

Guidelines to Freedom Part 9 - the Other Man's Grass

by Alistair Begg

The sermon emphasizes the importance of contentment and the dangers of coveting, highlighting the consequences of coveting on relationships and our ability to love our neighbors.

Duration: 1:20:11

Topics: "Freedom"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the problem of materialism and the desire for possessions. He uses the story in Luke chapter 12 where someone asks Jesus to intervene in a dispute over inheritance. Jesus responds by warning the crowd to be alert and not to be consumed by the desire for material possessions. The speaker emphasizes the need for an eternal perspective and understanding the true value of possessions in light of God's provision and salvation.

Transcript

The 10th commandment in verse 17 of Exodus 20 reads as follows, You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. His wife couldn't make very much of this individual. He had come home and he was obviously in a really bad mood.

He did not want to eat his dinner and went immediately to his bed. His wife clearly understood that the problem was not with her, nor was it with any other member of the family. The gentleman had been involved in a business negotiation which had gone bad on him.

He had wanted to secure a piece of property adjacent to his own, and although he himself had plenty of property, the other man's grass was looking an awful lot more greener than his, and he determined that he would seek to gain control over this piece of his neighbor's property. The man who owned the property would accept neither cash nor barter for it, and consequently the individual found himself at home and in his bed, and he was disgusted and he was annoyed. His problem was that he had a covetous heart.

Now his wife might have been a help to him if she had endeavored to talk him out of it, but instead her sin compounded his. She told him not to worry. She would make a way for him to get that property, and she arranged that a special function for this individual to be confronted by slander and by infamy, so much so

that he lost not only the title to the property, but lost also his life.

Now the story is so common that we might anticipate it coming from our newspaper as of the last couple of days, but in actual fact it comes from the 21st chapter of 1 Kings, and it is the account of Ahab and Naboth, and the reaction of one to the splendor of the other person's vineyard. Just as there is a clear distinction between a healthy appetite and gluttony, so there is all the difference in the world between appreciating what somebody else has, what belongs to another person, and coveting those belongings. And the 10th commandment confronts us with a problem, which if we are very honest, all of us need to admit is something with which we wrestle.

The 10th commandment forbids wrong attitudes towards the possessions and position which other people hold. The 10th commandment teaches us to be content with what God has given us. The Westminster Shorter Catechism summarizes the instruction of the 10th commandment as follows.

The 10th commandment requireth full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbor and all that is his, and forbiddeth all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbor, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his. As we've gone through what we've referred to as these guidelines for freedom, we've been confronted by the amazing and direct applicability of each one to our lives, and nowhere perhaps more so than in this whole issue of genuine satisfaction or the nature of true contentment. For whatever else may be said about our contemporary culture, we surely none of us would want to stand up and proclaim that one of the hallmarks of the late 20th century is contentment.

Indeed, an absence of contentment is so pervasive in our culture as to be almost palpable. About 12 months ago, in playing golf with three men, none of whom had anything to do with our church family here, all of them were essentially strangers to me, I was sitting at lunch waiting for the arrival of the fourth member of our foursome. Turned out the two men with whom I was sitting were stockbrokers and were in charge of some fairly healthy sums of money for some fairly significant clients.

In the course of conversation, which I found intriguing, I was brave enough to ask this question, how many of your clients are contented? I said, it was met by a deafening silence. I followed it up by this question, how many of you are contented? It was an even greater silence as they looked at one another. And in honesty, this is what they said.

As they looked around on one another, each one said, I cannot think of a single client who is contented. And they weren't prepared to be just as honest about themselves. And so I said, you know, one of the most wonderful statements I've ever found in relationship to this goes like this, godliness with contentment is great gain.

Who said one of them? That sounds really good. Just his friend. That sounds good, doesn't it? The friend said, yes.

He said, where did you get that? Well, I said, I got it. I said, it's in a book. And that led to a whole conversation which followed, but I told him it's 1 Timothy 6, 6. Godliness with contentment is great gain.

It sounded like a revolutionary statement because that is exactly what it was. The last two commandments with which we dealt, namely stealing and lying, had to do with actions. This one gets even deeper into our souls because the 10th commandment deals with attitude.

The 10th commandment tackles us not so much in the realm of our deeds as it does in the matter of our desires. Most of us presumably would never actually think of stealing somebody else's possessions. But the fact that we would not actually take that coat or jacket off the person's body or steal it from the racks that are out here right now, presumably does not prevent us from carrying in our hearts a bitter jealousy because we do not like the fact that they have it and we don't.

It's the sin, the problem, of coveting. It transcends cultures, barriers of race and creed, financial gain or the absence of it, age, distinctions, all bow to covetousness. Watch your children as they take a vanilla ice cream cone, are perfectly contented with it until they walk past somebody who got the works.

Would you like the works? And suddenly a perfectly good vanilla ice cream doesn't look as good, doesn't taste as good. But there was no transaction, no chemical change in the ice cream. The change was all in the mind of the little character who decided that this looked so much better that I don't like this vanilla one anymore.

Well, you're going to eat it. No, I'm not. And we have the great ice cream fiasco.

The degree to which we are able to score victories at the level of the ice cream determines what is going to happen to the kid in his teenage years, his college years, and the kind of husband he will be to his wife. That's why when we talk about baby dedications and bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, we're not just using a bunch of phrases, we're actually talking about something that is intrinsically important in the rearing and developing of character in children. We raise greedy kids.

We will walk our greedy daughters down the aisle and place them on the hands of some greedy man, and the two greedy individuals will spend their lives living consumed by covetousness. It's impossible to stop it once you start it without major surgery, as we'll see. That would be bad enough if everybody recognized that this was a problem, but the trouble is we don't.

And indeed, our society is so driven by materialism that it cashes in on the very defect. And it portrays so many things for us in such a way as to create within our hearts a longing which we may begin to believe is a necessary longing to have something just because somebody else has got it. If you want to enjoy a bath in materialism, watch the skins game, all right? That is Azinger and Palmer and Couples and Stewart, Nickers, Stewart, yeah.

Now, don't for a moment think that this is on the TV because you and I like watching golf. Don't be stupid. This is not a golf game.

This is an advertising extravaganza of gargantuan proportions. And in order to keep us watching the commercials, they throw in a little bit of golf every so often. Time it and you'll see that I'm telling the truth.

It is a huge materialistic vortex. Feeling a measure of discomfort with it, they have little cutaways to impoverish people and to talk about the fact that a certain percentage of these phenomenal sums of money will be devoted to charities. Why do they do this? In years past, they never cared.

Now they're getting a little more sensitive. The population's getting a little more thoughtful. And so they don't want to come across as completely crass materialists.

So we'll mention the fact that charity is going to benefit from this little extravaganza in which we are indeed. The evidence of coveting is clear. The verse identifies it for us.

It outlines a number of ways in which we will see the evidence of coveting. Coveting focuses on a number of things. It may focus on money.

Certainly the Bible is replete with references to those who were consumed by a concern for money. And some of us are tired with that brush. You're tired of hearing me use it as a reference, but it's as blatant and as honest a statement as come out of the last 30 years.

All the best things in life are free. You can keep them for the birds and the bees, but give me money. That's what I want.

That's what I want. At least they're honest. 10 points for honesty.

We don't want to live in Liverpool, riding around on bicycles and in bust down cars, carrying trashed out amplifiers. We want money. And they got it.

We want clothes. You read in Joshua chapter 7, the story of Achan and how in their conquest, they are able to pull together this vast amount of plunder. And the word of God to the people of God is, don't touch any of that stuff.

Achan determines he knows better. He takes it and he buries it. And the servant of God comes to him and says, Achan, what have you done? And Achan says, listen, when I saw that beautiful robe from Babylonia, when I saw the 200 shekels of silver, when I saw that gold bar, I said, I must have that stuff.

Well, now there's a strange feeling, isn't it? You've been to the mall recently. You had any of those feelings? When I saw that beautiful robe, when I saw that wonderful stuff, I said to myself, I must have it. And guess what? They gave me a car to take the waiting out of wanting.

To grease the slopes of my covetous heart, they allow me to have it now and pay forever. They call it later, I call it forever. Coveting money, coveting clothes, coveting people.

Here I have my wife from my youth. She grows, she develops, she bears my children, she nurtures me, she guides me, she counsels me. And society buffets me with visual images of the kind of wife that you should have.

She looks different, she acts different, she is different. And it sucks out of the mind of a man, the desire to discard this and go for this. And every day across our nation, it happens again and again and again.

It stems from a covetous heart, you see. Covetousness always appeals to that which is based within the heart of man. That is covetousness in a wrongful sense.

The writer John puts it very clearly, I think. But I'm going to have to check. 1 John chapter 2 and verse, yes, good.

Do not love the world, verse 15, or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world, and then he describes the world, the cosmos apart from God.

What is it? The cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does comes not from the Father, but from the world. So everything that my sinful heart begins to go for, the cravings of my heart, the lust of my eyes, the ability to boast about my possessions and who I am and my prestige and what I'm able to do, doesn't have its source in God. And he says the tragedy of it is that the

world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

It's a very clear choice. It's the choice between the broad road and the narrow road. It's the choice between time and eternity.

It's the choice between God's way and man's way. And every day we live our lives, we're confronted by those kinds of choices. Think about the fact that covetousness draws itself around our throats when we think of seeking after positions that other people have.

If only I was one further rung up this corporate ladder, I would be a happy guy. I don't like it here. I don't like this office.

I don't like how many windows it has. I don't like the fact that it has no windows. If I could get one rung up, boy, I'd be good.

And you know what? That joker one floor up from me, he shouldn't be there. Everybody knows that, especially me. I resent him.

I resent his car. I resent his income. And I resent the fact that he's in my office.

You ever felt like that at all? Covetous heart. Or coveting other people's prestige. So that people will be able to say, my, my, my, isn't he done well? They say that Richard Corey owns one half of this whole town.

And with political connections to spread his wealth around, he's born into society. A banker's only child. He's got everything a man could want.

Power, grace, and style. And I want to be Richard Corey. We're bringing our kids up with that as the American dream.

Whatever happened to the American dream? Let me ask you another question. Whatever happened to biblical contentment? Whatever happened to satisfaction in the awareness of the fact that God has not pledged himself to baptize our materialistic urgencies into orthodox Christianity? There is nowhere in the whole Bible that assumes that we're going to be healthy, wealthy, and wise as a result of our commitment to Jesus Christ. And to teach it that way is an absolute violation of the Bible.

And yet we hear it all the time, day in and day out. I put Jesus first in my life, and I have scored more touchdowns now than I ever did. I put Jesus first in my life, and you ought to come and drive in my car.

I put Jesus first in my life, and my company has gone through the roof in its profit. What is the message? The message is Jesus is a guru on the way to materialistic happiness. It doesn't sound like the words of Jesus, does it? If anyone would like to follow me, let him take up his cross every day, die to himself and follow me.

If any man would be my disciple, let him burn those bridges and go. Let him pull his boats up on the shore and follow me. Let him leave everything behind.

Loved ones, we've got it so upside down, and living with it for so long, that when somebody turns the scriptures the right side up for us, it starts to sound like heresy to us. In February of this year, when I had the privilege of preaching at those meetings in Hong Kong, in the morning post in Hong Kong, there's this

unbelievable piece of work. It says, you too can own one for only 9.5 million.

I can't read it to you all, I don't have the time, but I'll give you a little flavor of it. Everyone wants to be number one. Okay? It's right in it, straight off.

That's a real problem, isn't it? Because how many captains are there going to be in your soccer team? One, are you listening? One. Sorry, I thought you all died there for a moment. There's only going to be one captain.

So that means that 10 other boys are presumably, are going to have to live with the horrible feelings of resentment, because they were not picked as the captain. It is absolute rubbish that everybody has to be number one, and everybody wants to be number one. Okay? Everyone wants to be number one, but being number two does not come cheap.

As a tycoon proved yesterday with a flamboyant bid, which landed him with the most expensive car number plate in the world. This is a number plate. This is not a car.

In an ostentatious spending spree, even by Hong Kong standards, Mr. Wong Ming Hung forked out a record 9.5 million dollars for the number two license plate that formerly graced the limousine of Financial Secretary Mr. Hamish McLeod. His license plate is worth more than all of his cars. Lexus, BMW, the whole shooting match, when he takes all of his cars and rolls them together, they don't even come close to being worth what the number two is on the front of his car.

Now, his friends were really ticked off. For example, there was Mr. Chow who ticked off, got ticked off and left as a beaten man, while the bidding stood at a modest 7.6 million. Somebody, the bidding started at half a million and Mr. Ming Hung here got into it somewhere around 7 million.

He said, I'm happy with hitting the mark at 9.5 million. The price is reasonable. I expected to get it at over 10 million, said a cheery Mr. Wong afterwards.

Okay, now that's Hong Kong. Mr. Wong in Hong Kong. Now, I came here in October, in August the 3rd, 1983.

I started trying to get intelligent, read the Wall Street Journal. Wall Street Journal, Wednesday, October 12th, 1983. Here it is.

Headline, inside full-page advertisement in the Wall Street is headed, demoralize thy neighbor. Okay, now this is an Aston Martin for those of you who are car aficionados. It's one thing to trundle by in a Bentley, Jaguar, Mercedes or the like.

Everyone in your neighborhood has one of those. It's quite another thing to come in for a lending in your Lagonda. The Lagonda is an Aston Martin, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

And if you get an Aston Martin, then all the poor clowns in your neighborhood that only drive Jaguar, Mercedes and BMW, you're going to make them go to bed feeling really bad. So why don't you buy a Lagonda? Now, doesn't that appeal to everything that's good in us? Doesn't it? You're sensible people, think this stuff out. Is the Bible relevant to our day? Of course it is.

It's powerfully applicable to our day. It gets to the very heart of the issues. Now, if the evidence of coveting is plain for all to see, what about the effect of coveting? What effect does coveting have? Let me say four

things that coveting will do.

Simple things, obvious perhaps. Let me just underpin them. Number one, coveting spoils relationships and lies behind many of our disagreements.

Coveting spoils relationships and lies behind many of our disagreements. You take a couple of youngsters who track together through school. They were the best of friends.

They spent overnights. They did homework together. They were neck and neck all the way through.

They graduated well. They went on to college well. They were still neck and neck.

But after college, one of them went orbital in terms of financial success and the other one went on a slower track. The slower track fellow can't stand the success of this guy. And so when he calls, he's no longer as interested.

Their friendship is no longer cemented. Their care for one another is no longer what it was. Because this guy's got a covetous heart and he can't stand the success of another.

That happens between brothers and sisters in a family. It happens in churches. It happens between pastors.

I spoke to a friend of mine on the phone a couple of weeks ago and I asked him, I said, have you spoken to X lately, who's another friend of ours, who's a pastor? No, he said, I haven't spoken to X since we were together in the summer. That is this guy and I to whom I'm speaking. I said, well, I don't feel so bad about being at the other side of the Atlantic Ocean if you haven't even spoken to him and you only live 12 miles away from him.

Oh, he said, you don't understand. X is in the big leagues now. I don't know all that that means, but I know there's something of covetousness in that guy's heart.

There's something he's not dealing with because there are no big leagues. Secondly, covetousness breaks the summary commandment of Jesus, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. It's impossible to really love somebody and to be coveting their stuff when we should say, my, that is a very pretty color on you.

Our covetous hearts say nothing and we get in our car saying, I don't know why she got that. You can't have a covetous heart. I can't have a covetous heart and really love you.

Thirdly, a covetous heart makes me essentially selfish, makes me always ask what's best for me. How will I do in this? How am I going to come out of this? What will happen to me in this deal? And fourthly, a covetous heart, and perhaps worse of all, makes us think that life is all about material things. That the abundance of life is really what we've got.

That he who dies with the most toys wins. That we buy the whole package. Nelson Rockefeller, interviewed by a newspaper reporter on one occasion, was asked, how much money does it take to be happy? And Rockefeller replied, just a little bit more.

Think about it. Think about it when you're a child. Your father says you can have this much of an allowance.

You're really thrilled. You're pleased. After all, you had nothing before he said it.

Then he said it, then he gave you. You're thrilled. Until you walk outside and you say to your friend, hey, my dad gave me an allowance.

Gave me a dollar. Your friend says, my dad gave me two. Now you're going to find out what kind of covetous heart you've got.

You can't be content with the dollar in your pocket for worrying about the fact that the guy next to you has got two bucks in his. That's what happens in churches. That's what happens in companies.

That's what happens in families. Well, then the question is obvious. If the problem is as endemic as that, if it is as deep rooted as that, if it is as crucial as that, how in the world are we going to root it out? What are we going to do? Well, the answer is that we need to bring an eternal perspective to bear upon the effects of time.

And in order to do that, in conclusion this morning, I want you to turn with me to a story that is recorded for us in Luke chapter 12. And we'll make this our concluding illustration. Luke chapter 12.

But don't be deceived, this concluding illustration will last approximately 12 minutes. And I said approximately. Luke chapter 12 and verse 13.

Someone in the crowd said to him, teacher, this is to Jesus. Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me. All attorneys tell me they've never seen as many squabbles in their life as when they have to do with wills and the reading of wills.

You know, perfect friends become total enemies forever after they come in and say the last will and testament of Reginald Bozanket is follows. And the person who thinks they're going to make a bundle gets nothing. It goes to the jigger humane society to spay cats or something.

And people get really ticked off over that stuff, I believe. And justifiably so, especially as it relates to cats. But that's another question altogether.

The fact of the matter is there was a problem between these characters. Presumably one had it all and didn't want to give it up. And one didn't have it and wanted to get it.

So there you've got the perfect recipe for it. The guy's got it and won't give it up. A guy hasn't got it and must get it.

That's it, right there. It's right here. So he says, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

Jesus says, hey, look, I'm not in the business of dividing inheritances up. That's not why I can. There are people who can take care of that.

He said, but since you're so concerned about stuff, as you clearly are, and since you're so concerned about having an inheritance, let me tell you a story about a guy who was so sure that he had a good inheritance. And then he goes on to bring this eternal perspective to bear upon the circumstances of possessions. Let me try and summarize it for us, if I may.

First of all, he says to the individual, watch out. Verse 15. Or be clear.

That's the phrase I wanted to use. Or be alert. I beg your pardon.

Be alert. Watch out, he said. Be alert.

Don't just go with the flow. Don't just accept when people say everybody wants to be number one. Be alert.

Let your antenna go up for that and say, hey, wait a minute. If everybody wants to be number one and can be number one, we got a problem with everybody else who's two, three, four, five and six. And since I've spent most of my life being a good seven or an eight or a nine or a ten, there's not much chance of me being number one.

Be alert, he says. Think these things out. Secondly, beware.

Be on your guard, he said. Against all kinds of greed. All kinds of greed.

The comprehensive nature of greed is addressed here by Jesus. He says, make sure that you appoint sentries at the doors of your life, at the avenues of your existence that guard against the inroads of greed. You know, he says, the things that create that response within you.

Make sure that you set it up in such a way that you are not only alert to its advances, but you are ready for the advances. And thirdly, be clear, he says. Be clear about this.

A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Now, I ask you, loved ones, is that a revolutionary statement or what? Because today in our culture, prestige and power and recognition and influence are almost exclusively tied to possessions.

Think it up. In an earlier generation, perhaps, although we didn't live there and we can't say with authority, in an earlier generation, it would appear at least that certain things were valued above possessions. For example, the school teacher with a caring heart that instructed Anna Green Gables, okay? The doctor who was prepared in all days and times and conditions to go out for the delivery of the baby and everything else.

The pastor who was prepared to bring spiritual comfort and care to the dying and to the bereaved and to the wayward and to the lost. Those things may have been valued in earlier generations, but by and large, in our contemporary culture, the substance of a man's existence and his prestige is directly related to external, superficial, non-lasting stuff. Now, loved ones, if we don't believe that, we've got to ask ourselves the question, why it is we're spending so much time to get that stuff? And why we attach such significance to the stuff when we get it? It is because we have bought into the mindset of our generation.

Now, all of us are tainted with it. None of us, whether we've got a lot or a wee drop, can say we're not into it. It's not a problem of the haves, it's a problem of the have-nots as well as the haves.

Indeed, many of us who have not have maybe got a more covetous heart than many of the people who have. And one of the indications of our covetous heart is that we like the bad mouth of people who have just because we haven't. A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

The word there for life is the word zoe, which means the essence of a man's life. There is another word in Greek for life, which is bios, from which we get biology, which is the way of life. Jesus doesn't say that the

way of a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.

He says the essence of a man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of his possessions. See, my good friend in Scotland, who died on Thursday from cancer, had a lot of possessions. He had a Rolls Royce.

He had the largest Ford dealership in Scotland. He had power. He had influence.

But he's also the guy who, when he took the Ford dealership, only had 2,000 pounds to his name that his dad had left him. When the Ford dealer came to him and said, Mr. Cordner, you're going to open a garage up here in Aberdeen? Yes, I am. So he said, well, let me show you the prospectus of how you do it.

This is how Ford wants the places opened up. He said, this is the opening times. Stephen looked at the opening times.

He said, I got a problem with this. He says, I'm not going to open on a Sunday. The guy said, what do you mean you're not going to open on a Sunday? He said, well, I'm not going to open on a Sunday.

He said, I go to church on Sundays. I worship the Lord on Sunday. And I believe that Sunday is the Lord's day.

The guy says, you can't have a Ford franchise if you don't open on Sunday. The guy says, well, then I don't have a Ford franchise. But I'll tell you what, he said, you trust me with a Ford franchise, and I'll sell more cars for you in Scotland in six days than anyone else will sell in seven.

The guy says, well, it's against the rules, against the protocol, but we'll do it. And I want to tell you something, that in the funeral service tomorrow afternoon at one o'clock in Aberdeen, the people who will attend that funeral service for Stephen Cordner will not be there because he had a Rolls Royce. Most people don't even know he's got it.

They will not be there because of the abundance of his possessions. They will be there because that clarity of his Christian testimony so pervaded everything about that man's life that it was impossible to know him without knowing that a man's life does not consist in the abundance of what he possesses. Some of us, whether with much or with little, whether teenagers or kids, have never crossed that bridge.

We know it theoretically. We do not believe it experientially, and we live crippled by a covetous heart because we'll never, ever have enough according to our perspective. Once that becomes a drug, the heroin addict cannot shoot up enough.

Nor can the materialists. You talk to anyone who's in retailing around the malls of the city, and they will tell you that there are people who are not only on the lists who get the little card that says, come for our sale, but they're on the special list, the high-priority list, which says the minute a new shipment of anything arrives, call me. Because I cannot stand the possibility that my neighbor comes down the street with it first.

We're talking about intravenous materialism at that point. We're talking about shooting up big time. And Jesus says it's absolutely bogus.

And so he illustrates. He says the guy decided that he would keep for himself what he might have given away to others. He stored up for a future that never came.

He says to himself in verse 19, I'll say to myself, you've got plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy, drink and be merry. You've got plenty of time.

He had plenty of stuff and no time. He was foolish enough to presume that he would have forever to enjoy what he'd made. And he was wrong.

I got to preach this to some of you men as well. And I know you misunderstand me, but I'm going to preach it to you anyway. In 18 years of pastoral ministry, I have buried more men than I can tell you who refused to stop working.

It was not because they didn't have enough money. It was because they were consumed with their annuities and their investments. The one thing they were not going to do was touch principle.

And if I can just work a little bit longer, I get a little fatter, that will mean we will live off the interest always. And the nest egg will be big. And the wife, you say, honey, why don't we take a day off? I mean, why don't we go for a little trip? Why don't we sail on a boat? Why don't we take a train? Why don't we? Oh, no, no, no, no, no.

Wait a minute. Just let me go for another wee while. And when I finish, you're going to see you'll never have been on a vacation like we're going on.

With the Concord, the QE2, we'll just go round and round and round the globe. Many times as you want. And we'll never have to touch the principle.

That's what I love. Never touch the principle. You never touch squat of it because he's dead.

And I sit with his wife, she's got fat wads of money and she's lonely and she's empty. And she was always going to have the vacations that never ever came because he stored for a future that he couldn't bank on. Now, what's the lesson from that? That you don't plan for the future? No, that would be silly.

The lesson is *carpe diem*. Seize the day. You want to take your wife a walk? Take her a walk this afternoon, because if you plan it for next Thursday, you may not be here.

You want to buy your children an ice cream? Buy it now. You want to snuggle them in their beds? Snuggle them tonight. Don't snuggle them when you become smart enough to take four days off a week.

You may never live long enough. Snuggle them tonight because it's the only night you've got. Love your wife today.

It's the only day you have. Use your resources this afternoon because it's the only time that you may use them and know the benefit of generosity. You'll never have the fun of giving stuff away when you're dead.

Who cares that your attorney gets the chance to dish it out to everybody? You're not going to have a lot of fun in that. Well, our time is gone. The lesson is clear.

A covetous heart can only be driven out by the expulsive power of a new affection. The expulsive power of a new affection. The Psalmist's statement is as challenging as any I can ever read.

When he says, whom have I in heaven but you? That's good. We can all say that. I mean, whom have we in heaven but God? The answer is no one but God.

And then he says, and air has nothing I desire besides you. Psalm 73, verse 25. I'm not there yet.

I don't know if you are, but I'm not. But I want to be. I want to find out what that means.

I know for sure it doesn't mean stripping yourself naked and lying in a cave somewhere. I know that's not it. Jesus never taught that.

I know it's not about going in a monastery. I know it's not about communism. I know it's about the fact that some of us are going to be given more than others, and whatever we're given, we've got to make sure that we use it to the glory of God, and we don't covet what other people have, and we don't look down our long noses on others because they never were blessed in the same way as we.

But it's a hard one. And I wonder when's the last time you ever heard a sermon on the sin of coveting. I bet you can't remember one, because nobody wants to preach on coveting, because there's a whole lot of coveting going on, and nobody can avoid these bullets.

I know I can't. Don't try. Two verses in verse 19.

Now, we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law. Rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin.

For the past three months, we've been studying together the Ten Commandments. And as a result of that, none of us, I believe, have gone away believing that this has been an exercise in feeling good about ourselves. Not that we wanted by some strange punitive dimension just to feel bad, but we have been made painfully aware of the fact that confronted by God's perfect standard in the law, the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, none of us is able this morning to say anything other than that we are lawbreakers.

We have broken God's law. The question is, what are we then to make of this message, as it has come so clearly to us? The message has not been, if only everyone would get on with seeking to embrace the Ten Commandments, then we'd all be a lot better off. If that has appeared to be the message, then I have failed you.

You certainly have misunderstood. I must have miscommunicated. If the reaction has been to say, well, I think what I've been learning is that I need to try a lot harder if I'm going to make a go of this Christian life business, then again, something has gone sadly wrong.

However, if the studies have brought us to verse 20 of chapter 3 of Romans, then the Spirit of God has done his work. For through the law, says Paul, we become conscious of our sin. I'd like this morning to address this, to wrap up, as it were, this series under three headings.

The first of which is the condition to be faced. The condition to be faced. We've been discovering, and we need to reaffirm it today, that the law of God was never given to save us.

The Ten Commandments were not given as a step ladder up which we were to climb into heaven. Rather, what we've discovered is that the law of God has been given to pinpoint sin, to define it, to bring it out of its hiding place, as it were, and to show us the immensity of our problem. To show some of us who never believed that we had a problem that in actual fact, we do.

To show us that the wonderful good news can only be understood against the background of the bad news. To understand that the provision which God has made is only relevant in the heart and life of the individual who understands the awfulness of the condition that we face. So, if you turn back a page to Romans chapter 1 and notice Paul's great declaration of the gospel, which begins in verse 16, I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew and then for the Gentile.

And Paul sets out this glorious theme, this tremendous declaration of good news, this word of mercy, this word of grace, this call to faith, this call to believe, this call to trust, this call to be saved. And he does so like setting a sparkling diamond on the black velvet, as it were, of the condition of men and women outside of Christ. Indeed, the gospel's significance may only be understood and adopted and discovered when first we have been made to see by the Spirit of God the context of our own sorry state.

And the reason as to why many of us are ineffective in proclaiming the gospel, and the very reason that some of us remain in our sins, is because we have only had half a gospel to proclaim, or it is only half a gospel that we have received, and only half a gospel makes half a Christian, which is no Christian at all. Which is an explanation as to why some who are engaging in religious activity have no assurance that the wonderful good news of the gospel has been made applicable to my life or to yours. So we must always start where the Bible starts.

No matter how uncomfortable it may be, no matter how unappetizing it may be to the spiritual diet of modern man, we must start where the Bible starts. Having said, I am delighted to proclaim the good news, what does he then immediately say in verse 18 of chapter 1? The reason he says I'm so glad to have this message of good news is because the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress their truth by their wickedness. Now the wrath of God is not some uncontrollable emotional outburst.

That's how we understand wrath or anger from a human perspective, and we have great difficulty in conceiving of it in any other way. But we must understand this. God is absolutely pure.

God is absolutely holy. Therefore, God cannot tolerate that which is impure and unholy. That is why the prophet says that God cannot even look upon sin.

But as a compass turns to the north, so God's settled reaction to sin is the outpouring of his wrath. So that God's wrath is revealed as the antithesis to the godlessness and the wickedness which ascends from the earth to his throne in heaven. He doesn't wink at sin.

He doesn't excuse sin. He doesn't play with sin. His settled reaction to sin is the unfolding, the outpouring of his wrath.

Now this is directly related to the condition of man which Paul describes in these two key words. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all the number one, godlessness, and then number two, wickedness of men who suppress the truth. Now I wonder, is the order important here? I believe it is.

Because wickedness is the byproduct of godlessness. When men and women are godless, they will then be wicked. And the reason for the wickedness of our culture this morning is it's godlessness.

That modern man has rejected God, wholesaley rejected God. Even those who say they believe in God, so many of them reject the God of the Bible, reject the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We've

said many, many times that men and women today, when you use the word G-O-D, do not know what we're saying.

God for them is a cosmic principle. God is the earth. God is this.

God is that. God is whatever you want it to be. And so with an embracing of the name God, they are nevertheless godless.

And it is godlessness which gives rise to wickedness. Now, let me work this out in your mind for a moment, if I may. Modern man is not prepared to face that.

Modern man is prepared to accept the notion of wickedness, albeit under other terms. The fact that things are not the way they ought to be. The fact that we have some problems here and there and everywhere, actually.

However, it's not that man is wicked. Modern man doesn't like a word like wicked. It's like a dagger.

It sticks in him. He senses it may be true, so he pulls it out and throws it away. Oh, it's not that I'm wicked.

It may be that I'm uneducated. It may be that I'm a little lost. It may be that I'm a little wayward.

But I'm not wicked. And even if I am wicked, I'm surely not godless. But there is a direct correlation between a godless culture and a wicked culture.

There is a direct correlation between a godless man or woman and a wicked man or woman. And because our society refuses to accept the link between godlessness and wickedness, billions and billions of dollars are thrown after the symptoms, while at the same time refusing to acknowledge the disease. So myriad programs, political programs, social programs, educational programs, financial programs, are conceived of from Washington and in the highest realms of the land.

And they stand up and display their total unwillingness to recognize that the state of affairs is on account of godlessness. And they think that a little trip to church here, and a little holding of the Bible there, and a little bit of religion on this side, and a little bit of good works on that side, will somehow placate whatever deity it is with whom we have to deal. Oh yes, we do have problems, says our culture, but they're not spiritual problems.

They're not moral problems. Nowhere is it more manifest than in the total confusion and chaos in relationship to the problem of AIDS. Every sensible man and woman in America knows that if we would live with one wife in absolute purity, and prior to marriage live in absolute purity, as of today, we would be able to prevent the further development of the AIDS virus.

What is here is here, but there would be no more passed on. But since we cannot say to people, you're not allowed to sleep with your girlfriend, since we cannot say to people homosexuality is wrong, is deviant behavior, we are left not addressing the disease, but addressing the symptoms, and we are going to be subjected to the wholesale development of this for our children's children, because man's wickedness is due to godlessness, and a godlessness that man refuses to accept. So, while men and women will acknowledge that there is trouble in the street, there is lawlessness in the homes, there are guns in the schools, there is pain in the office, there is tragedy in the lives of developing teenagers, they're at pains to explain it.

They shake their heads and say, I don't know how in the world we got here. Well, the Bible tells us how we got here. It says, not only has God's wrath been revealed from heaven, but one of the indications and expressions of God's wrath is that when a culture continues to turn its back on him, God may choose to give that culture over to its own desires.

Romans chapter 1 verse 24, Therefore God gave them over. Verse 26, Because of their reaction to him, the God, the creator, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.

I am unashamed to say this morning, on the authority of God's word, that lesbianism and homosexuality is an absolute deviant behavior from the perfect standard of God's righteousness. And let the world say what it will, and let politicians mumble in their beards, but let God be heard, let his word be sounded. And it is his word which is powerful for the salvation of men and women.

And loved ones this morning, you better learn your Bible, and you better know your Bible, and you better say to your friends and to your neighbors, I can explain to you why we're in the predicament we're in. Because God's wrath has been revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men. How do you get a godless wicked culture? You get godless wicked individuals, isn't that right? You can't have a culture that isn't made of individuals, and individuals bring their own dimension to the culture.

So that means that it is, the problem is a personal problem, it's not ultimately a societal problem. You cannot change society by external means top down. The only way a society or a culture is changed, is by changed lives.

That's why Paul narrows it down. In chapter 3 again, and in verse 10 he says, there's no one righteous, not even one. You see, we don't have a problem this morning talking about our culture, do we? We're happy to talk about our culture.

Oh, we're not abortionists, we're not feminists, we're not these bad people. Oh man, what a culture we have. We've got the Bible, we're evangelicals, we hang close to God, we come on Sundays, we're okay.

No, we're not. That's what the Jews were doing in Romans chapter 2. They said, the Gentiles? What a bunch of scum. Man, do we hate those Gentiles? Messing up the culture, all those godless people.

But us, the Jews, we're the holy ones. We have the law, we wear it here, we wear it here, we wear it here, and when we walk around, we're sure that God's going to accept us, because we have the law. We have the Ten Commandments.

And what does Paul say to them? You'll need to read it this afternoon. Paul says to them, listen, you're in an even worse position. At least these characters don't even have the Ten Commandments and they stand condemned.

You've got the very things that condemn you and you're walking around holding them. And the thing you're holding in your hand, he said, and the thing you're strapping to your forehead and tying to your wrist condemns you. Who are you to judge somebody else, he says? Who are we to judge other people? Who are we to condemn the culture in which we live? We are the culture.

We are the people. We are the sinners. That's the condition.

Now, you answer me this. Is this the kind of message that contemporary bourgeois Americans want to hear? Not in your jolly life, it isn't. Only a madman, a fool, would stand before a congregation and proclaim the Word of God in this way.

I listen to the radio Sunday mornings. I listen to all these different sermons. Again, I heard the same old junk this morning.

And he's telling the congregation, and what are we supposed to do? We're supposed to do this kind of thing and that kind of thing and the next kind of thing. Never once did he say, we're supposed to proclaim the good news of the gospel. Why not? Because they don't believe it is necessary.

Because they do not believe that God's wrath has been revealed from heaven against wickedness. Because they do not believe that man is wicked. They do not believe he is godless.

And they don't believe in a God who would exercise wrath on the sins of men and women. So, ipso facto, you have no gospel. You have got nothing to proclaim.

The reason why some of us this morning sit in this congregation still in our sins is because we have never been brought by the Spirit of God to face our true condition before God's righteous standard. Some of us who are wondering about where we are in relationship to spiritual things are nowhere because we have never been truly converted by the Spirit of God. We have exchanged one set of external circumstances for another.

We once didn't go to church and now we go. We once weren't interested in religious things and now we are. We once didn't really care and we didn't have a conscience and now we do.

And so we add all of that together and we say, well, therefore, I must be in. I wanted to have a friend and somebody told me Jesus is a friend. I wanted to have purpose and somebody told me Jesus gives me purpose.

I wanted to be free from anxiety and somebody told me Jesus gave me freedom from anxiety. But did you ever once hear Jesus say, I have come in order that you might have purpose? Did I come in order that you might have life? Now, why would he want to give life to people who have life? Because the life we have is not life, it's actually death. We're spiritually dead.

But nobody's going to put up their hand and say, Jesus, give me some of that life. Until first the Spirit of God says, you're a dead man. You're a dead woman.

Ninety-three years of American culture in the realm of conservative evangelicalism has bolstered up our notions of ourself and our own supposed goodness, thus preventing many of us from actually ever coming to genuine faith in Jesus Christ. I say to you again this morning, as I've said to you so many times, if there really are that many conservative evangelical born-again believers in the United States of America, what in the world is going on here? Are there really 30, 40, 50 million truly converted people in America? No. There are many who are living with an illusion, having never faced the condition.

You may be one of them. It doesn't matter how moral we appear. It doesn't matter how philanthropic we are.

It doesn't matter how idealistic we may be or how apparent our righteousness is. None of that stuff transfers in the currency of God's kingdom. The purpose of the law, the purpose of the Ten Commandments, is to close our mouths.

That's what he says in verse 19 of chapter 3. The law speaks so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be accountable before God. The whole object of the Ten Commandments, then, is to show us that we must be saved and, secondly, to show us that we cannot save ourselves. So we do the Ten Commandments and we go, this is a message that says we need somebody to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Now, if we have truly come to faith in Christ, this is a reassuring thing. If we never have, then it is a nerve-jangling thing. Because what Paul has said is that irrespective of our background, whether we're a clueless pagan or whether we are a religious person, all of us has missed the mark.

You'll notice there in verse 22, there's no difference. Verse 23, for all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God. We all flunked.

We all flunked. The test papers came back and nobody got anything other than an F. Ever since I got a high F, I was very close to a D. I mean, I got a better F than you got. Yeah, but you got an F. It's all Fs.

Everyone got an F. The only person who ever got an A was Jesus. And he got an A so that our F may go down the tubes and he may put his A in our place and that God may accept us because of his A irrespective of our F. But do you know how many people in this church, Sunday by Sunday, go out of here assuming that the message is, I've got to bring my grade up. I've got to bring my grade up.

I'm sure I'm getting an F and I need to get it at least to a D or C or a good B. I've got to get my grade up. Hear me this morning if you've never heard me before. If you work from now to the day you die, you cannot do one thing to get anything else other than an F. There is not one religious thing I can do, not one philanthropic thing I can do.

There is not a thing I can do to alter my grade. Now, until I understand that, I am in the most perilous condition. Because I will then be living with the potential for considering that all these things that I am able to do or all these things that I trust in will somehow or another change my condition before God.

And it's okay for the pagan and it's okay for somebody else, but this isn't a message for me. We've got a dreadful problem in our culture. Yeah, look in the mirror.

Okay, you got it? Is that a good enough expression of the bad news? Best I can do in the time I have. Let's go from the bad news to the good news. The condition to be faced, the provision to be found.

I had to spend time putting the velvet down so that when I bring the diamond out, you can see how wonderful it is. This is one of the great problems. This is why people don't come to faith in Jesus Christ.

That people are walking around up here holding up diamonds. Holding up A's, as it were. And the person said, what do I need an A for? I'm very happy with a B plus.

This is they didn't realize they had an F. Okay, so what it's saying here, we got F's. And we can't get it any higher. Well, then we better have some good news for this story or we're all in deep trouble.

We do. Verse 21, two fantastic words. Two of my favorite words in the New Testament.

But now, but now. That's what we're waiting for. But now, but now what? Well, but now here's the good news.

What I, by my own endeavor, am unable to accomplish, God, on the basis of his great grace, has provided. All of my attempts to keep the law perfectly have been a failure. I know that.

You know that. You keep coming to me going, we've only done five and I flunked in all five. And I look as though I'm going for basically, I've got one out of ten of possibility.

And even that I'm not sure of. So we know we're lawbreakers. So unless there is a contribution made, there is nothing to do that is apart from our ability to contribute by our works of the law.

That's verse 21, the little phrase, apart from the law. Unless there is that kind of contribution from another source, we are dead and lost in our sins. Now, you see, what happens is this, that only those who have come to cease to rely upon their own endeavors and their own deeds and their own morality and their own religion will ever enter into the benefit of this provision.

If this righteousness, which is so necessary, does not become ours as a result of our endeavor, then how do you get it? That's what I want to know. Here is heaven. How do I get there? That's what I want to know.

What do I have to do? Nothing. Don't tell me nothing. I don't like nothing.

Because nothing means that I'm going to have to accept what someone else has done. You got it dead clear. Well, then I won't have any reason to boast.

You got that clear. That's what he says. Where then is boasting, verse 27? It is excluded.

Anybody on the road to heaven, they say, how come you're on the road to heaven? Say, hey, I'm a smart guy. I'm a smart person. I'm smart enough to exercise faith.

No, you're not. There's none that seeketh after God, no, not one. There's none that doeth righteousness, no, not one.

Well, the whole world is accountable before God. So on what basis, then, are we made acceptable in God's sight? Because of something he did in Jesus. And by his grace at work in our lives, opened our eyes to see it, unstopped our ears to hear it.

And suddenly we said, this is it. This is good news. Have you ever said that? You see, faith.

Because this righteousness comes from God through faith in Christ Jesus. Faith is not the cause. It's the conduit.

It's a big difference. It is not by our faith that we cause ourselves to be saved. It is that faith is the conduit through which God's grace is ministered to us.

We are simply that the only thing that I bring to getting saved is my sin. When I come to Jesus to get saved, the only thing I've got in my pocket is an F. A big F. What do you have to show for yourself out? Nothing. Well, here, give me your F. I'll give you my A. There's something not right about that.

There's something glorious about that. That's the glory of the cross. That's the blood of Jesus Christ.

At great cost to Jesus, the free bestowal to us. You see, this is a great mystery of what we read here. Then we will discover, verse 26, that God is just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Because God is just, sin must be punished. Because God is a God of grace, he punishes his own son who is in himself sinless in order that we who are the bearers of the F may be put in a position and declare to have an A. The man or the woman of faith has committed themselves to the truth of Jesus, has assented to that truth, is no longer looking to himself or at himself, but rather looking away from himself, looking to Christ. The man or the woman of faith has been justified, put in a right standing before God.

Justified freely by his grace, verse 24. I could keep you all afternoon talking to you about this. What does this phrase mean? It means that justification is not something that results from what we do, but it is something which may be ours on account of what another has done.

And he goes on to explain what the other has done. Justified freely by his grace, how come? Through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. How did that work? Well, he says, God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.

And all the Jewish people understood that. They understood. They remember the exodus from Egypt.

They knew they were held in captivity there. And they remember the angel of death flying over. They remember the instruction to put the blood around the lintels of the door.

And when the angel of death came seeing the blood, he would pass over them. And those who were in bondage in Egypt were liberated on account of the blood that was shed. And they was looking forward to the great redemption that would come when he, the Messiah, would be the atoning sacrifice for sin.

The suffering servant would die in order that those who rebelled against God and couldn't care less may be declared righteous in his sight. That the scum of the earth may become the kings of heaven. That proud, arrogant, middle class, British and American, snobby, self-assertive, independent, highly educated sinners may be brought to see their absolute folly.

And until they are, the message of the gospel is a joke to them. It is an affront to them. It is an irrelevance to them.

God has not saved us, Paul says to Timothy, on account of righteous things that we have done, but according to his own purpose and grace. Now, there's something I need to say to you before I move to my final point here in these dying moments, and it is this. To be justified freely by God's grace is not to be made righteous.

To be justified freely by God's grace is to be declared righteous. It's to be regarded as righteous. It is to be set in a right standing before God.

You see, many of us who are trusting in our own righteousness are hoping that our behavior will eventually prove good enough to merit the approval and acceptance of God. The problem with that is that even when we do our best, our best doesn't even come close to the perfect standard of God's righteousness declared in the Ten Commandments. In contrast to that, if God in his sheer grace, showering upon us his mercy and clothing us in his righteousness, accepts us as we are, and we gladly embrace what he offers us in Jesus, we can then go on and do his will without constantly worrying whether we're doing it adequately or not.

And I'm going to tell you something this morning, if you live your life all the time wondering whether you are getting a good enough grade, you have never understood justification. I'm not saying you aren't saved. I'm just telling you, you've never understood justification.

If you get on an aircraft and the wheels start to turn and the engines roar, and you think, this may be my last flight, which I usually do, and you find yourself saying, but I'm okay, you know, because I never, I didn't watch that thing on TV. And I remember I threw the garbage out. I kissed my wife goodbye.

I was at church, and I did read my Bible this morning. The individual who's thinking like that has never understood justification. Because the fact of the matter is, as difficult it is for us to understand and accept, if we kick the dog, threw the garbage out, fell over on the way out, forgot to say goodbye to our wife, and left in a rage, we may still go down the runway into eternity, confident of our salvation.

Why? Because he justifies freely by his grace. Here's the mystery of it. F.F. Bruce does it perfectly.

Bruce says this. God pronounces a man righteous at the beginning of his course, not at the end of it. You sign up for the course, and he gives you an A. Before you even begin the first class, he says, you got an A. You say, well, wait a minute, you haven't seen my program.

You haven't seen what I'm going to do. You haven't read any of my reports. He says, that's not the point.

I'll be reading them. I'll be looking at them. I'll be working with you on them.

But right now, today, I want you to know you got an A. Before ever they do any righteous deeds, therefore, God's justification cannot be on the basis of works, which a man or a woman is still to do. Justification is an act of God's grace, his free grace, whereby he pardons all our sins, and he accepts us as righteous in his sight. You get an A straight off.

Isn't that what the thief on the cross discovered? What was he going to do to make himself acceptable for heaven? He didn't have a chance. He's up there bleeding to death, asphyxiating. His life is running away from him.

His friend over on the other side is giving Jesus grief. Hey, you think you're the son of God? Why don't you get down from there and get me down from there? The thief on the other side says, I don't think you should be talking like this. After all, he said, you and I, we're up here, because we should be up here.

From what I understand, the guy in the middle, he didn't do anything. Lord, will you remember me when you come into your kingdom today? Today, you get an A. Today, you will be with me in paradise. That's the gospel.

That's why no sinner is too much of a sinner. That's why none of us can boast about our condition in Christ. Augustus' top lady in the great hymn, Rock of Ages, puts it perfectly.

Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling. Naked come to thee for dress, and helpless come to thee for rest.

I, the foul one, to your fountain fly. Wash me, Jesus. Wash me, Jesus, or I die.

So, there is a condition to face. There's a provision to be found. And finally, in a phrase, there is a decision to be made.

There is a decision to be made. This is the message of the gospel to all who believe. If you've lived to this point in your life, believing that because Jesus Christ died on the cross, therefore all people are automatically forgiven, and all that we have to do is realize it and get on and live a good life, somebody has been teaching us from an empty head and a closed Bible.

We dare not seek to rush people to Christ. We dare not seek to get them there any way, any how. We need to allow the scripture not only to control our message, but also to control our methodology.

And here in Romans 3, 19 and following, you have not only the message, but the methodology. You have it clear. Here's the message.

This is the only message that saves. Number one, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against godlessness and wickedness. Therefore, I need to come to see my godless, wicked life.

Until I do, what follows is irrelevant to me. When I do, when I recognize that I do not deserve one thing, then I find myself saying, amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, would die for me? You see, when we start with John 3, 16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, there is something in us that says, I understand that. I mean, because my wife loves me and my kids love me, and I'm a fairly lovable guy, so the fact that God loves me is not a big surprise.

But when I realize that I'm a wretch, when I realize that all my best-ers are like dirty, filthy rags, that every good thing that I've ever rested in, that every service I attended, every cup of coffee I gave, every offering that I gave, every time I went downtown and gave stuff out to poor people, none of that translates into currency that works in the kingdom of heaven. When I realize my condition, and I realize that God would love somebody like that. See, that's why it says it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Because a rich guy thinks he can buy himself in everywhere. Buy and lock. He can drive the right car, live in the right house, attend the right clubs, go to the right functions, and do the right things.

So he thinks, he figures, hey, I'll be able to do it. Jesus says it's easier for a camel, a camel to go through the eye of a lady's needle than it is for a rich guy to go into the kingdom of heaven. Why? Because a rich man is going to have to bow down flat on his face with the guy who was the thief on the cross and say, I got an F2, buddy.

And since he's unprepared to, he doesn't bow. So he remains innocent. To believe in Jesus means to quit believing in myself.

It means to quit believing in my religion. It means to quit believing in my good deeds. It means to quit relying on anything that I believe would make me acceptable before God.

And it means to come to him and say, just as I am, without one plea in my defense, except that Jesus' blood was shed for me, and that you have bid me come to you, Lord Jesus Christ, I'm going to come to you. And when a man or a woman comes like that, the assurance of the gospel is that they will be saved. Can I ask you this morning, we've finished these 10 commandments.

Have you faced your condition? Has your mouth been stopped before God? Have you understood the wonder of his provision? And if so, have you ever decided to accept the A and give up the F? And if you have, have you ever done it? I urge you to today. Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation.

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