friend this evening, Christ is here: He's in the gospel message, and He welcomes you to be blessed with eternal life.

His character is in the message, His condescension, and His call personally to you: 'He calleth for thee'. He calls you to be saved from sin and from the power of sin, from the consequences of sin. He calls you to service. He says: 'Go work in my vineyard, be my servant, do my bidding, fulfil my will'. What will you say? How will you respond? The Master is come, He's here tonight, He calleth for thee! Mary responded quickly, and we read in verse 32 that she fell at His feet and she confessed Him as Lord. Then the power of resurrection was manifest in her life, and Jesus went forth to the tomb, the stone was rolled away, and He cried: 'Lazarus, come forth!' - and he came forth! He said: 'Loose him of the grave clothes of the old way of life, loose him and let him go'. My friend, He will do the same for you if you fall at His feet tonight, and confess Him as Lord He will deliver you, He will emancipate you from sin and its darkest effects.

The Master has come tonight to this place, the Master has come to thee, and He calleth for thee - but I must warn you: Lot's wife was called, but she lingered, and because she lingered she was lost. But Mary arose, and Mary ran, and Mary experienced the resurrection, changing power of Christ.

Well, have you heard the call of the Master's voice tonight? He has come, He calls for thee. He says: 'Him that cometh unto me, I will never, never cast out'. Will you come in true faith and repentance, believing this gospel, receiving it? He will give you the power to repent if you will change your mind concerning sin. Oh, take the Saviour's offer tonight that He freely gives. Say: 'Lord, I am a sinner, and I confess my sin. I thank You that Jesus died for me. I take His gift of salvation freely offered. Save me now, make me Your child. Lord of my life, I crown Thee now'.

Father, give grace and help. We thank Thee, every child of God in this place tonight, for the wonderful Saviour that we have. Lord, we pray that we will grow to love Him more. We pray that if there are any without Him, that tonight they will hear His voice. We remind Thee of the words of our Saviour: 'My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish'. Lord, hear our prayer and bring sheep, lost though they may be in their own way, back to the fold tonight - for Christ's sake we pray, Amen.

"The Look Of Life"

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"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" - Isaiah 45:22

Now I'm sure that some people who are in our meeting tonight who are not Christians, will never have heard of Charles Haddon Spurgeon - but most, if not all, the believers in the Lord Jesus Christ here tonight will have heard of him. He is commonly called 'The Prince of Preachers'. Of course, the King of Preachers is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ - but Christian historians really believe that Charles Haddon Spurgeon, since the Apostles, and maybe after George Whitefield and characters like he and Wesley, is one of the greatest preachers who ever existed since the Apostle Paul.

Now, why do I begin by referring to him? Well, simply because he preached on this text, Isaiah 45 verse 22, many, many times. The reason being that it was through this text in particular that Charles Haddon Spurgeon was converted by the grace of God. In one such of those sermons, he actually tells it in his own words, how the Lord spoke to him through this verse. I want to just give it to you, I can do no better than in the words of the 'Prince of Preachers' himself.

He said: 'You have often heard me tell how I had been wandering about, seeking rest, and finding none, till a plain, unlettered, lay preacher among the Primitive Methodists stood up in the pulpit and gave out this passage as his text' - Isaiah 45:22, 'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else'. 'He had not much to say, thank God, for that compelled him to keep on repeating his text, and there was nothing needed, by me at any rate, except his text. I remember how he said: 'It is Christ that speaks. I am in the garden in an agony, pouring out my soul unto death; I am on the tree, dying for sinners; look unto Me! Look unto Me! that is all you have to do. A child can look. One who is almost an idiot can look. However weak, or however poor, a man may be, he can look; and if he looks the promise is that he shall live'. Then stopping', Spurgeon says, 'he pointed to where I was sitting under the gallery, and he said, 'That young man there looks very miserable'. I expect I did', Spurgeon says, 'for that is how I felt. Then he went on to say, 'There is no hope for you, young man, or any chance of getting rid of your sin, but by Looking to Jesus'; and he shouted' - I'm not the only preacher that does that! - 'as I think only a Primitive Methodist did', Spurgeon said, "Look! young man! Look now!".

Spurgeon says: 'I did look, and when they sang a hallelujah before they went home, in their own earnest way, I am sure I joined in it. It happened to be a day when the snow was lying deep, and more was falling; so, as I went home, those words of David kept ringing through my heart, 'Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow' (Psalm 51:7); and it seemed as if all nature was in accord with that blessed deliverance from sin which I had found in a single moment by looking to Jesus Christ'.

Look and live! Spurgeon looked, the promise was true, he lived! Ultimately every child of God has the same story to tell. It may not have been through this particular text or a Methodist preacher, it matters little - but the fact of the matter is: the only way men and women and boys and girls can be saved, and are saved, is that at a time in their own experience they have looked to Jesus Christ alone for their salvation, and they have found eternal life in Him. Many have looked, even in response to this very verse, Isaiah 45:22 - and it is my prayer tonight from the depths of my soul that that will be your experience here and now, that you through this verse will come to look and live through the Saviour.

To do that, we need to see four things that are very clearly portrayed in this verse for us. The first thing I want you to see is salvation's invitation, salvation's invitation. Look at the first three words:

'Look unto me', God says. Now one thing that is very unpalatable for people in our modern day age, people who believe they are extremely rational and reasonable and intellectual, they have evolved to the stage that we are at now - pity help us - but nevertheless they cannot handle the idea that we are sinners. It's more difficult for them to believe that, because we are sinners, God condemns us as such and casts us out of His holy presence like he did our parents in Eden, Adam and Eve, when they first fell. In fact, the Bible in the New Testament teaches that we don't need to do anything to be condemned of God as a sinner, because we are sinners by nature - if we simply do not believe in the Gospel, we are condemned already.

Romans 6:23 makes it very clear that the wages of sin is death. Because our father and mother in the Garden of Eden ate of the fruit that God forbade them to eat of, sin came upon all men; and because all men sinned all men will die, because death is the wage of sin. Now, modern man doesn't like that idea: 'I'm not a sinner. I'm no worse than anyone else who has ever lived. I am, in fact, better than a lot of people that might even call themselves Christians, and I do not want to believe that I'm condemned of God - certainly not condemned to death'. If you even go as far as to mention to modern man the concept of hell, he is horrified! Because God's revelation declares that not only are we sinners who die because we are sinners, but there is a second death - and one day all men without Christ will stand before the Great White Throne, and their works will be read out, and they will be judged according to their evil works. Those that are not found in the Book of Life, the Bible says, will be cast into the lake of fire. The Psalmist says: 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all people who forget God'.

Now whilst you may find it difficult to accept those revealed truths in God's word, I believe and the Bible teaches that God is perfectly just in His condemnation of sinners. If you would consider, just for a moment, that the reason why we find this hard to accept is the fact that we have no true conception of the holiness and the righteousness of Almighty God. If we, as sinners and saints alike, could only get a glimpse, one ray or beam of the ineffable light of God's holy presence, we would begin to wonder why God has had patience with the human race for so long at all.

This is, if you like, the dark side of the message of the gospel that God has given to us. It is that we are sinners, and it is that we are condemned for being such. This is part of the gospel for sure, and if you cannot see yourself as a sinner, and a sinner that deserves nothing but the wrath of Almighty God, and certainly nothing of the mercy of God, you will never be saved. I think that's elementary: if you don't see yourself as a sinner, why would you ever need a Saviour? I think the problem for many in accepting this great gospel that the Bible teaches is the fact that they leave their understanding of the Gospel there, where God declares that they are sinners, we are condemned, we are lost in hell for all eternity if we do not repent - and they stop there in their view of God, in their view of the message that God has given us. They don't realise that that is only half of the old old story, the rest of the story, the second half, the better half if I can say it, is of Jesus and His love. It is the message that angels cannot tell, the message that this God whose holiness is unapproachable, whose holiness has been offended, is the very God that offers pardon and forgiveness to all men.

You see, the message of the good news that the New Testament outlines for us is that God has come to man. God has sought from man reconciliation. You see, if you only see God as some angry despot in the sky, that just wants to judge people and send people to hell, you have got a short-sighted view of God! Yes, He is holy; yes, He is just; yes, He is angry at the sinner every day - but you need to see the Gospel! What is the Gospel? That God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. You need to see this God taking upon Himself human flesh, going to the cross at Calvary and after He had lived among men, witnessed the deeds of men, rejected by His own men in His own nationality - and, going to the cross, the Bible says, He was made sin for us, He who knew no sin, that we may be made the righteousness of God in Him.

To put it another way: the requirements of reconciliation between sinful man and an offended holy God, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ have been completely fulfilled. It is done! The work is complete! Jesus has died and God has created a covenant, signed in the blood of His own Son, to say that sinners - whoever they be, wherever they come from - all men can come unto God by Christ. All that is left is for the sinner to embrace this gift of salvation. Now surely, if you look at God in the face of the Lord

Jesus Christ, surely this evening it has enhanced your view of Him? That you no longer see Him as a judgemental figure, though He judges sin, but can you see Him as a pardoning God? Can you see Him as a God of grace, a God who has gone to these lengths of sending His only begotten Son to die and bear the agony and infamy of our sin upon Him as if it was His own? God comes to you tonight in the salvation invitation, and says: 'Look unto me'.

It's not just something that you look at to see, but I think in this idea of looking there is also the sense of turning to look - and you can also turn to look in order to speak. You turn in order to talk to someone, and the remarkable thing about the salvation invitation is that God, this holy God of heaven, the Creator and Judge of mankind, actually invites sinners to speak to Him. Have you ever spoken to God? I'm not talking about primarily in times when you're in distress - even atheists pray when that happens. I'm talking about: have you ever come to God and spoken to Him about your sin? Have you ever told Him that you are a sinner? Have you ever told Him what you are, all that you consist of as a human being, all that you have done, have you confessed it to Him? Have you ever told God how you feel about this issue of salvation, maybe even how you wish you would feel about it but you simply can't? Maybe you feel you can't repent of your sin, you can't believe this message - well, have you ever told God about that? Why don't you come to Him and say: 'Lord, I just can't repent, I can't believe what I'm hearing'?

What I'm saying to you this evening is: whatever your state is, the implication of God's word is that you respond and come and talk to God - and even if you doubt that He even is in the heavens and exists, I believe if you respond to this invitation God will respond to you. If you draw near to God, He will draw near to you - for He has said: 'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool'. This is an invitation to see the love of God, but it's an invitation to speak, to talk to God, to pour out your heart before God and find your need met in Him.

Looking and turning to look, also implies, I believe, looking away from something. I mean, if you turn to look at something, the inference is that you've turned away from something else. In order to look to Christ, and to respond to this invitation, you must turn away from other things. 'What are those things?', you say. Those things wherein you have sought satisfaction apart from Jesus Christ. The Jewish people that Isaiah was prophesying to in this book were looking to the idols of the Gentile nations to find their satisfaction. They were looking to their iniquitous, fornicatory, immoral worship to find satisfaction in the flesh and with other gods. You have an idol tonight, and in that idol - whatever that idol may be - you are seeking satisfaction in the flesh, in the emotions, through the mind, in the spirit...but you cannot find it.

That idol may be a sin that you love too much to let go of for Christ. These idols don't have to be negative in the sense of particular sins that are transgressions of the ten commandments, your idol could be a church, it could be a denomination, it could be an affiliation, it could be a creed, it could be a religion outside Christendom, it could be a sacrament - baptism, the Lord's Supper, confirmation. It could be anything: it could be a code of morals, maybe you're humanist, you don't affiliate with any religious body or institution - but you believe ethically that man should love his fellow men, and that is your idol. Maybe it's a lover, or it's a friend, or it's a member of your family that is keeping you from Christ. If you need reminding, let me remind you: to this moment in time you have not found satisfaction in any of those things. Do you know why? Because you must look away from them and look to Christ. That's why Jesus one day said to a people who were trodden under the weight of sin: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'. The hymn puts it:

'None but Christ can satisfy,
None other name for me;
There's love, and life, and lasting joy,
Lord Jesus, found in Thee'.

This looking also implies - my second point - not only in this verse do we find salvation's invitation, but we find salvation's intention: 'be ye saved'. 'Look unto me, and be ye saved'. Looking implies expectation, you would only be looking if you expected something to happen - and why shouldn't you

expect salvation when God has provided it? Need I go over the ground again, though it is a privilege to do such: the intention of God sending His Son from the realms of heaven into the form of a babe in Bethlehem, to grow among men to be 33 years of age, to walk in His precious feet on Palestinian soil, and then one day to be taken - after He taught men things that they had never heard - and nailed to a cross, the hands that performed the miracles, that made blind eyes to see, that stilled the ocean. There He hangs, the blood gushing from His form - why? Because God intended to save men, and because God, through the death of His Son, was providing that salvation - why should you not expect it if you look to Christ this evening?

Not only through His blood that He has provided, but in His word He has promised it - here, right here in this scripture and many more Scriptures - that if you look, you will live. He has promised to receive all who on His Son believe. My friend this evening, as sure as you look to Christ, you can expect to be saved - you will be saved. It's not a presumption to go to a wedding and expect a feast, is it? Oh, it's not presumption or wild arrogance that when God invites you to look to Him, that you should expect to be saved - indeed it is His declared declaration and intention in salvation: 'Look unto me, and be ye saved'.

Oh, what certainty is in it, and how many other texts between the two covers of Scripture declare this same truth. Romans 10:13: 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved'. Acts 16:31: 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved'. John 6:37: 'All that the Father giveth me', Jesus said, 'shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out'. What a cruel mockery Calvary must have been if God didn't intend to save men through it. Why would He die? Why would He shed His precious blood? Why, in those three hours, would He bear the wrath of Almighty God in His very soul? The reason why is, as Isaiah says in his great discourse, prophetically, in chapter 53: 'He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed'. We sang it a moment ago:

'We are healed by His stripes. Wouldst thou add to the word?
And He is our righteousness made;
The best robe of heaven He bids thee put on
Oh! couldst thou be better arrayed?'

Are your good works, are your religious affiliations, are your charitable deeds better than the cross work of Jesus Christ that He finished for you? Salvation's intention is that you might be saved - are you lost? Do you feel that your life is lost, and could be described in that way just now this very moment - you feel like a vessel out in the wild sea, tossed to and fro, you can't get rest, you find yourself battered and bruised by the winds and the storms and the waves of sin, you don't know where you're coming from, you don't know where you're going, you don't know why you're here? My friend, look and live! In Christ alone can you find your way! If your life, you don't admit it's lost - what will your eternity be? Will your eternity be lost? When you stand before the judgment bar of God, and the works of your life God reads to you, and then the pronouncement comes in conclusion when the Lord Jesus Christ Himself says to you: 'I never knew you. Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and all his angels'. My friend, if you don't know yet, surely those words make you realise you need God's salvation! The only way to have it is to 'Look unto me', God says.

Thirdly, salvation's inclusion is obvious here: 'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth' - salvation's conclusion. I'll tell you, there's not many verses in the Old Testament that are addressed to Gentiles, but here is one of the few ones that you will find. The prophet, looking to a future day, when all men of nationalities and backgrounds and cultures will be one in Christ and united - why? Because God's plan and intention in salvation is that He should love the whole world, and through the death of Christ that He should save all men from all races and cultures, all types of people on this globe. You see, it doesn't matter who looks, all that matters is you look. God is not concerned whether you're a Catholic or Protestant, Unionist or Nationalist, black or white, Socialist or Tory, these things don't matter at all with God!

'All the ends of the earth may be saved', that's why the apostles were told in the Great Commission to

go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, for this is a message to all men. But also we find in this inclusive statement that no one can ever be too far from God. We used to think the British Isles was the ends of the earth, then they discovered the Americas, and it became the ends of the earth. My friend, wherever you are tonight, however far away from God you feel you are, even if God is so far away from you that you feel if you went to look at Him you couldn't even focus or see Him because of the darkness of your sin and nature's night - I tell you tonight: none is too far from God to look to Him, all the ends of the earth can be saved! The Psalmist cried: 'From the ends of the earth will I cry unto Thee. When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I'.

On one occasion the Israelites in the Old Testament were murmuring against God and His ways and His leaders, and God sent fiery serpents into the camp in the wilderness, and they began to bite the people of Israel, and they fell one by one and started to die. Moses ran unto God and asked Him for a way for the people to be saved, and God told him to take a staff, and put a brass serpent upon it, and tell the people to look unto that serpent in the middle of the camp and they would be saved. Can you picture the scene: these half-corpses, writhing on the ground as the pain of the poison flushes through their veins, and they feel death's bony grip coming upon their very soul - but yet if, out of the corner of their dusty sin-ridden eyes, they can get a glimpse of that brass serpent, they will be saved!

One day Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, a Jewish religious man, and asked the same question: 'How can I be saved?'. Jesus said: 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have eternal life'. Wherever you are tonight, whatever you have done, however far from God you may be: if you look to Christ He will save you from the ends of the earth.

Salvation's invitation: 'Look unto me'. Salvation's intention: 'Be ye saved'. Salvation's inclusion: 'All the ends of the earth'. But finally, I want you to see salvation's exclusion: 'I am God, and there is none else'. Because of your sin, my friend, you need a God to save you. Your sin is so heavy, it weighs you down to the very depths of hell, that the only one who can lift it is one with an omnipotent hand, one who is Almighty - and there is only one true and living God, the Almighty Jehovah! He is the only one who has sent His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins. That means, my friend, if you're going to be saved, you're going to have to be saved through Him. I don't care what our pluralistic, politically correct, syncretistic religious society says about that - God's word declares, and the day is coming soon when we may be locked up for saying it, that there is one God. He is not Allah, He is not Buddha, He is Jehovah. There is one mediator between that God and man, the Man Christ Jesus - neither is their salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. One translation says: 'There is no second name, whereby we must be saved'. In other words, if you don't take God's salvation, you will be excluded from it! You will never be saved! Jesus said: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; and no man cometh unto the Father but by me'. My friend, don't look to any other man, don't look to any other god, for God has declared: 'I am God, and there is none other'.

Well, have you looked? Have you heard salvation's invitation, 'Look unto me'? Have you seen salvation's intention, that you can be saved and know that you're saved? Do you see the inclusion of salvation, that wherever you are, wherever you're from, whatever you've done, however far off you feel from God: He invites you? Do you see salvation's exclusion, that if you don't come by Him, and the way of His Son, and the way of His cross, you can never be saved?

There's a story that was told years ago of an old farmer who, whilst walking in the fields, told his companion that he'd been saved by his good looks - imagine that! 'You know', he said, 'I have been saved by my good looks'. His friend was so surprised, so he explained further that some time ago he lent his barn to an evangelist who took gospel meetings in it. He decided one night: 'I want to see what's happening down there, it's my barn'. Intrigue got the better of him, so he went down, and this is what happened: the preacher read his first text, Isaiah 45:22, 'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else'. The preacher pictured, just like the preacher for Spurgeon, the cruelty of the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ - Jesus on the tree, bearing the sins of the world. The farmer said, sitting there he gazed at that amazing sight. With the inner eyes of his soul he realised that he saw Him dying for me. Then the preacher turned to his second

verse, Hebrews 12:2: 'Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God'. He said: 'Then I pictured a risen Saviour, a Saviour who was not only able to save me on Calvary's tree, but a Saviour now who is alive and able to save to the uttermost all who came unto Him, a Saviour who is able to keep me from stumbling, able to present me faultless before His throne, able to empower me victoriously. He could not only do the job for me on the cross, but He could do the job for me, in me day by day'. Then he turned to his third text, Titus 2:13: 'Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ'. He said: 'What a thrill it was to hear that this same Jesus is actually coming again for His own blood-bought people, so that I'm looking for a time when I will see Him', the farmer said, 'and I will be like Him'.

His companion was so impressed, he said: 'That's wonderful, I understand now how you have been saved by your good looks' - have you looked to Him? The One who has died, the One who is alive this very evening to save you, and the One who is coming soon to judge you or, if you're His, to take you home.

Let's all bow our heads. You've heard the invitation from God's Spirit tonight, and all you must do is respond. Look away from whatever idol you're seeking satisfaction in, and turn to the true and the only living God who can save you, and His Son Jesus Christ. Just say: 'Lord, I confess my sin, and pray that you will give me the power to repent of it as I am willing to do so. I thank You that Jesus died for me, and in dying for me took my sin upon Himself' - this is a very serious time, please, everyone concentrate - and ask Him to save you. Say: 'Lord, save me now, come into my life, make me Your child and be my Lord'. Will you do that now? He has promised that if you look, you will live - but please, I plead with you: look tonight and live.

Lord, we thank Thee that the Gospel is so simple that a child can understand. We pray tonight that young and old alike, men and women and boys and girls, will lift their eyes from the dearth and dirt of sin, and look to the glorious realms of heaven where there is a nail-pierced Saviour at the right hand of God, risen and exalted and able to save all who will come unto God by Him. Give grace tonight, and glorify Thy name we pray, Amen.

"Remember Lot's Wife"

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My text this evening is from Luke's Gospel chapter 17, as we read, but just one verse - verse 32: "Remember Lot's wife". The Lord Jesus Christ spoke the words that we read together earlier, and it's as if He paused in the midst of this discourse on His second return, and He said "Remember Lot's wife" - and I want us to do that tonight.

Let me give you a bit of the context that we find this verse in. In verses 28 to 30 we find a description of the days preceding the second coming of our Lord. The Saviour Himself said that it would be similar to the days in which Lot lived. He talks both about Noah and Lot in this passage, and both Noah and Lot lived in days of religious compromise, days of moral declension - not unlike our day today. That's why many Bible scholars, including myself, believe that the Lord Jesus' coming is very near.

During the days of Noah population grew significantly - we know that from Genesis 6:1. From Genesis 6:5 we know that lawlessness increased, and the earth was covered in violence according to Genesis 6:11-13. In Lot's day the unnatural lusts of Sodom and Gomorrah were so abhorrent to God that He had to completely destroy those cities from off the face of the world. We can see right away the similarities between that age and our age today.

The interesting thing about what the Lord Jesus Christ says is that it was not their lurid sins that caused them to be unprepared when God's judgment came. According to the Lord Jesus Christ, rather than their sins, they were unprepared simply because they were preoccupied with the normal everyday mundane activities of life. In other words, they were getting on with life, their way of life may not be your way of life, but nevertheless they were eating and drinking, and giving and taking in marriage - and they were so engrossed and preoccupied with normal human existence, that they had no concern at all with God or with any of the warnings from God's prophet.

Now when we come to Lot after Noah, civilisation had advanced somewhat, so that by Lot's time the description of Noah's day was not sufficient, just that people ate and drank and gave and were taken in marriage. As we read in verse 28, then they also bought, they sold, they planted, they built. Noah's age was eating and drinking and marrying, normal sensual pleasures if you like. But by the time we get to Lot's age, ah well, humanity is wanting to push the boundaries a little bit. Now man is seeking not just to exist without God, but he's making an effort to bring in a golden era of peace and prosperity without God. The sin that the Lord Jesus levels at the feet of that generation is not their immorality, although that was abhorrent and an abomination in the sight of God, but the fact that they were wanting to get on with their lives excluding Him. That is why God's judgment came upon them suddenly.

When I was thinking about this, my mind immediately went to the parable the Lord Jesus told of the rich businessman or the rich farmer. He was doing so well in his business that he said to himself: 'I will pull down my barns and build greater', and he said to his soul, 'Soul, take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry' - but God said: 'Thou fool, for this night thy soul...'. Now that was an arresting statement to that man, because up to that moment in his life he had not taken into consideration that he even had a soul. But now, all of a sudden, because he had prepared for all his material needs, out of the blue, like lightning, God spoke to him about his soul - and he wasn't prepared for that!

In verses 29 and 30 we have a similar situation, for the very same day that Lot went out of Sodom, and God delivered him from that city, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all: 'Even thus shall it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed'. They weren't expecting it, they were eating and drinking and giving in marriage, they were planting and they were reaping, they were

expanding and building - yet it was at that very moment that the judgment came. So it shall be at the coming of the Son of Man. Jesus is simply saying: 'Do you see people who are engrossed and concentrating on their own pleasure, their self gratification and their business? They will be destroyed if they have excluded God from their lives'.

Verse 31 says it clearly: 'In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back'. In other words, those who have an attachment to earthly things, on that day it will imperil their very life. Can you believe this? I could hardly! That when the Lord Jesus Christ comes back again in judgment, people won't be falling to their knees and saying: 'Lord, have mercy on me!' - they'll be running back to their homes and trying to get their Mercedes out of the garage, trying to find their bonds and their shares to secure them all! Because there are some people in this world that are so infatuated, preoccupied with the physical realm to the total exclusion of that which is spiritual. He says: 'Don't try and salvage anything on that day. Don't turn back, you should flee' - and here's the immortal, ancient, timeless memorial to that fact that He gives: 'Remember Lot's wife'.

Here's why you shouldn't do it! You've heard of a 'legal precedent' in court, where they recount something that has happened before as proof of why something should happen again in law. That's what the Lord Jesus is doing, if you like: 'Here's how I know that there's no point running after your money and your possessions when judgment comes - remember Lot's wife!'. Now we could remember many things about her tonight. We could remember her look of disobedience, when she realised that she had incurred the judgemental wrath of God by her sin. We could look at her look of fearful doom as she turned, as the Bible says, into a pillar of salt. But what I want you to remember tonight about Lot's wife is three things. First of all: remember her privileges. Then secondly, I want you to remember her sin. Then thirdly, I want you to remember her punishment. You mightn't be familiar with this story, but hopefully as we go through these three points you will become very familiar, and I want you to become intimate with it - because I want you to realise that you're in the same predicament as her, and I want you to remember her story tonight, lest one day you lift up your eyes being in torments in hell and remember...but because you were unprepared, it will be too late.

Remember her privileges - what am I talking about? Well, if you read the book of Genesis, you will know that Lot was a righteous man. Lot came from a godly family, and so this wife of his married into a godly family, and her better half - and I'm correct in saying that - was the nephew of Abraham. Abraham was Lot's uncle, and so when Abraham was called by God from pagan idolatry out of a place called the Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham went out in obedience to the call of God, God promised to bless him, to save him, to make the fruit of his loins a nation that no man could number - and as Uncle Abraham went out, little nephew Lot went after him. I imagine that Lot was greatly influenced by his Uncle Abraham, and yet as we go through the book of Genesis we find that there are subtle differences between Lot and his uncle. Because, as we read Moses' account, we find out that where Abraham was content to dwell in tents, and travel and pilgrimage towards God's promised land that he had never seen, he didn't know what the name of it was - Lot got to the point in his life where he wanted to give up all this pilgrimage and living in tents, and he preferred the settled land.

This is right away where we see Lot's weakness, and this is manifested in the account when the two families, Lot's and Abraham's, got so big that their herdsmen began to fight with one another, and they decided: 'We're going to have to go our separate ways'. So Abraham, the wise man that he was, give Lot first preference to choose what part of the land he wanted, and the Bible says he took first preference and he chose the well-watered plain near the cities of the plain. Now the cities of the plain were these cities of Sodom and Gomorrah whose crime rate had soared and reached an all-time high, and we read within God's word that Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom. He's still in a tent, but he is now settling down in his ease in the world, and he's pitching it toward Sodom. Later on, as we read through the book, we find that just like the life of sin, one downward step leads to another - and as he moved nearer the city, he gave up his tent for a house, bricks and mortar, something more permanent in this world. He took his ease just like the rich farmer.

Now many preachers castigate old Lot, but you know Peter tells us that Lot was a righteous man. This is hard to understand at times, but Peter says that the sins that were in the city of Sodom vexed Lot's

righteous soul every day. But I'm not preaching to you about Lot, even though he may have taken steps in backsliding, I want to talk to you about his worse half - one who was not so vexed about the sins of Sodom, one who loved those sins and did all she could to stay in the environment of those sins. Sin got to such a stage in Sodom and Gomorrah that God was going to put Lot and his wife in a position where they would have to flee for their lives, or else they would perish. So God told them to flee from the city and, as they were fleeing from Sodom, not to look back - for if they looked back, they would be turned into a pillar of salt in God's judgment.

The remarkable thing is that with the flaming sulphur of the wrath of God Almighty falling behind her back upon the city that she had lived in, Lot's wife couldn't resist just one more lingering love-glance at her condemned home. Do you know what that proves? It proved that she loved the world more than she loved God, and it proves that the love of the world is death - whoever you are! Whatever your privileges have been, God's word says: 'If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him'.

Now imagine this, because here's another of her privileges - not only was she married into this family, a godly family that knew the way of salvation, but she was in the closest bonds of matrimony with this righteous man, Lot. She was married to this man of God, yet she perished. Do you know what this book, the Bible, teaches me, if it teaches me anything about salvation? It's simply this: you can be the father, the mother, the child, the sibling of the godliest saint alive, and still perish! Sure, even the brothers of Jesus thought that He was mad, and even though they were the half-brothers by human flesh, it didn't make one button of difference in the eyes of God. The word of God stands sure, John 3 and verse 3: 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'. It doesn't matter how you were born once - as a Protestant or a Roman Catholic. It doesn't matter what colour your skin is, or what church you evolved into by an accident of birth, what matters is the second birth.

I wonder, tonight, if you have a godly family around you. Maybe you're the child of a believer, or maybe someone has passed on and is in heaven tonight - I think we all have them - wouldn't it be a tragedy if we, in some way, had a privileged connection to someone that is on the very shores of heaven tonight, and we died within the sight of it, with the way to heaven in our heads but the world in our hearts! Can you imagine the adventures this woman had with her husband? She had gone through conquests with God's people, she had been in their struggles, in their sorrows, in their pains. She had heard first-hand about the gracious covenant that God had made with Uncle Abraham. She knew that God was willing to accept men and women through the sacrifice of blood. No doubt, on occasions, she joined in their songs, she revelled in their feasts, she even engaged in their prayers with the crowd of God's congregation. My friend, that is an astounding thing, that even though she experienced all these privileges with God's people, in a family where God's name was revered, she still perished!

But that should be no surprise, Jesus says that: 'When I come again, it will be exactly the same'. There are people who will have prayed prayers, there are people who will have called themselves Christians, He even goes as far as to say that there are people who will have 'healed the sick, cast out demons, done miraculous works in my name; but I will say 'I never knew you''. Communicants, church members, people who have been baptised, Jesus says they will say: 'We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets', but Jesus will say, 'I tell you, I know not whence ye are, depart from me all ye workers of iniquity'.

Let me tell you a couple of more privileges that this woman had. Do you know who took the message to flee from the wrath to come to this woman and her husband? Angels! Two angels came to her - and she, incidentally, entertained them - and they brought to her a message of deliverance. She listened to that message of deliverance, and here's another astounding fact: she actually took the first steps in being saved. What do I mean? Well, she heard the judgment warning from the angels, and she was aroused in her heart to realise that she was in danger, and she arose early in the morning with her husband and she began to travel. I can see her in my mind's eye running down the High Street of Sodom towards the gate, I can see her with every breath, with every sinew, with every effort of energy trying to, with breakneck speed, reach that gate and get beyond its boundary. There she is running, and she reaches the open plain running alongside her husband, following his example. You might say: 'Well then, what happened? Why is she in such trouble that Jesus says she was turned into a pillar of salt?'. Well, for some reason, her pace lessened, she slowed down - what was it she said? What was it

she thought?

She almost stopped to a dead standstill because she remembered what she had left behind. Oh, she left behind her home, probably left behind livestock, left behind her neighbours and her friends - but that's not what I'm thinking about, because the greatest thing that she left behind was her heart. She was out of Sodom, but Sodom was not out of her heart! The Bible says that she began to linger. There was another occasion when both Lot and her lingered, when the angels first came and announced the message of judgment the Bible says that Lot lingered, and the angels had to physically take the wrists of that man and woman and pull them out of their house and out of the city. You would think after that one lingering moment that that would have been enough for her, she would have fled, especially when she heard the cries of those who were being judged. Yet, my friend, she lingered once again. Lot didn't linger, he kept running, he kept going, but she lingered, she stopped. Her heart was in the world, and she turned, and as she turned the fire of God's brimstone rained upon her and she was turned into that salt.

Have you lingered before? How many people have been touched by God, not just angels, but by God Himself? You've been touched in your conscience on one occasion, you've been touched in your heart, perhaps at a meeting like this - and yet so many touched can still linger, and can be lost! If there was ever a lesson that we can learn in remembering Lot's wife, surely it is this: that to be almost saved is to be not saved at all! All these privileges that she had, yet she was lost and her husband was saved - and Jesus says: 'When I come again in judgment, there will be two in a bed, one will be taken and the other will be left. There will be two in the field, one will be taken and the other will be left'. For those who are in Christ, for those even in this fellowship we are going through the threshold of bereavement as we speak, there is a great hope of a meeting day when all the redeemed of God shall be together - but for those who are lost, there is not that hope, there is a separation and a separation for eternity! That's why you need to remember Lot's wife, remember her privileges, and if those privileges are yours this evening you need to flee and be saved immediately!

Don't just remember her privileges, but remember her sin. She lingered when the angel first spoke to her, and now she's lingering again. I can, in my mind's eye, almost imagine these two angels. The first angel in one hand has Lot, and in the other hand has his wife - and he's running as fast as his feet can carry him. The second angel has Lot's two daughters behind, and then all of a sudden he is slowed down as Lot's wife starts to linger, the Bible says. She started to slow down in her pace, and then she actually stops. She just couldn't keep up with the rest of them, and there are many people who are guilty of that sin in our land tonight: they're slack in their Christianity. Their Christianity is not a Christianity at all, yet they call it Christianity. They think that this evangelicalism, this Gospel preaching, is all fanatical. But, my friend, it is fanatical in this sense: we are fleeing from a burning city, we are crying for you to flee from a burning city - that's why we get excited about it! Your soul is at stake, there's no room for lingering!

Just calling yourself a Christian, just going to church, just trying to keep the ten commandments and doing your best to your neighbour, that is not enough! I'll tell you why it's not enough: because it wasn't enough for this woman. She was out, she was almost saved, she was beyond the pale of Sodom, yet the fact of the matter is that a religion of convenience wouldn't do her, because it hadn't changed her heart. Her second sin was not only her slackness but the fact that she doubted God. God had warned her first-hand from these angels that judgment was coming, she had seen the Sodomites blinded at her own door, she knew what God could do - but the fact of the matter is, I believe that she started to doubt God. You almost think it's not possible, how could she doubt after seeing such things? Well, if she didn't doubt, why did she turn? When God told her: 'If you turn, I'll turn you into a pillar of salt', was there not in her heart or her mind this doubt: 'Surely God won't destroy me'?

Maybe she woke up that morning, and it was a beautiful day, and she thought: 'Surely this is not the day of God's judgment?'. People are thinking in our world tonight, when you talk to them about their soul, 'Surely God won't judge this world? Surely He'll not keep me out of heaven? I'm not that bad! Surely God won't send people to hell? What kind of a God would do such a thing?'. I say to you tonight: let God be true and every man a liar! God's word is clear, and sadly she found it out to be clear, for as she turned the look of her eyes was only pointing in the direction that her heart was facing, because

she had left her heart in Sodom. Those treasures of hers were in Sodom in that burning city, and the Lord Jesus said: 'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'.

So what the Saviour is saying tonight to all our hearts is this: it doesn't matter what you say, it doesn't even matter what you do, how is your heart? Is thy heart right with God? Here's a lesson if there was ever one: you can't have the Saviour and have your sin at the same time. You can't have Christ and have civilised world, you can't have the two: your habits and the Saviour. Here's proof if ever there was one greater than any verse in the Bible that I could show you about repentance, why we need to turn from our sins and turn to Christ: it is the cross! This is why you can't have your sin and the Saviour, because it's your sin that put Him there! It's your sin that caused His hands to be nailed, it's your sin that placed the crown of thorns on His brow, it's your sin that buffeted His face, it's your sin that caused the soldier to put the spear in His side, it's your sin that caused the darkness to fall upon Him for those three hours, it's your sin that was laid upon Him, the iniquity of us all! It's your sin that put Him through hell for you! That's why you can't have it, no matter how much you want to have it.

Remember her privileges, remember her sin, and finally please remember her punishment. It was the same as those in Sodom, but here's the tragedy: she perished at the gates of Zoar, that was her city of refuge, that was the place where they would be safe. Whilst the others were in the city of destruction when they were judged, she was outside the gate of her city of deliverance. I say to you tonight: it's one thing to die with the ungodly after living an ungodly life, but imagine what it is to die and have the privileges that Lot's wife had. Here was a woman that had reached the very gate of heaven, and still she perished. Here was a woman, yet with all her privileges she perished. You say: 'Is that possible?'. I say, Jesus says: 'Remember Lot's wife'!

Peter said: 'For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they had known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them'. If you know the way of the Gospel, my friend, and you have had privileges just like Lot's wife, I'm telling you tonight on the authority of God's word that your judgment will be a double judgment. Her punishment was in an instant, suddenly she perished. One sermon I read today put it like this: 'She hadn't even time to single out her own house'. What if you should perish suddenly? What if the breath were taken from your body in the pew where you sit tonight? Jesus is going to come suddenly, and the awful thing for this woman was that it happened suddenly when she was in the very act of sin. Imagine if, for you, whatever you're dabbling in, whatever you've done, imagine that if suddenly God's punishment should come to you in the very moment of your transgression - it can happen, remember Lot's wife!

Remember her privileges, remember her sin - but, oh, remember her punishment. As Matthew Henry said: 'Be not loathe to leave a place marked for destruction, wherever, whatsoever, whomsoever you leave behind you that may be so dear to you - leave it!'. John Bunyan, when he wrote Pilgrim's Progress, he pictured the man who was realising his burden of sin on his back, and he leaves the City of Destruction before the wrath comes - and his family, his wife and his children, are crying out: 'Come back! Come back home!'. Bunyan says: 'He plugged his ears, and he ran crying for his soul, 'Life, life, eternal life!'. He was going towards a Celestial City, he went by the way of the cross and the empty tomb - but can I tell you something that happens almost at the end of that story? Just before he reaches the gate of heaven he meets a man called 'Ignorance'. Ignorance, rummaging in his pockets, he's fumbling around - he asks him what he's doing, and he's trying to find some money to buy his way into heaven, or to purchase a certificate to get in. All of a sudden, as Christian witnessed Ignorance fumbling around, not being able to get the cost, he sees two shining ones who come down, sent from God. Bunyan says that he grabs Ignorance by the ankles and by the wrist, and an opening appeared at the side of the hill, and the angels threw him into that hole.

Bunyan says in his book these words: 'Then I saw that there was a way to hell even from the gates of heaven'. Do you know that? I don't know what your privileges have been, I don't know what your sin is, but all I know is this: to be almost saved is to be lost. Which will you be? Maybe someone is saying: 'What do I do to be saved?'. Well, can I put it very simply - three things, if you mean them from your heart and do them: one, admit that you are a sinner, that you have offended God, and say that to Him: 'Lord, I confess I am a sinner, and if You give me the power, I repent of my sin and I turn from it and am willing to forsake it'. The second thing is to believe in the Lord Jesus, that means to believe that,

being the Son of God, dying on Calvary, He has done all that is necessary to take away your sin. You can't do it or add to it, it is His death and His death alone that you rely on. Say that: 'Lord, I thank You that the Saviour died for me, save me, cleanse me in His blood'. Thirdly, you simply accept that gift of salvation by faith, believe God's word that He says He will save you, and deliver your whole life over to Him. Say: 'Lord, save me, I call on Your name, save me. Take my life'.

Now if you do that tonight, friend, from your heart, He is duty bound to save you. None of us know when the Saviour is returning. None of us know when the hour of our death will be, but all of us can know that we are ready to meet our God.

Lord, save in this place tonight, move by Thy Spirit and do the work that only Thou canst do. To the glory of Christ we pray, Amen.

"Philemon"

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We're turning to the little book of Philemon. Now, you say, where on earth is that? Well, if you can get the book of Hebrews, which is quite a large book in the Bible, it's just before it. Maybe you don't even have a Bible, well, that doesn't matter - you can share, perhaps, with someone who has one beside you, or just listen as we read the God's word together. Now it probably won't make much sense to you at this juncture, but later on when we expound it and preach upon it, hopefully it will make very clear sense. Beginning to read at verse 1, we'll read the whole book, and you'll be glad to know it's only 25 verses of one chapter.

The epistle of Paul to Philemon - Paul is writing to this individual called Philemon: "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house: Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints; That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother. Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: Whom I have sent again: thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels: Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides. Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord. Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say. But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you. There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen".

Now it's wonderful to be here a year from the day, this date exactly, when we opened this church building. Now let me say in preface, before I go on any further, that I have had this message for three weeks before I even knew that we were going to have a night of praise and thanksgiving for the building. I didn't even realise this would be the year anniversary - so don't think that I've concocted this message especially for tonight as such, or especially for you, it was with me from the Lord three weeks ago.

But it's a privilege for us to have a house like this to meet in as the church of Jesus Christ - but that was not always the case, because away back in the first century, not long after the Lord Jesus died for our sins and rose again, Christians often met in their own houses. There was a little church that met in this house of Philemon, but what I want to ask you tonight is: is there a church in your house? What kind of a question is that? I remember as a little child, and many preachers can recollect doing the same, on a Sunday evening gathering all my great aunts and great uncles together, and grandparents and great-grandparents - I see some smiles, because I know some are doing it even in the day and age in which we speak, warn them that they might become a pastor in the days that lie ahead! I used to preach to them, used to get them to sing - and I wouldn't have been anything but four or five, six

years of age. Dear help those old folks, whether they were walking wounded or not, with sticks and zimmers, they had to get up and walk past me, and shake my hand. I hadn't got to the stage of learning to take a collection in those days, I have done since! But nevertheless, that's not what I'm talking about this evening, I'm not even talking about house churches - because some people still worship in houses in parts of our world for fear of building a building like this. I'm not even talking about whether or not you're a church member, I'm asking you this question: are you a member of the church?

What's the difference? Well, being a member of the church is not the same as being a church member. Being a member of the church is being converted by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, having a personal experience of salvation, and you become a Christian - that's all you have to do to become a member of the worldwide church of Jesus Christ. You don't have to sign on a dotted line, or give a tenth of your money in - although those things, necessarily, are not bad - but you're just to come and believe the Gospel, and embrace Christ as the only Saviour of men. So what I'm asking you tonight is: are you converted? Are all the people in your house in the church of Jesus Christ? Can you say this evening: 'I am a member of the church in my house'?

You're a father, are you saved? You're a mother, are you saved? Son, daughter, whatever home you've come from tonight, grandmother, grandfather, husband, wife - are you a member of the church living in your home? I know that you might well excel in your particular family role, you could be the best father that there is, the best mother, the most attentive and caring that there has ever been. You could be the archetypal example of a son or a daughter, you could be a doting grandfather or grandmother, you could be a loving husband, even a romantic wife - if that's possible! - but the fact of the matter is: you could be a great member of your family in the home, but I'm asking you the question this evening, are you a member of the family of God? Is there, within your house, not just a human family, but a spiritual family?

I remember reading, studying some time ago about a woman in the Old Testament, she was called the Shunamite woman, she's not even given a name. She noticed a holy man of God, it was the prophet Elisha, passing by her door each day, and she decided that he could become her lodger, and she would be good to him. So she built an annex onto her house, and she gave him a table and a bed, and a stool and a candle - and he was able to drop in when he was on his travels and stay with her from time to time. Because of her goodness to the servant of God, God blessed her with a young boy. As the years rolled on that little boy was in the field one day, and he was struck with a piercing headache - and he fell just there in the middle of the field at his father's feet, and the boy died. This woman couldn't understand why God had struck down this boy whom He had given her previously, and she ran to the prophet. The prophet Elisha saw the woman running to him, and sent his servant Gehazi to meet her and ask her this question: 'Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?'.

I wonder if I was to ask you that question tonight - I've asked you are you a member of the church living in your house - but if I was to ask you: is it well with you husband? Is it well with you wife? Is it well with you child? How would you answer? She was able to answer, even though her child was dead: 'It is well'. It was well with her soul, she still believed in God even though this terrible thing had transpired. Now I haven't got time to go into that story, but I want to ask you: how are things in your household? Are things bad? Maybe you have known what it is for a child to be struck down with a serious illness, or even killed. Are things bad financially? You can't make ends meet, you don't know what you're going to do, you owe so much money, and what's going out doesn't equate to what's coming in. Are things bad educationally? You're trying to climb the ladder and trying to learn, but it's just not happening. Maybe it's professionally, you're looking for that promotion, you're trying to be satisfied in your career, but you just don't seem to get the opportunities, you haven't got the privileges that other people have.

Are things bad in your home relationally? There's a problem between you and your partner, your husband, your wife, your boyfriend, girlfriend. Maybe you have problems emotionally, things are bad in the home, you've been scarred mentally, physically, because of an emotional torment or abuse in the past. Maybe things are bad physically, maybe you're sitting here tonight and you're only months away from death - maybe you don't know that, but you feel that. Maybe you've heard bad news in recent days, maybe you're suffering from an ailment that - although it's not going to kill you soon, it's

something that you're carrying as a burden on your back and it's destroying your life. Maybe you've been abused physically - how is it in your house tonight? How is it spiritually? Are you searching? Are you longing? Do you not have that satisfaction in your heart? Can you say: 'It's well with my soul'? How is your soul this evening?

Oh, if you were to answer 'Yes', 'Yes! I'm a member of the church, I'm a church member, I've believed in Christ and I'm a member of His body, I'm washed in His blood, I'm forgiven, I'm converted, I'm born-again' - I'll tell you, some of your fathers would have joyous hearts tonight, for they have been praying for you for many a year. Some of you, your mother's eyes would well up with tears at the thought that you've become a member of Christ's church. From the youngest in their family to the oldest, many a praying couple are longing for the day when they'll know household salvation - what is that? Everybody in their family, under their roof or in their family circle, saved! But you can't say 'Yes' tonight.

This, probably, was Philemon's greatest desire. This man who had a church in his house, he longed that everybody that met and was under the sound of the gospel was saved - the problem was, there was a black sheep in the family. There was a black sheep in the home, his name was Onesimus. He wasn't a member of the family as such, he was Philemon's servant - but the story is very simple, though it is hard to read at times. He, as Philemon's servant, wronged Philemon, and after wronging him - probably the sin was theft - he then ran away. He became a black sheep, he became a prodigal.

Now I don't have a clue who I'm speaking to tonight, I only know that God has laid this message on my heart for weeks now, and it could be that there's someone here this evening and you have wronged your father, you have wronged your mother as a son or as a daughter, and maybe you've even run away from home just like Onesimus. Maybe it's not a father or mother you've wronged, but a husband or wife - there's plenty of that goes on today. You've been unchaste and unfaithful. Maybe it's an employer you've wronged, and you've run away from work and taken a few pounds with you. Maybe it's an organisation that you've wronged, you've wronged the wrong man and now you're running away from him in fear for your life. Maybe it's even the law of the land you're running away from, or maybe you're just running away from God, from being in God's family!

Onesimus is so similar to the prodigal son that we read of in Luke 15. He went to his father before he was dead, obviously, but he asked for his inheritance, and that only came to you when your father died - so he was more or less saying to his father: 'I wish you were dead so that I could get my hands on your money'. His father gave it to him and he went into the far country, and he spent all of that finance on riotous living - wine, women and song - until he had nothing left. He ended up on a farm feeding the pigs and eating the very swill that the pigs were eating themselves, and into the bargain there was a famine in the land. He was at the end of his tether, and it was only then that he remembered what he had at home - he had forgotten about home. He remembered that there was bread in his father's house and to spare, and there he was living as a pig.

Is that you tonight? You're running from someone, you're running from something, but ultimately all men who have not embraced the Gospel are running from Christ! Well, Philemon, Onesimus' master's prayers caught up with him. I'm warning you tonight - you maybe don't believe in any of this nonsense, as you think: 'Prayer? Ach, sure it only reaches the ceiling, it doesn't do any good at all'. My friend, the prayers of Philemon caught up with Onesimus, and those who are praying for you, their prayers will catch up with you. Isn't that an encouragement, mother? You keep on praying. Father, keep on praying. Son, daughter, keep on praying for your loved ones. What mother's prayers have done in this world we'll perhaps never know. You know what I'm talking about, young man, young woman. You come home late at night, and they won't go to bed until they hear the key in the door and hear it shut behind you and hear you mounting the stairs - even if it is almost dawn, you've seen their light on in their room, maybe you've even peeped through the door that is ajar, and you've seen them on their knees. Maybe you've heard them utter your name, a mother or a father crying for you! Some have even told me how, when their child is sleeping, maybe after a drunken night, they stand over them and weep and pray. Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Wesley Gustafson experienced that very thing, and he heard one night his mother standing over him praying while he was asleep: 'Oh God, save my boy'. He was saved eventually, and do you know what

he said? 'I myself am quite sure that the prayers of a good mother never die'. It doesn't matter whether it's a mother or a father, or a master like Philemon, these prayers of Philemon's didn't die. Am I speaking to someone tonight, and someone's prayers have caught up with you? You can see them catching up, and you're trying to run all the faster, you're trying to dull their effect, you're trying to plug your ears to God's voice that's getting louder. You're trying to erase these things that you clearly see from your sight! How God answered Philemon's prayer! Maybe God is answering someone's prayer for you tonight.

How was this prayer answered? Let me show you it in six brief ways. Onesimus crossed paths with a man of God. He was put in prison for his crimes, that's how bad things got - and lo and behold, who was in the prison? The apostle Paul, in it for preaching the Gospel of Christ. Now that's often how it happens: someone is praying for you, and all of a sudden you have crossed paths with a man or woman of God. Maybe it's in your workplace, maybe it's someone in your family or a friend who has come to faith newly in Christ. Maybe it is an old friend that you knew was a wild man or woman, and they have been converted by the grace of God. Then we see that, obviously, Onesimus had fallen on hard times - that's how God's prayers catch up with us, people praying to God. Sometimes God can allow us to go into the far country, allow us to experience famine, He can allow us to be cast into prison like Onesimus so that we can get to the end of our tether, get to the bottom of the barrel and realise that there's nothing in this life for us apart from God.

This Onesimus was in prison - have you been in prison? But you know, you don't have to be behind iron bars to be in prison, you can be in prison in your mind or in your spirit. You can be in prison to sins and habits that are unimaginable and unspeakable tonight. The prodigal, when he was in the far country, spent all, and there arose a famine in the land, and he began to be in want - for the way of the transgressor is hard. Sin always takes more than its rightful cut: the wages of sin is death! You're experiencing that death working in your very life at this moment. You put the money in your pocket and there's holes in it, it all falls out. It seems that everything you gather as produce and materials, God comes along and He blows on it and it all disappears. You can't seem to get a foothold even in your very business - why? Because you're shutting God out, and God is trying to speak to you, people are praying for you and God's prayers are catching up with you!

Then we see that he was reaping what he sowed - that's how, when people pray to God, it catches up with us. Galatians says: 'God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, he reaps'. Hosea says that God's people on one occasion sowed to the wind, and they reaped a whirlwind. What have you been sowing in your sins? Little sins here and there, and you think they're insignificant and no one knows about them, you can hardly remember them all there's been so many, they've been so indiscriminate - but the fact of the matter is: you've reaped a whirlwind, and something is now taking place that you could never have imagined. It's just a simple fact, the law of the harvest: you've sown these things and now you're reaping them. You're just where Onesimus is, you've fallen on hard times, you're reaping what you've sown - could it be that all of this is because someone is praying to God for you, and God is answering their prayers, bringing you to an end of yourself?

Well, praise God, the fourth thing that happened in answer to Philemon's prayers was that Onesimus heard the Gospel through the apostle Paul. 'As God would have it', he was in that prison by divine appointment, God had him there to meet the apostle, and the apostle led him to Jesus. Now don't you think for one moment tonight that you are here just out of chance, or maybe you're thinking: 'I'm here by mistake, I didn't come to hear all this nonsense'. My friend, you're here by divine appointment, you're here because God - whether you think it, or like to think it or not - has directed your paths, even despite the obstacles. You know the obstacles that arose before you even came here tonight, trying to hinder you from getting to this meeting - but you're here! Why are you here? Because the Gospel is being preached, and God has brought you here perhaps in answer to your loved one's prayers to get you saved.

He not only heard the Gospel from Paul's lips, he witnessed the Gospel in Paul's life. I don't know how Paul behaved in prison with Onesimus, but I know this: in Acts chapter 16, when Paul - he was a real jailbird - he was imprisoned in Philippi on this occasion, and here as he was, the Bible says that he and Silas, his prison mate, were in the stocks and they had been flogged for their faith - but they were singing and giving praise unto God and praying at midnight. The jailer heard it, and it affected him, it

shook him to the core of his being, and God brought an earthquake to bring him to Christ. I'm sure Paul wasn't any different with Onesimus. Onesimus could see Christ and the Gospel in his life, and maybe Onesimus was just like the despairing jailer in Acts 16 in Philippi. When the earthquake came and he thought that the prisoners had fled, he was ready to kill himself, he was despairing - my dear friend, is that where you are tonight? You're despairing of life itself, and you could almost be done with it!

Praise God, Paul had a message for that jailer and Onesimus, and he has a message for you tonight, and that is: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. This man Onesimus, Philemon's prayers were answered finally when his heart was touched, his life was transformed - so much so that this man allowed the grace of Christ to enter his life, and he was willing to go back to his offended master and face whatever consequences there were. What does that tell me? He knew he was a guilty sinner, but he was no longer running away from his sin, he was facing it and whatever the consequences were he would take it. My friend, do you know tonight that you're a sinner, and do you know that you deserve hell as a sinner? I deserve hell! We deserve to be punished, for we are guilty, and God has told us that we need to repent of our sins, we need to turn from it - but what I want you to see now is not this black sheep that was in the family, I want you to see the Good Shepherd who brought him home.

I think there's a beautiful picture in this book, because the grace of God is seen in the apostle Paul who, in this story, reaches the sinner in prison. Then we see the grace of God in Philemon, the master, who receives Onesimus back into the home. What a beautiful picture this is of the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ - that's who I want you to see tonight! This parable was told just before the prodigal son, Jesus said a shepherd had a hundred sheep, and he used to count them every night. One night he counted and there were only 99. He went into the wilderness, into the mountains wild and bare, to look for that one sheep. He found that little lamb, and he put it on his shoulders, and he came back and there was great rejoicing over the one sheep that was lost but was now found. Are you that lost sheep tonight? Oh, my friend, that you would see the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Christian faith is not about condemning you, my friend - no matter what any preacher has said, or any Christian has done. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who has come to seek and to save those that are lost!

'There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold.
But one was out on the hills away,
Far off from the gates of gold.
Away on the mountains wild and bare.
Away from the tender Shepherd's care

'Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
Are they not enough for Thee?'
But the Shepherd made answer: 'This of Mine
Has wandered away from Me;
And although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find My sheep'.

Are you the Lord's sheep tonight? Maybe you've never been saved, but you know that the Lord is seeking and searching for you, and He has caught up with you tonight. It's time you admitted it. Your father and mother and family's prayers have caught up with you and you've encountered the Good Shepherd. Maybe you're a backslider, and you're one of His sheep now, and you're away! Oh to God, that you would realise the Saviour is still seeking you. You say: 'How do I know?'. My friend, He died on Calvary for you, He bled and died, suffering, the Just for the unjust - that means He bore your sin, He bore the penalty for your guilt and the wrong that you've ever done.

'But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost'.

The Lord Jesus, at the cross, had to go into that wilderness, He had to go out into the desert, He had to become sick as our sin was laid upon Him. He had become, as it were, guilty for us, that we might go free. He had to bear our stripes, He had to take our punishment - oh my friend, that you would see the love of God bleeding and dying - why? So that He might fetch you, and bring you on His shoulders back to the fold of God. If the Son braves the wilderness to seek the lost sheep, it is the Father who runs to receive the lost prodigal. That's what the prodigal son tells us. My friend, the message tonight is: wherever you are, whatever you've done, God would receive you in grace, and Jesus is your Saviour - that's what the name 'Jesus' means. That's why He was wounded: 'All we like sheep have gone astray', Isaiah says, 'We have turned every one to his own way, but the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all' - do you see Him, high and lifted up? Do you see the nail prints in His hands and His feet? Do you see the scar in His side, and the crown of thorns? Do you see what man has done in his brutality to the Son of God? But see more than that, my friend, see that He's dying for your sin - He's there for you, He's in your place! He was wounded for your transgressions, He was bruised for your iniquity.

Oh my friend, He is the Good Shepherd, and He said: 'I am the Good Shepherd who giveth His life for the sheep'. Just as the apostle Paul met Onesimus in prison in all his need, and negotiated through this letter with Philemon a reconciliation with his master, Jesus can say tonight that He loves you. Just as Paul wrote to Philemon and said in verse 9: 'This is for love's sake', that's what the cross was about! For love of you, my friend! Paul says: 'I have begotten this slave in bonds in prison. I have been bound', my friend, Christ begot you in bonds as He was crucified - what do you think He was doing? Just dying for a cause, or as a martyr, or as a reformer, or as a founder of a religion? Do you know what He was doing? He was working out your salvation. Oh to God, that you would see it tonight, so that He could come and bring you to God, having cleansed all your sin in His precious blood, and say to God - just as Paul said to Philemon: 'Receive Onesimus as you would receive me'.

Do you know what God has done in the Lord Jesus Christ, through the sacrifice for your sins? He has made it possible for you to be cleansed, He has made it possible for you to be brought to God and received into heaven just like Jesus! Did you hear that? Though your sins be as scarlet, Jesus says: 'If you believe in me, you'll be received just like I am in heaven'. Do you want to get to heaven one day? That's wracked your mind and your brains, you can't even sleep for thought of where you'd be if you die - my friend, if you're in Christ, you're in Christ forever. In verse 15 Paul says you can receive Him forever - you'll be saved forever! Oh my friend, can you not grasp what the Shepherd can give you tonight? In verses 18 and 19 Paul says: 'If he has wronged you, put it on my account, I will repay it'. That's what the Lord Jesus did for you, my friend. We sang:

'He took my sins and my sorrows,
He made them His very own;
He bore the burden to Calvary,
And suffered and died alone'.

He wrote a letter in the red ruby blood of His own veins, in order that it could go to God and God could read it and say: 'The sacrifice for sins has been made, the debt has been paid, paid in full by the blood of the Lamb'. Oh my friend, that you would grasp it tonight, there's no reason why you should die and go to hell, there's no reason why you should sit in sin's misery and the darkness of your natural mind and heart - you can be freed, you can be delivered and you can become one of the family of God!

In verse 16, sure isn't that what Paul says: 'Receive him as a brother in the Lord'. Are you one of God's family? Maybe I'm talking to somebody tonight, and to talk about a father is a negative thing. You have not had a good experience of a father. Maybe your father has beaten you. My friend, this Father, this Heavenly Father won't beat you, He'll bless you. Maybe you have had an absent father, you never knew him, and you resent it. My friend, this is an all-sufficient Father who'll never leave you or forsake you. Whether 'father' may conjure up bad things in your mind, don't superimpose those images onto God's personality - He is your Heavenly Father, He loves you, and He sent His Son to die for you that you might be cleansed, forgiven and saved. That is the grace of God, it's the story of grace - that's why grace is mentioned in verse 3 and in the last verse, 25 - it's all about grace! Though your sins be as scarlet, they can be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they can be as wool.

Are you an Onesimus tonight? You're all Onesimus' if you're without Christ, because we've all turned to our own way. Are you a prodigal son or daughter, or father or mother, or husband or wife? Are you a backslider? Oh, do you not see that God is speaking to you tonight. Maria - I've told this story before, it doesn't matter to me - Maria and her daughter Christina lived in a poor neighbourhood on the outskirts of a Brazilian village. Maria's husband had died when the wee girl, Christina, was an infant. She never ever remarried, and times were tough, and eventually Christina became old enough that she was able to get the job, and Maria hoped that it would help the household. But Christina used to go on and on about going into the city, and she dreamed of trading the dusty neighbourhood that she lived in for the exciting avenues of the city life. Just the thought of that used to horrify her mother, she knew exactly what Christina would have to do, the depths that she would have to go to to survive in the city. It broke her heart when one morning she went into the bedroom to waken her, and she was horrified to find that she wasn't there. Her daughter's bed was empty. She wanted to deny the thought, but she knew right away where she had headed. Quickly Maria threw a few clothes into a bag and she gathered all the money she had, and she ran out of the house, and on her way to the bus stop she stopped at the chemist for one last thing. She sat in the little photo booth and 'click, click, flash, flash', over again and again and again, she took as many little black and white pictures of herself as she could afford, and she shoved them all into her purse and got on that bus.

Maria knew that Christina had no way of earning money, and she knew that Christina was a stubborn girl, and therefore when pride meets hunger, a human being will do things that before were unthinkable - because of that, Maria began to search for her. She went to the bars, she went to the hotels, she went to the nightclubs and the brothels - any place of reputation for street walkers or prostitutes, she went to them all. In each place she left a little black and white photograph of herself. She taped them to bathroom mirrors, to hotel bulletin boards, she fastened it to the corner of telephone booths, and on the back of each photograph she wrote a little note. When the money had ran out and the pictures were all gone, she got back on that bus and she went home. A few weeks later the young Christina descended the stairs of a dingy hotel. Her young face was tired, her dreams had become a nightmare, but as she reached the bottom of the stairs her eyes noticed a familiar face. She looked, and at the corner of the hotel lobby mirror, there was a small black-and-white picture of her mother. Christina's eyes burned, and her throat tightened as she walked across the room and removed the small photo. She turned it over, and written on the back was a compelling invitation: 'Whatever you've done, whatever you've become, it doesn't matter - please come home' - and she did. Will you?

Let us pray. If God has been speaking to your heart tonight, don't resist Him, don't harden. He has been catching up on you, I know, and people's prayers are being answered even in this place tonight in a way that you could never have imagined. But it's time for you to surrender, stop resisting, it's time to give up, you've found there is nothing in this world to satisfy you - what you're missing out on is Christ, and you'll never be satisfied until you have Him. The danger is that you'll run too long. If you hear His voice tonight, harden not your heart. Backslider, it's time you came back to Christ. People sometimes say: 'I don't know if it's the right time or not' - it's always the right time, for He's always seeking the sheep that is lost! That's a lie of the devil, you need to put that out of your head and come to Him tonight. Whatever your circumstances are, come to the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. Why not say: 'Lord', as your head is bowed, from your heart, 'Lord, I'm a sinner and I confess my sin, and I repent of it. I'm willing to turn from it if You give me the power to turn from it. I thank You that Jesus died for my sin, and because of that I ask You to save me, save me now, for Jesus' sake, Amen'.

Oh Father, we pray that prodigals, lost sheep will come into the fold this evening, to the glory of Christ we pray. Bless our time together in fellowship, and those who will remain behind for counselling, bring them through to the Saviour. We thank You for the blessing of this building, but we thank You more for the Gospel that we're privileged to preach in it - and may it be preached ever from this pulpit, to the glory of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

"Life's Load Lifted By Love"

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I want to speak to you this evening on the subject 'Life's Load Lifted By Love', from Matthew chapter 11 and verse 28 - the words of the Lord Jesus, when He said: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest".

If ever there was a generation that felt life's load, it must be surely this one. Stress seems to be at epidemic proportions, and that stress is fuelled by the events that we're seeing taking place right across the globe - the latest being the bird flu, everybody seems to be in a fluster and a flutter about the bird flu. I thought everybody knew that birds flew anyway - but nevertheless, everybody seems to be intrigued by this new scare! Not so long ago it was 9/11, the twin towers coming down and the threat of world terrorism, and then that was brought nearer to our doorstep in the bombings in London in the month of July. Then the forces of nature seem to be going AWOL, the tsunami on Boxing Day of last year, this year the floods in New Orleans and in Texas, in the last week or so the earthquake in Pakistan and part of India and Indian Kashmir.

I don't know whether you have experienced this, but certainly I have heard of folk talking more and more about God, wondering why these things are taking place - whether God has anything to do with it, whether the Bible has any light to shed upon it, some have even asked whether this is the end of the world, if the apocalypse is on its way. Now I don't have any answers to those questions, but many folk are asking - perhaps you - what's next? What's going to happen next? Is the next chaotic occurrence and world event, will it affect me, will it affect my city, will it affect my home, my family? Maybe that's why bird flu does seem to create such hysteria, because this is not something that's happening in Iraq, or in Asia, or in other parts of the world, even the Third World, this is something that potentially could come and affect my life, my family.

Many personal lives, I feel, are like a microcosm of global problems and global events. Our little lives are like a mini reflection of what's going on in the world, because many people in our day and age are experiencing a private and personal chaos. It seems as if the whole building of your life is giving in and around your ears, you're in an absolute disaster. I wonder is that you this evening? You've come into our gathering, and I don't know where you've come from, or what circumstances you've left to be here tonight, God knows, and maybe God is speaking right into that situation - but you're here, and you find yourself at the end of your tether, you feel that you really can't cope any longer, because you don't know where to turn or who to turn to in order to get help. As you're sitting here, you're wearing the care-lines of life, you're displaying the wrinkles of worry. You know every day, of every week, of every year of your life, and most recently, a paralysing restlessness in your spirit.

Well, I want to tell you this evening: you are not alone! Of course, many people who find themselves in this type of predicament, it's often accentuated and made worse by the fact that they feel that they are the only ones going through such terrible and tragic circumstances. But these very words of the Lord Jesus Christ show us, as He speaks to all humanity - and we'll see how we know that this is what He is doing in this verse - He shows us that these problems of being laboured and heavy laden, experiencing the weighing down of life's load, is something that is universal. If most people were honest with themselves and with God here this evening, there have been times in your life, maybe even now, when you feel just like that: weary, heavy laden, laboured with life's load.

Maybe it's not a crisis, often it's not a crisis, rather it's the commonplace things in life that take their toll on you. There can be more strain and stress in the prolonged drudgery of Monday to Friday, nine-to-five life than in sudden calamity. You're just fed up with life! You don't know how to cope any more! Even with all the mod cons that we have today, we have more than ever, we've more money than ever,

we've better living conditions than ever, working conditions are better, we've more holidays and leisure times than ever - and yet there seems to be more strain, more stress, more striving and more struggling than ever in people's lives.

A wife called the doctor one morning, and said: 'Doctor, come quick, it's my husband!'. 'What's the matter?', he calmly replied. 'Well, he got up this morning and took his vitamin pill, then he took his appetite suppressant, and his antidepressant, and his tranquilliser, and he also took anti-histamine tablets, and some valium as well, and then he lit up a cigarette, and there was a great explosion!'. Now we know that smoking kills, but the fact of the matter is: many people in our modern world don't realise that anxiety kills. Worry kills, fear kills, and it is killing many. A lot of our hospitals and psychiatric departments and wards are filled with people who have been wracked by anxiety, fear, striving with labours and burdens of the load of life - and it is killing them! Maybe you're here tonight, and life's loads are killing you?

Now, some people have a more stoical disposition, and come up to you in the midst of your loads of life and say: 'Pull yourself together, you need to catch yourself on! I don't get on like you do!'. There are some people like that, naturally, in their personality and their makeup - but you're here this evening, and you know that you just can't pull yourself together. You know your problems, painfully so, you feel so heavily life's personal load that has been dished onto your lap. Well, I want to tell you tonight - and it's a great joy to be able to bring this message to you - that in this text, Matthew 11 verse 28, there's a personal invitation to you from Jesus Christ: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'.

You see, the Lord Jesus, in Matthew 12, is revealed as one who won't break a bruised reed, one who will not put more burdens on someone who is already feeling that they're drowning beneath the burdens of their present existence. He is not one who quenches a smoking flax. If you're trying to get a fire going up, He's not one to come into your life and blow it out, out of contempt. He is not a sadistic Saviour, but He is a sympathising Jesus. This personal invitation to you this evening is: if you are struggling, if you're experiencing the strains of life, if you perhaps even have been striving to be a better person - and that's a commendable thing to do - but you're always failing, and you feel a failure. Maybe you've been striving in religion, you're trying to keep some kind of dogmatic hold of some kind of faith, and you feel miserable because you just can't ever reach the mark. Maybe your problem is that you've no peace of mind, tranquillity in your heart has eluded you from your childhood because of fears, maybe even doubt about this life and eternity, maybe questions that you can't get answered. My friend, are you at this present moment sinking under the burden of guilt for things that you've done in the past? Maybe your heart is smarting because of hurts of others that have been inflicted upon you - but whatever it is, whatever your specific situation is this evening, you are under the load of life, and you feel it oh so heavily. You feel, even tonight, that you can't carry the load much longer, you can't bear much farther.

Well, I'm here to pronounce to you, from the Lord Jesus Christ to you personally: the Lord of love wants to lift you. He says: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour, with all your heavy burdens. Don't try and fix yourself up before you come to me, don't try and be in denial about your problems and your burdens, but come to me. Those burdens are not an obstacle to me, but I want you to come with all your striving, with all your struggling, with all your strain and stress that comes from your life'. This is truly the great invitation, the Christ of God is announcing to you tonight that He will embrace you - but more than that: if you come to Him, He will embrace your burdens too. The burdens that you're carrying tonight that are personal to you, or general to all humanity, I don't know what they are, but He has promised that if you come to Him, He will carry them for you.

Now, you might be sitting there saying: 'Well, that sounds too good to be true'. Maybe you're asking in your mind: 'How do you know that? How do you really know that if I come to Christ with my burden, with my problem, that He will take it?'. Do you know how I know? He said He would do it, He said He would do it! Do you doubt the words of the Lord Jesus Christ? You show me one place in this whole book where the Lord Jesus Christ lied. In fact, when it came to His trial before His death, they tried to get accusations against Him - and I'll tell you, if there had been any dirt on Him, they would have found it and flung it at Him - but they had to make up stuff about Him. Even Pilate said: 'I can find no fault in

Him', and it would have been easier for him to find it and get himself out of a fix.

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life - and He said: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'. Augustine, that great Christian, says: 'I have read Plato and Cicero's sayings, and they're very wise and very beautiful, but I never read in either of them, 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest''. Buddha never said anything like that, neither did Mohammed, neither did Joseph Smith - you go to the founders of all the religions of all the peoples and cultures of the world, and not one of them had an invitation and a promise like this. Christ said it, and if He said it should we not believe it? Of course we should!

Not only did Christ say it, Christ shared it - shared what? Shared your burden, shared life's load for you. He came as a babe, because He existed before Bethlehem, He is the Son of God eternally, but He came as a baby, and He grew into toddlerhood, and then teenage years, and then manhood, through adolescence like you have experienced and all of us have gone through. Then He lived the life of a man among men, He was God, but He didn't live as God among men. He was God, but He wanted to come to live the life of a man. He was tested in every part as you could be, yet He is victorious. He shared in life's load, and I'll tell you: He shared in things that you will never know. You have the blessing of being in a society, but He was cast out from His own. You have the blessing, perhaps, of a family - but His family disowned Him and thought He was mad. I could go on and on more, and then He went to the cross, and He was nailed, and He bled and died - and what was He doing there? He was bearing your sin and your shame, He was being punished for it. Peter says: 'He bore in Himself on the cross, our sin in His own body'. Isaiah says: 'All we like sheep have gone astray, every one of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord laid on Christ the iniquity of us all'. He said that if you come to Him, He will give you rest, but He shared in your unrest, in your burdens, in your struggles, in your striving, and even in your sin so that you might have God's peace.

Now listen, friend this evening: Christ is not saying that you should come to religion. A lot of people misunderstand this - because we're in a church, they think, and we're sort of Christians and we're preaching from a Bible like some other churches do, and they think that we're calling you into membership, or to become a communicant, or be catechised or baptised, or become a member of our denomination because we're right and we're the only ones going to heaven - that is not what Christ was saying here. He was speaking to the Jews who were spiritually proud of themselves, and they wouldn't believe just like little children, the way Christ wanted them to do. He prayed to His Father: 'Father, I thank You that these deep spiritual truths are not revealed to the proud, but they're revealed to those who are like little babes, who will just accept it'. These Jews were like spoilt children, they didn't get a gospel and hear a gospel that suited them, so they rejected God and Christ even though they were waiting for Him. They adopted a religion that was just full of rules and regulations. For the Jew, religion was a thing of burden, so much so that Jesus said in Matthew 23 and verse 4: 'These Jewish Pharisees and Scribes bind heavy burdens, grievous to be borne upon people. They lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers'. The rules and regulations of Jewish religion, even the ones who made up the rules couldn't obey them, couldn't come up to the standard!

What chance is there of you being a religious person, my friend? The Pharisees' command was to do, that's what religion says: 'Do this, do that, do the other and you'll be saved'. That wasn't Christ's invitation, Christ's invitation was: 'Come! Come!', because salvation is not to be found in a burdensome system of doing, but in a burden-bearing Saviour who said: 'It is done! I died for sin, I bled to cover your sins and to wash them away! Why are you trying to do it yourself? I have done it!'. Yet Moslems have been fasting in the last month of Ramadan, trying to bring themselves to God. Buddhists are trying to clear their mind and their spirit of the deadening influence of themselves, and pleasure and pain. Hindus lying on beds of nails, trying to do penance for God. Roman Catholics, dear people, many of them go up mountains on their knees and in barefoot. Protestants are going to their churches, even today in our city as we speak, trying to earn their salvation, giving to the church, doing good works - why? This is what they'll tell you: 'I'm trying to get peace! I'm trying to get rest for my soul!'. What's happening to them? They're going mental - sure, it would put you mental, wouldn't it? To try and do something that you cannot do, and to try and do something that God hasn't told you to do.

Is that you, my friend tonight? You're striving, you're trying to please God, you're struggling with religion and faith, you're saying: 'I can't get it, I can't find it', or maybe you realise that Christ is the answer and your concern is, 'I'm not going to be able to keep it! What if I get saved? I'll not be able to keep going!' - and this is the cause of your unrest. My friend, listen, forget about all that rubbish and listen to Christ's voice. He says to you nothing of the sort, only: 'Come, come to me'.

Now I want you to see in the closing moments of our meeting three things about this invitation. First of all: who it is from, from whom is this invitation? 'Come unto me'. In verse 27 Jesus said of Himself, if you look at it in Matthew 11 verse 27: 'All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him'. Now that's complicated, but basically what it's saying is that Jesus was claiming to be God's Son who was with the Father before the world was. He is God, He is the door to heaven, and if you're going to get to heaven you have to go through Him. He is the one who holds the keys to death and hell, He is the only one who can get you out of the grave and get you to escape through the fire exit of hell to get into heaven. He is the Good Shepherd who saves His sheep, He is the Great Physician that heals those who are sick with sin, He is the Bread of Life to feed those who are hungry and dissatisfied with all that the world has to offer, He is the Light of the World and them that follow Him shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life. He is God, who says: 'Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is none other'.

Don't you be under any illusion of who He is. He says tonight: 'Come, Ho everyone who is thirsty, why are you spending your money on all these things that will not satisfy?'. Come, without money and without price, it costs you nothing because Christ has paid the price, bought by His death on the cross. Come, and just receive it by faith. Now my friend, have you done that? All your striving, all your struggling, all with the burden of the load of life, even if it is a religious load upon you, will not do - you must come to Christ and Christ alone, He is the only one who can give you rest. This is a struggle for religious people especially. Horatious Bonar is the author of the closing hymn we'll sing tonight:

'I heard the voice of Jesus say, 'Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down Thy head upon My breast''.

It used to be called 'The Voice of the Galilean'. On one occasion he was speaking to a young man about salvation, and he discovered that that young man had a difficulty that many have today: he just couldn't believe that the Lord could and the Lord would save him from his sin. He couldn't believe it! Maybe he thought it was too good to be true, or it's just too simple. Dr Bonar asked him, and I ask you this tonight: Which is of greater weight? Your sin, or the blood that Jesus shed for sinners? Which is of greater weight? The answer quite simply, joyfully: 'I'm sure it must be the blood of Jesus weighing more heavily even than my sins!'. My friend, I can't put it any simpler: the only antidote for the crimson sin of your heart that is deep-dyed is the cleansing ruby red blood of Jesus Christ. That's the only answer! You can't work it away, you can't scrub it away, you can't wash it away with water or with prayers, or with reading or studying the Scriptures. What is your burden this evening? Is it sin? Are you gripped with a habit that you cannot get free from? Is it yourself? Are you convincing yourself that you don't need this evangelical doctrine, you don't need to come to Jesus, you're good enough yourself, and you're this, that and the other church member, and God will open ajar the door of heaven for you even if He closes it in the face of many others? Is it your sorrow that is a burden for you tonight? A loved one has been taken from you, a child, perhaps, has been lost, and you can't forgive God, and you can't come to Christ because this burden feels too heavy - bring the burden with you! Bring your questions to Him!

Maybe it's a sickness, you've been diagnosed with something - bring it with you to Christ. If He doesn't heal you - which He may - He will certainly satisfy you and give you grace to get through it, and take you through death to glory with great victory. Maybe it's your situation, it's the crisis you're in presently - maybe nobody in this meeting knows about it. My friend, bring it to the Lord Jesus Christ - would you rather have Christ with you in it, and for you in it, than against you and away from you? Maybe it's a spiritual oppression or spiritual blindness, you're dabbling in some dark arts, the occult, you're reading horoscopes, going to get your palm read and all this nonsense that brings with it a spiritual bind. You know when you drive over a bridge, and sometimes there's a sign on it, a big lorry

pictured and some kind of weight on it - I always worry in case I'm exceeding it myself - but nevertheless, across this invitation, across the door where Jesus stands and says 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden', is the sign 'No Load Too Heavy'.

No load too heavy! Whether it's your sin, whether it's yourself, whether it's sickness, whether it's sorrow, whether it's your situation, whether it's even a spiritual problem - He will receive you, and He will give you rest, my friend! Oh, I love Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan, and he realised his sin through reading the Book, it's called. As he read the Book, he cried: 'Oh, what shall I do?' - and he had a burden on his back, and it's pictured in the illustrations of that book, you should read it. His family tried to convince him to stay in the City of Destruction, speaking of the world, but he closed his ears with his fingers and he ran away shouting: 'Life! Life! Eternal life!'. One day a man pointed him to a hill with a cross, and told him to go up that hill. He ascended the hill, and when he saw the cross and the shadow of the cross fell upon him, the account says that the burden fell from off his back, rolled down the hill, and fell into the empty tomb. This is what Bunyan says Christian said:

'Thus far did I come laden with my sin;
Nor could aught ease the grief that I was in,
Till I came hither; what a place it this!
Must here be the beginning of my bliss?

Must here the burden fall from off my back?
Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?
Blest cross! blest sepulchre! blest rather be
The Man that was there put to shame for me!'

Who gives this invitation? Christ the Son of God who bore your sin, who died for it, and who buried it, and who rose again victorious over it, and who is alive and in this place tonight and can deliver you from it. No wonder we sing:

'At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away,
It was there by faith I received my sight:
And now I am happy all the day!'

Have you been to the cross? Have you met the Christ of the cross? Jesus is inviting you tonight to come. One of the early verses in the Bible in Genesis 7 is God saying to Noah: 'Come thou, and thy house, into the ark' - the flood was coming. In nearly the last book in the Bible, and the last chapter, and almost the last verse, in Revelation 22 verse 17 the Holy Spirit, the Bride, the Church say: 'Come!'. The whole of God's people are asking people to come, 'Let him that is athirst, come and drink of the water of life freely!'. That's the message of this book: we're lost and separated from God, and He invites men to come. Have you come?

That's who gives the invitation, to whom is it given? 'Ye who labour and are heavy laden' - He doesn't invite people that think themselves righteous or worthy enough, rather the description is wide: all who feel the load of life can come. Oh, in Genesis 3, after man sinned, we read that in sorrow and in the sweat of his brow would he till the ground, his whole life would be miserable. Job teaches us that man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward: 'Man that is of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble', he says in another place. The Psalmist, speaking of his sin, says: 'My iniquities are gone over my head as a heavy burden, they're too heavy for me'. Even those who are trying to obey the law of God in their own strength say it's like a yoke upon them, it's a burden that they cannot bear, it's a law of death in sin.

Oh, do you feel that tonight, my friend? Even in this chapter, John the Baptist was confused about Christ's method, He wasn't what he was expecting - but Christ invites the confused to Him. The people who He preached to and did many of His mighty miracles in their town were unreasonable and unsatisfied, and we live in an unreasonable and irrational and unsatisfied age - yet Christ invited them to come. Even the very cities that turned their back on Him, maybe you have turned your back on

Christ last weekend, or at other times in your life - Christ still invites you to come, even the very children! Are you a child here tonight? No matter who you are, it's for all, all who feel themselves labouring and heavy laden under life's load can come.

What do you come to? To rest. Oh, I don't need to tell you that unrest is one of the greatest characteristics of our age. People are running around hurrying everywhere, there is vexation on their faces, there is failure all around, pressure is being put on young people at school like never before, some are even driven to take their own lives. Some people live in a constant world of disappointment staring them in the face from every side, and they're looking for rest everywhere - in drugs, and in the bottle, and in promiscuous sex. They're looking for it in fashion, in music, entertainment, in family life, in career, in materials, in education - and they can't find it, because they're looking everywhere but Christ where they can find it!

The rest that you find in Christ is a rest of conscience: those things that have troubled you and haunted you for life will be gone. It's a rest of heart: the peace of God that passes all understanding will rule your heart as well as your mind. It's a peace and rest that is based on the pardon for sin: God will take your sins away forever, as far as the East is from the West, He'll put them in the depths of the sea and no one can ever go for a swim. He'll put them behind His back so He'll never look at them! Oh, would you not love a rest like that? That's the difference between the rest that the world seems to give. H.G. Wells said: 'I cannot adjust my life to secure any fruitful peace. Here I am at 64, still seeking peace. It is a hopeless dream'. Yet Augustine could say: 'O God, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our souls are restless till they find their rest in Thee'. It is in Christ that you will find that rest, that longing, that satisfaction!

Do you have it? No, you don't have it, for you're bearing the load of life alone. Today is the 450th anniversary of the burning of Latimer and Ridley at the stake in 1555 for their faith in Jesus in the city of Oxford. On the night before Nicholas Ridley was executed, his brother offered to remain with him in the prison chamber to be of assistance and comfort, and Nicholas declined the offer and replied that he meant to go to bed and sleep quietly as ever he did in his life, because he knew the peace of God. He could rest in the strength of the everlasting arms of his Lord to meet his need. Do you know anything like that? A peace, a rest that transcends any of the loads of life. Maybe you're saying here: 'Oh that I could find this!'. Job, in all his problems, didn't say: 'Oh that I could find this!', he said, 'Oh that I could find Him!'.

The still small voice of the Holy Spirit has come to you tonight and said: 'Come, you have found Him, come with your burdens and life's load. If you've never been satisfied, come to Christ. If you have sins to be forgiven, come to Me. If you've grief to be removed, come with your burden. If you've wounds to be healed, come to the Great Physician. If you've a conscience to be quieted, come'. Jesus says, 'Peace I leave with you, peace I give unto you, not the peace of the world. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world'.

I can't help thinking, at this moment, of old Peter. He's in the boat, and the storms of life are raging, just like they are in your life at the present. Christ wasn't in the boat, and all of a sudden the disciples see Him like a ghost, but they didn't recognise Him. Maybe you're not recognising Christ speaking in your life. Then Peter, as usual, gets up, and he says: 'Lord, if it's you, bid me to come and I'll get out of the boat and I'll walk to you'. Jesus said to Peter, like He's saying to you tonight: 'Come', and Peter got out of the boat - God bless him for it - and he started to walk. But this is what the passage says: the winds became boisterous round about him, and he got his eyes off Jesus and fixed his eyes on the winds, and he began to sink, and he cried: 'Lord, save me!'.

Is that what you need to cry tonight? Christ has said: 'Come', and you need to say: 'Lord, save me'. Maybe you're a backslider and you have taken your eyes off Christ, maybe you're looking to boisterous winds, problems, the loads of life - you need to look to Christ again! At one of D. L. Moody's services just like this one, in a tent, in the front row there was a deacon. His daughter-in-law had a wee baby, and the little one's eyes were fixed on Moody as he spoke. He gave the invitation from this verse that we've preached from tonight: 'Come', and he repeated it again and again and again. The wee child,

near the end, put his arms out to Moody, outstretched as if it was going to go to him and embrace him. Is that what you're going to do with Christ tonight? He bids you come, but you must come.

How do I come? Come saying: 'Lord, I know my sin has hurt me, I know my sin has offended You, and I know my sin will damn me. I want rid of it, I haven't the power, but I turn from it - save me, cleanse me through the blood of the cross, and make me Yours for now and for eternity'. Will you do that tonight? If you're a backslider, listen: you can concentrate on those loads in your life for as long as you like, they're not going to go away! But Christ, one day, will go away, and you'll be left with your loads, with your life, and maybe even with an eternity without Him. Oh, listen to His voice tonight: 'Come unto me, all ye that are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'.

The Lord has spoken to you tonight, hasn't He? How could He not? For there's not one, I suspect, in this place that at some time has not been heavy laden, labouring under a burden of life, a burden of sin, a burden of sorrow, a burden of sickness - but you're labouring under it without the Saviour. He'll put His yoke on you tonight, and He'll bear the greater weight of the burden, but you must come. Look to Jesus and find in Him your Star and Sun. I trust you'll come tonight.

Father, we thank You for a Saviour who invites all men. We thank You for a Saviour who has the ability to bear burdens, and has done so in His own body on the tree. But may that burden-bearing Saviour come personally, experientially into the life of some person here tonight - whether a backslider or an unconverted one - and shoulder the burden for them. May that child, whoever they are tonight, embrace Christ as He calls them to come, and may they experience tonight the joy, the peace they sought so long, the bliss till now unknown. Amen.

"Better To Have Loved Than Lost"

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I want to turn to our text this evening, 1 Corinthians chapter 16 is the portion from which we will read - one verse which we want to concentrate on this evening. First Corinthians chapter 16, the last chapter of Paul's first epistle to Corinth, and we read verse 22 together: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha".

Let us have a brief word of prayer together: Father, we come before Your holy, infallible truth, and from the reading of only one verse we feel its searing of our soul. We realise that it is two-edged, it is a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces, we know it is infused with reproducing power - but we pray that the Holy Spirit will take the Word of God, and apply it to the hearts of men and women, and boys and girls. Lord, we need You, tonight, to come in mighty power and saving efficacy, to quicken, to wound, and then to heal, restore and save. For the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

I want to speak to you on this text under the title 'Better To Have Loved Than Lost'. I'm sure you all know well the saying 'It is better to have loved and then lost, than not loved at all' - but seldom do we hear such a saying applied to the spiritual realm, and that's what I want to do this evening. I want to say: 'Better to have loved Christ than to be lost', for effectively that is what the apostle says in his closing remarks in chapter 16 of the first epistle to the church at Corinth: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha".

The word for 'love' here in the verse is a strange word for Paul to use, it's only the second time he ever uses it in the whole of the New Testament, and the only time he uses it in relation to love toward God. It is the word 'filio', he usually uses the word 'agape', 'the love of God' - but 'filio' means 'a tender affection towards someone'. It's a feeling, or an emotion and an experience that we can have towards other human beings, but he uses it concerning the Lord Jesus Christ in this verse. What the apostle is saying from his warm heart of love towards the Lord Jesus Christ is that he couldn't tolerate any indifference toward the Saviour. It's great for someone to have an agape love, the love that really pleases God, towards the Saviour; but the apostle is saying here that he cannot tolerate anyone not even having an affection, a tenderness towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, what the apostle is saying here is that as far as he is concerned, and he is inspired by the Holy Spirit, there can be no neutrality in our opinion and our disposition towards the Lord Jesus. So much so that he pronounces a curse upon those who do not love Him - 'Let them be Anathema'. That simply means 'to be accursed', or as some put it 'to be departed from the people of God', cut off from the congregation of the righteous, to be divorced from the favour of God, for God not to lavish any of His goodness or grace or mercy upon you; and ultimately to be delivered up to God's vengeance and God's wrath.

'Anathema', and then he says 'Maranatha', which simply means 'Our Lord comes'. Now put all those things together, and you get simply this meaning I think: if any man does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed when the Lord comes! You see, the Lord Jesus Christ came to Bethlehem, but He - we know from the Scriptures and from His own testimony - was the pre-existent Christ, He lived before Bethlehem, He is the Son of God. It was only at Bethlehem that He was born into this world, having taken human flesh. But the Bible tells us not only of the first advent of Jesus that we will celebrate at Christmas time, but it tells us of a second advent, and there are probably about eight times more prophecies concerning the second coming of our Lord Jesus than His first advent - and we know that He came the first time, and we can surely therefore be certain He will come again.

The question is to you this evening: how will He find you? What will your disposition be to Him when He comes? Will you be one of these people who loved the Lord Jesus? Will you have an agape love to Him,

a fervent love that God has inspired in your heart? Will you even have a tender affection toward Him? Or will you be someone who loathes the name and the person of Christ? There are some like that in our world today, they cannot stand the name of Jesus, they curse it and use it as a curse. Then there are those, and they do not love the Lord Jesus, they do not loathe Him, they are just lethargic concerning Him - take it or leave it: 'I'm not really concerned, I'm not that religious, I'm not into these things. I know He was a good man and all the rest, and I respect Him in a kind of way, but I don't love Him'. I wonder which you are this evening?

I want to give you first of all this evening the reasons why people do not love the Lord. Believe it or not - maybe it seems astounding to you here tonight - that there are some who do not love, or have a tender affection towards the Lord Jesus Christ. The more surprising fact is that it is not the obvious, that it's those who are in pagan lands and the heathen who have never heard the Gospel, and where no missionaries have been or Gospel evangelists have preached, but it's in those who have heard about Him. Maybe from a child in Sunday School, those who have grown up in a Christian environment and even in a Christian home or at least a Christian society, so-called, where there has been an influence of the Gospel - it is they, so often at times, who loathe Christ. They do not love Him, rather they hate Him, they reject Him.

Now why is that? Well, the first reason I want to give you why people do not love the Lord is that they love their sin too much. They love their sin too much. Actually, in this first epistle to Corinth, although it was written to Christians, there was a great problem in the wicked city of Corinth of immorality. So much so that it actually infiltrated the church and, although it's written to the church, we even get in the church characteristics of what was going on in the world and society in Corinth outside. It's no different than what's going on today in our world. Incest had infiltrated this assembly. We are told that a man married his father's wife, his stepmother, and committed incest and also committed, therefore, adultery and fornication. We read, as we go through this book, that some of these people were in danger of dabbling in prostitution because there was a great temple in the city of Corinth and they worshipped false gods, but they worshipped them in a sexual immoral worship through prostitutes - 'sacred vestal virgins' they were called. Then there were others who were getting rid of their husbands and their wives for sometimes 'religious reasons', they were getting divorced, separating from them. Then there were others in this city who were committing sodomy, or as we call it today 'homosexuality'. There were even male prostitutes in the worship of the gods in Greek society. Then Paul wrote warning of idolatry, those who were bowing down to idols and worshipping these false gods and even going to the temple - he was warning Christians against going to the temple and eating of meat that is offered to idols. There was theft, there was greed and slander, there were swindlers in this particular age - so much so that he even had to speak to the church and tell them not to go to court with one another for greedy gain. Then there was drunkenness, drunkenness - but believe it or not, this drunkenness was found not in the gutter or in the public house, but around the Lord's Table!

'What an awful thing!', you might say. It is an awful thing, all of these things are awful things, and they are in our world today. I might be speaking to someone who has been tainted and affected by those things, and maybe it's an habitual desire for those things that causes you to love your sin more than Christ. This is the reason for you stopping loving Him. In 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 9, Paul actually recites most of the sins that I mentioned there - but he says these words: 'Know ye not that the unrighteous', that is the people that commit these things habitually in their lifestyle, they are unrighteous, 'they shall not inherit the kingdom of God?'. In other words, Paul is saying that sinners do not get into heaven. If you've got sin, you can't get in - but the miracle of God's grace that is preached in this epistle is that Paul could say to them: 'But such were some of you: but you're washed, but you're sanctified, but you're purified and justified in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord, and by the Spirit of our God'.

God had cleansed them, so they had to depart from this whole way of life that was unrighteous. This is the message of God's gospel: that though men are sinners and can't get into heaven of themselves because of their sin, they can be saved by the grace and the gift of the Lord Jesus. Oh, my friend, do you realise this this evening? Maybe you're too attached to those specific sins to let them go, to take hold upon Christ in love of Him? Do you love your sin too much? Is that what is keeping you back from loving Christ, and owning Christ, and confessing Christ?

A second reason was that they loved themselves too much - you can do that as well you know, and that is equally a sin, but it seems to be, at times, a more acceptable one. In fact, at the beginning of this particular epistle, Paul castigates them for relying more on their own human wisdom than on the grace of God and the crucified Christ. In fact, Paul says: 'We preach Christ, and Him crucified. The preaching of the cross to them that perish is foolishness, but unto us which are the saved it is the power of God. It might be a stumbling block to Jews, it might be foolishness to the Greeks, but the Gospel is your only hope. It doesn't matter how clever you are, it doesn't matter what ability you might have - self cannot save you!'. Could it be that you're here tonight, and you think that because you're a fine upstanding member of the community, or even an officer in the church or a communicant, that you will be OK? Do you know what you're doing? If that is the foundation of your dependence, that means you love yourself more than Christ! We sang:

'Other refuge have I none' - not my immorality, or my church-ianity
'Hangs my helpless soul on Thee'.

They loved their sin too much, they loved themselves too much, but they did not love the truth enough. What am I talking about? Well, at the beginning of this book there were divisions, and the devil loves to bring division into families, division into society, he loves to bring division into churches. There are division makers, and they run to and fro from church to church, and they're not of God - they go out from us because they are not of us, and they're the devil's meddlers, and they love not the truth. Then there were the false prophets, they were running in and out as well, prophesying all sorts of ecstatic and charismatic utterances - and they were false, they had not the truth. Then there were false teachers, in chapter 15 he writes to them about the resurrection of Christ, warning them that there are those who say that Christ hasn't already risen - and Paul says that if that is true, we are of all men most miserable, and we are still in our sins if Christ is still in the grave.

Then there were the Judaisers, who were they? Well, they were the legalists, they were the people of 600 and more rules and regulations over and above the Bible, which you had to keep in order to be saved. 'Yes', they said, 'it's OK for Jesus to have died for our sins and rose again, and you must have faith in Him, but you know you've got to do a bit more: you've got to keep the laws of Moses and the rituals. You've got to get circumcised, the ceremony must be kept and practised'. My friend, this was all a lack of love for the truth which betrayed a lack of love for the Lord Jesus. The fact is these heresies and falsehoods and divisions were actually causing them not to love Christ as they ought. Potentially you could be unsaved in this place this evening, and these are the very things that are hindering you: a division, someone is a Christian, or so-called, and they've done something against you - and that is the very thing that's keeping you from Christ. Maybe you're listening to false prophets and false teachers, or maybe you're wrapped up in some kind of legalistic religion or a cult - I don't know what it is, it doesn't really matter, but if you think you can get to heaven and God with more than the cross of Christ, you're deluded! It's the cross, nothing more and nothing less.

In fact, Paul said, when he pronounced another 'Anathema' in Galatians chapter 1 verse 8: 'Though we', the apostles, 'or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed', anathema. 'As we said before', he says it again, 'so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed'. Do you know why it's such a tragic thing to have a gospel that's different from this book? Because it keeps men from loving Jesus Christ. The truth brings people to the Lord Jesus. Is there someone here now, and you don't love Him, and the reason why you don't love Him is you love your sin too much, or you love yourself too much, or you don't love the truth of God enough?

Let me give you, this evening, what's more important - the reasons why you should love Him. It's strange to me, indeed it's even saddening, in fact I'd go as far as to say that it shows the stupidity of sin, why men do not love the Lord Jesus. In fact, it is absolutely unreasonable not to love Him, because there is everything in Him to love! He is the Altogether Lovely One, He is the Fairest of ten thousand, He is the Altogether Lovely One and Lovable One. So why is it then that men do not respond to Him in love? Well, if you respond to love shown toward you, usually the response comes in a twofold manner. The first, I think, is gratitude - if someone shows love toward you, practical charity, you usually will

express gratitude. That gratitude shows that you appreciate what they have done for you, you're thankful, you really do thank them for what they have done. When we look at the Lord Jesus Christ, the portrait and picture gallery that we find from Matthew through to the book of John, we find that He never ever did anything to discourage a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, from loving Him. In fact, He never ever did an evil deed, He never ever slighted a man with evil intent in His words or in His actions. In fact, to the contrary, we read that He humbled Himself, He came as a Servant to God, He took upon Himself our nature, our humanity - apart from sin, of course - and the Bible says He lived for men, He lived for you and me! He died for men on the cross, bearing their sin! He rose again for men, and He is willing now, as He is risen, ascended at the right hand of God, He is willing to do every good for mankind - and the greatest good that He has done is opening heaven for us.

Now, ought you not to show gratitude towards the Lord Jesus for those things? Should you not love Him because of what He has done for you? But then the second response we often have when we become recipients of another's love is esteem. Not only do we have gratitude, but we esteem the one who has shown love to us - and, oh, I couldn't even spend time here tonight speaking of the esteem that we ought to have of the Lord Jesus, for He is not only the humble Servant of God coming to earth to die on the cross and bear our shame and our iniquity and the contradiction of sinful men, but He is the very Son of God who came. He is God's only begotten, He is the darling of God's bosom who was sent - ought we not to esteem Him, and worship at His feet, and say: 'My Lord and my God!'. He should be esteemed as Saviour, for that is who He is. He came to save men, not to condemn them. He went to the cross and shed His blood to save them, and rose again to save them, and ascended to heaven so that at the right hand of God He could save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him, because He lives.

Now, why, why do you not love Him? You should love Him because He loves you! Isn't that what 1 John 4 says? 'We love Him because He first loved us' - verse 10 of that same chapter says: 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins'. That big word simply means 'a sacrifice that satisfied God, and exhausted God's anger to such an extent that there's none left for us, because it was all poured out on Him!'. Should you not love God and Christ because of that? Paul could say in Galatians: 'The Son of God who loved me, and give Himself for me'. 'Yes', Paul says, 'if you love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let any man like that be Anathema' - but my friend, do you realise tonight that the Son of God was cursed for you on Calvary's tree? That's why you should love Him. Paul said in Galatians: 'Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; because it is written', in Deuteronomy, 'Cursed is everyone that hangs upon a tree'. There He was, cursed of God and of men - why? Because He loved you, and He was taking your curse that you might never be Anathema, if you would only embrace Him and love Him.

The reason, secondly, why you should love Him is that there is a curse on those who don't. Paul leaves no way of escape: if you don't love the Lord Jesus, you can't be saved, you are Anathema. There's no loopholes, there's no excuses, there's no fine print, there's no legal challenge - it's plain, black and white: Love Him, and if you don't you'll be lost. That word 'anathema' literally means, as I've said, 'let him be devoted to the wrath of God'. To not love Christ is to deliver yourself into the hands of the Almighty, who cannot only destroy the body but can destroy both body and soul in hell. I can't describe hell for you, part of me doesn't even want to try, but it's an awful place. It is an indescribable place where the soul is cut off from Christ, the very centre and root and foundation of man is severed from his Creator, and is tortured perpetually throughout eternity. 'He that believeth the Son', Jesus said, 'has everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him'.

My friend, you should love Him because He first loved you; but also because there's a curse on those who don't love Him. Is there someone here this evening asking the question: 'David, how do I know, how do I know if I love Him? How do I know if I'm saved? How do I know that I'm not cursed and won't go to that place called hell?'. Well, it's very easy to know, it's easy to know when someone loves another, isn't it? They are the chief object of their affection, and their primary in their life. Let me give you a number of ways how you can know if you love the Lord Jesus. You will be engrossed with Him as the subject of your thoughts, He will be in your mind, He will be in your heart, He will be the darling of your life, your Beloved. Your heart will beat for Him, your soul will move for Him, deep will call unto

deep at the noise of His voice. Do you know that?

He will be the attractive theme of your conversation. If you love someone, you don't just think about them, you talk about them. Have you confessed the Lord Jesus? Have you told others? Could it be that because you haven't, you don't know Him as your Lord and Saviour, you don't really love Him in this sense? If you love Him, pleasing Him will be your greatest delight! That's what you do for those whom you love, you please them. Do you live for Him? Fourthly: He will be the greatest influence on your character. You've heard about the one going down the isle, the bride saying: 'I'll alter him, I'll alter him' - and that's what happens, isn't it? But we do alter one another when we come close to each other in friendship or marriage or whatever, we influence one another, we become like one another. If you love Christ, my friend, you will be influenced by Him, and if you love Him more than any you will be influenced by Him more than any.

Fifthly, He will be the one who is most identified with your conscious life here on earth. What does that mean? Because you love the Lord Jesus Christ, when men see you, when your life's story is told at the end of your days, what men will see and hear and remember is Jesus Christ, and the love that you had for Him, and the love of Christ that you spoke about Him. Another three things are that you will look forward to His return - Paul said to Timothy: 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing'. Paul says: 'Let anyone that doesn't love the Lord Jesus Christ be anathema, Maranatha' - Jesus is coming, He's coming to judge those who don't love Him! How will He find you, my friend? Will He find you loving, and looking, and waiting, and anticipating for Him coming? If you're not saved tonight, you can't do that. Maybe you're sitting here, and you're saying: 'I don't know if I'm saved' - how could you look forward to His coming if you didn't know, if you weren't sure? Make sure!

Do you obey His commandments? Jesus said in John 14: 'If you love me, keep my commandments'. Don't, my friend, call yourself a Christian if you're living a life that is filled with worldliness, the flesh, and maybe the devil himself! If you really love Christ and if you are His, you will obey Him. Here's another one: you'll love Christians, you'll love Christians! Maybe it took you all in your power to get into this place tonight, or listen to the message, however you're listening to it - and I know some Christians are hard to love, me included - but the Bible says we know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brothers: 'He that loves not his brother abides in death'. My friend, do you love Christ? If you love Christ, you'll love Christians - warts and all - you'll love their singing, you'll love their meetings, you'll love being in their company, you'll love hearing them speak of Christ.

I'm not asking you do you admire Him, I'm asking you do you love Him? There are atheists and agnostics in our world who admire Christ. Gandhi admired Christ, who was a Hindu - but we're asking: do you love Christ? That's what Paul says is the distinctive of the child of God. I'm not even asking do you abstain from hostility towards Him - that's good that you don't take His name in vain, that's good that you think He was an upstanding man and all the rest, but the question is: do you love Him? Do you have a tender affection towards Him as you recognise who He is with gratitude and with esteem? I'm not even asking do you take His name on your lips. You could say: 'I believe Christ', you could call yourself Christian and go to a Christian denomination, you could keep His day, you could meet with His people, you could drink of the emblem of His blood and feed upon the emblem of His flesh, and not love Him. It's happening today all over our province, all over the world. I'm not even asking do you work for Him, I'm asking you: has He touched your heart? Do you love Him?

One day a man betrayed the Lord Jesus by the name of Peter. He was the one who said: 'Lord, I'll never ever disown You. In fact, I'll die for You, I'll follow You to death'. Peter was renowned for shooting his mouth off, but I believe that deep down in his heart he really did believe it. But the Lord told him that the cock would crow, and he would deny the Lord Jesus three times - and he did it with oaths and with curses over the fire because a little girl asked him was he one of Christ's ones. Out of the corner of his eye he sees the Lord Jesus being taken away, and Christ looks at him - and he despairs and goes into the night, and breaks his heart, and weeps his eyes out. Surely that's his Christian career over? Surely that's all hope of apostleship, and position at the right hand of God that he so yearned for, gone? But one morning after the Lord Jesus' resurrection, on a seaside around a

breakfast fire, the eyes of the holy Christ of God looked into Peter's eyes through the smoke and the embers, and pierced into the depths of his heart and said: 'Simon Peter, do you love Me?' - and he did, and the Lord knew he did. All that he had done, but he loved Christ, and that's what the love of Christ can do.

My friend, Christ is here tonight, and He's at your heart's door. Imagine someone in the dead of winter coming to your door - or, better, imagine you in the dead of winter breaking down in your motor car or something like that. You're out in the middle of nowhere, but you know one house of one friend, and you know how to find it. You get your way up there by foot, and maybe it's four below zero. You come to their door, and you rap it, and you rap it, and you rap it, and you see the light on, you maybe even can hear noise in the house - but they don't come out! They know that you're there, they know that you're freezing, hypothermia could set in - but they don't care! What would you think of a friend like that? You might be driven to curse them! Christ is at your heart's door this evening. He stands knocking with a very sore hand. He stands in the cold, in the blasting winds of human suffering and the punishment for sin that He bore on the cross, and He says to you outside your heart's door: 'I have come a long way for you, I came from the splendour of glory in heaven, I went to Bethlehem as a baby, I then went to the despised Nazareth, and then I went to Gabbatha and then to Golgotha to hang on the cross - and I did it for you, and now I'm here, having risen from the dead, and I've come to your heart, let me in!'. Would He say: 'My feet are bare, but for a covering all they have is blood. My head is uncovered, but for a crown of thorns. All these wounds, hand and foot, feet and heart, beg you to let me in. I've been here a great while, the night is getting darker' - would He say, 'I'm dying to get in!'?

My friend, would you not lift the latch, and shove back the bolt, and push open the door, and let Him in? He says: 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha', but He also said in John 10: 'I am the door, by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved'. The 'if any' of salvation, anyone here tonight - young child, older adult - if any! 'Behold I stand at the door and knock, if any man' - that is the 'if any' of communion, He will come into your life, He will change it, He will feed you. In John 7 He says: 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink' - that is the 'if any' of satisfaction. You will be satisfied, the satisfaction that you have longed for in your life of sin and self and in this world and in falsehood, you will find in Him. But there is an 'if any' of condemnation, and it's our text: 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema'.

I heard a story just yesterday about the puritan John Flavel. He was preaching in a congregation like this on the same text, and there was a 15-year-old young man in the gathering. At the end of his message he went to pray, and then he said that he could not pronounce the benediction because he felt that there may be someone there who did not love the Lord Jesus Christ, and who would be damned. Preacher and congregation went out with great solemnity. That young 15-year-old boy emigrated to the United States, he lived to a hundred years of age. One day, standing in his field, he remembered that night when Flavel could not bring himself to bring the benediction, and he knew that evening that he was the one who did not love Christ. At a hundred years of age in the field he started to love Him!

No matter how old you are, no matter how young you are, where you've been, what you've done - He is a Saviour to love, and He loves you, my friend. Will you not embrace Him tonight as He is freely offered in the Gospel?

Our Father, we thank You for Your love which was demonstrated for us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ bled and died for us. Lord, help people in this meeting tonight to see that love: the love that Jesus had for me to suffer on the cruel tree, that I a ransomed soul might be, is more than tongue can tell. May they love Him tonight, by the Spirit of God enduing their heart with the new birth, that they may see in Him the wonder that they have never seen before. Lord, do it we pray, for the glory of Thy Son, Amen.

"A Close Encounter Of The Divine Kind"

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by David Legge

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Daniel chapter 5 is where our reading is taken from this evening. I want to preach to you later on under the title 'A Close Encounter Of A Divine Kind'. We're reading from verse 1 of chapter 5.

This is the word of the Lord: "Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone".

"In the same hour came forth fingers of a man's hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance was changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote one against another. The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. And the king spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and shew me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom. Then came in all the king's wise men: but they could not read the writing, nor make known to the king the interpretation thereof. Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his countenance was changed in him, and his lords were astonished. Now the queen by reason of the words of the king and his lords came into the banquet house: and the queen spake and said, O king, live for ever: let not thy thoughts trouble thee, nor let thy countenance be changed: There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers; Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation".

"Then was Daniel brought in before the king. And the king spake and said unto Daniel, Art thou that Daniel, which art of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Jewry? I have even heard of thee, that the spirit of the gods is in thee, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom is found in thee. And now the wise men, the astrologers, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and make known unto me the interpretation thereof: but they could not shew the interpretation of the thing: And I have heard of thee, that thou canst make interpretations, and dissolve doubts: now if thou canst read the writing, and make known to me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third ruler in the kingdom. Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy rewards to another; yet I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation".

"O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew

that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written. And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians".

"Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old".

I was going to share with you, just in introduction to my message, the story of the man who wrote 'Amazing Grace', John Newton. I have done this in the past, but I feel it's applicable tonight to the message. John Newton had a godly mother, but she died when John was only seven years of age. He was turned over to relatives, and soon forgot the Scriptures that his mother had taught him at her knee. He began to dream about following his father's footsteps - he was a sea captain. At the age of 11 he realised his dream and joined his father's ship, but from that moment on it was far from plain sailing - because he soon learned the ways of sin of many seafaring men. His biography tells us that he began to fight with his own father, he clashed with his employers, he was flogged for desertion, and finally he ended up in jail. He even earned the reputation of being able to curse for two hours straight without repeating a word. But punishment didn't even change him, after he was released from prison he continued an immoral life, living in unrestrained debauchery. Eventually his downward path led him to desert the Navy and he fled to Africa so that, in his own words, I quote him: 'I might sin my fill'. He eventually ended up in the most despicable of all trades in those days, the slave trade. Because he was a skilled navigator he earned the position of the first mate on a slave ship, but while the captain, on one occasion, was ashore, Newton broke into the ship's rum and got the entire crew drunk. When the captain came back he was so incensed that he hit Newton, knocking him overboard - and Newton would have drowned, only for a sailor who threw a hook, a spear, into the water. It went through his thigh, and he lifted him out like a fish. The wound was so big, his biography says, that you could put your fist into it in his left leg.

But one day Newton, on this slave ship off the north-west of the coast of Ireland, hit a storm. That storm thundered against the vessel, so much so that the whole crew feared for their lives. The water began to fill the decks, and they all got their pails and their pumps, and tried to get it out of the boat - but Newton and the crew knew that they could do nothing. Fearing for his life, Newton said: 'If this will not do, then the Lord have mercy on us'. Then, all of a sudden, when he said that, he was arrested in his heart - he thought to himself: 'What mercy can there be for me? A man who is a wretch of a sinner, who has lived such a sinful life, I find myself in this storm, in a crisis, my life is at threat - what mercy could there be from God for the likes of me?'. Miraculously the storm abated, and Newton was gloriously converted by God's grace - and later he penned 'Amazing Grace', and that verse is particularly poignant when you think of it:

'Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come'.

He died on the 21st of December 1807 in London, having served the Lord after that moment of conversion for 60 years. On his tombstone in the churchyard at Olney, where he served as a minister, it says: 'John Newton, clerk, once an infidel, a libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long laboured to destroy'. Newton had a close encounter of the divine kind, a similar one to that of King Belshazzar that we read of in Daniel chapter 5.

You see, what I want you to notice this evening is that this is often how God works. God is a God who breaks through our crises, and makes the most godless of men and women know that He exists. This was the same for the jailer in Acts chapter 16, a godless man to all intents and purposes. Now some people are spoken to by God over a protracted period in a still small voice in a very mundane and simplistic way, but there are other people, especially deep-dyed sinful people, and God needs - like the jailer - to send them an earthquake to shake them out of their apathy and their spiritual slumber. In other words, God needs, for those type of people like Belshazzar, to bare His hand.

That is the theme, if there is one theme, of the book of Daniel. It's found in chapter 2 and verse 28: 'There is a God in heaven' - do you know that this evening? Maybe you've come into this place, and you say: 'Well, I'm an atheist, I don't believe in God'. Maybe you're an agnostic, and you admit that there are a lot of questions and mysteries in life and in the spiritual realm, but you just don't know about these things, and you think you can't be sure. Maybe you're a practical atheist, that's someone who believes in God in your head, maybe even in your heart - but you live a life as if God were dead, as if He wasn't your Creator, or one day will be your Judge.

Now what God did for Newton, for Belshazzar, for the Philippian jailer in Acts 16, was that He broke into their godless existence, and they had a 'God experience', they had a close encounter of the divine kind. I wonder are you here this evening, and you have a godless existence. 'What is that?', you say - well, we find it in this chapter outlined and illustrated for us. In verses 1 to 4 we see that King Belshazzar and his court revelled in sensual pleasures. They lived for the senses, what they could feel and experience. They lived for the asceticism of life, they lived on the principle: 'Whatever your eye sees, if you want it, take it and make it your own. Enjoy life to the full, eat, drink, and be merry, because tomorrow you're going to be dead and you can't enjoy yourself any longer'. Is that your philosophy?

The problem with revelling in sensual pleasures for them and for our 21st-century world today, is that you can be so blinded by the pleasures of time that you cannot see the realities of eternity. This life down here is not all that there is. Jesus told the story in Luke chapter 12 of a rich business farmer, so rich and successful that he had to pull down his existing barns and expand and build greater. He said to his own soul: 'Soul, eat, drink and be merry. You're so successful, enjoy your success now', and he was living as if there was nothing but time. Then the Bible says that one night God came to him, and God says: 'You're a fool, for this night your soul will be required of you - and then whose shall those things be which you've provided'. You see, the Bible says that if you forget God in life, God will forget you in death: 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God'.

I'm not against enjoying yourself, and I hope I'm not a party-pooper in any shape or form - but the fact of the matter is: most people in this world today are just living for sensual pleasures, and they have ignored the realities of eternity. That is a godless existence. If that's you, you're just living to enjoy yourself - some Christians live like that, you know.

Then secondly we see in verses 2 and 3 that Belshazzar's godless existence was illustrated in that he was playing fast and loose with holy things. His father, Nebuchadnezzar, before him had stolen these receptacles from the Temple, and they were gold and silver, and they started to take them out for a bit of a laugh in their drunkenness, and poke fun at religion. You've experienced this, haven't you? Tell a joke about Jesus or something like that, and this is what they were doing in their own context. Then they come and they fill these vessels that were meant to be holy, set apart for the use of God, with wine - and they get intoxicated with it. Playing fast and loose with holy things, a lack of respect and reverence, total sacrilege and blasphemy - is that you? Is that what comes out of your mouth? Is that the way you think?

This is not reserved to the enemy nations of God, like Babylon. In fact, if we go further back in the Old Testament to 1 Samuel, we find that Eli's sons, they played fast and loose with holy things. They were priests in the Tabernacle, but do you know what they were doing? They were lying, having sexual relations with the women that assembled at the door of the Tabernacle congregation, and they probably worked in the Tabernacle vicinity. Here they were, meant to be representing God as holy men in holy things, and they were actually defiling holy practices, playing fast and loose with holy things!

Are you a person that says you're a Christian, takes the name of Christ, maybe involved in a Christian work of some kind, and you're dabbling in the sexually immoral? You don't have to be doing that. In the New Testament we come to 1 Corinthians 11, and we read that there were people at the Lord's Table, Holy Communion if you want to call it that, and they were eating and drinking unworthily - they were eating and drinking damnation to themselves. This goes on every Sunday in Ulster, people around the Lord's Table, the Communion Table, they're maybe communicant members of some denomination or other, and they're not converted - they're playing fast and loose with holy things. Is that you?

That is a godless existence if ever there was one. Maybe you're charismatic, maybe you've seen some wonders done, you have cast demons out or seen it happen, you've done mighty works, you've spoken in tongues or one thing or another - don't think that that in any way says that you're saved. In Matthew 7:22 the Lord Jesus says that many will come to Him on the day of judgment and say: 'Lord, Lord, did we not do these things' - all of those that I have listed - 'in Your name?', and He will say: 'Depart from me ye cursed, I never knew you!'. You can have those things and still have a godless existence - sure, didn't Peter the apostle deny the Lord Jesus with oaths and curses, Judas for thirty pieces of silver sold out the Lord Jesus Christ, and had the audacity to betray Him with a kiss. People have been cursing the name of Christ for centuries and selling Him out for even less than 30 pieces of silver.

Belshazzar's father, Nebuchadnezzar, we read was a converted man. He was like a John Newton, he was converted by the grace of God - but before God saved his soul, God had to put him through the mill. God had blessed him, even in his unconverted state. Maybe you're here tonight and you can identify with that, things are going well for you in your business or in your family life, your career - but because God had blessed, and he attributed it to having come from his own hand, his own success and aptitude, so his heart was raised in pride. Pride got in, and you need to remember, we all need to remember, that pride is the sin that made the devil the devil. He was an angel, he became proud, he wanted to take the place of God in the universe - maybe that's where you are tonight: you want to pilot your own life, you want to be in the driving seat, in control of your own destiny. Well, God had to come and humble him.

Oh Belshazzar had witnessed this, his own father was a man who God had raised up, and because of his pride He had to pull him down again, and actually make him to crawl in a field like a beast and eat the grass - to humble him to know that there is a God in heaven who rules over all. Now isn't it remarkable, and doesn't it tell us a lot about sinful man, when we see in verse 22 that Daniel tells Belshazzar: 'Thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all these things'. You have repeated the same mistakes of your father, maybe even done worse! Yet you have remained unconverted - at least Nebuchadnezzar was saved by God's grace, and when God started to put him through the mill he humbled himself, and looked up to heaven and pleaded the mercy of God.

I'm sure there are many here this evening in father-son relationships, maybe mother-daughter relationships. Father or mother, what are you teaching your sons and your daughters? What example are you giving them? Is your godless existence starting to rub off on your own children? Son or daughter, what are you learning from your father or mother? Is it a way of sinfulness, a life of pride before God, a godless existence revelling in sensual pleasures, playing fast and loose with holy things? My friend, if you hold onto those sins, even though they be the examples of your parents, you will damn your own soul!

I never fail to shudder when I hear, again and again, the story of a young intellectual man who was dying without faith in God or Christ. The doctor said to him as he lay there in the last breathing moments of his life: 'You will meet your God'. He cried out immediately: 'I have no God, I have fought against God, and I have fought against my mother's prayers, and it means today that I will be in hell'. Then he turned to his father who was standing in the corner of that room, and he said: 'Father, you taught me this way'. Could your son say that of you? Son, could you say that of your own father? Do you know what he did? He cursed his father, and the sweat broke out on his father's brow, and his mother was carried out of that room - and that young intellectual man died in his profanity, cursing God, cursing his fellow man. He lived a godless existence, and to live a godless existence will mean that you will experience a godless eternity.

I think it rich at times talking to some people - and I don't mean to be unkind - but it's staggering to think that they feel they can live a godless existence in the face of a holy God, and throw everything they've got in rebellion towards Him, and then He's going to let them into heaven in the end. My friend, that cannot be the case. A godless existence was seen in the revelling and sensual pleasure, playing fast and loose with spiritual things, but thirdly: they worshipped at the shrine of materialism. They worshipped the gods, verse 4 says, of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood and stone. They were living for things - is that you? Come on now! Answer the question! All that matters for you is your career, or your clothes, or your fashion, or your sexual relationships, or your luxurious existence of affluence! Maybe all that matters for you is four wheels, a car. We were talking to a man over the Mission Weekend, and he said: 'I don't want anything to do with this Gospel, I live for Land Rovers' - Land Rovers! You've heard the song 'You can't get to heaven...' - you can't get to heaven in a four-wheel-drive! A Land Rover will not get you out of hell, or a Mercedes, or a Jaguar, or a BMW - nothing you have now will you take with you into eternity. It will prove no good for you at all! What we have in our society today is millions upon millions of people amusing themselves to death - they have a godless existence, and they're on their way to hell, and they don't even see it!

Oh, my friend, that God would quicken you tonight to realise the danger you're in. Several years ago I heard the story of how the Eskimos catch polar bears. They, until recently, have lived an existence that's almost 500 years old. They depend almost entirely upon the polar bear. Its meat is their food, its fur is their clothing, its fat they cook with, its bones and teeth are their tools. They have developed, over those centuries, ingenious ways of catching the polar bear. What they do first of all is they kill a small animal, maybe a seal. Then they drag the blood through the snow leading to one central location. They get a dagger about two feet long, and they freeze the shaft of the dagger, the handle, into the ice. Then what they will do is they take that animal's carcass, and they will place it on the blade. The polar bear will come along, it picks up the trail and finds the easy meat, and the delicacy is devoured very quickly - but the Eskimos are smart enough to know never to use a large animal. They want the polar bear to be hungry, and it's incredibly hungry. After eating the seal, it just likes to keep - like a child licking a cake spoon from its mother - it wants to keep on licking, and licking, and licking. It licks the blade, until it doesn't even realise that there has been a transition from licking the blood of the seal to licking its own blood, until it bleeds to death!

The more they lick the more they get, but what was attracting them was their own blood - and the lust for it killed them. My friend, are you living an orgy of decadent and godless celebration? God is not in all your thoughts, you're living a life that is separate to the existence of God - whether you're revelling in sensual pleasures, or playing fast and loose with holy things, or worshipping simply at the shrine of materialism - beware! Why? Here's the warning of God: in the same hour, at that moment, God broke into the godless existence of Belshazzar. It wasn't that there was some kind of parallel universe, but the existence that Belshazzar had denied all of his life was real, and God wanted him to know it. Are you here tonight, my friend, and you're presently having a close encounter of the divine kind? Are you having a 'God experience'?

Well, let me show you what this is - in verse 5 he got a sudden spiritual shock. The finger of God visibly reached out and pointed out his godless existence. Can I ask you: has the finger of God touched your life recently? What are you talking about? Well, one of the mentions of the finger of God in the Bible is found regarding the third plague that God sent upon the Egyptians to free the Israelites. It was a plague of lice, God made the dust of the ground into lice that went throughout the whole cattle and destroyed the livestock. Again, like in the book of Daniel, the soothsayers and the magicians, the occult witches and wizards, were called by Pharaoh: 'Can you tell me what this is and can you do something with it?'. This was what those godless men said: 'This is the finger of God'.

Are you experiencing, tonight, the finger of God? Is it some plague of sin? You know the way of the transgressor is hard, the wages of sin is death, and maybe you're sitting tonight shocked by how low you have gone in sin, and the consequences of the sin that you're living in presently. But there are various ways that you can be touched by the finger of God. Job tells us in chapter 33 of his book that God can speak once, and speak twice, and men don't regard it. Has God been speaking to you quietly and very simply in a still small voice through the reading of the Scriptures, maybe it's through

observation of the heavens and the wonders of creation and science? Maybe your conscience has been speaking to you quietly? Maybe friends and loved ones - you have grown up in a Christian home, and you've witnessed the gospel godly influence, but you haven't listened! Once, twice, God has spoken, but you've put it out of your mind. Well then, Job says what can often happen is that God comes and speak through sickness, pain and disaster.

Is that what's happening to you? He says of a man lying who God speaks like this to: 'His flesh is consumed away that it cannot be seen, and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyer'. C. S. Lewis said: 'God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains'. Is God speaking to you tonight, because you haven't listened to Him once, twice, through His word, through a godly influence, through your conscience, and now He has to shout to you through a disaster, through a tragedy? If that doesn't work, sometimes He sends a messenger, Job says. You say: 'Well, I have never had any messenger sent to me' - don't you ever say that! For 'the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world'. God sent His only begotten Son for you, and He went to Calvary to die for you, and He took upon Him your sin, and was punished in your place and on your behalf - He bore hell for you! Don't ever say that no messenger has ever come!

The spiritual shock was sudden to this man - has it been sudden to you? It shook him to the core of his being. I don't know what you're going through tonight, but if you look at verse 6 of chapter 5 you see that the King's countenance was changed - visibly, he was shaken to the core, and his thoughts troubled him. Mentally he was troubled, he was troubled to the depths of his emotions, emotionally - then it says that 'The joints of his loins were loosed'. Physically he actually shook! His knees knocked together, because there was a spiritual reality that was coming forcibly home to him. He hadn't even a moment to think about it or do anything for it: one moment he has a godless existence, the next moment he is having a God experience, and he knows he's without hope because he's left God out of his life!

Then we see that he sought help in the wrong places. He sent for the soothsayers and the magicians, and maybe there's someone here tonight and that's exactly what you're doing. You're going to the occult, or you're reading your horoscopes, somebody is reading your palm, or doing tarot cards, or looking into the bottom of your teacup. My friend, don't you look there, the devil will damn your soul through those things. But you know, there are religious folk, and they point you in other places. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress has so much instruction. When the man read in the book that he was to flee from the wrath to come, the Evangelist pointed him to the cross where every lost soul should go, but then Mr Worldly-Wiseman - his name says everything - came along and said: 'You can't get rid of your burden like that', and he pointed him to the village of Morality. He says: 'Go and meet a gentleman called Legality, who has a son named Civility' - be civil! Obey God's law, be moral, that's enough to get rid of the burden of sin - no, it's not!

His family even tried to quell his fears, his wife tried to calm him down like Pilgrim's wife in Pilgrim's Progress. Indeed, his whole family said that they were sore amazed, they thought that some frenzied distemper had got into his head: 'Therefore, it drawing towards night, and hoping that sleep might settle his brains, they hasted him to bed'. My friend, if you are troubled for your sin, there's not something wrong with you - hallelujah! - you're in good spiritual health, but you need to get to Christ! You need to put your fingers in your ears, and whoever is trying to distract you or dissuade you from the Gospel, you need to ignore them and cry: 'Life! Life! Eternal life!'.

Someone eventually came to Belshazzar, and told him of a man who could help him. You listen to this carefully now: in John chapter 4 there was a woman at a well, a deeply immoral woman. The Lord Jesus, with His prophetic vision, came to her and said: 'You have been married five times, and the one who you're living with is not your husband. You're an immoral woman, a loose woman, and I know that about you' - but what He was saying was: 'I love you'. She said: 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet'. He said: 'I can give you water that will satisfy your soul, so that you're not running around immorally trying to get some sensual pleasure to satisfy your longing, but I will give you eternal life'. To cut a long story short, she embraced Him as her Saviour, and she went and told the men that she'd been with: 'Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?'. There is a

man!

Belshazzar was told in verse 11: 'There is a man, and he has God's message' - but I want to preach to you about not Daniel, but the Saviour, the Lord Jesus. He has God's message, He is anointed, He said: 'God has anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the broken hearted, to release the captives'. He couldn't be compromised, just like Daniel, He couldn't be bought, He couldn't be bribed. He went to the cross, whilst men tried to dissuade Him from doing so. He spoke against sinful pride in the religious establishment, He proclaimed that the judgment of God was coming, and men needed to repent - and that's what the Bible teaches! 'It is appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment'. He told of personal folly in rebellion against God, He told them: 'Except ye repent, ye shall perish'. He predicted death and irretrievable loss if they did not embrace His message. God honoured His Servant the Lord Jesus, just like He did Daniel, because when He died on the cross for sin, God rose Him again the third day - and has exalted Him to the highest place that heaven affords, and given Him a name above every name, so that one day at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess that He is the Lord to the glory of God the Father.

God fulfilled His word for Daniel, and God will fulfil His word for the Lord Jesus Christ. 'Though heaven and earth pass away', Jesus said, 'My words shall never pass away'. This is what I want you to see: God's man came with God's message, but God's message was rejected in the heart of Belshazzar, and in that night his soul was required of him! Like the rich man in Luke chapter 16, he lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torment. Do you know, my friend, that your life is a vapour? It only appears for a little time, and then it vanishes away. Are you playing fast and loose with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Or has God recently, maybe even tonight, broken into your godless existence? You're having a God experience, a close encounter of the divine kind: God is speaking to you - oh, today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart. 'For what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'.

Let us pray: Oh, our Father, with your all-seeing eye You can see into the hearts and lives of every soul present here. You know those who have a godless existence. Presently they are revelling in sensual pleasures, they're playing fast and loose with holy things, they're worshipping at the shrine of materialism - but oh that, if not already, that tonight they would have a God experience, a sudden spiritual shock that will bring them to life, that will shock them to their core visibly, mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. That they'll not seek help in the wrong places, and whatever their families and friends might think or say or do, that they'll hear of this Man of Calvary who died for them, and that they'll realise that this is the One who can help them, the One with God's message anointed of God, the One who God has honoured. Oh, Lord, fulfil Your word tonight, and as the Saviour has been lifted as the only way for sinful men to be saved, save souls from hell we pray. Restore backsliders, to the glory of God, for we ask these things in the Saviour's name. Amen.

"The Moment Of Discovery"

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We're going to read the Scripture together, Mark's gospel chapter 15 is where our reading is found. Matthew, Mark, then Luke and John. If you don't have a Bible, don't worry, just listen as we read the Scriptures together.

Mark chapter 15, and we're beginning to read at verse 22: "And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not. And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take. And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, Save thyself, and come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him. And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias. And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God".

I want to preach to you under the title 'The Moment Of Discovery' - for one man, a man who was below the cross on Golgotha's hill. We read in Mark 15:39: "And when the centurion, which stood over against him", the Lord Jesus, "saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God". That was his moment of discovery.

Now I don't know whether you know anything about centurions in the Roman army, but they were the backbone of the Roman military establishment. A Roman legion was made up of 6000 soldiers, and one legion was divided into 60 centuries. Now keep with me, you don't have a calculator I know, but a centurion commanded each of those 60 centuries, 60 groups of 100 soldiers, in that legion. A centurion was, if you like, a long service, a career soldier. He wasn't in it serving his time for a couple of year's experience and discipline, normally he was in it for his life. Indeed, it was the highest office within reach of an ordinary soldier - any soldier could reach the heights of the office of a centurion. It was also a well-paid position, so there was incentive to get there.

A centurion was responsible for discipline in the regiment, and some have said that centurions were the cement which held the Roman army together. The Roman army wouldn't have become what it did without the centurion as the linchpin of those centuries of soldiers. Each individual centurion had great authority and power extensively. There were times when he had to not only oversee wars and battles, but individual executions like the one we've read of, of the Lord Jesus in this passage. Those who were guilty of capital offences, they were able to oversee. Not only in war, but in peace the morale of the Roman army depended on the centurion.

Let me give you a glimpse of the character and personality of the type of man a centurion would have been. Polybius writes like this, I quote: 'They must not be so much venturesome seekers after danger

as men who can command, steady in action, and reliable; they ought not to be over-anxious to rush into the fight, but when hard pressed, they must be ready to hold their ground, and even to die at their posts'. Now if you know the Bible, you will know that there are a number of centurions mentioned within the Scriptures. Always they are seen in an admirable light. In Matthew chapter 8 we read of a humble centurion who came to the Lord Jesus seeking the healing of his servant boy. Jesus says: 'I'll come right away to your house, heal the young lad', and the centurion said: 'No, I'm not worthy that you should even come under my roof, if you only speak the word it will be done. I am a man under authority, and I have men under my authority, and I know when I speak a word one goes and does what I say. I know that if you speak a word, you have the power over disease and death, Jesus, just speak the word'. That centurion had discovered that the Lord Jesus has all power in heaven and on earth, and all things must obey His voice whenever He speaks.

Then we read of another centurion called Cornelius in Caesarea in Acts chapter 10, and the Bible says that even before he was converted to Christ he was a devout man and one that feared God with all his house. He gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always - that can't be said of many people before they are Christians, and some even after it! He was the first Gentile believer, and in the Acts of the Apostles as a whole, three times we read of three different centurions on three different occasions who prevented the apostle Paul being harmed physically, and even being put to death. So we see the type of individual a Roman centurion was: he was an impartial, a courageous, and yet loyal person. He was an upstanding member of society, even high Roman society. He was a person that displayed great morality, and even at times, when it was called for, great human tenderness and compassion.

One thing is for sure: in any society you could never have considered a centurion to be a sinner. You see, that word 'sinner' has always been reserved for the dregs of society, the riff-raff, the centurion was not one of those people. Now I wonder could this sketch of the personality and characteristics of a centurion be a biographical sketch for you? I wonder are you here tonight, and you are an upstanding member of the community? You are in a position, perhaps, of authority, or even hold high office of some kind. You're maybe well-paid - there don't look to be too many paupers here this evening - maybe you have good career prospects, and as far as you're concerned, and others looking at you, you have it made for the rest of your life. Maybe you wield a certain power and influence in the circle you're in - and that doesn't have to be legal, it could be illegal, and we know all about that in East Belfast. Maybe you're a person who, like a centurion, has tremendous responsibility - maybe you have the welfare of others in your care, or maybe financially you have a great amount of money at your disposal and stewardship. Maybe, like some who work in hospitals, you make life and death decisions every day of your existence. When some of us are debating what colour of socks or tie to wear, you're making life changing decisions for people who are ill or on their deathbed. Whether it's from the medical field to the military field, many people in our society have great responsibility and great authority weighing continually on their shoulders.

Maybe you're not as exciting is that, but nevertheless you work in an office or you're engaged in labour in a business, maybe you own a business - and you're used to being a steady rock, that when others sway and buckle beneath the weight of pressure, you're always the dependable stalwart, the one who has to be there and take every punch that rolls your way. Perhaps, like even Cornelius the centurion, you could add to that great CV that I just mentioned: you're also religious. Maybe you're just moral, but you could be religious like Cornelius, a man who was devout and fearing God, and praying and giving to charity on a regular basis. Now if that's the case, and you fit this portrait, I wonder is it true of you what would have been true, I believe, in the Roman times: that you cannot conceive of yourself as a sinner.

I think the hardest people, sometimes, to see themselves in need and in a position of needing dependence on another is one who is like this, one who has authority, one who wields great power, one who has a lot going for them in many respects. If you're one of those who have everything going for you, maybe you think to yourself: 'Why spoil it and get all religious? Why would you ever think that you were a sinner?'. Yet I want to point your attention to the fact that there are several centurions in the Bible who were able to get off their high horse down to the feet of the Lord Jesus. This centurion that we read about in Mark 15 verse 39 was one of those.

Let me share a number of things about him with you tonight. Here's the first thing that you might think very shocking: he was among those who crucified Jesus. This centurion was among those who crucified Jesus. Now let me give you a background to this passage of Scripture, and those who were guilty of bringing Christ to this point in history, to Golgotha's hill and nailed to a cross. First of all there were the Jews, and the Jews, if you like, were active in the crucifixion of Christ. They were the ones who cried out in verses 13 and 14: 'Crucify Him! Crucify Him!'. They were aggressively opposed to the Lord Jesus, all that He said and all that He stood for. Now often those who are in high position, or think they're in high position morally or socially, are like that: they are actively opposed to the Gospel - why? I don't know why entirely, but I imagine that it's a threat to them, just as Christ and those who followed Him were a threat to the Pharisees, the Scribes, the High Priests, and the Sanhedrin. Often people who are high in society, in whatever capacity, feel that the Gospel, religion, Christianity is a threat to their well-being.

Is that you this evening? Well, the Jews were active in His crucifixion, but Pilate was also there behind the scenes, instrumental - but he was more passive in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. We read in Matthew 27: 'When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing', wanting to set free the Saviour, 'but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it'. Now I believe with all my heart that he knew Christ was innocent, he said it: 'I find no fault in Him' - but he was a typical politician: 'See you to it'. He was sympathetic with Christ, yet he wanted to remain neutral for political reasons - but you see, a disclaimer where Christ is concerned is not possible. I want you to hear this this evening. I don't care if you're in a high position or not, like Pilate, and I know that there's a lot of politics in our land - the fact of the matter is: you must be with Christ or against Christ. You can't be passive. The hymn put it:

'Jesus is standing in Pilate's hall,
Friendless, forsaken, betrayed by all;
Hearken! what meaneth the sudden call?
What will you do with Jesus?

What will you do with Jesus?
Neutral you cannot be;
Some day your heart will be asking,
'What will he do with me?''.

But you cannot be neutral! Pilate thought he could, often people in high places think: 'I can take it or leave it. When I'm talking to these Christian folk, I can talk like a Christian, I know the language, I maybe even look like a Christian. I can go to my church and behave like a Christian, maybe I'm even an elder in a Christian establishment' - but you're not for Christ.

Then thirdly, among those who crucified the Lord Jesus were the Roman soldiers, or you could say the centurion. They were necessarily active or passive, but more specifically I've defined them as being cooperative and compliant with the death of the Lord Jesus. In verses 14 to 20 we see that - they took Him, they scourged Him, they mocked Him, they put a crown of thorns on Him, they put a purple robe on Him, they bowed down before Him and said: 'Hail, King of the Jews'. They took a reed and smote Him on the head, they buffeted Him, they spat upon Him, they cursed Him, they mocked Him, they blasphemed Him. Now of course, they weren't the ringleaders, they didn't have governing power like Pilate did to condemn the Lord Jesus, but they carried out the wishes of the crowd. They went with the flow, their peers in society and the hierarchy, they weren't willing to oppose them - they went the whole way. Often you find that those who are high in society, there's a certain etiquette, there's a code, you don't get religious, you don't take on Christianity as the evangelicals define it.

Well, I don't know which you belong to this evening, but I know this: the Jews who were active, Pilate who was passive, and the Romans who were compliant are a cross-section of all people's response to Jesus Christ in our world this very evening. The bottom line is simply this, don't miss it: all these are Christ-rejection, all of them. Whether you're active and opposed; whether you're passive, you can take it or leave it; whether you just go with the crowd, the status quo - all are expressions of Christ-rejection, because not one of them is saying: 'I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no

turning back'.

Now you might say: 'Well, you're speaking about this centurion aren't you? There he was at the cross, but you don't know that he laid a finger even on the Lord Jesus Christ'. Well, I don't know, and indeed I believe he probably didn't - but the fact of the matter is, and this is intrinsic to what I have to say to you tonight, he didn't need to lay a finger on the Saviour. Yes, he was a Roman soldier; yes, he was there at Calvary, but the prime reason why I have defined him as being among those who crucified Jesus is not the fact that he's a soldier, or he's historically placed in the context - but he's a sinner! Maybe you're sitting there thinking to yourself: 'I know what's coming next, he's going to tell us we're all sinners'. Well, would you believe me if I did tell you that? A lot of people like this centurion find it very hard to take that in their teeth, but Romans 3:23 does say that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, that there's no difference. You think, perhaps, that there's a difference between you and other folk that could be classed as sinners - do you believe that you're a sinner? People like the centurion usually just dismiss it: 'That's nonsense!'.

You see, the problem is that people like the centurion usually never get near enough to the cross to realise that they're a sinner, that we all had a hand in the crucifixion of Jesus. Do you believe that? My friend, do you realise that you have a personal responsibility for the death of God's precious only begotten Son? Do you know that it was personally for you that He hung there between heaven and earth? I want you to look at Him tonight, I want you to see Him where He is - what do you see? 'Oh, I see spittle running down His face, I see blood, I see scars, I see tears, I see Him hanging there with dislocated bones, I see nails, I see thorns, I see spears' - my friend, if that's all you see, you're not seeing Calvary! You need to see that your sin is there, and your sin put Him there, and your sin, invisibly, was taken upon Him. You can't see this, there was even a darkness came over the cross so that we wouldn't see it, but though we didn't see it, it's real because God said it happened. He was punished for your sins.

'What sins?', you say. Maybe you're still sitting there thinking: 'What sins are you talking about?'. Have you kept all the commandments? Have you ever put anything before God? Have you ever made an idol of anything? Have you ever committed adultery, even if you didn't do it physically have you done it in your mind and in your heart? Have you ever murdered anybody? Never? Have you ever hated anybody, that's the same, Jesus said! Have you ever coveted something that was another's? Oh, I could go on and on - have you ever stolen? Have you ever taken the name of the Lord in vain? Have you ever sworn, and taken the precious name of Jesus on your lips as a curse? You know what I'm talking about - you could check every box there, couldn't you? I could, I'm telling you that now. There's nothing special about me, but maybe you're here and you're high and mighty, and you're saying to yourself: 'But I have never committed the big sins, I'm moral'. Where did you get this thing about there being big sins and little sins? It's like black lies and white lies, it's a myth, it's a fairytale - a lie is a lie, truth or lie, there's only one or the other!

Maybe your problem is the tongue, maybe you've a slanderous mouth, maybe you have a scandalous reputation for talk. Maybe it's just envy or bitterness, or anxiety or fear in your breast - it could be anything, all these things the Bible says are sin. But I'm telling you tonight on the authority of God's word, and you cannot contradict that - you could contradict me all you like - but God's word says that we're all under sin. If you're the perfect man or woman, I want to meet you. What you need to see tonight is not only that you have sin, and you have sinned, but it was your sin, my friend - can you get your eyes to Calvary, and see that that was why Jesus was dying? It wasn't a miscarriage of justice alone, it wasn't in the volition of the Jews, or Pilate, or the centurion - God led Him there, and He led Himself there to die for your sins!

I never cease to be amazed, and I've told it many times, at the story of a man who put his head to the pillow one night and he began to dream that he was on Golgotha's hill. He was seeing all the crucifixion as they laid the Lord Jesus' body out on that cross, and then they nailed the nails in with the hammer, and finally they lifted it up and then they dropped it into its socket, and His bones went out of joint. There he was on Calvary's hill, but at that point when he saw the Roman soldier nailing the nails into the hands of the Lord Jesus, he was just standing there behind him - and with each blow of the hammer as it fell low, he felt as if it was in his heart, and he couldn't take any more. In his dream he

ran towards that soldier, yelling: 'Stop! Stop! This is wrong!', and he put a hand on his shoulder and he turned him round, only to look into his own face. He was that soldier.

Oh, we can be very hard on the centurion and all the rest of the Romans and the Jews and Pilate - there's a big debate, the Jews are talking about how we can be anti-Semitic talking about the Jews crucifying Christ, and how it was as much the Romans, it was as much the Governor, and all the rest. My friend, that's all irrelevant, because we all had our hand in it - you did too. We all are that soldier, for our sin nailed Him to the tree. Isaiah says: 'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the punishment of our peace was upon Him; and with those stripes down His back that carried the cross, we are healed'. But my friend, I want you to see that you are among those who crucified Him! Ray Boltz has a song that puts it well. He imagines that he was that centurion, and it goes like this:

'I was in the crowd
 The day that Jesus died,
 And as He hung upon the cross
 His mother cried.
 I saw the crown of thorns He wore
 The stripes upon His back,
 The water and the blood ran out
 And then the sky turned black.
 My mind was filled with anger,
 My heart was filled with shame,
 This man brought only healing
 Who could bring Him pain?
 Why does it seem the strong
 Always victimize the weak?
 And suddenly I found myself
 Standing to my feet.

And I cried,
 Who nailed Him there?
 This child of peace and mercy
 Who nailed Him there?
 Come and face me like a man
 Who nailed Him there?
 And the crowd began to mock me
 I cried, Oh my God,
 I do not understand
 Then I turned and saw the hammer
 In my hand!'

The second verse goes on:

'I am just a Roman soldier,
 An ordinary man.
 I love my wife and children,
 I do the best I can.
 How could I have killed Him?
 It must be someone else!
 There's got to be an answer
 I just can't blame myself!

I nailed Him there,
 The Child of peace and mercy.
 I nailed Him there,
 I am the guilty man!

I nailed Him there
 With my sins and my transgressions!
 I cried, Oh my God,
 Now I understand
 When I turned and saw the hammer...
 In my hand!

Do you see that tonight my friend? You put Him there, it was your hammer, those were your nails, those were your thorns, for those were your sins. Just as he bowed his head, you need to bow your head and admit that you, by your sin, put the Saviour to Calvary.

Very briefly, two more things: not only was he among those who crucified Jesus, but he witnessed the greatest event of history. Do you see this? 'What's great about this?', they say. Our opponents talk about 'a slaughterhouse religion', how can you call a bloody, brutal scene like this 'great'? Look at what they're doing to Him, this is the basis of your religion? Well, this centurion had seen many people die in battle, he had been given authority over many executions and crucifixions just like this - but he had never seen a man die like Jesus died. My friend, you can tell me all the stories of Jesus, and they're wonderful. You can show me His miracles, and you can tell me about His life, but there's no doubt about it - the cross has a special impact on people's hearts! The hymn writer put it:

'It has our wondrous attraction for me,
 For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died'

Well, the greatness of it is seen in verse 34, where we read that the Lord Jesus shouted with a loud voice: 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'. He was taking your sin, so God forsook Him! I don't understand that, I was talking to someone about it this morning - I don't understand it, but it had to happen for me to be saved! Then in verse 37 He cried with a loud voice and gave up the ghost, that means He died, and then the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom, that veil that stopped people getting to God was now torn in two - that's the greatness of it! The greatest demonstration of love is Calvary. 'Greater love hath no man than this', Jesus said, 'but that a man lays down his life for his friends'. My friend, He was laying down His life for you. Romans 5:8 says: 'God demonstrated His love, commends His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us'. The hymn writer asked the question: 'Lord, was it the nails that held Thee to the tree?', and the answer comes back, 'No, twas My everlasting love, My love for thee, for thee'.

Do you understand it? Are you taking it in? He came to the poor, He came to heal the brokenhearted - are you brokenhearted tonight, with an ache and a pain and a tragedy that I could never enter into, but God knows? He came through the cross to bring deliverance to the captives - are you bound this evening by some hurt, by some sin and transgression that you can't get free of? He came to give sight to the blind - maybe you're just not able to see things or understand eternal matters, and you're questioning them, you're sceptic? My friend, He can give you light tonight! He came to give liberty to the downtrodden - do you feel downtrodden? Maybe you're not one of these high and mighty folk, but you feel that you're in the dirt and everybody's walking over you?

I don't care how high and mighty you might be, everybody at some point in their life feels brokenhearted, feels captive, feels blind, feels downtrodden - and sometimes all this high and mighty stuff is just a mask for the way you're really feeling. The greatest demonstration of love is Calvary, the greatest display of anger was at Calvary, for God forsook Him. Isaiah says the punishment of our peace was upon Him, he also says that the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all, for our transgressions was He stricken, it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, the Lord made His soul an offering for sin. My friend, get beyond the Passion movie - it may be all true what you see when Christ is hanging there, but more went on than that, for His soul was judged for your sin! He bore your hell.

The greatest display of anger was Calvary, but hallelujah, the greatest declaration of forgiveness came from Calvary. He said: 'Father, forgive them!'. God has pronounced that because of Calvary, though our sins and iniquities have separated between us and God, He is our peace, Jesus Christ, and He has

broken down the wall of separation. God was in Christ at Calvary, reconciling the world unto Himself so that - to put it bluntly - your sins could be forgiven. That's why the veil was ripped in two, to bring you to God - what a declaration of forgiveness!

Well, you see Him tonight high and lifted up, He's crucified among us here this evening. He's on the cross, I'm asking you: is it nothing to you? Behold, do you see Him, the greatest demonstration of love, the greatest display of anger, the greatest declaration of forgiveness - see if there be any sorrow like His sorrow! All ye that pass by, to Jesus draw nigh, to you is it nothing that Jesus should die? Praise God, not only was he among those who crucified Jesus and witnessed the greatest event of history, but he confessed the truth about Christ: 'Surely', having seen all of it, 'this man is the Son of God!'.

You have seen your sin, I hope, this evening - but do you see this? Can you come to confess the truth about Christ? You know you're a sinner, but do you know this? You know it, but have you confessed as Romans 10:8, 9 and 10 tell us: 'That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved'? Remember the apostle Peter, when Jesus said to him: 'Whom, do men say that I am?', speaking to the disciples. It was Peter that answered and said truly: 'Thou art Christ, the Son of the Living God'. Jesus said: 'Peter, Simon bar Jona, flesh and blood has not revealed this unto you, but my Father who is in heaven'. Do you know what that's saying? God needs to reveal to you who Jesus is - has He done it? Do you know who He is tonight? He is the Son of God, the Christ, God the Son.

First Corinthians tells us that no man can call Jesus 'Lord', except by the Spirit, do you know He's Lord tonight? It's alright saying He is the Christ, He's the Messiah, and He's the Son of God, and God the Son, and He's the Saviour - but is He your Saviour? Is He your Lord? He is risen from the dead, three days later after Calvary He rose, and He's Lord now, and He's coming back as Judge of this world. If you don't bow the knee to Him tonight, voluntarily, there's one day that you'll be forced to do it. Can you say: 'Truly this Man was the Son of God, and He bore my sins in His body on the tree. I'm a sinner and I need Him as my Saviour, and I want Him now, and I'm taking Him by faith'? Are you guilty of the blood of Jesus Christ? Oh my friend, are you prepared to meet your God with Christ's death on your conscience? You've become a witness tonight through the preaching of the Gospel to the greatest event, just like that centurion, and I'm asking you: will you confess the truth about yourself and about God's Son, and be saved from hell, from judgment, and be taken to heaven when you die?

Let us bow our heads: Our Father, I can't do an awful lot, in fact without You I can do nothing - but I have, I hope, with the Spirit's help lifted high the Lord Jesus. He has said: 'If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto me'. Lord, draw people now, we pray.

My friend, if you hear God's voice, all you have to do by faith from your heart is say: 'Lord, I know I'm a sinner and I repent of it, I turn from my sin'. If you don't feel you're able to do that, that's OK, because God will give you the power if you're willing to be made willing to turn. 'Lord, I know that Jesus died for my sin. Lord, I want you to save me because of the Lord Jesus. I want Him to be my Saviour, I want Him to be my Lord. Save me now and make me Your child, and come into my life'. My friend, what He will do with you will be determined by what you do with Him tonight, for He is before you. What will you do?

Father, help souls tonight, and draw them we pray. We have been to Calvary, oh, and we don't want to leave - but our prayer is that those who are without Christ, they will stay at Calvary and know what it is to be washed in the crimson tide that flows for sin and uncleanness. Let them plunge beneath it this evening, our Father, and know all their sins washed away. Amen.

"The Hardened Heart"

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Perhaps we could read the Scriptures just at this point in our service. We're turning to Matthew's Gospel and chapter 13 for our reading, Matthew chapter 13 - and it wasn't that long ago that I spoke on this passage of Scripture before, but I want to home in on a different aspect of it this evening, and I want to concentrate specifically on 'The Hardened Heart'. We'll read verses 1 through to 23 for our portion this evening.

Verse 1: "The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them. Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty".

Now through this whole portion of Scripture, the Lord Jesus is essentially asking a question of the people who are His listeners, and it is this: what is your spiritual heart condition? I wonder how you would answer that question this evening? Now, everyone has a spiritual heart condition. You may not be aware of what it is, but you have a heart, I hope, and therefore you will have a heart condition - not only a physical one, but a spiritual one. Of course, we all have a red bit of flesh beating in our chest, our physical heart, but this word 'heart' has often been used in the Bible, and indeed in our own language, as an expression of the seat of affections and how we stand before God. So really, what we're asking is: how are you in the sight of God tonight? What is your condition in God's eyes? How is your heart?

Now there are a great deal of similarities between the physical heart and the spiritual heart. For

instance, if your heart, physically, is in good shape, you'll be filled with life, you'll have a regular beat, there'll be a free flow of blood that brings the oxygen of life to your body and your whole well-being, you'll be supplied with every need, physically speaking, that you could ever want; and you'll have the burdens of life sustained by the strength that your healthy heart brings to your body - and of course, it goes without saying that your heart will be free from all disease. But you know, that's not a million miles away from what a spiritual heart in good shape is like: it's filled with life, the very life of God. It has a regular beat, it's in time with God's will. It has a flow of blood that brings to it the oxygen of God's eternal life, it supplies every need through God, we're sustained through the burdens of life by the power of God because God lives in our hearts. It's free from that awful disease of sin! Is that the way your spiritual heart is tonight? It's in good condition?

Of course the opposite, bad condition, means you've got heart trouble. If that's the case in the physical realm for you, you will know that your heart will have lost some of its vital and related functions, you may even have experienced heart failure - your heart has failed you at times. Maybe your heart beat is irregular, maybe there are blockages to prevent the flow of the oxygen of life coming to it. The result is that your health suffers, you become slow and lethargic, you lose energy, you're not able to concentrate as you used to be. You know my friends this evening, many suffer heart disease. Their heart trouble is because their heart is diseased, and ultimately it will lead to their death. Surely the parallel is obvious?

When our hearts are not right before God, we lose the vitality of life, we do not function as we ought, and our hearts sometimes fail us for fear, we are irregular in our beat and walk of life. Often it happens that when our heart disease, spiritually speaking, becomes protracted, our arteries become hardened. It becomes more difficult - and you understand what I'm saying - for God to communicate His life to us because of the hardening influence of sin and spiritual heart disease. Ultimately, as Romans 6 verse 23 says, the result of that is death.

How is your heart tonight? Now I know that some may be suffering from physical heart disease, but there's something much more serious than the hardening of your arteries, and that is the hardening of your heart spiritually. You see the Bible teaches us that we're all born with a heart defect. Spiritually we have inherited a problem, genetically, from our father Adam and our mother Eve in the Garden of Eden. Not only is that the problem of original sin, but the Bible says that we have learned sin in our lives. We're born in sin, God's word says, but as we grow up we begin to practise sin more and more, and we abuse our spiritual heart to such an extent that it has a hardening effect. When we abuse our heart with sin we get harder. Just like in the physical realm when we abuse our body and our physical heart we get problems, heart disease, that becomes even more protracted as we get older, as the years pass. As we increase in age, we find that time affects our disease in our heart, and it's the same in the spiritual realm: the more we sin the harder we get, and the more time passes the problems get more difficult.

Now what do people do to try and solve their heart condition? Well, in the physical realm they try to treat their heart, they take medication to try and keep the symptoms at bay. That's what many people do in the spiritual realm: they try and redress the balance because they feel deep within them, without maybe admitting it publicly, sin - they decide that luxury, or pleasure, or materials, or success, or some kind of drug, or even self-confidence will keep the symptoms of their sin at bay, the problems of their spiritual heart. Some will even turn to artificial substitutes. If their heartbeat is out of pace with God, well, they try to bring a more regular beat and they turn to religion. They get the ten commandments or a code of ethics, and they feel that that keeps them in pace, morally, with God. But ultimately, even in the physical realm, medication and even artificial substitutes can be no substitute for a healthy heart.

A more extreme procedure that some of you have gone under is bypass surgery. Ultimately what it does is self explanatory, it bypasses the problem, it avoids, temporarily, the problem. Anyone - not to put fear upon you - who has had a heart bypass for over 10 or 12 years will tell you that even this is not a long-term solution, it's not a complete solution. It's the same in the realm of the spiritual: if you try to avoid your heart condition, if you try to bypass it, that is not a cure. You can try and dull the symptoms by medication, you can try and substitute a good heart condition by some other means, you

can try to bypass it temporarily - but ultimately what we need as spiritual entities before God are new hearts. Our heart is so diseased by sin that we need a spiritual heart transplant. I'm not talking about another person's heart that is subject to the same problems as ours has been, but we need a new and a perfect heart to replace the old diseased one.

Now I'm asking you again: how is your heart? A good indication of the condition of your heart is how you respond to the message of the Gospel. If you like, the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, is God's heart monitor, it's God's ECG, it shows the condition of your heart. Now the Lord Jesus, in the passage that we read together this evening, talks about the conditions of the heart, and they are various. I want you to notice first of all in verse 9 of our passage that the Lord Jesus said these remarkable words: 'Who hath ears to hear, let him hear'. Now these words give us an insight into how we can measure the condition of our heart. He could have said: 'He that has a heart to hear, let him hear'.

Now as we go through the Gospels we find that He says this three times in Matthew's gospel, three times in Mark's gospel - and when He comes to Revelation (incidentally, for the benefit of you Christians here tonight), He said it eight times to the church: 'He that has ears to hear, let him hear', or 'He that has a heart that can hear, let him hear'. That is God's measure of your heart condition: whether or not you're hearing and receiving what God has to say to you.

Now the Lord Jesus in this parable outlined four specific heart conditions. First of all in verse 23, if we can take them in reverse order, we see that He talks about the receptive heart: 'He that receives the seed in good ground is the one who hears God's word, understands it; and he bears fruit, brings forth a hundredfold, sixty, and thirty'. The Lord Jesus is talking about a heart that has received the seed of God's word, received God's message, and what happens is: it has been a prepared heart, God has dug up the ground of sin and allowed this person to receive the seed of God's word, and they have understood it, they have grasped the message of God's good news, and they have borne fruit to that effect. It's the good, the clean, the deep-soiled heart in which the seed of God's word might flourish. The proof of it is that it brings forth much fruit. Now that's very simple tonight, that means that if you're a Christian you should be bringing forth some kind of fruit to the glory of God - and if you're not, the likelihood is that you may not be a Christian.

The Lord Jesus couldn't have made it plainer: you need to have a receptive heart, and if you're not receptive to God's truth - even if you repel it at the extreme - that's a sure sign. But even if you're just apathetic - you could give and take it - that could be a sign that you're not saved. The second heart He mentions in verse 22 is the crowded heart, He said: 'He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful'. This is a preoccupied person, a person who initially has received God's word and agrees with it and gives intellectual and emotional consent to it; but then all of a sudden, through life difficulties arise, and thorns and thistles grow around them. Now in Palestine in these ancient days, the Lord Jesus was referring to how farmers would have at times been lazy. The farmer would have cut the weeds off his ground and burnt the ground to eradicate all the shoots, but deep down within that ground the roots were still there. The Lord Jesus is talking about men and women who have divided hearts. On the one hand they have chosen to follow Christ, and on the other hand they are preoccupied with riches and the things of this world and they're not fruitful. Their life is full of thorns, they're deceiving themselves and deceiving others, pulling out the weeds that are visible to everybody around but God says that the root of sin is still in their heart.

My friend, is that you tonight? You're preoccupied with this world, you're taken up with all that it has: riches, its deceitfulness, the care of this world. Though you believe the Gospel, your life is choking God's influence in your soul - and that's a sign, my friend, that you're not saved. Now get it from the Lord Jesus: not saying that you're just not the Christian you ought to be, it's saying that you haven't got the real thing - and that's serious!

Then the third heart in verses 20 and 21 is the shallow heart. This person receives the seed in stony places. He hears the word, with joy he receives it, yet he has not root in himself 'but dureth for a while: and then when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by he is offended'. This

speaks of the impulsive person. I'm not saying that all impulsive people are shallow, but sometimes that is the case. The Lord Jesus illustrated it by saying the ground is stony, and in Jesus' day stony ground would have been like the shelf of rock over which there was just an inch or two of sod. That narrow skin of earth wouldn't have been sufficient either to nourish or to protect the seed. What would happen was: the seed would be planted, and then it would start to shoot, and there was no nourishment from beneath. Then when the sun came out, the sun would scorch it and it would wither away.

There are many people, Jesus says, who when they hear the Gospel, they receive the seed of God's word. They embrace it and say: 'That's great! That's the message that I want, I want my sins forgiven, I want to go to heaven one day', and then problems come because of their confession of faith. They receive tribulation, persecution, because of the Lord Jesus and they say: 'I've had enough with this, I didn't sign up to all this trouble', and they leave the faith. Jesus says: 'They were never mine in the beginning'. My friend, if that's you, you've never been saved.

Then fourthly and finally what I want to concentrate on tonight is the hard heart in verse 19. Jesus said: 'When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side'. This is the unresponsive heart. We've seen that there is the receptive heart, the crowded heart, the shallow heart, and this is the hard heart - it's hard ground! We believe that it was probably a thoroughfare, the right of way that had been trodden down by travellers throughout the years, it's the wayside path. So many people have walked on it that when the seed fell on it, it couldn't even sink in. Then the birds saw it and they swooped down and snatched it away. Jesus says that's the person who hears the word of God and it just rolls over their consciousness, their understanding and their heart - it means nothing to them because their heart is so hard!

Now my friend, all of these illustrations about the heart that Jesus gives us - but especially that of the hard heart - tells us that when we hear God's word, just like you're hearing it tonight, we have a responsibility to hear and to heed it; and if we don't there are serious consequences. You only need to look at verse 12, the Lord Jesus explained this: 'Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath'. Very simple, the Lord Jesus is saying: 'If you respond to my word you will receive more of it, and I will bless you more. But if you reject my word, you will lose what you already have'. Now this is a law that we find right throughout life - not just in nature, if the sod did not accept the seed it would lose it - but you receive it not only in that part of nature all around us in our environment, but in our own bodies. I've told you before that if you covered your eye up for a couple of months, and you take the patch off again, you'll probably be blind or at least your sight will have debilitated somewhat. Strap your arm up and your muscle will waste away - and it's the old lesson that 'if you don't use it, you'll lose it'. It's not just in the physical realm, it's also in the mental capacity - if you don't use your mind, you begin to lose its capabilities. That's why all you old men do crosswords and Sudoku and everything like that, to keep yourselves active - thinking! But my friend, in the spiritual realm it's the same: if you don't use what God has given to you, the opportunities that He brings along your path, there is a danger that you'll lose it!

Indeed, many believe that this hard heart speaks of business, the picture of all these journeying people travelling down this road of life, and they're beating down the path harder and harder, asphalt-hard by their frantic feet. Maybe I'm speaking to someone tonight, and all this matter of spirituality and the Gospel and God's word, well, it doesn't really matter to you in the sense that you don't necessarily agree with it terribly much, but you don't have time to contemplate it! It's too inconvenient, your life is too busy, it's cluttered with too many things - and the danger is you could be hardening your heart to the Lord Jesus! I'll tell you my friend, business is a killer of the soul. The devil will keep you like a little hamster in its cage going round that wheel over and over again, and he'll just stand there laughing while you neglect your soul.

How is your heart tonight? Is it hard? Let me tell you the consequences of a hardened heart. Someone could be attending this meeting - and this is what's on my soul just now - and they could be hearing the message week after week, or on other occasions, and they're just remaining unmoved, constantly

unresponsive to God's word. There's no change in their life whatsoever. Jesus said in verses 14 to 17 that that is you, my friend, if you just can't see this message - you can't see it! That is, your spiritual sight is nonexistent. I mean the Gospel is just not clear, you can't seem to focus in on it, you maybe think it's a bit of a fairytale, pie in the sky when you die. It just doesn't come to you as real, it hasn't touched you in the depth of your soul. My friend, that means you can't see it, and you can't see it because your hard heart won't let you.

Jesus said people like that can't hear it, their spiritual hearing has gone as well as their sight - that means it's not sinking in. You're not really listening to it! On another occasion the Lord said: 'Let these sayings sink down into your ears'. How graphically He's describing to us that this is meant to go into your ears and travel down 18 inches or so into our heart - but you're not hearing it that way, are you? You're not seeing it the way Christ wants you to see it. Then thirdly He says that hardhearted people, the consequence is that they don't understand it. You don't understand spiritual thoughts, you're not grasping the import of the fact that you're a sinner, the fact that Christ died for you, and the fact of the great danger that you're in without Him!

Well, in one respect we should not be surprised. First Corinthians 1:18 says that the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. It's not wise to tell people they're delivered through a Man who dies in a Roman form of execution. Paul gives us more insight into this in 1 Corinthians 2:14, where he says that the spiritual truths of God are foolishness to the natural mind of a man who has never been converted. My friend, the harder your heart is to God's influences, the more ridiculous and foolish the Gospel will be! So if you're sitting here in your subconscious or your conscious, and you're just laughing, poking fun at what we're saying, or finding fault and questioning - it could be that you have a hardened heart, and you're in an awful state, my friend.

Consequently, if that is your condition, the greatest truths of the Gospel leave you numb, unresponsive. A preacher tells you of your sin, and how God says that you have broken His law and His wrath is upon you, and He's angry with sinners like you everyday - you don't say, like Isaiah, 'Woe is me! For I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips, I dwell amongst a people of unclean lips'. You don't say, like Peter, in the presence of one who is preaching Christ: 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man!'. You don't say, like the apostle Paul: 'I'm the chief of sinners! Lord, have mercy on me, I see my sin'. Then when we bring you from your sin to Calvary, and we present to you a loving Saviour who came from the right hand of the Father, clothing Himself in perfect human flesh, living the life of a man and going to a cross and dying the death of a sinner, and bearing your shame, enduring God's wrath, exhausting the punishment of a world of sinners - and you see the blood flowing from His veins, from His hands and His feet and His side, and from that crown of thorns, and you see Him spat upon and buffeted and mocked and blasphemed, and you see the darkness come down for three hours when God pours on Him the iniquity of us all - and you remain unmoved. You don't sit at the foot of the cross, like John who was there, and say: 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and give His Son to be the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice, for our sins'. You don't say, like the apostle Paul, who wasn't even following Christ when He died: 'The Son of God, look at Him, He loved me and He gave Himself for me!'

When you hear this Gospel that you're a sinner, and God's provision has been made through the precious blood of His Son, and the invitation goes out to you that you need to repent of your sin and you need to embrace this One who died on the cross and rose again the third day - you don't say, like the Philippian jailer: 'What must I do to be saved?', you just sit there. You go out the same way you came in week after week after week - it's nothing to you! Your sin is nothing to you, the Saviour is nothing to you, and the Gospel sermon means nothing to you! Your heart is cauterised, it's desensitised - Paul says it's past feeling! My friend, if you're there, you're as good as in hell! But if there is just an ember of the sense of your shame, and the sense of the suffering of Christ, and the sense of your need - Oh, I pray and I plead with you to fan the flames of that spark, for it could be your only chance tonight!

The cause of your hardened heart has been the effects of protracted sin, self-righteousness, abuse. If you were to test your spiritual cholesterol level tonight, you would find perhaps that sin is floating around your whole system. Hosea said: 'Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart', and

your life has been taken away by sin, and you're sitting here tonight - that's why you're hard, a life of protracted abuse. Your heart is further hardened by the influence of Satan. It's bad enough that we're killing ourselves, but we have an enemy who wants to poison us. Second Corinthians 4:4 says he is the god of this world, seeking to blind the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the Gospel should shine into them, and they be saved. Bishop Ryle said: 'Sin and Satan will always find helpers in our heart'. If our heart wasn't bad enough, there's sin all around us, and there is Satan, like a roaring lion, wanting to devour your soul, my friend. That's why you're hard, that's why you can't see it or hear it or understand it.

Finally this evening I want to tell you about the cure for the hardened heart. My first point here might surprise you, but it's simply this: in one sense there is no cure. Did you hear that? In one sense there is no cure. Jeremiah 17 verse 9 says: 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?'. Another translation puts it like this: 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and beyond cure'. That means that without God you are helpless, you're hopeless. You can't change your way, you can't turn over a new leaf and get religious all of a sudden - it's not like that. The Bible says an Ethiopian can't change his skin, or a leopard his spots, 'then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil' - it's in you, it's in me, it's in us all! My friend, if you continue unresponsive to the only cure that God has given in the Gospel, you can be sure that you'll never be cured. Proverbs 29 and verse 1 says: 'He that hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be broken, without remedy'. If you harden your neck to God, my friend, He'll break you.

But praise God, though there's no cure in you or in me or in any of us, there is a softening influence in the Gospel of God's grace that can cure us! When we get to Calvary with the weight of our sin on our back, and we're melted by the love that flows from Jesus, that is the influence that can melt our hardening heart! But I'll tell you this, some people ask me from time to time: 'Is anyone beyond redemption?', and you know my answer is 'Yes'. A man or woman is beyond redemption if the cross does no longer affect them. If Calvary love doesn't touch them and doesn't change them, the likelihood is that they will never be changed! My friend, if God has shown you what His Son has done for you, a man or woman who doesn't appreciate their sin or appreciate the Saviour and His suffering can never be saved!

Not only is there the softening influence of God's gracious Gospel, but there is the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. My friend, if you need a new heart - and you do if you're not a Christian - this is the very place to get it, and I'm not talking about the Iron Hall. God's word says: 'A new heart will I give you, a new spirit will I put within you. I will take away the stony heart of your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh'. Jesus said: 'You can be born again', He will give you His heart, the heart of God that desires His desires and wants to please God. It doesn't matter whether you say you're a Christian or not - is your heart right with God? One man was baptised, he was able to do mighty works in Acts chapter 8, Simon Magus was his name, and he wanted to buy the power of God the Holy Spirit so that he would do the wonders. The apostle said to him: 'Your heart is not right with God!'

Would he have to say that to you tonight? Or can you cry out, like David who said: 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, renew a right spirit in me. Hide Your face from my iniquities to bring me into Your presence'. I don't know whether you know why ice forms on the ground, but there are really two reasons that are related. Of course, the temperature drops and then ice forms, but there's another cause and that is simply the subtraction of the sun's rays. My friend, you can harden your life with sin; the temperature, morally, can be dropping - but do you see if God starts to retract His rays of influence and grace, and the Gospel no longer affects you the way that it used to - listen to me: you are in trouble! Murray M'Cheyne said in one of his sermons: 'As long as you are unconverted, you're under a double process of hardening. The frosts of an eternal night are settling down upon your soul, and the Sun of Righteousness with westering wheel is hastening to set upon you for ever. If, then, the plough of grace cannot force its way into your icebound heart today, what likelihood is there that it will enter tomorrow?'

'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear', and if today you hear His voice, harden not your heart. The Lord has been gracious enough to give you another opportunity of hearing His voice, and receiving the seed of His word and His Son who is your Saviour. But what if your soul is drifting over the deadline

tonight, and this further act of refusal is your final one? My friend, what if God should actually heed your refusal tonight, and never speak again? Turn while the Saviour, in mercy, is waiting.

Lord, move, we pray, in this place. Draw sinners to Yourself. Impress upon them the necessity of fleeing today to the arms of Jesus, not squandering the seed that has been given them. Let no one in this place harden themselves one more time to the truth, but may they embrace Christ as He is freely offered in the Gospel, in His wonderful name we pray, Amen.

"Sodom Similarities"

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We're going to turn in the Bible to our reading tonight from the Old Testament, from Genesis chapter 19. I want to share with you some 'Sodom Similarities', and this is the story of God's judgment upon Sodom.

Verse 1 of chapter 19: "And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat. But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them. And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof. And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door. But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door. And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door. And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides? son in law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring them out of this place: For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law. And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my LORD: Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast showed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt".

Let us bow together in a word of prayer: Our Father, we give You thanks for the revelation of Your truth to us. It is by these pages that we know that this message that we're going to preach this evening is an ancient one, indeed we believe that it is the eternal Gospel that was devised, planned in the mind of God before time began. Lord, it humbles us to think that there is a purpose in it for us

tonight in this place at this time, and for specific individuals gathered here that as yet have not met the Lord Jesus. Lord, we want some of these Sodom similarities to come home to them in such a way that their heart will be gripped, and that they would realise that they need a Saviour, and that they need Him this evening. Strive, we pray, with those who are lost, with those who are lethargic in their faith, those who have left their first love. May we rejoice tonight over souls that have been gloriously delivered from the wrath of God which is to come. Hear us Lord, I need Your help tonight, in the Saviour's name, Amen.

We read from Genesis chapter 19 as the portion for our text tonight, but you may or may not know that the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke's Gospel chapter 17 verse 28 said that: 'As it was in the days of Lot, so it shall be at the coming of the Son of Man'. Now that's a verse that is not as well as another similar one that says: 'As it was in the days of Noah, so it shall be at the coming of the Son of Man'. Most of you are familiar with the story of Noah and the flood and the ark, and only eight being saved along with the animals that went in two-by-two and seven-by-seven. But we're less familiar with the story of Lot, and therefore we're less familiar with the similarities of what the Lord is speaking of when He says that before He comes again - and let me be absolutely clear, the Lord Jesus came the first time to Bethlehem, He died on the cross for our sins, was buried, three days later rose again, ascended to heaven 40 days later, and promised that just as the disciples saw Him go, that same Jesus would come again, and He's yet to come. But to give us a clue as to when He's coming, and the signs that His coming is drawing near, He said: 'As it was in the days of Lot, so it shall be at the coming of the Son of Man'.

So, this evening we want to look at some 'Sodom Similarities', three characteristics that we find in our day, our contemporary situation here in the 21st century, 2006, that were also characteristics in Lot's day, particularly the account that we read from Genesis chapter 19. So let me share them with you as briefly as I can. The first Sodom similarity is the divine revelation that was similar, the divine revelation that was similar in Lot's day to what God is saying in our day. Now a divine revelation is simply a message from God, and the message that God gave to Lot, and to Lot's family, and to Lot's generation is very similar to the Gospel message that we have been singing about and will preach about this evening - the Gospel for today.

Now let me show you how this is the case. If you look at chapter 19, the very last statement in verse 12 says: 'Bring them out of this place'. God sent two angels to Lot's house to tell them that judgment was going to come upon the cities of the plains, Sodom and Gomorrah, because of their awful sinfulness. The divine revelation that God gave through these angels was: 'Bring them out of this place' - bring your family and your friends out of Sodom, because judgment is coming. Then in verse 13 the angels proclaim the message of God: 'For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it. And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place'. It was a message of deliverance, it was a message of warning. God was saying through His messengers: 'Judgment is coming! I'm angry against your sin, I'm going to judge you - but I want you to get out! I'm giving you a chance, this is the fire door, the exit'. Then we see it in verse 17 again: 'And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth', these angels delivered the people, they said to them, 'Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed'.

There's one wee verse in the Bible I think sums all these expressions up, and it's simply this: the message that God gave to Lot's generation was, 'Flee from the wrath to come'. There's judgment coming, and God revealed it, it wasn't a secret! God didn't strike them in the dark when they were in ignorance, God warned them to flee! The generation of Lot's was so sinful that God had to judge it, if He didn't judge it, well, His justice would not have remained intact. The world that we live in is not inherently sinful in and of itself - sometimes we get that into our head, we talk about a sinful world, and we forget that the world is populated by sinful people. The trees aren't sinful, the soil is not sinful, what makes this a sinful universe is because there are human entities walking about it who are sinners - you and me! Romans 3:23 tells us that there's no difference between any of us, we're all concluded under sin, and all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

We are the same today as sinners were in Lot's day, and so here is the first similarity: we are sinners. But praise God, another similarity that is the song that we've got to sing about this evening is that our God is a God of mercy. Verse 16 says: 'God being merciful unto Lot: brought them forth, and set them without the city'. The message of the Gospel in the New Testament is not only that we are sinners, Romans 3:23, but also Romans 5:8: 'But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us'. It is the message of the cross, the message that whilst we have fallen into our own sin and selfishness, and a whole universe after us, God sent a Saviour that He promised right in the Garden of Eden when man fell. That Saviour was born in Bethlehem, the sinless Son of God in flesh, and went all the way to Calvary. As He hung between heaven and earth on that cross, He was suffering the wrath of God for us, He was taking your punishment and mine, He was bearing your hell and your chastisement.

I hope you're aware that that's what the cross is all about. It wasn't about a martyr dying for a cause, it wasn't even a good man who experienced a miscarriage of justice - it may have been that, but it was much more than that. It was a loving Saviour, the Son of God, who knew that man needed to be saved, and at the right hand of God He said: 'If they need a Saviour, I'll be that Saviour. I'll go and take flesh, and I'll die'. There on that cross He submitted to His Father, pouring upon Him the wrath of God that was your due - what mercy! Praise God, we still have a merciful Saviour, and because of that He can offer deliverance just as He offered to those in Lot's day, and said: 'Get up! Get out and flee, because there's danger ahead!'. Romans 6:23 says that: 'Though the wages of sin is death; the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord'.

To get out of this city, Lot and his family had to get up, they had to come to their senses and rise to their feet, they had to turn around in the direction of Zoar, and they had to turn their back on Sodom and all the sin that was in it, and they had to walk away from that sinful place and walk toward the place of God's deliverance. Do you know what that is? That is repentance. Repentance is a change of mind towards your sin, it is to turn, to about turn with your back to sin and your face to the Saviour. It is to embrace by faith all that God has done in His Son, to receive His forgiveness, to receive His gift of mercy, and it can be gained - hallelujah!

We've got a hard message tonight, it's a message of God's judgment - but before I go on any further, let me say categorically: don't see all the darkness and ignore the light. Though God is an angry God towards sin, though God is a God who must judge sin and will judge sin, praise God: He is a Saviour who has given a way out to mankind. Never you forget that! The Lord, being merciful unto Lot, is also merciful towards us. That's why Paul could say in Romans 1:16: 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation' - it is the power to deliver men and women. I don't care what bondage you're in this evening, whatever your sinful habit may be, you can say tonight - if you embrace God's message:

'At the cross, at the cross,
Where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away;
It was there by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day!'

The divine revelation in Lot's day was similar to the divine revelation in our day: that we are sinners, and God will judge sin, and God will judge sinners - but God has provided a Saviour for sinners in the Lord Jesus Christ, and there's a way that sinners can be saved if they repent of their sin and put faith in the Lord Jesus.

The second Sodom similarity is that the rampant sinfulness in Lot's day is similar to the rampant sinfulness in our day. It points that the Saviour's coming is near, but it also points that judgment is near. The moral state of the generation in which Lot lived was at an all-time low. If you look at verse 20 of chapter 18: 'The LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous'. Now, sin is sin, but for God to say sin was very grievous, He's really laying it on here - the emphasis that what they were doing was abhorrent in His sight. In chapter 19 and verses 4 and 5 we get the same sense, and when we read this story, this narrative of the two angels coming,

Lot pulling them into the house lest anything happened to them during the night, we see that the men of Sodom surrounded the house - old and young, all the people from every quarter - 'And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in tonight to your house? bring them out unto us, that we may know them'. They wanted to have sexual, homosexual relations with these angels, they saw them as men - but what I want you to grasp is how this was panoramic across the population in Sodom. It was the young men, it was the old men, it was all the people from every quarter. This sin was an epidemic!

Now, you would need to be blind, deaf and stupid not to realise that you're witnessing, in our age, a resurgence in homosexual behaviour - what used to be called 'sodomy 'because of this portion of Scripture. With this resurgence there has come to be a growing acceptability of it, and hence the recent changes in our laws allowing the privilege of civil partnerships to same-sex couples, which effectively is same-sex marriage. You might say: 'Well, it's not really marriage', well if the politicians can call it marriage, and the ministers can call it marriage, I can call it marriage - that's what it is, effectively. But there's more than just an acceptability of it, I feel and I feel I'm right in saying that there's an aggressive promotion of it. It's pushed into our faces. You're not allowed to push religion, especially evangelical religion, in people's faces today - but you can push homosexuality in people's faces. It's promoted aggressively, actively, from children's storybooks in schools, primary schools, to television soap operas. Not that you should be watching them anyway, but you can hardly watch an episode without a homosexual in it.

It has got to such an extent in our society that those who oppose homosexuality and its practice are branded 'homophobic'. Let me just say that no one should be violent towards another human being for any reason: their colour, their creed, their religion or their sexual preference. But 'homophobic crimes', as they're called today, is incorporating, I feel, anyone who disagrees, and even calls this practice of homosexuality 'sin' - it's equated to racism. You watch the news now, and you listen, and they'll say 'homophobic and racial crime' - they put the two together as if they're equal. All crime is equal, but if you have a hate of this sin, an abhorrence of what God hates, I don't think it's going to be long until that is concluded a crime as well. Let me say this: as far as God's word is concerned, no matter what way you like to interpret it - and I know there's ways people interpret it, they would almost think that homosexuality was a great thing in God's eyes - God spells homosexuality 'S-I-N'.

Now my friends, Lot's world was full of this sin. Our world is full of this sin. Lot's world was under God's judgement because of sin, it was going to be destroyed. I know that fire and brimstone preachers are not too popular today, those who warn that God is going to judge with fire again - but let me say this: before we even think about that, the state of Sodom was not a sign that God's judgment was approaching, the state of Sodom was a sign that God's judgment was present and resident upon them!

Now please note this - turn with me to Romans chapter 1, for I feel that this is important. Romans chapter 1, and this is as much for information of believers as anything, verse 18 of Romans 1 says: 'The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness'. It says 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness' - that's present tense. God is showing His anger and displeasure towards those who suppress the truth that God has made known to them. So God tells us what's right and wrong in His law and in our conscience, and when we suppress that truth and do what is wrong, God judges us. It's not just all about some day in the future, it's about now. Verses 19 and 20 say that God has spoken to us in our conscience what's right and wrong and in creation. He shows us that He has created the world, we are His creatures, so we'll be answerable to Him one day.

He has given us this moral compass in our heart to show us right and wrong, but verse 21 of Romans 1 tells us that when men knew God, they glorified Him not. Now that speaks of revelation, that all men at one time - whether they were aborigines, or pagans, heathens in the jungle - at one time every civilisation in existence knew God: God revealed through conscience, through creation, and through a revelation of Himself, who He was. But when they knew this and suppressed this knowledge and didn't glorify God, they made retrograde steps - so much so that verse 20 says at the end that all people are without excuse.

My friend, sometimes people say: 'How could God send those people in the jungle to hell?', or 'How could God send somebody to hell who doesn't know the whole truth?'. The fact of the matter is: everybody at one point knew the whole truth, and that knowledge was suppressed, and there was a knock-on effect. If you withhold food from your child, what's going to happen? It's going to starve. In the same way, if you withhold the Gospel truth from your progeny and your descendants, they will suffer - and whose fault is it? Is it God's? No, it's yours.

What man has done to the knowledge of God is, he has rejected it for his own - verse 21 of Romans says that he became vain in his imagination, and his foolish heart was darkened. He worshipped, verse 25, the creature rather than the Creator. That's what we're seeing in our world today: sex-mad society worshipping the body; we've got to the stage where animal rights become more important than human rights of the unborn child - isn't that right? We're taken up with self, the worship of the creature; with idolatry, worshipping creation and materials rather than the Living God. Listen to this: to such a generation like Lot's generation and our generation, God will not judge us - He will, but He *is* judging us! That's the emphasis of this passage, verse 24 says that to those type of people: 'God gave them up', verse 26, 'God gave them up', verse 28, 'God gave them over'. He abandons, He removes His restraining grace, His influence.

If you think things are bad my friend, if God took away His grace all hell would be let loose! What would happen is, it's like the wee boy with his finger in the hole of the dam, plugging it - if God took away His grace, it would be like unplugging that hole, and the whole dam coming forth. His grace is starting to be taken away, I believe. Here are the signs of judgment, here are the signs - and you ask yourself: is it upon us now? Verse 24: 'God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves' - immorality dominates. You ask yourself: is that happening today? God allows people to be abandoned to their own sexual immoral urges, and it's not only done among people, it's approved of - everybody thinks it's normal.

Then we find in verse 26 the second retrograde step is: 'For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet' - homosexuality is popularised. First step, immorality dominates; second step, homosexuality is popularised. The side effect is that they receive within themselves the recompense of the error due, that means there's diseases: STDs, AIDS and so on and so forth. The campaign in the 80s against AIDS with contraception and so on, it hasn't worked - it hasn't worked because the problem is sin in the heart.

We're living in a depraved society where the grace of God is less seen than ever, and what we're seeing here is God's judgment upon the nation: first, sexual revolution is found; and then there is a homosexual revolution. Paul said in Ephesians: 'For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret'. Not only is it no longer a shame to speak of them, it's no longer done in secret. That shows God's judgment upon a nation: first, immorality dominates; second, homosexuality is popularised; thirdly, the mind becomes depraved. Verse 28: 'And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient'. First of all the body is destroyed: immorality, homosexuality, and then the mind is destroyed. That's why you've got people in government, or in positions of education, or even in the church, and they're advocating sin as acceptable and perversion as normal - it's God's judgment! He's allowing it to happen, He's giving them over, and it's a sign that Jesus is coming soon.

Do you ever wonder why Bill Clinton was so popular as a President? He was almost impeached after his indiscretions and his lies publicly - do you know why he was so acceptable? He made the people wealthier, and he was only doing what they were doing in secret - that's the bottom line. The divine revelation in Lot's day is similar to our day, the rampant sinfulness in Lot's day is similar to our day, but what I want you to see lastly is that the human reaction to God's judgment upon their sinfulness, and the human reaction to God's message of love to them is similar today as it was in Lot's day.

Let me show you this: first of all some laughed. In verse 14, if you go back to Genesis 19, Lot came to

his family 'unto his sons in law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the LORD will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in law'. They thought he was mocking, he was making fun, and they poked fun at him, they mocked him in return. How many people are there today, and when you preach the Gospel, especially in our age - and this is one of the characteristics of how we know the Lord is coming soon - people mock more and more the Gospel of the Lord Jesus. Someone has said: 'Ridicule is the first and the last argument of fools'. My friend, if you laugh in the face of the Gospel, you're a fool. I don't say that mildly, I mean it: for most people that laugh at the Gospel have never ever searched the Scriptures, they've hardly read a page of the Bible, they've never weighed the evidence, they've never compared the alternatives, they've never pondered the realities of eternity.

Proverbs says the fool makes mock not only at the message of God, but at sin - he doesn't even recognise sin! Maybe you're one of those people sitting here and saying: 'I'm no sinner, I try my best, I help my neighbour, I'm maybe even a little bit religious, praying and reading my Bible and all that' - my friend, you're a sinner! You're no different than any of the rest of us, we're all sinners - don't mock at sin! There are other people who mock at judgment, Peter talked about them in 2 Peter chapter 3, that when people would talk about the second coming of the Lord, they would laugh and say: 'Haha, where is the promise of His coming? You've been talking about this for years, but it has never happened!'. Don't laugh at God's promises - as one has said: 'God's wheel grinds exceedingly slow, yet it grinds exceedingly sure'.

I read a story about a rattle necklace that was found in South America some years ago, and in it was a seed that was 600 years old. Whoever found the necklace broke it open and took out the seed, and they planted it. In 1968 that seed had grown into an over 6 foot tree, and it also blossomed. It was 600 years old, but when it was put in the ground it did what it was created to do. God's promises may be thousands of years old, that doesn't matter, it doesn't dilute them - they will come to pass! Indeed, Jesus said: 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away'. God's purposes shall ripen fast, don't you laugh at God's message, don't you laugh at the fact that you're a sinner, don't laugh that judgment is coming!

Can I ask you a question: you might be laughing, but what if you're wrong? Is it not reasonable that you should consider this possibility, that you might be wrong in your assumptions of atheism or agnosticism or whatever they may be. The inevitability is, as God's word says: if you're laughing, God one day will have the last laugh.

Some laughed, some lingered - verse 16: 'while they lingered, the angels laid hold upon their hand'. Linger is procrastination - that's a big word, it just means putting things off. It's well known, the saying 'Procrastination is the thief of time', it would be better said 'Procrastination is the thief of souls'. How many people are in hell tonight because they put off the matter of their soul's salvation? I remember hearing preachers saying: 'Don't put it off till tomorrow, because tomorrow never comes'. I used to think: 'Where did they go to school? Tomorrow never comes? That doesn't make sense' - but it does! You see, when you keep putting something off until tomorrow, when tomorrow comes it becomes today, and then you say: 'Well, tomorrow...' - and then tomorrow it becomes 'Tomorrow', and it never becomes today. The poet put it like this:

"Tomorrow" he promised his conscience,
 Tomorrow I mean to believe.
 Tomorrow I'll think as I ought to,
 Tomorrow the Saviour receive.
 Tomorrow I'll conquer the habits
 That hold me from Heaven away
 But ever his conscience repeated
 One word, and one only--"Today!"

Tomorrow! Tomorrow! Tomorrow!
 Thus, day after day it went on
 Tomorrow! Tomorrow! Tomorrow!

'Till youth like a vision had gone,
'Till age and his passions had written
The message of fate on his brow,
And forth from the shadows came Death
With the pitiless syllable, "Now!"

Thank God the angels pulled Lot and his wife out of their lingering. He pulled them through, my friend: will you be pulled through tonight? Will you realise the danger you're in? Will you realise that judgment's ahead? Will you realise that Jesus is coming soon? Will you realise the offer of mercy and grace that God's Son has purchased for you on the cross? Will you be pulled through by that love?

Some laughed, some lingered, and some looked back. We read in verse 26 that Lot's wife: 'looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt'. Do you know there's two things that the Lord Jesus on the earth told us to remember: the first was when He took bread and the cup and instituted the Lord's Supper, He says 'This do in remembrance of me'. Do you know what the other thing was? He said: 'Remember Lot's wife'. Remembering His death, that's the most important thing, but the other thing is to remember not to lose your soul. This is what happened, this woman looked back, the look of her eyes was towards the direction of her heart. She left her heart with her treasures, with her house, with her clothes in the burning city. That's what the Lord said: 'Where your treasure is, there shall your heart be also'. She may have been pulled out of Sodom by angels, but Sodom hadn't been pulled out of her!

The angels pulled her out. Imagine this: the hand of God had been upon her conscience and been upon her heart, yet this woman perished. If ever there was a story that teaches us that you can't have the Saviour and have your sin as well, it's this one! This was superficial salvation: she was out of Sodom, but Sodom wasn't out of her heart. God's word says that if you put your hand to the plough - I don't care what you say or what you do - and you turn back, it's not of God. The parable of the sower tells of the seed, and it went into the shallow ground and it didn't get any root, then when the sun came it got scorched. Another one, where the thorns and the thistles came round it and choked it, the cares and the riches of this world, sinfulness, hardship, trials - so many people confess Christ, and a couple of weeks later they're gone! My friend, that's not salvation! Don't be looking back. Are you thinking you're a backslider tonight? Or you're just going through a wee blip? Would you ever consider the fact that you might never be saved at all?

Some laughed and lingered and looked back, the sad thing is that the woman that looked back endured the same judgment as those in Sodom. The Bible said she turned back at the gate of Zoar, she was just a few steps away from salvation. My friend, it's one thing to live an ungodly life as a homosexual or as an immoral person, and to die an ungodly death; but it's another thing to stand at the gate of heaven and end up in an eternal hell. Do you realise that there is a way to hell from the very gate of heaven?

How sudden was her judgment, in the very act of her sin, she didn't even have time to get a glimpse of her wee house, and God judged her! Imagine if, in the next sin that you were going to commit, your favourite sin, your titbit sin, if God judged you, or if Christ came! Just like the rest she was lost. Those people in Sodom, most of them were unmoved and apathetic, Jesus said that in their day 'they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded' - that was the majority, and it's still the majority today. People are just getting on with their life, and they don't want to know about Jesus Christ - is that you, my friend? You're just going through the routine, day after day, and life is dripping through your fingertips and you don't notice it. You're just trying to get the day through and the night through, and a week's work done - but one of these days, my friend, Jesus is going to come; one of these days your soul will be required of you.

There were those who were lost, but praise God there were those who left. They listened to God's message: 'Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed'. My friend, hear God's word tonight, turn your back on your sin, and get up Calvary's mountain and get to the foot of the cross where that precious blood is flowing for your forgiveness, and be delivered, be cleansed, be made whole! Escape for thy life! May you at least have

that similarity with Lot of old this evening.

Let's all bow our heads. Now the Lord Jesus has been speaking to you this evening, and I don't know whether you know that, but He knows it. I hope that you're waking up to that fact, and you're hearing the divine message that God has for you. He has shown you your sin. You mightn't be a homosexual, but I tell you what: there's as much sin in any of our hearts to damn us for all eternity, even one sin would do that. Whatever you have done, praise God, though judgment will be upon you, and is upon you perhaps, there's a message of grace and pardon for you if you'd only take it by faith. My friend, I can't do that for you, you've got to heed the warning, repent of your sin, and trust the Saviour who died for you. Do it where you are just now, just say from your heart: 'Lord, I have sinned and I deserve Your judgment, but I thank You that the Lord Jesus died for me, and because of Him I want You to save me. Save me from the judgment to come, cleanse me and make me whole'.

If you hear His voice, harden not your heart. None of us know what a day, even an hour brings forth. None of us know what this night will bring, only God - but my friend, you can know, whatever it brings, that your soul is safe in the Lord Jesus. Take that step, Jesus is calling, get up and come away from your sin, and come to Him.

Lord we pray, we plead in the name of our Lord Jesus, that tonight - just as those angels of God pulled that family from Sodom - that tonight the Holy Spirit of God would bring people into the fold, would compel them to come in. O God, we cannot do it, we have discharged our responsibility in the message, Lord, it is over to You. O God, do the work that no man can do, that no one can do for themselves, and save from sin and judgment, and make a life whole in the Lord Jesus. For His glory we pray, and with His blessing we ask that we should go, Amen.

"The Nature And Attainment Of Blessedness"

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Psalm 32 is our reading this evening, this is a well-known Psalm to many believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a real blessing to us in our own personal devotions as we meditate on it and meditate upon the blessings that we receive in the Lord Jesus through the Gospel. But I'll be applying it to those who are without Christ this evening, but I'm sure everyone, hopefully, will get a blessing from the great eternal truths that are within this Psalm of David.

Verse 1: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah. 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. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart".

I want to speak to you this evening from this Psalm on 'The Nature and Attainment of Blessedness', or to put it into modern day language: what blessedness is, and how to get it. Of course, 'blessed' is the first word of this Psalm in verse 1: 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered'. Now 'blessedness' is a Bible word - what does it mean? Well, if you asked Tom, Dick or Harry walking down Templemore Avenue this evening, they would probably say: 'Well, it's blessed to have good health. You're blessed if you're fit and well and of sound mind', or they might say 'Well, you're blessed if you have a few pounds rubbing together in your pocket, if you have wealth that's a blessing'. Maybe you're talented, you've a great gift musically or academically, or maybe it's some other ability that you might have, and they define blessing as having good looks or intelligence or personality, or maybe it's having a family or experiencing a love relationship of some kind - that is what it is in the modern man's mind to be blessed.

Now seeing as 'blessedness' or 'blessed' is a Bible word, we do well in going to the Bible to find out its definition. Some translations, modern day translations, translate 'blessedness' as 'happiness'. I know what they're getting at, but 'happiness' is not a sufficient word in our English language to describe 'blessedness' in the biblical sense. Whilst those who are blessed are definitely, I'm sure, happy; those who are happy are not always blessed. Many people in our world find happiness in wealth and in health, and in love and in talents and intelligence, and so on. In fact, some people can be extremely happy, and testify to being such, in the most sinful and depraved lifestyles. In fact, the actual meaning of the Anglo-Saxon word 'happiness', if you split it in half it is comprised of two expressions: 'hap', 'ness'. The inference is that your disposition of joy is determined by 'happeningness', by circumstances. Therefore, the inference is that you can only be happy when circumstances are going for you.

Now that creates a real problem for every human being, because you can only be happy, therefore, when your circumstances are conducive to happiness - in other words, when things are going well for

you. That adds a great responsibility upon us - why? Because we feel, therefore, that we ought to try, at least, to control our circumstances in order to find happiness: to always be healthy, to try and get wealthy, to acquire a talent or intelligence. Whilst there's nothing wrong with those things in and of themselves, if we think that we need to strive toward them, or even control our circumstances and find them, well, we're being deceived and deceiving ourselves. You see, we cannot, and therefore anyone who simply seeks happiness in the happenings and circumstances of life is destined to a life of futility, a life of frustration, and eventually - sadly for some - a life of suicidal despair.

I believe that 21st-century man's holy grail is happiness, happiness being in circumstances. Whereas what the Bible teaches as true satisfaction does not come from modern man's idea of happiness, but from blessedness. 'What's the difference?', you say. Well, blessedness, according to the Bible, is to be found in God and in God alone. It literally means 'the favour', or 'the approval' of God. This, therefore, is something, obviously, that transcends our circumstances, because God is above our circumstances and our puny lives. Therefore, if it is above us, it does not change with the winds of time and sense and circumstance. To be blessed of God means that the anchor of your soul is in the grip of the Almighty.

I wonder this evening, is your hand in hand of God? Is your soul and your life rooted in God? Therefore, man should not be asking the question: 'Am I happy?', but rather asking 'Am I blessed?' - for it's only in being blessed that I can be truly, eternally satisfied. Now I know immediately, when I start talking like this on this particular point, I'm going to lose many listeners in our world today. Whilst it is true, as we said, that man seeks happiness almost at any cost, and arguably even one who takes his own life does it to gain an absent happiness and satisfaction that he feels he cannot attain in life, so he must look for it in death. But once you tell a man, even who is seeking, as his holy grail, happiness, that he cannot find true satisfaction in the circumstances of life, and that he cannot find it apart from God, right away he's offended - isn't that interesting? He may even object by saying: 'True happiness for me doesn't include God'. That's why, although most men think that they would like to go to heaven, they wouldn't like it if they got to heaven because they don't want anything to do with God whatsoever!

Whilst it seems that every man or woman has a perennial crusade to find happiness, the Scriptures are vindicated when they teach this truth that there is none that seeks after God, they're all gone out of the way, they are all together become unprofitable. You see very quickly how sin has warped the judgment of mankind. The very thing that he gives his life to find, he will not seek it in the very place it can be found. Why? Because it is to be found in God, and contrary to popular opinion: men and women do not want God. Oh, there's a great deal said about bigotry and prejudice in our day, and much of it is valid - yet you'll never see on BBC1 news at 10 o'clock the greatest prejudice and bigotry that mankind has, whatever colour, creed, or culture they come from - that is a bigotry and prejudice towards the eternal Almighty Living God.

If you're one of those this evening who is attempting to find happiness in sin, in self, the things of this world, even your own righteousness or a Christ-less religion - Protestant, Roman Catholic, it matters not - oh tonight, that God's Spirit would reveal to you through the written word your folly, to see as the hymnwriter has said:

'Now none but Christ can satisfy,
None other name for me;
There's love, and life, and lasting joy,
Lord Jesus, found in Thee' - and found in Christ alone!

I wonder is there one here this evening who has been brought to the awareness that the way of the transgressor is not happy, but it is hard - that true satisfaction is not to be found in the circumstances of life, but in the blessedness of God. Perhaps the Spirit of God has led you here this evening to learn how true blessedness can be achieved, what it really is, and how you can get it. We began this evening with a Bible word, 'blessed'. In the first five verses of this Psalm 32, there are six ideas that can be classified in six wonderfully descriptive words, all capturing aspects of how we can be blessed by God through the Gospel of Christ.

Now may I just address Christians in passing for a moment, because Christians in this age in which we

live have dropped many of these words that are based on Biblical doctrine. But I warn you: because if you lose your language, it's not long before you lose your identity. Whilst we don't want to be a people that are continually tripping out cliches that people don't understand and we don't explain them, the fact of the matter is: if you lose your language, eventually you will lose your identity - that means you will lose who you are and what you have in Christ. I picked up a very modern translation of the Bible recently, a contemporary one, and on the back of it the little quip advertising it was: 'Finally, a Bible that is like your newspaper that you read every morning. There's no religious jargon, no theological words in this Bible, you can understand it completely'. Well, I don't want a Bible like that, like my newspaper - especially some of the newspapers people read today! I want a Bible that tells me something different. Yes, you've got to understand your Bible, that's true, but there's something different that God is telling man that is God's revealed will that you cannot find in, and it cannot read like any ordinary book.

That's why today, when you ask some Christians, especially among the young, to explain their salvation; there is not only an absence of these biblical words, but of the ideas - and that's what I fear most. So let's not lose them, always explain them and apply them, for there lies therein the secret to blessedness. What is it? Verse 1: forgiveness - there's the first word: 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven'. Forgiveness gives you blessedness. What is 'transgression'? 'Transgression' literally means 'a crossing over of the line', to cross over the line - we even use it as an expression today: 'You've crossed over the line, you've gone too far'. What the Psalmist is describing here is how God has given us His laws in the ten commandments, you know many of them, but David himself actually as he writes this Psalm is conscious in his own soul that he has broken three of those commandments that God has given. He committed adultery with Bathsheba. He killed off her husband Uriah in a battle by putting him on the front line, and thirdly he tried to hide his sin by deceit. Right away: 'Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not bear false witness'. He broke 'Thou shalt not covet', number 10 as well. In fact, God's word says in the book of James chapter 2 that if we keep God's whole law, yet offend in one point, we're guilty of them all. So one sin is enough to make us a transgressor.

I would love if you could put your hand up tonight, if you were able and man enough to admit that you'd never ever sinned - but right away I would tell you that you're a liar, because no man can say that he has not sinned except the Lord Jesus Christ. But forgiveness brings blessedness: 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven'. Another word you could use to describe what forgiveness is is 'justification'. It's a legal word, it actually means 'an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardons all sins and accepts us as righteous'. Imagine this: you're standing in God's dock, in the court of heaven, and you're accused of transgressions of God's sovereign, holy law. God is just in His condemnation of you, He is right to judge you for you have sinned, like all have sinned - but then you, a sinner, are declared righteous by God Himself; so that Paul can say in Romans 8:33: 'Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth'.

Is there anything that this world could give that could possibly compare to the sheer joy, the tranquil peace, that comes from knowing your sins forgiven? What sins are you guilty of this evening? David was guilty of murder, adultery, lying, deceit, covetousness. He had put other things and ones before God. You're guilty of sin this evening of deepest dye. Maybe you don't esteem your sin as bad as even David's, but praise God it doesn't matter how great your sin is, God's forgiveness can wipe it away. Is there someone here this evening haunted by memories, skeletons in your cupboard, things that you wish you could put the clock back to undo, but you can't? You can't forget them, they trouble you - those are the things that you remember, what about the things that you've forgotten? We've all got sins that we cannot conjure up, because there are so many in our lives, they heap up to heaven, there's a great list of offences to our name in the book of God. But what a joy to proclaim tonight the Gospel of God's forgiveness: 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven'.

Shelia O'Callaghan was a Belfast girl, a factory worker, and she contracted tuberculosis. She had to leave work, and so her colleagues put the hat round and raised a bit of money to send her to the Giant's Causeway to recuperate in the fresh air. But they didn't know that TB wasn't her biggest problem, because she was under the conviction of sin - she realised how guilty she was in the eyes of God for breaking His law. As she sat on one of those rocks at the Giant's Causeway, she was reading

the prophecy of Micah. The problem of her sin and what she was like in the face of God troubled her, and she was asking the question: 'How can my sin be removed?', and she read in the book of Micah: 'I will cast all your sins in the depths of the sea'. What a message! She was converted, three weeks later she died, but before she died she took up her pen and wrote this poem:

'I will cast in the depths of the fathomless sea
 All thy sins and transgressions, whatever they be,
 Though they mount up to heaven, though they sink down to hell
 They shall fall in the depths, and above them shall swell
 All the waves My mercy, so boundless and free,
 I will cast all your sins in the depths of the sea'.

We sang it: 'Happy day! Happy day! When Jesus washed my sins away!'. Now, for some that's too simplistic, that's unrealistic, irrational. 'If we are sinners as you say we are, how can God just justify and freely forgive?' - my friend, freely to you does not mean without cost to Him. 'Freely' does not mean 'cheaply' - what do you mean? Well, look at verse 1 again: 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered'. In order for a man to be justified his sin must be covered over. The word for that is the word 'atonement', that's what it literally means 'to cover over'. Where does this atonement come from? Well, we go right to the very beginning of the Bible and we find there that without the shedding of blood there is no remission, or no forgiveness of sins. It takes blood to cover over sin, but the blood of bulls and goats in the Old Testament were only pointing forward to a perfect sacrifice in the person of Christ. The book of Hebrews portrays that when it says that the blood of bulls and goats, or any other man, cannot take away sin - it had to be God's Son.

That's what the cross is all about, atonement. 'Why had it to be God's Son?', you say. Well, in order to reconcile man to God, it had to be a man that atoned for sin - for if it was not a man, he couldn't be punished for man's sins as guilty, he couldn't be man's saviour. But equally, if He was not God, He could not have borne up under the great wrath of God - you or I couldn't have endured it, and even if we could, our sufferings would not have been infinite, for He was the eternal Son of God. We could not have satisfied God, for we were not perfect in life or in death, but Hebrews tells us in a great conclusion that our God has wrought for us an eternal redemption. That is why Paul said: 'We preach Christ crucified'. Paul would have nothing else preached among the Corinthians.

In other words, whatever clergyman or preacher tells you that you can work your way to heaven with a good life, he's a liar inspired by the devil. You cannot get to heaven through good works, you cannot get to heaven through church affiliation, you cannot get to heaven through sacraments, you cannot get to heaven through your own character - something must cover your sins before the eyes of God, and the only thing worthy and able to cover them is the blood of Christ. He alone can bring you to God. You can only be satisfied and blessed with the forgiveness of sins through the work of Christ on the cross. Colossians said: 'He has made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself'. It says again: 'We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins'.

So I ask you tonight: what are you relying on for your salvation? What are you relying on for forgiveness? Is it the word of a priest? The absolution of a vicar? Is it your own penance? Is it good works? My friend, Isaiah says all these things are as filthy rags in the sight of God. How would you like to go into God's presence covered in filthy rags? What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

I love the book of Pilgrim's Progress, I would encourage every one of you to read it. It's an allegory of the Christian experience of salvation right through to entering into heaven. He portrays this man, Christian is his name, as Pilgrim, John Bunyan is the writer. This man Pilgrim journeys from the City of Destruction to the New Jerusalem, the Celestial City. On his way he feels through guilt and conscience the burden of his sin on his back, and the whole message of the story is really following this man to a place where he can get rid of this burden, and eventually then enter into heaven. Cutting a long story short, eventually he's pointed to a hill where there is the cross of Calvary, the place of atonement. As he gets up that hill with the burden on his back, he is heard to say:

'Thus far I did come laden with my sin;
 Nor could aught else ease the grief that I was in
 Till I came hither: What a place is this!
 Must this be the beginning of my bliss?
 Must here the Burden fall from off my back?
 Must here the strings that bound me crack?
 Blest Cross! blest Sepulchre! blest rather be
 The Man that there was put to shame for me'.

The place of atonement - but my friend, David shows us deeper into the heart of the cross, for blessedness is to be found in forgiveness that atonement brings, but it comes through imputation. Verse 2: 'Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity'. 'What does imputation mean?', you say. Well, it's an old word for bookkeeping, for something to be put on account. You've heard children saying as they play their little games: 'Ah, well, that doesn't count any more, you're out' - that's the idea. Blessed is the man of whom God can say: 'That doesn't count any more, those sins are all gone'.

Now this is the personal aspect of Calvary to you: your sin imputed to Christ. This is the great exchange, where on Calvary's cross God is attributing to Christ your guilt, it was ascribed to Him as if it was His own, though He did no sin. God, accordingly, in those three hours of darkness punished Christ for your sin. But the great transaction is that as the account has been given to Him of your sin, His account of righteousness that He lived before God all of His life, His eternal righteousness as the Son of God, is attributed to you by faith. Glory to His name, what a glorious fact: that through faith in Him, His righteousness can be regarded as your own - so that now, when God looks on a man or woman, or a boy or a girl who has put their faith in Christ and Christ on the cross, He no longer sees your sin, He sees Christ's pure, spotless, holy righteousness. That is what gives us confidence to approach God in all His holiness.

What blessings are these! Some will maybe say: 'That's a doctrine of licence' - some people are very clever in their answers. They say: 'Aye, God forgives you, God wipes the slate clean freely, you don't have to work for it and you can live as you like' - some believe that that's what the evangelical message consists of, and I concur with you a little bit that sometimes that's what it sounds like. But Paul asks the same question in Romans chapter 6: 'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer to sin?'. How could you live in the sins that Christ died for if you have received the salvation that comes from Calvary's cross?

But apart from that, true blessedness is not just found in forgiveness, and atonement, and imputation, but it's found in repentance. Look at verse 2: 'Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile' - no deceitfulness, in whose spirit there is an absence of sin. All of us have sinned, and none of us can get away from it, even those who are saved the longest, until we get to glory - but what David is expressing here is that true blessedness is not only found in forgiveness for past sins, but in a changed life in the present and for the future. God gives a new nature, His nature - we were singing about it at the beginning of our meeting - when God's life comes into us by the new birth, and the things that we used to love as sinners we now begin to hate and loathe. Though we get tripped up from time to time, we hate it, and we try to get away from it by the help of God's grace. We begin to love righteousness and the things that, perhaps, before we hated.

Blessedness is to be found in true repentance, a willingness to forsake and turn from sin, and turn to God and His righteousness. You might say: 'Well, I can't do that' - I'm continually saying I know you can't do that, that's the first step to realising your humility and inability before God. Realise that repentance is a gift of grace that God gives you if you come to Him and show to Him your need! There must be a willingness, a frame of mind to receive it, you must be willing to forsake the sin that damns you!

Blessedness is to be found in forgiveness, atonement, imputation, repentance, and fifthly conviction. Verses 3 and 4, David says concerning his sin: 'When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my

roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah'. Guilt is to the conscience what pain is to the body. Have you ever felt guilty for your sin, the pains of the soul? Have you experienced this? He's saying literally: 'My body wasted away through my groaning, my vitality drained away as the fervent heat of summer. Thy hand was heavy upon me'. Do you feel that God's hand is heavy on you tonight in conviction of sin? Oh, there's not too many experience this today, yet God is striving with a few - and I've had the privilege of being with some in recent days whose sins were weighing heavily upon them. They felt the weight of their sins, and the guilt was so heavy that they just wanted to get rid of it.

There's a little word after these two verses 4 and 5, 'Selah', which literally is an expression - we don't know whether it's a musical rendition in the midst, or just a pause in the Psalm - but what it is there for is in order to make us stop, and to think about what he's said. I'm asking you to think about this tonight: the guilt that is on you as a sinner without Christ, you're condemned, you're on your way to hell. Are you not feeling like this man at this moment? Groaning within, saying like Pilgrim: 'Oh, what shall I do?'. So many are apathetic, so much nonchalance in their attitude to salvation - 'What do I do?', that's what you need to say! You're in trouble!

Do what the Psalmist did if you want to be blessed by the forgiveness of sin, this is the sixth and final word - verse 5, confession: 'I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin'. Do you know what confession is? It's to agree with God, put up your hands and say: 'Lord, You're right in Your assessment of me as a sinner, in Your just decision to damn me as one. The sins that I have committed and the punishment that I deserve, I freely admit that it should all be mine' - and you don't hide anything, for God knows, you can't hide from God! He is the discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. David said: 'I did not hide my sin', are you hiding sins this evening?

What is implied within that word 'hide' is that he made an open confession of his sin, there was restitution. What does that mean? Like Zaccaheus who was a thief and a pilferer as a taxman - he, after his conversion, said that he was going to restore fourfold all that he had stolen. The Philippian jailer, after he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, he took Paul and Silas who he had whipped to shreds, and he bathed their wounds, he cleaned them and clothed them in his own home. He made right the wrongs of his life, practically that's what happens - but that's where great blessedness is attributed from.

You might say to me tonight: 'David, I want this! I cannot find happiness in the circumstances of life, I need God's blessedness, God's favour. I need forgiveness, I need my sins atoned for, I need the righteousness of Christ imputed to me, I need to repent of my sins, I need conviction for my sins, I need to confess my sins - how do I receive this blessedness?'. Can I put it in five short points at the end of this Psalm. Verse 6: pray for it. Come to God tonight: 'This shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found'. Have you ever prayed to God about this? Come to Him by faith tonight and say: 'Lord, I am a sinner. Lord, I need to repent of my sin, and I haven't got the will or the power - but, Lord, help me'.

Verse 7 tells you secondly to take refuge in the Saviour: 'Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance', or salvation. Take refuge in the Saviour's bleeding side, in His wounds that He shed blood for you from. Thirdly, verses 8 and 9, surrender to His will: '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'. Submit to the will of God, surrender and give Him your whole life.

But my friend, the fourth point is: beware of ignoring or neglecting this matter this evening. Verse 10 says: 'Many sorrows shall be to the wicked'. If you leave this matter aside and contemplate it another time, and procrastinate when you feel God's conviction and the necessity of the futility of your life, and the need for salvation - my friend, there's a danger if you neglect it. You will add sorrow upon sorrow upon your present condition. The simple message is in verse 11, trust and be blessed: 'Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart'.

What is true blessedness? Its nature is simply found in God and His Christ, and you can't get it anywhere else my friend. The sooner you come to that conclusion, the better it will be for you. How do I get it? It comes to you by the free favour of God, but if you embrace, by faith, the Gospel of Christ tonight, and say: 'Lord, I repent. Lord, I confess. Lord, I believe the Lord Jesus is the only One who can save me. Lord, take my life, I surrender to Your will and Christ as Lord. Save me and make me Your child, and give me Your new nature' - hallelujah, you will be blessed! For 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered'.

If God has been speaking to your soul through the word, get right with God now. Is it not a wonderful thing to you this evening that pardon and forgiveness are ready for you now, by faith, if you will have it.

Our Father, we pray this evening that men and women and boys and girls will take up the free offer of the Gospel. Lord, we pray that they would realise the price that was paid for redemption, the cost it was to Thee as God, and to Thy Son the Lord Jesus - what their sin cost Thee. But yet, still in grace, Thou art willing, able and ready to receive sinful men. O Lord, may that matchless grace be focused in peoples minds and hearts, and be received with willingness, repentance, thankfulness and faith to their eternal good and blessedness, we pray. Blessed are they that die in the Lord - O Lord, we pray that all may be ready to die in that blessedness tonight, for Jesus' sake and for His glory we pray, Amen.

"The Devil Undone!"

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Just now we're going to read the Scriptures together, Luke's Gospel chapter 8 is the portion that I want you to turn with me to. It's a well-known story, perhaps not as well-known from Luke chapter 8, but nevertheless it's the same story all through: the demoniac of Gadara. I have preached on this before, not from this passage, I'm sure I'll preach on it a hundred times more - so I make no apology for that, it's one of the greatest passages of Scripture to preach the gospel from.

We're going to begin reading from verse 26 of chapter 8 of Luke's Gospel: "And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. And when he went forth to land, there met him", that is met the Lord Jesus, "out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not. (For the Lord Jesus had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.) And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep. And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them", He allowed them. "Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked. When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country. Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid. They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear: and he went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with the Lord Jesus: but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him. And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him: for they were all waiting for him".

Let's pray together before we hear God's word: Father, we're coming in the name of the Lord Jesus, and we want to get to Calvary's cross and to that foot where redemption is complete, where sins can be forgiven, where mercy meets the judgment of God's wrath, where sinners can be emancipated, delivered. Lord, get us there, we pray. Bind the strongman in this house, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and may the power of His precious blood that He shed on the cross be manifested in our midst tonight. In His name we pray, Amen.

My title this evening is: 'The Devil Undone!'. A number of years ago there was a book written entitled 'Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth', and we would do well to ask the question, especially in our contemporary society today: is he, or at least do we believe that he is? One side effect of atheism is also the disbelief in the devil, and many people who don't believe in God or the supernatural or miracles, also do not believe in the devil, a personality called 'Satan'. Even men of the cloth, sadly today, don't believe in the devil any more. That should not surprise us - they seem to not believe in very much that's in the Bible any more, but rather some of them say: 'Well, the devil or Satan is a personification of all evil' - we're to interpret him as a metaphor, as it were, of evil, a principle or force of wrong in our world, the inhumanity that is in all of us. Often it is seen as irresponsible to put it onto another person called Satan and blame him for everything. Now we're not doing that, we're saying that

we are intrinsically evil as well, we are fallen creatures before God - but yet there is, we believe the Bible teaches, a person called Satan, the devil.

Just to illustrate to you how things have changed today regarding this: 'White witches', so-called, a pagan religion I think it's classified as today, they testify as well that there's no such entity as Satan - at least as the Bible portrays him to be - but we're surrounded in nature by 'forces', or they might call it 'spirits', and we can manipulate them to get our will, to bless others, sometimes to curse others, sometimes to entrance others - but there is not actually a person out there that the Bible describes as being the devil. This is the trend of belief that is around today, that Satan is not a personality, that he's not a being that is organising and orchestrating among his minions of principalities and powers - just other words for demons - his evil way upon this world.

I ask you the question: what greater tactic could Satan have than to convince people that he isn't there? Of course, he is described by the Lord Jesus Himself as a liar from the beginning, and of course the Lord Jesus taught that he was an actual person. He said: 'I saw Satan falling from heaven like lightning'. Satan today is doing exactly what he always did. Jesus said he was a liar from the beginning, and in the beginning, when we go into the Garden of Eden at the beginning of the book of Genesis, we see that he deceived our first parents, Adam and Eve, as well - just as he's deceiving people today. God spoke His word to Adam and Eve, He said: 'Of all of the trees of the garden you may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die'. So Satan comes along and says: 'Has God really said that?', he begins to doubt God's word - but ultimately, in coming in this way to our first parents in the Garden, he's claiming to be their greatest guardian of welfare. 'I'll look after you better than God does! I'll give you more than God will! God is trying to disenfranchise you from the greatest things that are out there, but if you do what God has told you not to do, you'll be like gods!' - and of course, they believed the lie.

Man today is still believing the lie, and many people have signed their souls, the keeping, the guardianship and stewardship of their souls over to Satan. What I want to do tonight is to warn you lest you do the same, from the account of this man's life. Here's the first thing that I want to share with you this evening: first of all, what the devil had done to him, this man in Gadara; and what the devil will do to you as well. Now I'm sure at the beginning of this man's life, when he started to dance with the devil, as it were, that things were exhilarating, things were exciting. I don't know how his courtship with Satan started in the early days, it may have been that Satan gave him some special powers so he was able to charm, maybe he had a special knowledge that he thought he could see into the future. I don't know what it was, perhaps it was just simply the pleasures of sin - maybe it wasn't supernatural, but the devil give him some kind of a buzz through the activities that he was dabbling in. Whatever it was, though that may have been the beginning, and often is with people who flirt with Satan, it wasn't long before first of all, we see in verse 27, the devil had stripped him.

We read of this man, and I want you to note this in verse 27, that when the Lord Jesus met him coming out of the city he wore no clothes. Now I believe that can speak to of us of three things. It speaks to us of many things, but this is one I want to bring to you this evening: physically the devil had stripped him of his clothes - what is that? The devil had stripped him of his dignity. Now that is what the devil wants to do with men and women, he did it from the beginning and he's doing it today: he's stripping men and women of dignity. Whether it's through alcohol, or drug abuse, or sexual promiscuity, it all has this effect - your dignity goes.

Now we don't believe the Bible teaches the theory of evolution, it's a lie of the devil as well: God created everything. But it's no wonder to me that people in our modern age are believing evolution, because men and women, and even teenagers and children, are behaving like animals, like beasts - and nakedness is an association with this, lack of dignity, lack of humanity. I have to be careful what I say tonight because there are children in the building, but you can hardly go out the front door without seeing nakedness somewhere - whether it's on a billboard, or on the side of a bus, it's everywhere! It's a sign that Satan is stripping our society of its dignity. Maybe you have been stripped by drink of your dignity, when the drink is in the wit is out. Maybe it's drug abuse, or maybe it's even sexual promiscuity and literal nakedness - you could find yourself stripped of your virginity. It can also speak of poverty in any way, and all of these things will strip you of welfare in any shape or form: financially

or morally speaking. That's what the devil wants to do with you.

Then secondly, the devil stripped him personally of his character. What does that speak of? His personality. I don't believe for one moment that the demoniac was born like this, he couldn't have been - and certainly he didn't live most of his life like this in the early days at least. He wasn't always a madman, and madmen aren't always madmen. There's a downward spiral, there's a first step on the road. If you could have brought his schoolmates to him on this hill, this particular day when Jesus was with him, they probably wouldn't have recognised him. This is what Satan wants to do, and this, incidentally, is what sin does to our personality. We can name alcohol, drugs, sexual promiscuity, gambling, we can go over many many moral sins, and all of them have this effect of eventually, as we spend our lifestyles in them, changing our very characters and personalities. That's what the devil wants to do, strip us of our personalities, who we are, our dignity and our actual being.

Then thirdly, the devil stripped him psychologically of his consciousness, or you could say his sobriety - did he know who he was? I'm sure if you had asked him today: 'Who are you?', he probably wouldn't have known. He couldn't have told you his address - you often hear them saying: 'Do you know who the Prime Minister is?', he definitely wouldn't have known who the Prime Minister was! Did he know what he was doing? I very much doubt it, and if he did know what he was doing one thing is for sure: he had no control over it. Psychologically the devil had stripped him of his consciousness, his sobriety. Now you tell me that's not what the devil does with people today - he gets them to a position, at first they think they're in control of their habits and their lifestyle, and before they know it they're out of control. Sometimes they're found in nothing but a drunken stupor, and they can't remember what they've done the night before. That's the devil's plan.

Friend this evening, has the devil stripped you of your dignity, of your personality, of your sobriety? The Bible tells us in the book of Genesis that God made man in His own image, do you know what that means? God made him with dignity, and as God created the heavens and controls them, God made man with control over himself and over all around him. God gave man, above the beasts, reason and rationality. God made man, separating him from the beasts with personality and with self-awareness - and the devil wants to strip man of all of it! Has he stripped you of some of it?

Then secondly the devil had uprooted him, not only had he stripped him, but verse 27 says that he didn't abide in any house. I believe he had been a man who had been uprooted from his home. I don't know whether his mother and father were living, they may well have been - but one thing's for sure, if ever there was a prodigal, this was him. He had left his home country, he had left his home, his father and mother, and now he was living a life that was incredible, I'm sure, to them. How many parents are there - and they don't have to be Christians by the way - but their hearts are breaking because of the lifestyles and the life's paths that their children have chosen? You can go to a drunk lying in the gutter, or go down the centre of town and see those prostitutes standing there, and do you know what they are? They are some mother's son, or some mother's daughter - they used to be the wee baby in the arms and in the pram, and 'Goo-gooing' - but this is what the devil has done to them, and what sin has done to them!

Now I'm not exonerating them from any guilt or responsibility, but can you see where this demoniac was? He grew up as a lovely wee young boy, but he's not there any more. You used to be there, but not any more. The devil uprooted him from his own family, I believe he probably had a wife and children, we read of his own home later on - Jesus tells him to go back to it eventually. The Psalmist on one occasion could say that because of circumstances that had come into his life: 'Lover and friend hast thou put far from me', his nearest and dearest, both friend and lover would not come near him, would have nothing to do with him. This is what sin does: it splits marriages, it makes parents estranged and absent where children have to grow up without a father or without a mother - is that you? Waken up, my friend! This is the devil's strategy, he wants to attack the family.

How would you feel if this was your father? How would you feel if your father was the town drunk? If this was your father, or father if this was your son, or wife if this was your husband, or vice versa - it doesn't matter - how would you feel if they were the laughing stock, a byword, everyone was poking fun and joking about them? Well, he was uprooted from his home, his family, and his society - the

neighbours could do nothing with him. The devil damns some people through their friends, and there's others he has to sever from their friends and their family to do it. Maybe you're like this man: society does not accept any more what you have become, or what you're practising, or what you stand for - you're one of these people that bucks the trend, and because of that you haven't a close friend in the world. Oh, you've people that will rip you off, you've people that will get out of you what they can take for their own ends, but you don't have a real true friend. Can I tell you something: in the beginning God created everything and it was good, and not only was man created in His image, but the family God created and intended to be the centre and nucleus and foundation of all society. What has Satan done? He has come in and he's perverting the family, he's warping husband and wife relationships, he's trying to get gay people to marry, he is bringing abortions where children are being slaughtered in their millions year after year - do you know what he's doing? He's compromising the whole of society!

The devil stripped him, uprooted him, verse 27 tells us the devil was killing him. It was manifest in his lifestyle: he was living in the tombs. Now you can tell me what your lifestyle is like tonight: is it good or is it bad? It's very simple: is it killing you or is it not? In other words, is it bringing you to God or is it the highway to hell? Is it damning your soul? If it's not bringing you to God, it's certainly taking you away from Him! Not only was it manifest in his lifestyle, it was manifest in his tendencies because - we don't read it in Luke, but in Mark 5 we read that this man always, day and night, in mountains and in the tombs, was crying and cutting himself with stones! He was self-harming, he was suicidal, he maybe didn't even know half of what he was doing because of his demons, but he knew this: he hated himself! He was no longer afraid of dying, he was more afraid of living! Is the devil killing you with your lifestyle or with your tendencies?

The devil not only had stripped him, uprooted him and was killing him, but the devil had possessed him. In verse 30 we read that there was a legion of demons, that means thousands. Those devils had entered him, you see devils like to possess men, they like a home to live in - and it's a frightening thing. We see in verse 34 that the farmers that fed these pigs were so frightened when they saw Jesus casting them out of this man into the swine that they ran away. But there are some people, and they're not frightened of the devil, they're morbidly preoccupied and fascinated with the devil. Whether you want to take it from a child's intoxication with Harry Potter, to this movie that will be coming out soon 'The Exorcism of Emily Rose' - I don't know whether it's a true story or not, it doesn't really matter in a sense - but one thing is certain: this phenomenon exists. When you dabble in a small way with the devil, he will take you a little bit further - like a camel going into a tent, once the head is in, it's not long before the whole camel is trying to get in.

The devil possessed him and controlled his behaviour. He bound him by compulsion. Many people are bound by compulsive disorders, and I'm sure there are psychological reasons for some of them, but I'm convinced that there are demonic reasons for a lot of them: fears and habits, anxiety. It's common, in fact it is rife - and the devil is able, oh he's not able to read your mind as such, and he's not able to do all things like God, but he can plant fears and thoughts in your mind and have you continually, 24 hours, chasing your tail, not knowing which end of you is up.

The devil bound him by compulsions in his mind, but he also made him unresponsive to other people's restraints. He had possessed him so strongly that other people couldn't control him, even when they bound him with fetters - he broke free! How could anybody else control him, he couldn't control himself! Is that you? Have you tried to help yourself and you can't, and you've gone to other people to try to help you in this particular area, but they can't - here's the lesson my friend, listen, it's a little chorus that I learned many years ago and some folk will know here tonight:

'Sin will take you farther than you want to go,
Slowly, but wholly, taking control.
Sin will keep you longer than you want to stay,
Sin will cost you far more than you want to pay'.

Do you know why sin is so destructive? Because there's an intelligent, very powerful personality behind it, and that's the devil! Maybe he's got you over a barrel tonight - this man was literally possessed, and I believe there are still those around today who are possessed. Maybe you're not one of them, and you

think this sermon's got nothing to do with you - are you oppressed by the devil or by sin? I think most unconverted people are, even some converted people are oppressed. Maybe you have been dabbling a little bit in things that you don't think are of the devil, you're reading your horoscope every day and you don't realise it, but you're looking to your horoscope more than God as to what's going to happen to you today. Maybe you have even been looking in the tea leaves, or a clairvoyant, or tarot cards, divination of all sorts - even if it's only of the water - it's of the devil.

Oh, I could go on: pendulums and all sorts of things. You hear of these people going and seeing whether their baby is a boy or girl, swinging the pendulum over it. That's of the devil, my friend, and if you have had it done, or you have had charms done, the danger is that the devil can have a foothold in your life. You aren't open yourself up to the devil, because it will affect you. He is the god of this world, he has great power in this system at the moment, and his desire is to blind people's eyes to the light of God's Gospel. It doesn't matter how you've dabbled in the occult or not done, the fact of the matter is: the devil has a foothold in everybody's life that isn't saved. I'm telling you that, now believe me because he's even given a foothold in the lives of some people that are saved! So if you're not saved tonight, you can be sure that he's got a foothold in your life. I want to tell you tonight, and give the lie to the devil's lie: he is a thief, Jesus says in John 10:10, he has come to steal your life, to kill your life, to destroy your life, and the sins that you're presently involved in are the highway to hell for you that the devil is taking you on - do you know why? Because he's going there himself.

Jesus said that hell wasn't prepared for men and women, this everlasting fire was prepared for the devil and his angels. The devil knows he's going there, and though he might be self-deluded to think he can get away with the odd thing now, he wants to damn as many people as possible with him. Friend, don't you think this gives me any pleasure telling you this tonight, if you only knew how hard it is for me to preach on something like this, and how much I struggle with this issue of hell, you probably wouldn't believe me.

What the devil had done to him, he will do for you, be warned - but let me tell you tonight, and this is the good news: what Jesus did for him, He can do for you. This is the story of the Gospel, no matter where you find it: whatever the devil has done to you, Christ can set you free - hallelujah! 'If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, you shall be free indeed' - there's nobody else can tell you that. It's not getting out a pen and paper in a doctor's surgery and writing you a prescription that doesn't work - I'm not against medicine, far from it. I'm not one of these people that tells you: 'Trust God and forget about the tablets', no! But I'll tell you this: what the tablets cannot do, Jesus can do. He can set you free from any of those anxieties, because He, as He said, is the one who came to give us life, and to give us it to the full.

Jesus' word delivered this man, I love this. In verse 29 we read that the Lord 'commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man'. There is power in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Jesus' word delivered him! There's power in the Gospel, that is the word of Christ. In Romans 1:16 Paul said: 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes'. The Greek word for 'power' there is 'dynamus', which is the word we derive the English word 'dynamite' from. The Gospel is the dynamite that blows the devil to hell - hallelujah! The Gospel has the effect that nothing else can - do you believe that?

What Jesus did for him, He can do for you. He can give you His word, the Gospel - and that's what you're hearing tonight: that you can be freed from your sins, and Jesus died for them and paid the penalty for them there, and bore your hell. That's the dynamite that can cast Satan and sin all away in judgment, because He bore the hell that was rightfully yours. Not only is there power in the Gospel of Jesus, there's power in the name of the Lord Jesus. In Acts 3 and verse 6 a man was healed, and we read this: 'Peter said, Silver and gold have I none', he was begging, 'but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk'. There's power in Jesus' name, and there's a day coming, Philippians 2 tells us, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Did we sing tonight:

'In the name of Jesus,
In the name of Jesus.

We have the victory;
In the name of Jesus,
In the name of Jesus,
Demons will have to flee!

Who can tell what God can do?
Who can tell of His love for you?
In the name of Jesus, Jesus,
We have the victory!

The great hymn puts it:

'Jesus! the name high over all,
In hell, or earth, or sky!
Angels and men before it fall,
And devils fear and fly'.

Do you know why it's so powerful? Because Jesus' authority is in His name. In verse 28 of our portion we read that even the devils in a loud voice said: 'Jesus, thou Son of God most high, torment me not'. Isn't that amazing, that the devils knew who He was? The devils knew that He wasn't just a miracle man - don't you believe that for one minute! He's the very Son of God, He's the Holy One of God, He is the Creator of the ends of the earth, God the Son and the Son of God. In Luke chapter 10 verse 17, the disciples rejoiced one day: 'Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name'. There's power in the name of the Lord Jesus, and there's a day coming - because Jesus has now risen from the dead, gone to heaven, He's on the right hand of God, and angels and authorities and powers have been made subject unto Him. He's going to come and He's going to put it all right, He's going to iron out all the creases of humanity that the devil has ruffled and ripped.

Even the demons know who He is, and the Bible says they tremble about it. Oh, are you trembling? Do you know He is the Holy One of God, and there's power in His Gospel, and there's power in His name, and - hallelujah - there's power in His blood? For the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son - the power is in it because of who He is - cleanses us from all sin. Revelation 12 says we can overcome the devil by the blood of the Lamb. Do you know something? Revelation 1 and verse 5 pictures a great throng in heaven, and do you know what they're singing? 'Unto him that loved us, and washed us', or loosed us, 'from our sins in his own blood' - the blood of Christ has power because it can loose us from our sins, because Jesus shed His blood, bearing our sins, taking God's punishment for our sins that should have been ours - but because God loved us and Christ died for us, we can be freed from them through His Gospel, in His name, and by His blood.

Jesus' word delivered him. Hallelujah, we can say tonight, no matter how strong the devil is: Jesus is stronger than Satan, and Satan to Jesus must bow. Secondly, Jesus' work was undeniable, the devil was undone, the work was permanent. In verse 33 the demons were cast out of the man and into the pigs, and they all went down and perished - the demons weren't coming back. Hallelujah! My friend, you can go to AA, and they do a tremendous work, and you can go and get counselling and all the rest, and I don't despise those things - don't misunderstand me, sometimes they're necessary, even when you come to Christ. But I'll tell you this: only Jesus can do a lasting work for time and for eternity, to such an extent that your life can be totally transformed with a permanent undeniable work!

I'll tell you how it was undeniable: not only was it permanent, but it was evident. Verse 35 says that when people went out to see what was done, and came to Jesus, they found the man out of whom the devils were departed sitting at the feet of Jesus. I can imagine this man going home, because Jesus sent him home, I can imagine him walking up Main Street - can you? The whispers starting - the women usually start that! - and there they are in the market whispering away: 'Look who that is! Isn't that your man? That's not your man, it couldn't be - look, he's dressed, he's clean, he's got his marbles. That's not him, it must be his brother or something, come back from a far country'. Then he gets to his home, and he knocks on the wee door, and they haven't seen him in years. The children come running and open the door ajar, and they take one glance and shut it again and run away:

'Mummy! Mummy! Mummy!'. She won't believe them, and then she comes to the door, and she tells him to get out, she doesn't want to see him again! He pleads: 'But it's not the man I used to be, I've been at the feet of Christ, this Man, this miracle Man, this Son of God. I'm free, I'm changed, it's all different!'. His home would have seen his new life, his neighbour would have witnessed the change, and here's why: because he had a new direction, he was at the feet of Jesus!

That's your answer, my friend. You can go to church all you like, and there's nothing wrong with it in a sense, but that will never save your soul nor change your sinful ways. You need a personal encounter by faith with the Lord Jesus, you need to get at His feet - because Jesus' word will deliver you, Jesus' work will be undeniable, it will be permanent, it will be evident in your life. Praise God, Jesus' transformation of this man's life was wonderful! Incredible! Verse 35, look at it, you remember all the ways that the devil had stripped him, and uprooted him, and killed him, and possessed him - it says in verse 35 he was sitting at the feet of Jesus, do you know what that tells me of? Many things, but he was emotionally calm. He was sitting - my, his backside, as we say around these parts, had never lit in a long time - running up and down with all these demonic thoughts going through his head. Maybe you know exactly what I'm talking about, you can hardly sit still you're so tormented! Well, here he is: sitting at the feet of Christ, emotionally calm - would you long for that? Jesus is the One that can give it to you!

He was clothed, he was physically restored. Though he had been stripped of his clothes and stripped of his dignity, the Lord Jesus Christ can give it back to him, and can give it back to you no matter what has been done to you. He can make you purer than the whitest driven snow. We read that he was in his right mind. He was emotionally calm, he was physically restored, and he was mentally subdued - at peace with himself and at peace with the world, because he was at peace with God. He was spiritually enlightened in verse 38 - how do I know that? Do you know what he said? He wanted to stay with the Lord Jesus Christ. He was spiritually enlightened, he knew who He was, and he appreciated the change that had been wrought in his heart. What did he behave like with the Lord Jesus in verse 28? Now I know the demons had a bit to do with it, but he was telling Him to go away! Now he wanted to follow Him!

Can I say to you tonight: the devil is undone, Jesus has defeated him. What the devil did to this man, he can do to you - but, hallelujah, what Jesus did for this man, He can do for you. As the song puts it: 'What He has done for others, He will do for you!'. If you turn from the devil, turn from your sin, and embrace the Saviour tonight, you'll be sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in your right mind.

Lord, help us we pray, we need You. We've needed You all through this meeting, and we need You now to seal Your word and Your work in people's hearts with salvation blessing. O, come by Your Spirit and make new creatures in Christ Jesus, that old things will pass and all things will become new. Lord, we leave it in Your hands tonight, and we pray that the Saviour will be glorified tonight as He was those 2000 years ago with that man sitting at His feet. O, may there be someone at His feet tonight, those nail-pierced feet. For His glory we pray, Amen.

"The Prayer Of The Perishing"

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If you have a Bible or a copy of the New Testament, I want you to turn with me to Matthew's Gospel, the first Gospel, and chapter 8. If you don't have a Bible, don't worry about it, just listen very carefully to the reading of the Scriptures, and remembering of course that this is the word of God, and specifically in the Gospels we have the account of the Lord Jesus' life and many of His sayings. In verse 23 of Matthew 8 we have a great miracle that the Lord Jesus performed as He stills the tempest, but also He stills the hearts of His fearful disciples.

Chapter 8 verse 23: "And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!".

Let us bow just in a moment's prayer: Father, we want to get such a glimpse of Your Son tonight that we will marvel with the disciples at the manner of Man He is, and that someone in this place who has never seen Him in all His wonder of His worth and of His work, would cry out from the depths of their soul: 'Lord, save me, I perish!'. For Christ's sake we pray, Amen.

I want to speak to you this evening on 'The Prayer of the Perishing'. I don't know whether you value it this way, but Christians believe that prayer is a mighty gift from God. Someone has described prayer as the greatest exercise that a human being can engage in. If you imagine, for a moment, what a great privilege it would be to have an audience with Her Majesty the Queen, or with the President of the United States, or another President or potentate of a nation of our world - well, prayer surpasses and transcends all of that because when we pray, we are given an intimate one-to-one audience with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. The miracle of prayer for the Christian is that we don't need to wait, as it were, for a personal invitation or a specific time and appointment, but we're invited to come at all times to the throne of grace, and to obtain grace and mercy to help us in time of need. So, effectively, we can go in and out of the throne room of God any time, wherever we are, and for anything. We find that we have, through the blood of Jesus, an access to God in prayer.

I know that some folk think you have to be in church to pray, or you have to be on your knees to pray, or you have to pray through a priest, or through a saint, or through a prayer book - that's not the case. God's word says very clearly that all of us can avail of this gift of prayer. Not only is prayer a mighty gift from God, but there have been thousands upon thousands of amazing answers to prayer. Many Christians have proven the text Matthew 7 and verse 7, where Jesus said: 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and the door shall be opened unto you'. I could ask this congregation tonight, and they would keep you here the rest of the evening, perhaps the rest of the month, recounting to you stories of how God has answered prayer in their life. It was Alfred Lord Tennyson who wrote in poetry form: 'More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of'. Prayer is a mighty gift from God, and prayer in the life of many many believers has been testified and proved to be real through the answers that it has brought.

Let me say by way of warning this evening - because I'm sure all of us at some stage in our life, no matter how religious we might think ourselves to be, have prayed - that prayer is not a foolproof way of getting our wishes granted. Sometimes that's the way it is perceived. It's like some kind of magic. You pray like a spell, like 'Abracadabra', and something materialises before you - if not now, in a number of days - that you have desired. That is not what prayer is, and God is not a performing genie

who just gives people their requests at the moment they ask Him. We should never ever make the mistake of thinking that in some way we can test God through prayer. God is faithful, and as I've said God has answered prayer many, many times. But we should never think that we can in some way subject God to, if you like, the scientific conditions of a laboratory in order to prove God. Never do that!

Maybe I'm speaking to someone tonight, and that's the way you have behaved towards this gift of prayer. It must be almost a year ago, or just under it, I watched a documentary on Channel 4 and it was entitled 'The Exorcism'. It was the title of this documentary that caught my attention, because they were actually claiming to perform, in the midst of a television studio, a live exorcism of a person who they reputed was possessed of a demon. They put this person, who they considered was understood to be possessed, in laboratory conditions, as it were. They wired him up to computers and monitors and so on. There were psychologists and scientists, doctors and religionists from all sorts of denominations and religious backgrounds. There they had a pastor - who, I would have to say, was very misled to even try this - and they claimed to perform this exorcism. Now I don't know what was more pathetic: the naivete of the pastor who actually believed this man was possessed, or the stupidity of the producers thinking that the Almighty God could be experimented with under laboratory conditions. The man wasn't possessed at all, and the way the pastor was exorcising him wasn't valid - but yet it betrayed this mentality that you can get God, and I say it reverently, like a monkey out of a scientific lab and you can poke Him, and you can inject Him, and you can test Him, and He has to perform through scientific means.

This is why many people are disappointed even in this realm of prayer. Christian or non-Christian, it doesn't matter, they get down on their knees and they ask God for something specific, and God doesn't answer them - and what do they conclude? 'It's all a farce, it's a fairytale! God doesn't work! He's not there! Or at least if He's there, He's not listening to me!'. What people like that, perhaps you, fail to understand is that there are principles to prayer, there are rules and laws like there are in all of life and all of nature and even science. You see, those rules, principles and laws of prayer have to be acknowledged and submitted to and practised, before God can be assured and guaranteed to answer you.

Let me say categorically to you this evening if you're not a Christian: though you have prayed many times, and perhaps even seen some answers to prayer, there is no guarantee whatsoever that God will ever hear the prayer of the impenitent, that means the prayer of a person who has never repented from their sins and embraced Christ as He is freely offered in the Gospel. Now here's why I know that's the case, Hebrews 11 verse 6 tells us: 'Without faith it is impossible to please God. Whoever comes unto God must believe that He is, He exists, and He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him'.

Now He might hear your prayer, and I know all the stories of many unbelievers who have had their prayers answered, but let me say to you tonight: if you're a person who is not a Christian, yet you're praying and expecting an answer to your prayer - answers to unbelievers are exceptions rather than the rule. Whatever you do, my friend, never take the attitude: 'If God answers my prayer, I'll believe in Him' - that's not the way God works! Do not test the Lord your God, rather say: 'I believe in Him', first, and then see what answers God can bring to your prayers in your personal situation.

Praise God, prayer is a mighty gift, and there have been thousands of accounts of how God has answered prayer - but He is not obliged to answer the prayers of those who have not repented of their sins and trusted in the Gospel. Yet let me say tonight, this is where I'm getting to, there is one prayer, there is one prayer prayed sincerely and with penitent faith that God has promised to answer, and that is the perishing prayer. We find it in verse 25 of our text: 'Lord, we perish: save us!'. Some time ago I preached to you from Matthew 14 verse 30, which was the account of where Peter got out of the boat at the invitation of the Lord Jesus. He took his eyes off the Christ, and he put his eyes on the storm and the boisterous waves around him, and he began to sink! He cried: 'Lord, save me!', and that was Peter's perishing prayer - but here's a prayer that all of us can own, because it's attributed to the disciples at large. They cried out: 'Lord, save us: we perish!', and the Lord heard them.

Now I'll tell you: I could finish my sermon here and now, and say to you that where you are at this very moment, if you realise you're a sinner, you know that Christ died to bear your sins and carry them

away, you know He's the only way to get to heaven and home, if you cry unto God where you are and where you sit, He'll hear you and He'll save you. I need do no more work. Romans 10:13 says that: 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved'. The Lord Jesus Himself said in John 6 and 37: 'All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out'. Even now, if you will cry to Him, He'll hear you.

Maybe you're not convinced. Well, let us examine this perishing prayer tonight. First of all I want you to see that it was a desperate prayer. Verse 24: 'There arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves'. It was a desperate prayer. Leonard Ravenhill, a preacher of bygone days, I once heard saying: 'I don't think God answers prayer, He answers desperate prayers'. I think there's a measure of truth in that - why? Because until we feel that God is our only hope, and if we think that there's hope elsewhere - whether in ourselves, our own goodness, our own ability to save ourselves, or in the ability of another, a person or a system, to save us - God will not hear that prayer. The reason why God heard the disciples' prayer was that the Lord Jesus heard them saying that they were perishing, and more or less that He was their only hope. It was a desperate prayer! If He didn't hear them and help them, they were lost.

That's why the Lord sometimes has to get us into desperate situations in life, to get out of us desperate prayers. Maybe your back is to the wall this evening, I don't know whether you find yourself in a desperate situation - but do you know, my friend, that God could be manoeuvring and manipulating in His sovereignty and providence to get you into a desperate situation to get out of you a desperate prayer? These disciples were in a storm, and maybe that's the desperate situation you find yourself in. Maybe it's a storm of sickness, or a storm of sadness, you've been bereaved or a marriage has broken or you've been betrayed. Maybe it's a storm of tragedy, one whom you love has died, maybe a child, maybe a partner, in tragic circumstances. Maybe your storm is failure, failure morally, failure academically, failure in your business, failure in your marriage or in your home life as a father or a mother, or a son or daughter. Maybe your storm is addiction, addiction to drugs, addiction to drink, addiction to gambling, addiction to pornography, addiction to sex - we could go on, and on, and on; there are so many addictions.

Whatever it is: you find yourself in a storm; and if it is the storm of sin you have found that, as the Bible says, the way of the transgressor is hard. You're miserable - oh what a tangled web we weave when we sin, it causes storms because the wages of sin is death. The reason why you're so miserable tonight, whether you want to admit it or not to yourself or others, is because you're living a life without God, and that is a life of sin and its wages is death. The devil gives out those wages, in John 10:10 he is a thief who has come to steal, to kill and destroy. Are you in a storm tonight?

Not only were they in a storm, but their vessel was overwhelmed. We read in verse 24: 'insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves' - and this is the consequences of being in life's storm. Whether it's the storms of life through sickness and bereavement and all the rest, or the storms of sin, there comes a point in your life when you feel that you're at the end of your tether, you're overwhelmed, you can't take any more, you've reached the bottom of the barrel! Are you at that point tonight? You just can't imagine things getting any worse. Now come on: open your heart to God, you know that I'm touching on sore points, and God the Holy Spirit is speaking to your heart, not me. This is the consequence, your little sailboat is starting to fill, and it's starting to sink, and you know it's only going down, and you're despairing because you don't know what to do, you don't know how to get out, you don't know where to turn.

The worst tragedy and consequence of the storms of life is that many people think that to get out of it they should despair of life itself, and choose death rather than life. Many young men in our land are doing that, there's an epidemic of it. The tragedy of that is that the greatest consequence and the greatest storm and overwhelming experience is yet to be, for the book of Hebrews tells us: 'It is appointed unto men once to die' - you can only die once in the physical realm - 'but after this the judgment'. Don't think for one moment that you can get out of your problems by taking your life, the easy way out! No! Indeed in this very chapter, Matthew chapter 8 and verse 12, the Lord Jesus speaking to another man said that there is a place of outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Bible calls it 'hell'. My friend, if you think you're overwhelmed now in the storms

of life, what will the storms of judgment be like in eternity? There's a hell!

I'm asking you: how will it be for you on that day? You see, the Christian can say: 'With Christ in the vessel we can smile at the storm, as we go sailing home' - but you need to ask the question: will your anchor hold in the storms of life, when the clouds unfold their wings of strife? What will happen? Will you be overwhelmed? If you're being overwhelmed now, you will surely be overwhelmed then!

Here's the third thing that caused them to pray desperately: God seemed to be at a distance. In the middle of all this, a storm, and an overwhelming storm at that, God seemed to be as far away as possible. You see, some people think that God's obliged to save them, they don't need to do anything. But you find the characters in this passage, I don't have time to show you them, in chapter 8, at least three of them all came to the Lord Jesus and asked help - even the man that was demon possessed was led to Christ. We find it in these disciples, verse 25, they called unto Christ: 'Lord, save us: we perish'.

You say: 'Well, what's the Lord doing? Is He playing a game of cat and mouse here? He's wanting them to seek Him out, yet He's not being available, He's lying asleep in the boat, He's distant'. My friend, I think the Lord was testing them, He was pushing them into a desperate situation, a desperate position. He wanted them to see and He wanted them to ask for the meeting of their need in Him alone. I'm just wondering tonight where you find yourself? Could it be in your storm, in your overwhelming situation, that the Lord Jesus is taking away His gracious influences from your life to show you what you're like without Him, and how much you need Him? How helpless you are, and how helpless you are without Him - is that maybe why God seems far away to you at the moment? Is that why your life seems pointless?

Can I ask you what you're going to do? Are you going to do what a lot of people do, in your desperation you're going to throw your hands up and say: 'I give up, I'm not going to look for God. There's no hope in prayer or in religion or anything like that, I'm giving up on life and all!?' Or will you turn to the Lord Jesus? Let me show you, this is what the disciples did: they sought the Lord. Even though they couldn't understand or make sense why He seemed distant and ignored their need, they still cried out: 'Lord, save us: we perish'. You see, Christ wanted them to see their need without Him, and seek Him to find their need. Oh, that you could see that tonight. Do you see your need of Him?

But the big question is not only will you see it, but will you search for Him? Joseph Scriven was born near Banbridge, and after he graduated from Trinity College in Dublin, he seemed to be set for a brilliant career and a happy life. He was engaged to be married, but tragedy struck - a storm overwhelmed him. His fiancée was drowned the eve of their wedding, and Joseph, after that moment, was plunged into sorrow. But this tragedy brought him to a personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus - in the midst of his tragedy he sought the Saviour, even though, I'm sure, He seemed to be far away from him. The story of his life goes on: in 1845 he sailed for Canada to start a new life and leave behind him his sorrows, but it was not to be. Ill-health struck him, it dogged him so much it forced him to return home after a couple of months to Ireland. Eventually, after a year or two, he returned to Canada to take up a teaching post. Then he met another young girl, 23 years of age, but that happiness still wasn't to be. He got engaged, and before they could take their marriage vows she was struck down by a deadly illness and passed away. Twice Joseph was plunged into deep depression, but twice Joseph sought the Saviour. When his mother was dying back in Banbridge here in Ireland, it had been 10 years since he'd seen her face, and he wasn't going to see her before she died because he was too ill to travel. He wrote her a poem, and we've just sung it:

'What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!'

Joseph Scriven brought everything: his sins, his sorrows, his sadness to Jesus - and he found in Him a help and a strength. That's what you need to do, that's your problem. I want you to see that it was not only a desperate prayer, it was an urgent prayer - verse 25 - because it was desperate it was urgent,

that's the reason why. I want to ask you tonight how urgent you feel your soul's salvation is? How concerned are you about your eternal soul? The measure of your concern will be your urgency to get saved. If you're not dying to get saved tonight, it's a sure sign that you don't see your sin and the Saviour the way they are. I know God may be distant, and you don't understand a lot about Him - but my friend if you get lost in the midst of a bleak forest in the dead of night, and the darkness seems to be inches away from your nose, and your friends have left you all around the vicinity - what do you do? Do you whisper, or do you cry all the louder for help? You mightn't see God tonight, you mightn't be able to touch Him, you mightn't even feel His presence or His leading in your life, and there are many things you don't understand - my friend, that's all the more cause for you to cry out to Him with urgency!

Their prayer was urgent - why? Because their condition was fatal: 'We perish!'. My friend, you're perishing, you're lost, you're undone! You're without hope because you're without Christ, and if you were to die tonight or the Saviour was to come, you'd be lost forever! Oh to God that you could see it, I can see it, but Christ can see it greater than all of us! Oh, that He would give you a vision of your lostness!

Not only was it urgent because they knew their condition was fatal, but because they knew their only hope was in Christ: 'Lord, save us!'. They didn't turn to the church or Judaism. You see, they hadn't time for that. It was so urgent they went to the One who had the answer. My friend, you can go all you like, but I'll save you a lot of time: go to every religious establishment, denomination, church, religious faith you like, cult, sect; but Christ is the only One who can save your soul forever! He's the only One who is the Son of God, and the only One who has died for sinners.

But I want you to see for your encouragement tonight: not only was it a desperate prayer and an urgent prayer, it wasn't a perfect prayer. They cried out, and the Lord said in verse 26: 'Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?'. Do you know why it wasn't perfect? Because it was a sinner's prayer. You see a lot of people get confused, they think they have to come up to a certain standard before they can reach the Lord, and before the Lord will receive them. They even think that praying a certain way, or a certain amount, or to a certain person, or through a certain church will gain them credit with God - but we see here that the ones that prayed were sinners. The Lord says: 'Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?', and the reason why that is, is because in verse 13 of chapter 9 the Lord Jesus said: 'I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance'. He didn't come and tell you how you could come up to speed with His standards and get yourself squeakyclean to get in through the gate of heaven. He came to save people who knew they were helpless and hopeless without Him, sinners! That's why tonight, my friend, you mightn't feel worthy, you mightn't feel that you can pray the prayers that should be prayed or could be prayed - come as you are! That's what Christ wants!

These disciples were in a desperate situation, they had no time! They couldn't better themselves, they couldn't sit and contemplate what kind of language they were going to speak to Almighty Saviour, they just cried in their desperation their need to God: 'Lord, save us: we perish!'. They're just like the thief on the cross, they hadn't time to get down and clean themselves up morally, and that's why one of them cried out: 'Lord, remember me when you come into Your kingdom', and the Saviour said, 'Today you'll be with me in Paradise'. That's where you need to get this evening, you need to get to Calvary, the cross where Jesus was uplifted and Jesus bled and died for your sins because He loved you, because He wants to make a way back to God through Him for you - so that you might cry out like the thief, seeing your sin on Him...

But my friend, not just seeing your sin on Him, because a lot of people see their sin and they do one of two things: they get dejected because they don't know what to do about it, or they get deluded and they think they can save themselves through religion. Don't you look at your sin, my friend, your sin is on Christ! Look at your sin on Him, not in your heart! If you look down at your boots your head will stay there, but lift your head high to Calvary, and see that your sin and all of its deep dyed immoral depravity was laid on Him - but He is able to save you, that's what you need to see!

Look to the Saviour and see your sin, and the One who can save you from it at the same time. Pray the sinner's prayer - don't come to God and say: 'Now I haven't been a bad church attender, and I've kept

some of the commandments, and I pray at night the Lord's Prayer, and I read the odd Psalm, sometimes the Gospel of John now and again a wee chapter here and there'. My friend, don't you come like that to God. Say: 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling'.

It was a sinner's prayer, but it was also a doubter's prayer. They thought the Lord had forgotten them, is that where you are tonight? You don't just think He's distant, you think He doesn't care - don't ever think that, my friend! The book of Romans says that because of Calvary God gave everything, and if He gave His only Son, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? God wants to give you everything you could ever imagine in Christ - what are you going to let your doubts do? You can let them drive you from God, or you can let them, like the disciples, drive you to God. This wasn't just a sinner's prayer, it was a doubter's prayer - but out of their doubt and their fear, they cried: 'Lord, save us: we perish!'. Will you do that tonight?

Here's another thing that should be an encouragement to every person without the Saviour tonight: it was a prayer of little faith. It was a sinner's prayer, it was a doubter's prayer, and it was a prayer of little faith: 'O ye of little faith', He said to them. You might be here tonight, and there's a lot of questions in your mind and heart, and you don't understand everything, you're confused. I'm not trying to dupe you, you think things through reasonably and rationally - but there was a wee girl in the backroom there the other evening, and she was confused, and she didn't understand absolutely everything about Christianity, but she knew she wanted the Lord Jesus. I explained it like this to her: when a wee baby is born, they come out of the womb, the first thing they do is not turn round to Mummy and Daddy and say: 'Hello, how are you doing, I've been longing to see you'. They don't understand a lot, do they? They don't know an awful lot about life, but who would dispute that they're born? Who would dispute that they have it?

My friend tonight, you mightn't know everything about Christianity, all the questions and problems of this universe, and I don't know them either - but I know this: a wonderful Saviour is Jesus my Lord, and with little faith that you have, if you cry unto Christ, He will save you. He accepted even little faith, that's the mighty fact here. It was not the quantity of the faith that was important, but the quality of the One in whom the faith was exercised. In verse 10 we read of a centurion who came to get his servant healed, and he had a different faith. The Lord Jesus said He had not seen such faith in all Israel, his faith was great, and with great faith he came to Jesus. But then we find in verse 25 of the same chapter, the disciples came to Jesus and they had a lot of doubts and very little faith, but they came to Jesus - and here's the point: both of them came, those that had a lot of faith and those that had a lot of doubts, they both came to Jesus and - hallelujah! - He took both of them in. That's why at many a Gospel meeting we sing: 'Just as I am'.

Now I know some of you here tonight perhaps are waiting. I don't know what you're waiting for, but you're a fool because Jesus wants you to come just as you are. Does that not cause you to rejoice tonight? He heard the sinner's prayer, He heard a doubter's prayer, He heard even a prayer of little faith - why should He not hear my prayer tonight? Oh, He'll hear it alright, because this wasn't just a desperate, and an urgent, and an imperfect prayer, but it was an answered prayer: 'Then Christ arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!'.

It was an answered prayer in that the Saviour brought peace to their little boat. Is your home wracked with unrest tonight? Is your heart ripped apart by anxieties and fears and distresses? He can give you the peace that passeth all understanding to rule your heart and mind through Him. He can give you the peace of the past being forgiven, the slate wiped clean, all the sins that you've ever committed, and those you've forgotten, and those you're ignorant of - cleansed in the precious blood of His cross! He can give you the assurance - what peace that brings! - that if you died you'd be with Christ forever. What more could you want, my friend? Cry to Him: 'Lord, save me: I perish!', and He'll bring you peace - and here's the greatest thing: He'll reveal Himself. Men have been striving to know God for centuries, but you can only know God through following the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God and the way to God. But if you come to Him tonight and pray this perishing prayer, you will be standing like those disciples looking into the face of the One who loved you and gave Himself for you, and you'll be saying: 'What manner of Man is this?'.

At one point He's sleeping, because He's a man; at the next point they're calling Him 'Lord' because He's God's Son, and He's stilling the storm! 'The Man of Calvary has won my heart from me, and died to set me free; blessed Man of Calvary' - you'll say that tonight if you cry: 'Lord, save me: I'm perishing!'.

Let us pray: Father, we pray that if You've been moving and striving, as we believe You have, in people's hearts tonight - Lord, make that work complete and bring them into the fold this evening, bring them on the Shepherd's arms out of the mountains wild and bare, from the boisterous storms that they're in, and carry them home Your sheep. For Jesus' sake we pray, Amen.

Can You Answer These Questions?

1. Are you sure that your sins are forgiven?
2. Do you know God in a personal rather than religious way?
3. Have you peace within your heart?
4. Have you a life that is truly satisfying?
5. Are you sure if you died today that you would go to Heaven?
6. Are you sure that you are not going to Hell?

If you cannot answer these questions definitely from your heart, that is a sure sign that you are not a true Christian. You may ask "Well then, how can I be?" As always the answer is found in God's Word, the Bible. If you are to be a Christian and sure of salvation, you must from your heart, come to a realisation of these things.

1. **You must realise that you are a sinner.** The Bible says in Romans 3:23 *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"*. This means that because no one can reach the perfect standard of God's goodness, no one can come to God by themselves as they are. Romans 5:12 says, *"Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned"*. Death therefore is the greatest evidence of sin in the world and in our own lives, by our wrong actions, words and thoughts it is clear that we are sinners by nature and by habitual practice.
2. **You must realise that as a sinner you will be punished for your sin.** We are debtors to God because of our sin, *"the wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6:23). The punishment for our sin is eternal damnation in a place the Bible calls Hell. Hell is a real, literal and terrible place. It is a place where there is constant torment and *"weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth"*. It is eternal, it will never end. The only qualification a person needs to be there is to be a sinner, and we know that *"all have sinned"* therefore all are heading to that final destination. We cannot change these circumstances by trying to live better, or be more religious. The only way that this awful situation can be changed is if God intervenes.
3. **You must realise that the Lord Jesus Christ has paid your penalty.** God did intervene on the sinners' behalf at Calvary where Jesus died for our sin. Romans 5:8 *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"*. Christ was not a sinner and could not sin for He is God in flesh. Because He was perfect He is the only one who could reach God's standard. He was also fully man, therefore He could pay the debt we owed to God on behalf of humanity. Jesus Christ, the God-Man, took our punishment upon Himself on the cross so that we could be set free from the penalty of sin and be sure of a place in heaven. The amazing thing is that God the Father laid all our sins on Jesus at the cross (Isa 53:6). The key to understanding the cross is to realise that it was not a simple execution or miscarriage of justice, but behind the scenes God had planned it as the way to bring men back into a right relationship with Himself. God, who we had offended, was the only one who could help and save us - and He did. We cannot work for it, nor can we earn it or learn it. The work for our salvation was done on the cross. And to prove it Jesus cried *"It is finished"*, and to show that God was pleased with Christ's sacrifice for sin, He raised Him from the dead three days later!
4. **You must repent from your sin and by faith accept what Jesus Christ did for you.** Acts 3:19 *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out"*. To repent from your sin means simply to turn from it, forsake it and be prepared to leave it for the rest of your life. It also entails turning to God by faith for salvation, for if you only turn from your sin that is not good enough for it takes God Himself to do a work of salvation in your life. This means having faith in Jesus Christ, not simply a head knowledge but exercising an inward belief that Jesus died for you, to save you from your sins, and claiming that personally for yourself. It means taking Jesus at His word that because of His great work of salvation on the cross, if you accept that gift as your own you will be saved. There are only two types of people in the world, those saved through the blood of the cross and those lost because they have rejected God's way of the cross. John 3:36 *"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"*. Jesus Himself said, *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life"* (John 5:24).

If you have been brought by God to realise these things above and you want to savingly believe and put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for your salvation, why not use this prayer below as a base to pray to God to ask Him to save you. Please note that these are not magic words and this prayer recited will not do anything for you. You must believe in your heart these sentiments expressed and mean them personally as you pray them to God.

Lord Jesus Christ, I know I am a sinner, and I deserve to pay the penalty of my sin on my own, but I do believe that You died for me to pay the debt of my sin. I now repent and turn from my sin and trust You now as my Saviour from sin and follow You as the Lord of my life. Amen.

If you have prayed the above prayer, meant it personally and believed it in your heart, please take a moment to contact us. We can send you some literature and give you some pointers on how to grow in your Christian life as you seek to follow your Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We also want to pray for you and rejoice with you in your new-found life in Christ. May you experience God's blessing and know His presence in the days that lie ahead.

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