

Gleanings From the Garden - Part 1

by Art Katz

Art Katz's sermon discusses the deceptive nature of good and the necessity of confronting falsehoods in a culture that often misdefines morality.

Duration: 1:16:42

Scripture: Psalm 41:9, Proverbs 27:6, Matthew 7:21, 1 Corinthians 5:6, Ephesians 4:15, 2 Timothy 3:5, 1 Peter 4:17

Topics: "Garden Of Eden"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of engaging in conversations with students at a university. The speaker emphasizes the importance of engaging in discussions about ultimate questions and values. The sermon also touches on the influence of media and the need to be discerning about what we consume. The speaker highlights the prophetic dilemma of having to confront and offend, but also emphasizes the universal nature of the condition that needs to be addressed in contemporary Christendom.

Transcript

Different cultures are predicated on what is good, the consensus of men and how they view values, and just one illustration of what I'm talking about is the day that I removed my TV set from out of my house. It has found a way back in, but it hardly has any use at all. I'm no more a video player, but in the old days, I came into the house, the room was dark, the living room, and the kids were glued to the screen.

My children and the children of other people in the community, they were watching a program, a drama, whose setting was the Olympics, and there was a love affair between a woman Russian athlete and an American athlete. There was nothing lewd, there was no foul language, there was nothing depicted that was sex. It had every appearance of being a very fine drama, and as I just looked in, passing through, I just caught something of the dialogue and the conversation between this man and this woman that passed for romance, that was so sinister, so evil, all the more because it was not apparently evil, but purported to be good.

And my kids, the kids were drinking it up. I went right to the machine and I pulled the plug out of the socket. It was almost like Phineas putting a spear between the fornicating Israelite and the pagan woman.

It was all the more evil because it had the appearance of good, but what was being communicated in that good was deadly. It was anti-Christ, it was contrary to God, and had everything to do with a false reality

that somehow is benign and has every appearance of attractiveness, and that's what made good evil. So when the Lord forbids the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we need to understand that the good is as evil as the evil, perhaps even more evil, because its appearance is disarming, and the culture is interwoven with what men endorse.

That seems to have the appearance of benevolent understanding and kindness, but if we could see through it, it's opposed to God. Now there's a wonderful line that I often quote from the play Hamlet by Shakespeare, where Hamlet confronts his mother. I don't know if you know the play, but in my opinion, it's probably the greatest play ever written.

It shows forth the genius of Shakespeare, and I don't know to what degree the Bible was formative in his own understanding, but there are certain things that come up in his writing that are remarkably rich. So here's a student who has come back from school to find that his father has died mysteriously, and that his mother has remarried, and she's remarried the murderer, who was the brother of the deceased husband, and Hamlet is learning about this terrible plot and subversive usurpation of power, and that this woman in her mindlessness and in her sensuality has married even the murderer and doesn't even know it, and there's a scene of confrontation in which he opens the locket from around her throat, and in it on one side is the picture of the deceased husband, and on the other side is the picture of the husband who now is, and he pushes this thing right into her face and convicts her of what she has done, lying between incestuous sheets, and all of a sudden her heart is struck because the reality of what she has in her mindlessness done comes upon her in this confrontational thing, and she cries out, Hamlet, no more! No, I can't take any more! And he says, sometimes one must be cruel in order to be kind. Well, in my short career in the Lord, I have had more than one occasion where I've had to be cruel in order to be kind, and you're going to have more than one occasion when you will appear to be cruel in order to be kind, but if you're stopped by cruelty or what appears to be offensive and violates the sensibilities of men and their definitions of what is good, you will have fallen short of God's requirement in that moment.

And the last thing, the most powerful thing that disarms saints from an ultimate obedience toward God is their respect for what is good, and wanting to be found respectful of what is good, and to receive the approval and the benediction of those who subscribe to what is good, not knowing that more often than not, what is good is evil. Only that which is from above is good. You remember when a man came to Jesus and called Jesus good? And Jesus stopped in that moment.

He wouldn't tolerate it for a moment. Why callest thou me good? There's no man good but God. He might just as well have said, there's no thing good but that which issues from God.

We mustn't be deceived by the appearances of good, and we mustn't look upon good as somehow a sanction, as being respectable and approved, and therefore we can affirm it also. And I think we're moving toward a head-on collision with culture, with society, and the thing that will offend society more than anything is when you the whistle on its apparent values, when you remove the veil, when you remove the disguise that appears to be benevolent, and show it to be vicious, self-seeking, anti-Christ, and opposed to God. The world does not want to be found out.

The whole world lies in the wicked one who is the father of lies and the master of deceit. And they remember that in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, his every probing thing was apparently good. Why don't you turn this bread, the stones into bread? Oh, you have this coming.

You deserve all the kinds of things where Jesus was impervious, he could not be seduced. So we need to be alerted to the peril of good. Why is it a peril? Because it does not appear as evil, and because the world sanctions and approves it and condones it as good.

There's no man good, Jesus said, but God, and there's no thing good but what comes from God. And what Hamlet was doing with his mother, as cruel and as fierce as his insistence upon confronting her with the truth of her sensuality and of her lie, was God, even though it brought an extreme pain. Now, I'll just give you, I said I have to draw from episodes out of my own life.

Not too long ago, maybe the south in North Carolina, I was the guest of a couple whom I've known for many years. I had known the wife for maybe 30 years, at one time she wanted to be my secretary. That's how close our relationship was.

Some of the greatest adventures in our history, that first conference on messianic discipleship was conducted in Rowley, North Carolina, and she was one of the instrumental people in setting that thing up, so we had a long history. I've been in their home many times and have spoken in the area. On this occasion, the visit began by attending a full gospel monthly meeting, whatever it was, where her husband is the full gospel president.

I was not the speaker, but we just attended. The next day my own activity began. In fact, it began at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, at the pit, which is the open debate area where the evangelists come and engage these students in face-to-face confrontations, and I've been there before and have had really significant times of confrontation.

But the night before, I'm at this full gospel thing, and it is horrendous. It is full gospel at its worst, back-slapping, amens and hallelujahs. It was a carnal, I don't know what to call it.

I could barely sit my way through it. It was so bad. It's a culture.

It's a full gospel culture, and full of loud, ribald statements, and ain't we got faith, and all of that kind of thing. I could barely get through it. Well, the next morning was the confrontation at the university, and this brother, who's the president, came and brought one of his officers with him.

We sat around the perimeter of this pit area, and instead of my preaching or speaking, the Lord had another format. It was one-on-one, just going to these students, sitting around that perimeter and engaging them in conversation and earnest discussion. A number of black students, and white of course, and the last one that I spoke to was a Jewish boy.

I would not have known it. Blonde and blue-eyed. So the Lord was really engaging representatives of the whole of humanity around that pit.

Students who are earnest about questions of an ultimate kind. But these two men sat watching and had not a single word to say. They had nothing to say.

They were not involved in engagement, though it was available to them. And something in my spirit was being chafed in the contrast between what was taking place the night before in this so-called evidence of the Holy Spirit, and ain't we got faith, and blah blah blah, and their complete silence when it counted. Where was your Holy Spirit then? Where's your anointing now? Where's your unction? Where's this fullness of the Spirit when life and death and eternity is at stake right now? Why are you silent? Well, I

didn't say anything then, but the final meeting was at this brother's house.

And that morning, as is my practice and the Lord's early, because I had a premonition that that night I must address this and speak it. And it's going to be offensive. It would be a naming of names.

It would be clear to everyone that if I drew the comparison between the full gospel, look my no hands, fulminations, and the silence of the same men were counted, that it would be clear who was being referred to, but that I would have to do it. That there was something at stake. It wasn't the Lord just wanting to needle someone.

It was the Lord wanting to expose a whole counterfeit Christian culture that revealed its paucity, its emptiness, the night, the morning after the night before, by the failure to be able to bring that so-called fullness of the Spirit to the point of confrontation where life and eternity was at stake. Can you understand what I'm saying? I'm giving you a little picture of the prophetic dilemma of having to offend and that your heart is pierced in a strange way that would have passed completely over the mind of the heart of the understanding of others, but somehow the prophetic heart is zinged by the contrast of the profession of the one and the failure of the other. And somehow to the prophetic man, it's more than just a moment that took place in North Carolina.

It's an eternal moment. It's a statement of a condition that is pervasive that goes far beyond North Carolina. It's universal in our contemporary Christendom, and it needs to be confronted, needs to be revealed.

It needs to be, the whistle needs to be blown. See what I mean? But you can't blow that whistle and be nice. You can't register the heart of God and spare those who are the very ones that were involved.

There's a necessity to be cool in order to be kind. And I felt that these people were living a kind of dream world, a fantasy that their amens and hallelujahs and turning up the volume of the loudspeakers and the whole ribald, R-I-B-A-L-D culture, I don't have another word for it, was somehow representative of reality. But where was it when it counted? It was revealed as wanting, and it needs to be addressed.

And that, so I was early in the morning in their house. They were still sleeping. The brother who was with me from Ben Israel was still sleeping.

The same brother who slept while I was run over by a hundred Mack trucks in the Philippines and in Australia and in New Zealand, he accompanied me on a Southeast Asia trip, where every time we came to a capital city, I spent an entire sleepless night being worked over by the evil one. I can't tell you, not just physically as well as spiritually. Groanings and agonizings of the powers of darkness while my brother snored all through the night.

I even took my flashlight to see what he was doing. Could he remain in that sleep while I'm going through this agony? Yes, he did. This is a brother who has subsequently left us because his wife heard from the Lord that Ben Israel is under judgment and they're getting out while they're getting it good.

Doesn't the scripture speak about those with whom you went into the house of the Lord together and they ate your bread and now they've kicked up their heel against you? You see how I'm required to draw from these things, not because I want to identify anyone or embarrass anyone, but this is the grip of life and the prophetic men are groomed in it and draw from it. That's why they marry prostitutes. That's why their wives leave them.

That's why they're confronted with infidelity. Is there anything that more crushes a man's spirit and leaves him hanging for dead than to find his wife in bed with another man? I'm speaking that symbolically. Whatever corresponds to that, that must come into the experience of men who bear God's burden for an Israel that has gone to bed with idols.

That somehow those that are called to that nation and are involved in the process of their restoration have in some measure to know God's own grief, what he has had to bear over the ages in the unfaithful wife that Israel has been. It's remarkable when I look back over the years how many men I see that are being dealt with like that and it's for me the evidence that they have that goal. So that morning I was on my face before God if I could have run and found an exit.

The time I finished crying out the guy because I knew what he was calling for that night in and the meeting was in the man's own house. Well brother haven't you ever heard of southern propriety? You don't do that in the south. You don't bite the hand that feeds you.

You don't offend those who have profit hospitality. What kind of a brute are you anyway? So I knew what was coming and I was crying out the time I finished and I'm not, this is not an appeal for pity but a description of what is intrinsic to the prophetic call. To whatever degree that call is yours it's the call of the church at large in itself.

The church that's not prophetic is not the church. So there's a measure in which the church must bear and experience realities of this kind and if it's not your call personally you're called as an intercessor for those who have that call who have got to groan through episodes of this kind all the more as we come closer to the end of the age where the issues are so pregnant that they can't be addressed in any other way without being cruel. So when I finished my time before the Lord while my brother was yet sleeping who later on though he was with me the whole thing accused me of arrogance that my speaking that night though he didn't tell me that then but later on in his indictment against me by which he has been justified in leaving Ben Israel he recalled that episode as being a statement of my arrogance.

Well I want to tell you dear Saints I'm not saying that the man is not right he may be right maybe I'm wrong and that the prophetic man has always to live with the tension of that very possibility. You'll never know with uttermost certainty that what you spoke and what you did was to look it may well have been human arrogance. It's either that or it's uttermost humility the one or the other.

When Jesus upset the money changes tables was he being arrogant? By every appearance would he really take it upon himself to physically turn over these tables and who did he think he was and these are long established practices and people needed to buy pigeons that couldn't afford a lamb for sacrifice. So it's a moot question of whether that act of obedience to the Father was a man acting out of his own bumptious presumption and arrogance or really the uttermost humility. If humility is not the issue of walking on eggshells and being self-effacing but humility is doing the will of God no matter what the requirement and knowing that the greater the obedience the more it will be misunderstood and be misconstrued as exactly being opposite of what it is sort of the act of love is looked upon as cruelty.

You know what I mean? And you'll be accused of lovelessness when it's the very act of love that people misconstrue. Do you know why? Because they are attuned to the world's definition of that which is good and they're judging you by that standard because they themselves are living consistently from the tree of knowledge of what is good rather than knowing what is good from the life of God. And what is good from the life of God in one moment may be for the very next day not good.

In other words you can't act on it because it was the Lord one day as if he's giving you a principle or an allowance that that act can always be. No. It's a moment-by-moment obedience to God which is good and never our determination by our thought of our assessment of what is good.

Because by every human reckoning that night it was not good to name names. I didn't name the man by name but it's clear who's being described. But there was no way to reveal the issue of what has happened to our American Christendom in its charismatic form that its blatant failure were accounted in the issues of eternity around that pit area with those students.

So I spoke that night there was a you could have heard the proverbial pin drop and it was a real call to resurrection life that there's no alternative for us but to live and move and have our being in him because we're moving by our own humanity our own thought our own definitions of what is propitious and appropriate. We will miss God. It was a real call to a death and resurrection and I naively thought that the Word of God would bring that man and those who are with him in subscribing to that culture down on their faces nigh unto death and that they would be raised up into a whole new dimension of a resurrection life that is what the South really needs what those students really need.

But no he sat quite complacently and listened because he's a southern gentleman and I'm a Brooklyn lout and so he has the largesse and the magnanimity to tolerate this offensive and crude thing that is biting the hand that feeds it and violating against one's own host in one's in his own home. That man today is dying from cancer. When I got home there was a letter waiting for me or soon after making sure that I understood what an offense I had been and that I had burned the bridges behind me and I had destroyed relationships that were over a quarter of a century old by my brute insensitivity and I tried to answer how do you answer a little like that.

Now that man is dying of cancer. He's had all kinds of treatments and we prayed for him here at Ben Israel and then I don't know if Adam remembers or Pearl morning prayer times. I had the thought should I write him a letter? I wonder if there's any conjunction between his cancer you remember that and the fact that he had repudiated the word of the Lord and the servant who bore it.

Could that be that that God would allow a judgment of that kind nigh unto death by refusing that critical word? At least it's a possibility and how can we pray for his healing or deliverance if God is waiting for a repentance. So what am I going to do now write him a letter and say that your cancer this is what they call this is putting salt in the wounds. This is heaping offense upon injury.

It was one thing to be a loudmouth and a boor and violating Southern conventions and propriety and what is good then but now while the man is suffering cancer and is staring death in the face to bring an accusation or an indictment and a suggestion. You know what they know how they interpreted his cancer? It was a brave testimony because the man's doctor is Jewish and they're really showing their faith and it's the enemy attacking them and well that's one way to perceive it and maybe they're right. Am I saying that thus sayeth the Lord that that cancer is directly related to the rejection of God's Word and God's Messenger? I can't say thus sayeth the Lord but I know it could be a possibility and do I have the responsibility understanding that to write that to them while the man is down? What would you do? Stay on with the Lord and it will be.

That's why I'm taking the pains to recount this. I'm in advance. This is coming.

Should having offended once do you now perform the greater offense and suggest that the man's cancer is not the statement of his spirituality where he's giving a brave testimony and fighting against the devil but a consequence of a rejection of a time significant word and the man who bore it and that you'll not be delivered from your cancer unless you acknowledge that and repent of that and it will release the deliverance of God. I sent that letter. I wrote that letter.

I sent that letter. I have not heard from them since. I can only imagine the the horror when that letter came.

Wow. Well it was one thing when he did that but now. So how are we led? What's one of the basis for our obediences? How do we assess and act? And here's where the issue of the two trees comes in.

Are we acting on the basis of what we think good? And how much of our thinking is socially and culturally conditioned? I can remember an episode some months ago a couple had come to us. They're only here maybe a couple of weeks. We're having a Bible study in their home on the cross and at a certain moment I don't know what possessed me I turned and I looked at the wife and I said something about your politeness is a mask.

I don't remember the exact words. Just like that and the Lord was uncovering something that had been what shall I say a guarded personality all through that woman's lifetime and the Lord was pressing to open it and she started crying. Oh praise God.

It was the word of the Lord and she needed this relief and this confrontation. I don't take any delight in that but there it was and one of the sisters in the room the next day in the prayer meeting make sure to make clear how that was an offense and look at how the poor woman was upset and disturbed by it and that that that that that. The woman who is making these comments the next day is speaking herself out of a cultural mentality that you don't do certain things publicly.

It's not nice. Look how she was offended. More recently in one of our community meetings just before the advent of this school the issue came up about Inga cooking in the kitchen.

Well if you know the history my wife is not at all reticent to let you know her whole history of grief with Ben Israel and this is wrong and that's wrong and that that that that that and my husband she's going to make sure that you're not all that carried away by being that impressed with her husband because she can tell you his foibles and will just give her this much opportunity and so the question was she she was not cooking last year the Lord gave us a replacement but she wanted to cook this year should we allow her and would she begin to express those things that would have an adverse effect on students and those who come. It was a real question a legitimate question. It had to come up in our community meeting because I wasn't going to push something through that would affect us all and affect the school.

It was a critical thing. It needed to be publicly discussed and we had come to a place of maturity where those things can be discussed. Sure enough the same lady who was offended by my abrupt turning to that young wife and saying your politeness is an exterior cover you know and was offended that I allowed my wife to be the object of discussion and she made sure to say in the next morning's prayer meeting this distant embarrass her to say I don't know what man would ever have allowed his wife to be the object of public discussion like that implying that this man allowed that but why did this man allow that? Because I have a greater responsibility then quote the protection of my wife.

We're out we're in this but my wife and I where our faces are sticking out we're naked and exposed that's what community is. All you who went to hear abandon all hope of covering your in your dignity and issues are going to arise in which you yourself are the object of the discussion. So yes from the point of view of morality or propriety that could be offensive but from the point of view of the health of community for the righteousness of the issue for the necessity to discuss something that could not be veiled there was there was no alternative it had to be out.

So how do you view it? From what tree are you eating? So that's what is in my spirit this morning that we must not make sure to pass over the subject of the two trees and miss the subtlety and the power of what issues from the tree of the knowledge of good as well as evil that the good in the last analysis can be more insidious than the evil because it disguises itself and appears as good and for us the toughest issues in the last days are going to be seeing through what is good and sometimes having to be cruel in order to be kind. Well what example do we have in the Lord himself and in the God of our fathers in having to be cruel in order to be kind? What do we call his judgments? How do we understand his holocausts? How do we understand the destruction of two temples? The inviolability of Zion where the Jewish defenders against the Roman legions were convinced that God had to win because how is he going to allow uncircumcised pagans to destroy the city of God itself and the holy temple of God itself? They died on its roof, burned by the fire that was set by the Romans to the temple in order to melt the gold out of it and they were crushed. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost.

The blood I think was proverbially up to the bridle of the horses. You know almost the total population annihilated and a remnant sent into slavery in the Roman Empire. It was one of the one most massive tragedies in Jewish history and the only thing to which it can be likened is the holocaust of the Nazi time.

But where was God? The God who is kind and good. There's no man good but God. Oh yeah? So how do you explain that? Well I have to explain it that when God has got to be cruel in order to be kind that cruelty is good.

That judgment is love. Painful though it is and God does not restrain himself because he is violating against the expectation of his own people or their own understanding. He's willing to leave them devastated not only in their bodies but in their minds and in their hearts and in their understanding and is not quick to give explanation.

It's now a half century since the German holocaust, Nazi holocaust and there are yet a people without explanation and in fact Jewish authorities of the Orthodox kind think that it's not propitious. It's unbecoming even to seek an explanation let alone that your explanation has something to suggest that the holocaust was not some aberration in history or a historical accident but the fulfillment of God's own very word in judgment for sins that go back through the generations and are called for in this historic moment of time. Now you know that a rabbi in Israel has recently caused a great furor because in one of his public addresses he said the holocaust was God's judgment on sinners who were reincarnated to experience that judgment.

Whoa all hell broke loose. What are you saying? You're defiling the memory of the martyrs who died nobly and you're offending their survivors by suggesting that there's even a connection between the holocaust and sin because reincarnation is his own strange twist but he's the first religious authority that I know that has even implied that there's a connection between the holocaust and sin and that that took the top off. You could the howls and screams and shrieks from every sector of Israeli society and Avraham Borg an

Orthodox Jew with a yarmulke on his head who presides over the Knesset he said well that rabbi had to blame man because he could not bring himself to blame God.

Can you believe that? That it's better to blame man than to blame God. In fact if you'll not blame man God is inevitably the culprit. So it's as if the lid is being lifted from the garbage can and what men are expressing in their horrified responses to this rabbi's statement reveals their hearts.

So be assured that we're going to offend many in the last days but my concern and I think the jealous heart of God this morning is that we don't miss him at any given moment because we're acting out of the consensus of culture and of society that has established the norms of what is acceptable and what is good. The world is eating from the wrong tree and good from that tree is death. God's cruelty that seems not to be good is life maybe not in the moment but ultimately and we have got to have an unswerving devotion to the tree of life and abstain at all costs from allowing ourselves to draw from the tree of knowledge of good and evil it will always be death.

Let's get right down to the nitty-gritty. Was it good to send that letter to this dying man and his wife or just raising the possibility that maybe what is that issue here is a failed response to God and God's messenger that needs to be recognized and repented for? Who says you're right in that and if you're not right aren't you really pouring salt into the open? Is this a time to make a suggestion like that when a man is gasping for very life? Isn't that cruel? Isn't that an offense? How would you determine whether to send that letter or not? Are you going to hear a voice from heaven? Listen, thus saith the Lord my son, yes send that letter. This is complete silence where he allows you to choose from the one tree or the other and I'll tell you what if you're not consistently living from the tree of life and have too often condescended to the other you're not likely to know.

You understand what I'm saying? I don't have a word for this. I'm saying this now for your benefit. My poor wife has had to suffer me for over 35 years.

You know how Inga is made? God bless her. She comes out of a Danish culture that is nice and she wants always to make people feel good and it's so solicitous for them that when we had our most recent house guest she laid out two sets of towels on the bed, two bath towels, two this. It's always overkill, it's always nice, it always grates me but I have grated her.

That poor woman has had to bear the humiliation of sitting on a platform while her husband is bringing offense to the sponsors of a conference whom she loves and wants to spare and not offend. So I've done more to kill my wife in the area of her sensibilities and kindness because she's made that way. She has the gift of mercy and of kindness and here she's living with this brute who goes where angels fear to tread and brings uproar and that's why she doesn't want to travel with me.

So what do you do when you're faced with the issue of obedience to God and offending against a wife who's delicate and whose culture and upbringing will completely misconstrue that moment and will be hurt by it? Well you can be assured you're not going to have an immediate satisfaction or gratification or seeing God smooth out the wrinkles and placating and making everything right. He'll allow even that obedience to go for a long time to be a sore and exacerbating thing, an irritation before you vindicate it. And your wife has got to bear that for that length of time also and maybe there's a vindication that has yet not come.

Obedience to God will bring that offense to those that are dear to you and are you willing to allow them to be offended and trust the Lord at some future time of his choosing to bring the answer and reconcile and

show them that it was of himself and that they actually have received a benefit. Though you know it's not going to come in the moment. See we don't suspect our own humanity the way Jesus does.

We somehow are convinced that we have some virtue, some ability, some understandings and knowledge. It says many believed upon him seeing what the miracles that he performed, but he would not entrust himself to them for he knew what was in man. He would not even accept the tribute of their acknowledgement of him as Messiah because they came to that conclusion by interpreting the miracles, the external work of God.

It was not revealed to them from the Father which is in heaven. So he would not even receive their acknowledgement because it came humanly rather than divinely. So great was his suspicion of that which is in man.

But as Oswald Chambers I think says he was never cynical about man. It didn't allow him to be embittered because he knew what was in man. He just was powerfully realistic and understood that there's only one source of good and that is God.

That's why those two trees are so remarkably important. And I just have to repeat myself, unless you are habituated to the tree of life, you're continually living from it. You'll not miss the critical moments.

So this is more than just an ability that you're going to find in a crisis moment if you have not consistently and consciously cleaved to the life of God and the life of God. What do we say? Why didn't they go to that tree immediately? Because somehow it was not as apparently as attractive as the other. In fact it might have had something of the repulsion of the cross itself and that to go to the place of life is always to go through something that has as its first appearance death.

Isn't that ironic? It's the life that issues out of death and it would repel us. We want to go to what's more attractive, what the world thinks, what the world applauds, what's kind, what's nice, what's good. That's death.

But to go to an offensive letter heaping insult upon injury that appears to be death, if it is the Word of God, could save that man out of death as nothing else will or can. And you have got to be willing to experience the death of sending it because you might be wrong. See what I mean? It's a death guys.

Going to the tree of life is a death and we have got to be willing for it. And I think one of the most powerful illustrations, just a moment ago, is Jesus hearing that his friend Lazarus whom he loved, let's put in the scripture, he's a zinger. That's Lazarus who's a stranger or a secondary acquaintance or a casual guy whom you love is sick, implying sick unto death.

And Jesus hearing that remained two days longer where he was. And the disciples assuredly gathered that our master is saving his neck because Bethany is only a stone's throw from Jerusalem and already the word is out that his life is in peril. So he doesn't want to bring himself in a place of jeopardy to his own life by coming immediately to the bedside of his friend and saving him who saved strangers, who healed this one and that one.

Why would he not immediately alleviate the distress of one whom he loved? Isn't that good? Shouldn't he have done the good thing, the expected thing, the approved thing? Didn't the sisters chide him when he finally came too late? If you had been here, our brother would not have died. Both the sisters said that, both the spiritual one and the woman who attended to the kitchen. Both gave him the same thing in his

teeth.

It was a zinger, a rejoinder, a thorn. If you had been here, coward, Jesus was willing to offend the sisters, was willing to offend his disciples who would surely misconstrue his failure to act as personal cowardice. And he did not offer a word of explanation, but only to say in a mysterious way, this sickness is not unto death, but this will glorify God the father and his son.

And sure enough, by the time Jesus came, this man was already four days in the grave. Where have you laid him? And Jesus wept. The shortest verse in all scripture, two words, Jesus wept.

What was he weeping about? Was it saccharine tears? Was it sentimentality? Was it the loss of his friend? Or was he weeping about the Jews that were having a bash of, what's the word? Psychic, cathartic release of having a good cry. Wasn't it a pity that a man so young had to die and that if his friend had really come earlier, it might have been prevented. What lamentable loss, how sorrowful.

And they were enjoying their tears, self-pitying. Jesus wept because to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Death is not all that tragic.

And where's the sovereignty of God who alone determines when to take a saint. What are you crying about? It's evident that you're not rightly related to him and you have no understanding of the superiority of heaven and of the unquestionable sovereignty of God that you're allowing yourself this bash in tears. I think he was weeping over the weeping because it was such a statement of the chronic era of Israel of its being out of place in God that completely misconstrued the meaning of the death of a young man.

But where have you laid him? And then Jesus stood by the tomb and turned his eyes to heaven and said, Father, I know that you hear me always. How do you know that? Because he hears God always. He hears the Father always.

Because he's up early every morning while it's yet dark seeking a place of prayer, which is more than just putting his petition to the Father, but being in the place of communion to hear the Father, to receive the import of the Father, the disposition of the Father, the sense without the Father naming off the details, but registering upon the one who has come into communion with him in prayer. Those things that will give him a sensitivity and walking out a day that will surely offend many because of an obedience registered and affected by the communion obtained in the early morning prayer time. You want to know how to eat from the tree of life? Not in the moment of whether you write the letter or not, but all the moments that have preceded it while it is yet dark and everyone else is sleeping.

You're before the Lord, not plying him with your petitions, but being in his presence. I can't tell you what that confers. It's something about God as God that when a crisis moment comes, though everything is contrary to what it says, you shouldn't do that.

Somehow inwardly, you know that this is the way that I must go, misunderstood though it be. How do you know that? Because you've been in a place of communion with the tree of life himself. So when Jesus cried out, Lazarus come forth, what? Talk about history in suspension, talk about eternity at stake, talk about the whole issue of the salvation history of God coming to a point in that one moment of whether this man was going to be raised from the dead.

That resurrection is the make it or break it issue of the validating of the son of God and the whole issue symbolically of Israel's one day future resurrection when it will be called out of its grave, when a prophetic

people who will be standing before the tomb of Israel in the last days will have the same prophetic credibility and oneness with the father and authority to speak a word that will release that nation, that they'll take the veil from its eyes and unbound its hands and loose it to be what God intended Israel always to be and cannot be accepted the resurrection mode. It'll not bless the families of the earth except out of a resurrection power, resurrection enablement, the life of God and it's got to experience death first. So don't you go running to Israel now and making nice and placating and telling them God loves you and you don't have to suffer this and you hang in there, you'll come through.

That's false encouragement, that's false counsel, that's pre-empting God but not to run and not to go. I thought you loved Israel, I thought what are you doing and they're going through crisis, shouldn't you be there now and comfort them? False comfort is deadly and Jesus refrained, restrained himself but what does it mean for Jesus in his humanity not to go to the bedside of a man whom he loves who is writhing in his sweat and in his fever waiting for his friend to come and it's not explained to him why his friend does not come. So the friend also has to suffer without explanation unto death and Jesus knows that.

Everything of that suffering is registered upon his humanity in every corpuscle and yet he restrains himself, he will not go. In order for the life of God to come out in the statement, Lazarus come forth, rested entirely on prophetic obedience unto death. Had he done the good thing, I don't have a word to assess what the loss would have been and this very thing that he did do that raised Lazarus from the dead set in motion Jesus's own torturous death because when they saw that and the whole world will be running after him, it's now time that one man died for the nation.

His obedience to the father set in motion his own death and it will set in motion yours. Prophetic obedience, it's going to violate everything to which not only the world but Christianity itself subscribes as to what is appropriate, what is good, what is acceptable, what is nice. You call that Christian? You call that indifference Christian? Where's your love? Are you willing to die to the reproach of accusations that you cannot answer? Are you so lost in God that you have no reputation to maintain? What about your spirituality? You're a minister, you're expected to do this or to do that.

Are you dead to that? That's what it means to adhere to the one tree and to ignore the other. It is, despite all appearances, uttermost love and obedience to God and respect in the honor of his name. Priestliness means blood and gore from fingertips to elbow.

You can't be a priestly mediator between man and God except you're willing for that blood. By the time the priest is finished, as I say on my message on priestliness, you can't tell where the sacrifice ended or the priest began. He's become interred with his own sacrifice.

Then he can perform and stand before God, before men. I'll give one more illustration out of my many episodes of the past. When I came in California one time years ago, another kind of full gospel conference with this pastor I'd never met him before, I was assured that I had to be there and be a speaker.

I came late, the conference was already on, it was a hot day, I was driving, my feet were swollen, my shoes were off, I wasn't wearing my tie. Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the middle of the sun. I arrived in that condition, completely out of it, no inspiration.

Finally, we went in and quickly washed my face, got my shoes on, sat down, and there was a woman missionary talking. I forgot what she was saying about God and the abundance and what he puts on the table. I couldn't stand it.

Finally, when I was called on, the first word I said was, if I hear one more word about this kind of abundance by faith, I will puke. From that day, the children of the pastor never came back to any service. People were horrified.

I went on from that beginning, each time worse, more horrendous, more wild. I thought, what am I saying? I was being put up at a motel. I was hoping that the car would not come for me, that they would learn finally to let the man alone.

No, there it was every time. Every time I spoke, it got worse. When I had to look in to the face of the pastor's wife, you want to see looks that could kill.

If you want to see pure, unadulterated hatred coming out of a spiritual woman's eyes and face toward me as if I was the most loathsome thing that had ever come upon the scene, the poor man was beside himself. We came into the office. I said, dear brother, I can't explain what I'm saying and what I'm doing.

He said, artist, I've never experienced anything more horrendous than this in my life. You're making a mess of everything. It's terrible.

I said, I know it. We went down on our knees. He said, but I know that you're supposed to be here.

I can't reconcile. And so it went right to the end. And the Lord did not pull the string until the end.

And in the end, he brought it all together and broke through. It was necessary. That outrageous confrontation, that violation of all taste and rectitude was necessary to break through that veneer of a man who was taught how to build the church by hiring airplanes and taking people for rides and dropping balloons.

And I mean, it came out of a whole milieu in an environment that is so unbelievably carnal that it took this devastation of the word again and again, to finally break through. So I always remember the last morning, the day of our departure, and his wife was not there. And I said to the brother, where's your wife? Oh, he said, art.

She was all the night weeping, all through the night, because you finally broke through and opened her to things that went back all the way to her earliest childhood that had been suffocated and suppressed and compressed and was like a cancer that affected her rigid, religious, righteous behavior. You exploded that. And she just wanted to tell you that she's grateful and that she thanks you.

Well, you don't always experience that kind of vindication at the end. And you yourself don't know why you're acting as you are, because it's not only violating the sensibilities of the congregation and the pastor who's inviting you, it's violating your own sensibilities, your own sense of propriety, your own sense of what is right and appropriate from a minister. Are you willing to be obedient, even when you yourself are offended? That's the kind of obediences which God will call in the last days, that will be the issue of life or death.

I could have been a nice guy, I could have blessed them, I could have said all kinds of things, but the wife would have remained in that condition. And the man would have gone on in that full gospel-ish mentality of how to build the church. He was devastated in his every category.

It was back to square one. God threw everything up in utter confusion and confrontation. It took that.

And maybe that's a picture of what it's going to take. I'm wondering about all of these revivals and the Torontos and men running from all over the world, and God allowing it. But I'm wondering if one day he's going to call for it.

Men so persuaded that what they're experiencing is God, when it actually might be. I'm not saying it is, I'm willing to make allowance. But assuming again, that he's allowing men to have what they want, experience.

Some kind of thing that lifts them from the grayness of their everyday predictable Christianity. And they're so in such a place of lacking in the knowledge of God, that they construe any sign of power as being God, and are quick and avid to grasp for it, and to lend themselves, and to submit to it, no matter what they're incurring and bringing into themselves, that one day will redound to their ill. Though in this moment, they're experiencing quote, blessing, excitement, whatever.

And that the Lord will one day bring it down, and show them that they did err, because they did not know God as they ought, and were so hungry for some kind of an experience that would alleviate their grayness, that they were not too questioning or critical or discerning as to the auspices or the origin of that which they ran too greedily to receive. I think that one of the leading exponents of that movement, I could even mention his name. He said, even if it's from the devil, it's good, because our condition is so desperate that that that's, we need something to happen, even if it comes from the devil.

Can you believe a statement like that? I can't help connect. Let me read from Karl Barth. The man who lives under the sign of the tree of life cannot know of himself that which he must know, and which has therefore to be told him to be explained and interpreted to him.

The reality of divinely given life speaks for itself. The possibility of divine likeness does not do so. It obviously does not commend itself.

Man has to be told specifically, and that and is in fact is told that from that tree he must not eat. It's not an opinion, not an evaluation that he makes. He needs to be told and to receive the word that comes to him from God as being the statement of the Lord.

And that this is the relationship that God is wanting to establish from the first in the garden, that man is not to make his own independent assessments or determinations by the operation of his own mind, which is eating from the wrong tree, but that he recognizes that there are things that he cannot know. He cannot know what is good. You cannot know what is good, because what is good in your estimation and that of the world and of society, and that is approved and conventional, can be the most vicious opposition to God in his way.

And what might be approved on one moment is for the next moment wrong and evil. You cannot know. And if you need to know, you're already habituated to the wrong tree, that the issue for man in the garden if he's going to enjoy the Edenic and paradisaical relationship with the God who is the creator and alone knows what is good, because when he created, he said, and it is good.

And he made light and day. He said, it is good. Everything you created, it is good.

He alone knows what is good. We cannot know, except that we are told, you shall not. And the issue of relationship with God is the fellowship that comes with obedience to that which is told us and which is given from his word or from the tree of his life.

Well, that brings the whole emphasis on the role of the prophet to the king, the role of the prophet to the church, the role of the prophet to society and to the world, the role of the church in its prophetic function to the world. Because how shall the world hear and the world know what is right in God's sight, except it comes from those men and that church that have this prophetic character and distinction who have been trained in uttermost fidelity to God through the process of death and can speak the word of the Lord, contrary to the world's whole understanding and expectation. See how critical this prophetic function is.

And giving you enough example, and maybe, you know, out of your experience and from the reading of prophets, the dealings of God with them is severe, ruthless in what he requires from them in order that they would be so paired and shifted from themselves and their own sensibility, their own sense of propriety. Don't they have it? Aren't they ethical and moral men that they might be ruthless in what needs to be spoken because only they can convey it. The whole issue is being heard, that their word comes to them as the word of God.

They are the mouthpiece speaking for God as God and giving of discernment, a perception of reality completely in opposition to where men otherwise would understand it. And the issue of their receiving that word contrary to their understanding is the issue of life or death. What a remarkable thing the prophetic phenomenon is.

And the irony is that the more faithful the prophetic man to the fidelity of God and to that word, the more likely to be accused of being false. Because he offends. Is this a time to tell Israel that they're facing imminent disaster? Hey, shouldn't you rather encourage them? Aren't they suffering enough? Haven't you suffered enough historically? Come on, it's time to make nice and to assure them that whatever their present troubles with the Palestinians and God will see them through.

After all, they are the chosen people. What are you telling them that they need to brace themselves and impending disaster and your cities will be left in ruins and the nation and the land left desolate and you're again going to be expelled and be cast out into the nations? That's false. That's destroying their confidence.

That's giving the enemy his opportunity and advantage. So you can see what speaking the word of the Lord will mean. It's got to be misconstrued, got to be misunderstood.

And you'll be accused of just the opposite. If you're speaking out of love, it's lovelessness. You'll be accused even being a Jewish messenger of being antisemitic.

We lose the rest if we exceed the limitation of God. If we can only rest in the defined limitations that God has established for us as creatures. But when we transgress and take for ourselves an activity or a role or a conduct that is not ours, we lose the rest.

We've got to rest within the confines of God. So we're raising up a whole generation of distraught women full of fretfulness and anxiety and seeing psychiatrists and drugs and I don't know what else they're taking who are exceeding God's definition of what he has intended for women and have allowed the world to encourage them out from those parameters to function as men. Not that they're not capable.

The fact that they're capable is not God's evidence that they are entitled or encouraged to that function, but that it's given not to possess or to perform, but to relinquish and to forsake. Understand what I mean? What does submission mean if you cannot exceed that submission because you're able? It's because

you're able and not choosing to act in that ability because you want to be in the rest of God's parameters and restriction because that alone is freedom and shalom that it's really significant. See what I mean? Women can be and do exceed even men in their capability, but is that God's permissive thing or does he give it in order to be abandoned, to be forsaken? Yes, I can, but I will not because to do that though I have the ability is to move myself out from the place of the limit that God has set in his own wisdom of what is good and is the basis for my peace and my Edenic tranquility and fellowship with God and with men.

Let me read this. It is the judicial wisdom of God to know. Only God has the right to know.

Only God can know because God alone is omniscient. He knows the whole. He sees the whole thing.

Nothing is concealed to him. Everything is transparent, naked, and revealed. We cannot know and therefore we cannot judge.

We cannot assess. We cannot make a direct assessment by what we observe and think about because we'll always be in error because as we were told yesterday, there's always one thing more that we can't know that if we did know it would change the whole perspective. Only God knows and if we're going to know, we'll only know by his knowing, not by our own direct assessment, but by what is mediated through him in our fellowship and communion with him and not directly with the event, the man, or the circumstance.

For example, Moses when he directly apprehended the plight of Israel killed an Egyptian and had to flee for 40 years and was lost to the purposes of God in the wilderness tending sheep. He acted out of his own direct assessment. After all, he was a prince in Egypt and he was a Levite.

Can you think of two more distinguished attributes by which a man could have a basis for making independent judgments and acting upon them? He was a prince in Egypt and he was of the house of Levi. He was a priest as well as a prince and he acted on this uncommon human ability in looking upon the apparent distress of his people that ended by he looked this way and that way and slew the Egyptian, but he didn't look that way. You can almost say that his flight was a judgment and a necessary dealing with God if he's going to lead the people.

Then how does he receive his commission? Those 40 years later burning bush and God speaks from out of the bush and says, the affliction of my people has come up before me. Now go therefore and say to Pharaoh, you're being sent not on the basis of what you have seen, what you understand, what you have assessed. You're only going because I send you.

Look what happened the last time when you acted out of your own human assessment. Only I know the truth of this condition and I'm sending you not out of your sap, but out of my will. Now you can go.

Now you can be a deliverer. Before it only ended in the death of an Egyptian, now it'll end in the deliverance of a nation. When I was at that Lutheran seminary and I saw these middle class students bleeding for Africa, bleeding for Latin America, bleeding for the oppressed and the crushed and who are living on a nice style of life as beneficiaries of a whole system of oppression and their middle class consciences are bothering them.

And so they are bleeding hearts. They wear their hearts on their sleeves. Oh, the condition, you know, I'm not at all impressed.

I'm not at all touched. I know that as full of tears as they offer the plight of mankind tomorrow, they'll be at a rock concert. That's mankind acting out of itself.

Only God knows. Every good and perfect thing comes down from above. His thoughts are not our thoughts.

You say, well, brother, how do you know how to proceed in these days? Not misusing or abusing the potential of what's before. Look where God has sent people from different parts of the world and what a collection of saints of whom the world is not worthy. What's the agenda? And once understanding that, how do you perform it? Only by the life.

And that's what Adam was celebrating this morning in his prayer. That's what I know only too well. So.

It is the judicial wisdom of God alone to know and his judicial freedom and office to decide what he wills and does on the one hand and does not will or do on the other, and therefore what is good and evil for salvation or perdition, for life or for death. It is in this wisdom, freedom and competence of a sovereign judge. Remember what Paul said at Mars Hill? God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world by that man whom he has raised from the dead.

Well, that man whom he's raised from the dead is the one who created the world, and only the creator has the right also to be judged. For he alone knows what was good in his creation, what was violated in it by man, and what is a true judicial response in equity and in righteousness. He will judge the world.

And he judges everything, judges us, judges us in our conduct, judges us in that letter that was sent to North Carolina. I'll have to stand before the Lord one day in responsibility for having written that either in terrible offense by rubbing salt into the wounds of a dying man or in obedience to God if it is that, and I don't know for sure. I have got to take that risk and stand before him that I have offended one of his servants who really is fighting a battle against the devil and making wonderful testimony before a Jewish doctor, and you cannot know until the day of judgment.

And yet the agony of the prophetic call is you're still required to act because the one thing that would be intolerable for me to consider is to stand before the judge in that day for not having acted, for unwilling to take the risk and allowing a man to perish who might have been saved by a word that was sent to him in time that he might have repented by virtue of it. Do you mean the tension that we're in? There's no way that we can humanly resolve such tensions when life and death and eternity is at stake. Our brain box, our thought can never come to a right decision, only the life.

In the last analysis, the issue of this, the sending or not, the not sending, was the issue of my proximity to the life of God and to that tree. That I knew that I knew. I had to write it.

There was no alternative. But it was not a determination by virtue of logic or appraisal or weighing up the pros and cons. His way is not our way, nor his thoughts are our thoughts.

How many Christian kids have I upbraided for going to college who never even thought to consult God? Of course God wants me to have a career. I got to make a living. Of course he approves my choice.

Oh yeah? How do you know? Maybe he wanted you to be a garbage man first. Maybe he wanted to bring you to a place of humiliation. That you could then appreciate and receive the value of the education that would come.

And how do you know that the course that you have chosen and the major and the degree is my choice? Have you consulted me? Am I Lord or am I not Lord? Oh Lord, I'm leaving the great questions for you, but the issue of my career, my schooling, my marriage, that's my baby. Oh yeah? He's Lord over all or he's Lord over nothing. And when I challenged Christian students with questions like this, I said, even now it's not too late to seek the Lord.

And if he would say, what you're presently doing and attending is not my will, would you forsake it? And how are you going to explain that to a mother who has worked her fingers to the bone to send you to college that you could have a degree? Aren't you going to disappoint your Jewish mother who wanted you to be a lawyer or a doctor? You know what I mean? Are you willing to disappoint? Are you willing to offend in obedience to him alone who knows who is judge and who is the Lord? Because if you're not in relationship with him as Lord, you're not in the fellowship of the garden. You'll be cast out and then you'll work by the sweat of your brow and you'll know the...

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