

(Hebrews - Part 46): Christian Manifesto - Part 2

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of recognizing and experiencing our spiritual blessings in Christ as a true community of believers, distinct from mere institutionalism.

Duration: 31:21

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3, Hebrews 12:22

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of Christians living a spiritual and eternal life rather than being consumed by worldly desires. He uses the story of Elisha and the chariots of fire to illustrate the power and protection that comes from being aligned with God. The preacher also highlights the beauty and glory of God, comparing it to the beauty of nature and the senses. He concludes by encouraging believers to embrace the beauty of God and share it with others, even if they are met with skepticism or disbelief.

Transcript

Paul also tells us some of the things we've been brought unto. Not that we will be brought unto in the day of Christ, but that we now enjoy. He says, Ephesians 1, 3 and on, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places.

Once more, don't think of heaven as far out beyond Venus and Mars and Saturn, and don't think about our being blessed with something way over there. These heavenly places, or heavenlies, are now present to us and available to us, according as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself, and that present, according to the good pleasure of his will, through the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved, that present, in whom we have redemption through his blood, that present, the forgiveness of our sins according to the riches of his grace, that present, wherein we have abounded, he hath abounded to us in all wisdom and understanding, having made known unto us the mystery of his will, that present, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself, that in the dispensation of the fulness of times. And then he races on out into the future and shows that all this that we have is but, as Eisenhower once said, a prelude.

It's the beginning of what we are to have. He was talking about politics and we are talking about theology, but all this that we have is but the prelude to all that we will have. And yet we do have these things.

They are here for us. I want to call your very, very careful attention to this, that the institutional church misses all this. And I must explain what I mean by institutional church, because as soon as you have three people organized, you've got an institution.

So I'm not objecting to an institution. As soon as you have a President and a Vice President, a Secretary and Treasurer, that'd be four, but we'll make three. As soon as you have an organization, you have an institution.

So it's impossible for a church to be together and have a pastor and an elder and a deacon and an usher and not be an institution. But institutionalism, institutionalized churches, tend to move away from the shining glory that we are called unto, the thing that makes us churches, and differentiates us from all other social bodies. The institutional church, which is merely institutional, which is an organization and not an organism, which is what it is because of its constitution to which everybody subscribes, or instead of being the spiritual body, the company of renewed Christians, a minority group in a hostile world, I say that as soon as we get away from this concept and the institution takes over, then we don't have a church at all.

We have something else. The institutionalized church offers some good things, but not the glory. It offers social contacts, for instance, and these are very pleasant, unless we are hermits by disposition and unsocial to a degree where we don't want to meet people.

Everybody likes to meet and talk with everybody else. I'm going down to Detroit tomorrow, and I'll be there with Ken Oberman. That to me is just like coming out into the sunlight.

I'd just love to be around that big, good-looking guy. That will be pleasant now. He'll be giving missionary talks, and I'll be preaching there at Central Church.

That will be delightful. There will be others there, too. Tommy Thompson, the pastor, my good, warm, long-time friend.

Those are good things, and I appreciate them, and I appreciate social contacts. But this is not the Christian manifesto. This is not what we're for.

This is not what we stand for. It includes that, but it isn't that. These institutionalized things give us lots of things that are pleasant.

For instance, they give us parties, and there's nothing wrong with a party, I wouldn't suppose. If you act decent at the party, parties where they drink and tell dirty stories, that's another matter. But parties that are decent, I suppose nothing wrong with them.

Games, nothing wrong with games. Nothing wrong with the heights, good for your muscles. Nothing wrong with fish fries.

Fish, of course, is a brain fool. Mark Twain in one instance, a young fellow asked him if he thought he ought to eat fish, and he said, Try a whale to begin. So it's good for your head.

Then there are toasts and taffy pools. They're all good, and I don't mind them at all. At my age I'm not particularly interested in taffy pools, and I never heard any time when anybody ever got blessed at a taffy

pool and suddenly broke down and said, Glory to God, isn't this wonderful? I haven't heard about it.

Could be. But I say these are the social things, they're group activities, all harmless enough. But you can get them at the Boy Scouts, the Elks, the Eagles, and community organizations, and all the rest.

In other words, there's something you can do, and they're innocent, and they may even be pleasant and nice, but it isn't the Church. The Church could do this. There's no reason why a Church couldn't have a taffy pool, and there would be no reason why a bunch of Christians couldn't go on a hike, no reason why they couldn't fry fish.

Somebody else caught the fish, there's no reason why they couldn't, but what I'm trying to say is, the institutionalized Church lives on this because they've got nothing more. But the Church of the Living God is something else altogether. It is a group of called-out people of many nations and tribes and kindreds and tongues and levels of intellectual achievement and varying levels of educational accomplishment and varying social levels, all called together out from the world around the person of Jesus Christ.

The presence of the Lord is there, and the Holy Ghost is there, and they are a spiritual body, and they don't belong on earth. They actually belong in heaven, for the scripture says our citizenship is in heaven from which we wait for the Savior. We belong in another world altogether.

I've always been a bit amused in a kind of a sad way at how people will migrate from one country to another. Say, coming to Canada or going to the States from some other country, say in Europe, and they are going to these other countries evidently because they like it there, and yet they won't learn the language, they stay together, and they live in a certain little section in the city of Chicago. We have a Polish section, a Lithuanian section, and a strong Jewish section, and there's Chinatown, as they call it, where the Chinese live.

They come to another country, but they bring their own country with them and stay a minority group. I'm not criticizing that. I don't know why it is.

I would suppose that it could easily be figured out psychologically. But it does illustrate why Christians stick together. Christians know they are a minority group.

They are migrants. They are from another world. They have another nature.

God has imparted to them a nature which is from him, and they have a sense of belonging to each other. And while they are here, exiles or immigrants, so to speak, in this world, they love to cling together because they speak the same language, they love the same song, they are loyal to the same king and constitution, the Bible, the same king being the Lord. And thus the Christians come together.

That's what makes the Church, ladies and gentlemen. That's what I'm talking about. That's what the Bible talks about.

Now, the institutional Church starts with its trustees and the rest and goes right on, up or down, whichever way you go to be the pastor, up and down the scale. And we have it all organized. But you know, and I know, and we might as well be admitted and admitted kindly, that there are thousands of such organizations throughout this North American continent that have not one modicum of spirituality, therefore.

God isn't there, Christ isn't there, the Holy Ghost isn't there, no worship there except that which is superimposed by cut-glass windows and solemn organ tones. But that wondrous delight that the disciples felt when they saw the Lord is not there. Some go a little further, and they have literary activities.

I enjoy that, I enjoy hearing people talk about literature and political things and civic improvements. These are all good, and there's no reason why Christians couldn't take part in them, I suppose. But they are not the supreme gift of God, they are what anybody can have, whereas you and I are called unto and into that which is bought by blood and made possible through the Spirit.

The text tells us here, I've gone over this two or three times already, what we can experience now. It says that we can have them now in this life. And we tend to overlook the plain fact, and that is that the inner man is a real being just as certainly as the external man.

The soul has ears and can hear, and the heart has eyes and can see, and the Spirit has a tongue and can take, so that we can experience with our inner eyes and ears the soul, the heart, the Spirit. We can experience these things now in this life. And this is the purpose of the fellowship of the Church.

It is to bring the Church together and give them something better than they could have. You can have literary clubs, you can have political groups, no harm in them, and they may even be useful to society. You can have civic groups, and there can be civic improvements, and we're for them and they're good.

But this is not what the Church is for. The Church is a spiritual group brought together to hear with the soul and see with the heart and taste with the Spirit, and enjoy those things that are eternal which were brought to us through Jesus Christ our Lord and presented to us. Hence, these spiritual treasures are likened to material treasures.

Christ, for instance, is said to be bread and meat. So that shows that just as the external man, the outer man, has to have bread and meat in order to live, the inner man has to have Christ in order to live. Christ is to my inner spirit what a good meal is to my body.

The Holy Ghost is water and showers as springs of living water, and they shall flow out of him as rivers of water. That's the Holy Ghost. And so we have, just as we need water, oh, how desperately we need water to keep alive, for our bodies are 70 or more percent water, and if the water balance is disturbed, if we get too much or too little, we're sick.

We have to keep the balance, and always in perspiring and breathing, we give off liquid, and then we have to take water into our system in order to keep the balance right that we may live and be healthy. So the Spirit of the living God is as necessary to our spirit as water is to our body. As the outer man must drink of the spring that flows out from the hill, so the inner man must drink from the spring that flows out from the throne of God.

And then there is Christ. Christ has said he is the light, and so just as the sun must shine, the beautiful sun that shines down on Toronto today gives light to the world. Jesus said, I am the light of the world, so our inner spirits must have the light shine upon it.

Perpetual darkness is a terrible thing. They tell me that there are fish that live in underground rivers where there is no light, and those fish have lost their eyes. They can't see any more at all, because they have never had any use for their eyes.

They were hatched down there and grew, matured down there and lived and died down there, if you can call that living in the darkness. There are bugs that you sometimes find in caves, in dark caves, weird, funny, hairy, slippery looking things that make you sick just to touch them, and they live in the dark. So the human soul is said to be in the dark.

I am the light of the world, and he that follows me shall not walk in darkness. Jesus Christ becomes, not to these external eyes but to my inner life, the sun to my spirit. And he is a God of beauty? No, philosophers can't agree about whether there is such a thing as beauty at all.

The old Greeks said there was. But these modern philosophers are trying to tell us that beauty is only what the eye has been evolved to approve. And therefore it isn't beautiful, it's only beautiful because the eye has been evolved to like it.

Well, people like that have gone to school too long. As I've said, there are two ways to be ignorant. One is to go to school not at all, the other is to go to school too long.

And these brethren have gone too long, and so instead of believing in beauty, they believe that beauty is nothing. Nothing is any more beautiful than anything else, but there is a certain thing the eye has learned to approve. Well, I would rather look at a flower bed than to look at one of these lots where they put old, discarded cars, wouldn't you? My eye has learned to approve the flower.

I suppose if I want to be philosophically modern, but I don't. Ah, let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us. And there must have been some reason why the Spirit inspired men to say that he is the lily of the valley and the rose of Sharon, and he is the bright morning star, and he is the sun of righteousness with healing in his wings.

There must be something about God that set David's harp a tune and that caused Isaiah to play his great organ notes and that gave us the hymn of the day of the ages. There is beauty in God, and the Church has found that beauty. How beautiful, how beautiful is the sunset, how beautiful the starry night and the sea and the forest and the mountain, but how much more beautiful is the triune God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

We have this, and this is brought to our hearts, and the sweet fragrance of Christ. Have you ever noticed what a marvelous sense of smell it? Have you ever smelled something that took you back 20 years to some place you had been? The smell of tea berries, or what do they call it, evergreen, in chewing gum. I've forgotten.

Wintergreen, that's it. But to us back on the farm, that was tea berries. And when I get near somebody chewing wintergreen gum and he breathes in my face, I can just shut my eyes and soar back to my Pennsylvania hills, where we kids used to get down on our hands and knees and pick little cups full of them and eat them.

They are very sharp, and you can't eat too many, but oh, what a fragrance! A sweet fragrance is a beautiful thing. Anybody can tell me that wants to. But there is no such thing as a sweet fragrance, that my nose only evolved to approve certain things.

I don't know, I'm just too intelligent to take that in. I can't possibly do it. I got some Limburger one time and brought it home.

Now, I threw it out, and we've never had any Limburger around since. My nose evidently hasn't evolved sufficiently. Or maybe it has evolved too far.

I don't know. But I do know this, that I love the smell of the lily and the rose, myrrh and aloes and cashew out of the ivory palaces. But I don't like the other.

So we have this. This is accessible to us now. The Church of the Living God is to cultivate this.

To cultivate his inner sense of smell, to cultivate our inner sense of sight, to cultivate our inner sense of hearing, and cultivate our taste. And then God sits before us the rich table and says, This is all yours. Share it with the innumerable company of angels.

Share it with the General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn. Share it with those who are blessed with all blessings in heavenly places. Share it, it's all yours, and Christ in the midst, the Big Brother at the table, presiding over the Father's table, gives you these things.

We may experience these now, and this is what we Christians have to say. Now, there isn't any way possible that we can equate this with downright secular philosophy. It's impossible, you can't do it.

The world rejects this and says, You're a bunch of weird mystics and you haven't got anything to stand on. We know better than this. We know that we have eyes and see, we have ears and hear, we have hearts and feel, we have tongues and taste, oh, taste and see, that the Lord is good.

Blessed are they that put their trust in him. We don't feel called upon to make our faith intellectually respectable before the world. They said, Paul, the greatest mind probably that ever lived, even the scholars admit that, Paul was a picker up of scratch, and that much learning had made him mad.

They said very much the same thing about every other man that has stood out solidly and said, We are called unto, here is what we stand for. And they've shrugged and walked away and said, What a bunch of weird. Ah, my brother, we hear and we see, and they don't hear and they don't see.

The blind man never will believe in the beauty of a rose, and the deaf man never will acknowledge the beauty of a symphony, and the sick man will never admit the good taste of food. And so the man who is dead in his sins, though he be a learned man, a genius, an artist, a poet, he will only smile and shrug when we talk to him about the beauty of Jesus, and the glory of God, and the sweet wonder of the Holy Ghost, and the present accessibility of this Zion, the City of God, and the Church of the Firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. They smile, but we let them smile, and we smile again.

And he who smiles best who smiles last, because we know what we've found. The spirit of just men made perfect. When we lose a Christian, we don't really lose him, we think we do.

My good friend, Dr. Whitmer, I told you about him, he's gone. He's gone. And I just heard last week down in Pittsburgh, out in Pittsburgh, of how two of our young missionaries, probably in their middle twenties, I would say, had just been on the field in Peru, just hadn't been there long enough to get settled down.

They were still getting their house arranged. And early in the morning, driving in a little Volkswagen along the highway, they ran into a park truck, killed her instantly, and he's in a coma. That would be Mr. Gertner of Peru.

Now, she's gone, and we say how tragic. And it does feel that way to us in our human way, a little baby in the back seat wasn't injured. Maybe he'll die if he does, but two will be gone.

Maybe he'll live crippled. But she's gone, Dr. Whitmer is gone. I heard of my good friend E.C. Anderson, District Superintendent of Western Pennsylvania, for whom I preached many, many, many a time when he was District Superintendent.

I found him dead in bed the other day. The people of the Lord are going one by one. What shall we conclude? Are these dead soldiers? Are these casualties? Is this a loss? Never, never! As the dear old woman said to the young Methodist preacher, when he tried to console her for because she was dying, she said, God bless you, young man, don't pity me.

She said, I'm just going over the river here in a few minutes, and my father owns a land on both sides. That's all, my dear friend. They've just gone over the river.

And Bunyan said, when he saw Christian and hopeful enter the city of God and start up the Golden Street, he said, and when I had seen them, I wished myself so that we don't lose them, really. The Church of the Firstborn and the spirits of just men made perfect, they are God gathering them in. When the farmer gathers in the wheat off of one field and puts it in the granary, the rest of the fields around it don't weep and say, we'll never see them again.

Just give them a few days and the farmer will be back to the next field beside it, and he'll gather them in, and they'll all be gathered into the garner together. So we have this, the general assembly in the Church of the Firstborn. I've never cared too much for memorial windows and graveyards out back of churches.

But I wonder if there wasn't a sort of a wisdom in all that. I wonder, after all. Sometimes the only spiritual people you will find in churches are the ones that lie out back.

And I wonder if, after all, the Church isn't trying to say, wait a minute, we haven't lost them, they're still with us, they haven't gone, they're with the Lord in their spirit. But since the spirit doesn't know time and space, since the spirit of a man, it's the very quality of spirit that it is not subject to the laws of time and space. Therefore, physically they're away from us, but because our spirits and their spirits, united in Christ, rise above and laugh at the limitations of space, they're with us after all.

I don't mean there are a bunch of ghosts floating around, but I mean that they're one with us in Christ, and that soon we will all be joined and united there in one universal, organic unity, and Christ's prayer is answered, that they all may be one. Bodies are material and so subject to material laws, but the spirits are not subject to any laws except the laws of spirit. So we are with the Lord, and they are with the Lord.

Why do we enjoy so little? Why do we enjoy so little? I suppose it's because of absorption in worldly affairs, it's because of preoccupation with the cares of this world, I suppose it's because the flesh takes over, I suppose it's because of our unbelief. Dear friends, this young brother here, whom I am, is David M. Johnson. At least I am, I don't know how he feels, but I think he likes me too.

But I certainly love him. If we can only, by God's grace, inspire you to see around you these invisible spiritual gifts, these things that are yours in Christ, because you are part of the body of Christ. If you owe us a debt, you never can pay.

And if you pray for us, we'll owe you a debt we never can pay. And we'll go off together and bless the debtors to each other. Elisha, one time, was playing a little spy on the Syrians and telling Israel, the King of Israel, what the Syrians were doing.

Syria was losing the wars, the battles. So the King of Syria called them in, and he said, Who is a spy in our rank? And they said, Nobody here, Mr. King. He said, Nobody is a spy here.

He said, The spy is in the camp of Israel. He said, Well, how could that be? Well, he said, A fellow named Elisha is there, and he foresees things, and he is a prophet. Here is your man.

If you get him, you can win your war. So they started out after him, and they sent a whole army, multitudes of them. And they camped around the city of Jerusalem, where Elisha was.

And Elisha's young assistant came rushing in, pale-faced and shaking. He said, Oh, Master, Master, look, look, we're done for. What'll we do, what'll we do? Look at the soldiers and chariots.

The old man bowed his shaggy head and said, Heavenly Father, open his eyes. And God opened the young man's eyes, and what do you suppose he saw? He saw chariots and forces of fire all around about Israel, around about Elisha. And Elisha said, God, make them blind.

And they made the whole army blind. Elisha said, I can see. I'll lead you where you want to go.

And he led them into captivity. Beautiful. He had all the armies of God around about him.

But I think that story ends about as nice as any Bible story in the Old Testament. Somebody said, All right, let's kill them. Elisha said, Kill them? No.

He said, They're hungry and they're thirsty. Let's feed them and give them some water and turn them loose. And that's just what they did.

And then it ends this way, it says, So Syria came no more into the land of Israel. There weren't any corpses around there. There was just a man who could see chariots of fire and horses of fire all around about him.

I believe, my Christian friends, that if we'd stop being so carnal and so worldly and realize that we Christians are called unto something eternal and real, as real as the rock of the mountain and as eternal as the throne of God, and continue to cultivate that and preach about that and sing about that and live for that, then the overflow of this kind of spirituality out into social contacts and activities would make us what they were in the New Testament, the people who justified their right to live in the world by the good deeds they did in the world. God grant it may be so with us. Amen.

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