

(John - Part 2): In the Beginning Was the Word

by A.W. Tozer

A.W. Tozer explores the profound implications of the phrase 'In the beginning' as it relates to God's nature and the creation of the universe.

Duration: 55:17

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Genesis 2:8-9, Psalm 90:2, Isaiah 55:8-9, Matthew 6:33, John 1:1-5, Revelation 21:1-4

Topics: "Expositional"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by acknowledging the difficulty of preaching on the phrase 'in the beginning.' He compares it to the impossible task of lifting oneself up on a table from a market basket. However, he explains that the human mind is capable of doing things that seem impossible. He then asks the audience to imagine a time before time existed, when there was no space or matter. The preacher then reads and discusses the opening verses of John 1, emphasizing the power and significance of the Word. He concludes by acknowledging the challenge of preaching on such profound truths.

Transcript

The opening 18 verses of John 1 are such that anyone sensitive to the truth contained there is in danger, in attempting to preach on these verses, he's in danger of dying of a kind of spiritual suffocation. I find it so in these opening verses. I want to read a few verses and then talk from the phrase in the beginning.

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life and the life was the light of man. And the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not. Now all the excuse I have for the message I want to attempt tonight is contained in a famous line by a Pope, that fools rush in where angels fear to tread.

No man ought to try to preach on the phrase in the beginning, and yet it is here. And so to begin with I want to ask you to do something that is virtually impossible. I'm going to ask you to do that which is equivalent to standing in a market basket, reaching down, taking hold of the handles, and lifting yourself up on the table.

Now I'm going to ask you to do that tonight. That would be impossible and what I'm intending to ask would be impossible, except that when God made the human mind, he made a wonderfully flexible and resilient

instrument, capable regularly of doing things that can't be done. So that while it would be impossible physically for you to stand in the basket and lift yourself onto the table, it is not impossible for you to do what I intend to ask.

And I'm going to pay the compliment to your intellect to believe that you can do it, and then I'm going to have and do have confidence in your spiritual hunger to believe that you want to do it. To believe that you are not satisfied with religious toys, that you actually come to church to gear in to deity and meet God and hear from the world above. Now what I'm going to ask you to do is this.

I'm going to ask you to think everything out of existence. I'm going to ask you to go along with me and dismantle the universe, to take it down stone upon stone and hurl it into nothing, and unmake everything that is made. And in doing this, I'll not be acting the part of a fool or playing with the truth, but I'll be only trying to get back to where my text begins.

So I want you to think away everything with which you're familiar. A time, for instance, this rolling stream of time. I want you deliberately to get a hold of the handles of the basket and lift yourself up and say to yourself, there was a time when time wasn't.

And because our language is so limited, we have to use a word that we're trying to get rid of to tell you to get rid of the word. So we'll have to say that we want you to think of a time when time was not. And then we want you to think away space.

That used to be that a half a mile was quite a distance and two miles was quite a journey for an old horse. And now we have telescope space. Until we can get around pretty rapidly, they're going to come over from London, they tell me, and their new British jet planes in how long? Four or five hours.

They've already done it. And that makes space look pretty small. But I want you to think away and dismantle that idea and break it down and get it out of your head and say there's no space.

There isn't any such a thing as space, that there isn't any. And there isn't any such a thing as time. And there isn't any such a thing as matter, that familiar matter that one of its attributes is impenetrability.

I strike it with my knuckles and it stops me. That's matter. It has many forms.

But I want you to think of the timeless time before space was when there wasn't any matter. There wasn't anything in the universe. There wasn't any of those little things that they're breaking down now to make the atom bomb.

There weren't any. They just didn't exist. They weren't there.

And I want you to think away of all beings and all created things and then think yourself away and then go back to the void and then think the void away. Now, to raise this, I want you to get in a rocket ship with me and race backwards, not in space but in time. Race backwards in time and as we race backwards in time from 1953, we'll get rid of a lot of things.

And the latest things, of course, will disappear first. Just as when you get in a plane and soar upward, the closest things necessarily are the ones that disappear first. And then as you go up and up and up, you get the general skeletal outline of things.

But in time now, as we move backward in time away from this present moment, we first get rid of a lot of things that I'm not so sure it wouldn't be a pretty good idea to get rid of anyway. I don't know about that. That would take another lecture or a lecturer to take care of it.

But if there was a debate, I think I'd know whose side I was on. I want you to think away every city, dismantle them all. Let's get rid of London and Berlin and Tokyo and New York and Chicago and every city that there is.

And then let's think out of existence also every bridge and every highway and every famous hotel and every ship and every train and every automobile. And I say those are the things I'm not so sure it might not be a pretty good idea to get rid of anyway. An old man would be considered a heretic for even daring to say that.

But Adam and Eve didn't do so bad when there wasn't any automobile to get around the Garden Inn and when there weren't any ships to ride the sea and run away from their Edenic home. They didn't do so bad when there was only a bower with the moon shining through to bless them as they slept. They didn't do so bad when there wasn't any highway to get killed on or any city to get lost in.

They just lived and loved and knew God wasn't so bad back there. So there's a case to be made for it, but that isn't our purpose tonight. And I want you to think clear back down the years would be something of an adventure for the mind to think back of the time when Columbus discovered America when there wasn't anybody over here but Indians.

They had this whole hunk of land we call the North American continent from Hudson Bay country to the Rio Grande. They had it all and nobody was bothering them. Then think back to that, the cave builders and the back of that to the day when Abraham walked in Ur of the Chaldees and on back of that yet to the time when there was just Adam and Eve.

Think it all away. There isn't anything now but Adam and Eve and then we go back to Adam and Eve and think them out of existence. They don't exist either.

We're talking about in the beginning tonight. And then when we've gone back of Adam and Eve and have depopulated the earth and taken away every bone and every marker and every track and trace and every leaf and blade of grass and everything that is the earth. And then we begin on the stars that jut and jot down out of the heavens.

They're like pinpoints and we get rid of every one of them for there was a day when they were not and we're wanting to go back there tonight. As we race onward backward through time we have many stars now. The moon is not and the sun is not and the stars are not.

And then we go to heaven itself and there is then no sea of glass and no archangels and no seraphim and no angels and no cherubim and no four square city and no anything just the void. And that is what it means when it says in the beginning. And do you know what you would have found there then when you came to that place? You would have found God.

For it's that I am and there is no other. And Moses when you go to Pharaoh go and say I am that I am sent you. So that there before the beginning, not in the beginning, but before the beginning there was God.

Now God had no beginning. I gave a series some years ago in which I mentioned that. That God had no beginning because beginning is a creature word.

And it means that somebody was working on something. He started to work on it. He worked a while and he finished it.

And it had a beginning and then it had a finish. And that's a creature word but God is not a creature. God's the creator.

So that you never can say that God had a beginning for he never had any. God could not receive anything from anybody because God had all there was. You see that? Now I want you just to stop and kick that idea around a little while.

Brother it may give you a charley horse in your head but it'll do you a lot of good. It'll be worth more to you than the latest chorus that rolled off the press Friday. And it'll do you a lot more good than that cheap brown track that somebody wants to sell you on.

Although I give like tracks myself. But as a ruler cheap and brown. And I want you to get back of it all and way back to where God was.

And find there that God is the uncaused one. Everything around here has a cause. This building is here because.

The woman's reason, because. And it's here because there were some people who prayed. It is here because it's caused by something.

And or someone. It's here because there were a group of adventurous and faithful brethren who believed it could be put here. It was here because there were some Swedish gentlemen who lay brick on brick.

And brick on brick. And rubbed snooze and laid brick on brick. And finally the building was here.

That's the cause of it. And everything else has a cause. You have a cause and I have a cause.

Everything is the effect of some cause. Until we have gone into our machine and gone back where there was nothing and no one only God. Where there was not a creature stirring, not an angel, nothing.

And there you have causeless existence. Self-sufficient, uncreated, unborn, unmade. You simply have God.

Now I say that if God received anything from anybody then he'd be in debt to the people that he received it from. But because God is all, God never received anything from anybody. Some of us lay a ten dollar bill in the plate with a triumphant bounce.

As much as saying, now God will feel better. God doesn't need your ten dollars, brother. He just doesn't need it.

Now that hurts some of you. Some of you think you've been bailing God out every Sunday morning by giving to the offering. Say, well poor God's in bad shape and no doubt there's a depression in heaven.

But if I give faithfully, I'll save God's face and I'll bail God out. God doesn't need your money, brother. He doesn't need a dime of your money.

And if you want to keep it and let it rust and ruin you, keep it. But don't think if you give it that you're doing God the favor. God doesn't need anything you have.

God says, if I had need of anything would I tell you? No, if God had need of anything he'd be ashamed to tell us because he wouldn't be God. And God to be God has to have no need of anything. God doesn't need an angel.

And don't ever imagine that the archangels and seraphim and angels over in heaven are God Almighty's little helpers, that he created them in order that he might get along. As a farmer might hire ten hired men to help him in harvest time so he wouldn't get stuck and the rains wouldn't catch his grain in the head. God doesn't need anybody.

I know that God had himself a wonderful, glorious time in creating the universe to admire and to admire him. But God doesn't need anything because, you see, when you give God anything, you only give what God gave you in the first place. And every gift that anybody ever gave God, God never got any richer by receiving it.

And when God gives anything, he's never any poorer for giving it. If you give ten dollars out of a hundred, you have ninety left and you're ten dollars poorer. But when God gives anything, God does not lose it.

He gives it without separating himself from it. He gives it without loss and he receives back without gain, because God is all and takes in everything anyhow. So that God never received anything from anybody, that is God.

Not in the beginning, but before the beginning, because it says that in the beginning God created. But we're concerned with that which the Bible calls before the foundation of the world tonight, for the moment. So I would point out further that God doesn't need his creation.

That if he needed anything, he wouldn't be omnipotent. If God needed strength, he wouldn't be omnipotent. And if he wasn't omnipotent, he couldn't be God.

And if he needed counsel, he couldn't be sovereign, because he therefore wouldn't be, he wouldn't have his sovereignty. And if he needed wisdom, he couldn't be omniscient. And if he needed support, he couldn't be self-existent.

God has to be utterly self-existent, self-created, and yet not created. Uncreated is a better word. And self-existent, that's to be accurate, rather than the other phrase that slipped out.

And that is God. Now you've got God to deal with, ladies and gentlemen. All this little business you got around about you, little churches and little preachers and little editors and little authors and little writers and little singers and little musicians and little elders and little deacons and little tape recorders and little radios and little cities and little statesmen and little Sir Winston and little General Eisenhower and little, and we're so smothered under the little dusts of grain that make up the world and time and space and organize as I'd matter, that we're likely to forget that God once lived and dwelt and loved and existed without support and without help and without creation, self-existent God.

Now Faber celebrates God's self-existence and all in some lines which, because I've got too many things to think about to memorize, I want to read to you a few lines to you. He says, When heaven and earth were yet unmade, when time was yet unknown, thou in thy bliss and majesty didst live and love alone.

Thou wert not born, there is no fount from which thy being flowed, there is no end which thou canst serve, but thou art simply God.

Thy life is one unwarying day, before it's now, thou hast no varied future yet unlived, no lapse of changeless past. Far upward in the timeless past, there form and space had come, we see thee by thine own red light, thyself thine only home. Now that was before the beginning.

And then it says, In the beginning God created. Now of course it doesn't mean in the beginning of God, for the reason, as I've said, God has no beginning. But it means at the beginning of the creation, and it so has it in so many, in some translations.

In the beginning of the creation, and God made the heaven and the earth. So that phrase, in the beginning, doesn't mean the birth date of God Almighty. It means the time when God ceased to be alone and began to make time and space and creatures and beings.

So God began to create. And God created matter, that I've spoken about already, that which is totally and altogether unlike God. You know, they talk about materialism.

Sometimes some people feed the audiences on great resounding terms, and I'm afraid the audience is busy with something else and doesn't know what the term means, turns off his receptive powers until the Learned Brothers, through talking, sings a hymn and goes out for fresh air. I'm afraid that often happens. And we have the term materialism.

You'll hear a man get up and say, we've got to fight this materialism. And everybody looks around for the enemy and can't find the enemy. Doesn't know what materialism is, and therefore he doesn't know what he set out to fight.

As long as you don't know who to shoot at, you're not likely to kill an enemy. And many don't know what materialism is, not because they're dumb or not even because they're uneducated, but because materialism is a jargon. It's a jargon phrase which men have picked up, and all it means is this, that we have accepted matter as the ultimate.

That we have accepted matter, anything you can touch and anything you can smell and taste and handle and see and hear that yields to the senses, that's matter. And there are those who say that's all there is, there isn't anything else. So all this talk about God and spiritual life and spiritual beings is so much superstition.

We're simply here in the world and our bodies and minds and our chemical outfit within our body and our nerves and that's all there is to it. Now that's materialism in its crassest form. That's what people mean when they say we've got to fight materialism.

Doesn't mean you're going to get up and get a sword and run after a fellow named material and cut him down, but it means that you've got to start believing in the beginning God and that matter is only a creature of God. That God rubbed his hands together and rolled them and tossed it out and we had matter and all the matter there is. So God began by creating matter and then God had some place to put matter so he created space.

He had to have a room to store matter in, so to speak, so he created space. And we have this strange, terrible, wonderful, incomprehensible thing we call space. And then God had to make room for motion and

so he created time.

Now do you ever think about it, what is time anyway? We imagine time as a material thing. We think that there's a great big spool in heaven and that time rolls off that spool. They keep rolling it off, it rolls off faster for men than it does for women.

But we roll this off and that's time. Now time isn't anything like that. Time is the, what shall we say, is the medium in which things change.

It isn't time that makes you old, brother. It isn't time that took those hairs off the top of your blessed head. It isn't time that took your 32 honest teeth out and got you those hypocrites.

It isn't time. It isn't time that does that. It's change that does that.

Nobody ever has to be afraid of time. Time never hurt anybody yet. Time is just a word for things.

Time is a medium in which change takes place. It isn't time that makes a baby grow up. It's change that does it.

Things change and in order to change there has to be a sequence of change. There can't be one before there's two, or two before there's one rather. And there can't be three before there's two and there can't be five before there's four.

They have to have a sequence. And that sequence is time and we call that time. So God made matter and then he made space to put it in and then he made time in order to give it a chance to jump around.

And then he made law to govern it. And so law governs time and space and matter and that's about all there is to it. That's simplifying and perhaps it's oversimplifying but at least you don't have to read 19 books to get it.

That law is simply God said to matter now you behave in a certain way. And he said to time now stretch out and let things move around. Let there be sequence so babies can grow up and things can change.

They won't always have to be sitting around in a rut. And then he said now you take care of space. And then God created life.

He created life in order that life might be conscious of all of this. Time and space and motion and matter so that life is self-conscious or conscious of all that. And then he created spirit in order that there might be creatures who were conscious of himself.

And then he organized the whole business and they called it the cosmos. And thus we have the world. Now it took longer than it's taken me to tell it and I suppose it's a good deal more complex than I have said.

But in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Now that was the beginning and that was the beginning of human thought. And I want you to think of the beginning that all things began.

It was back there in the beginning of John the first verse, first chapter, first line, in the beginning. That was where time began and that was where matter began. That's where space began.

That's where created life began. That's where law and order began and that's where history begins. They talk about prehistoric times and they mean by that what happened before man got so he could write about it.

But history didn't begin when a man first put down the thing down on paper. The murders committed in Cicero, two gangsters shoot each other up and history, that's history. But it isn't written up till the next day.

They didn't get on the job and the reporters are slow so that that was prehistoric in the sense that it happened before the historians got there to record it for the front page of the newspaper. When we talk about anything being prehistoric, we only mean that it's back there before they started writing. Now let's look at the scripture a little bit here and I want to give you a little baptism of prepositions again.

We talked about the prepositions this morning and I know that my brethren make a great deal of prepositions. In fact, you would think that to hear some people preach that the Bible had said in the beginning was a preposition. But it didn't.

It said in the beginning was the word. That's quite another matter. But here is, here are some scriptures and I want to show you four prepositions having to do with the beginning.

Hebrews 1.10 says, Thou Lord in the beginning. That's in the beginning. Matthew 19.4 says in the beginning.

No, he made them at the beginning, male and female. So we have at the beginning, Matthew 24 something says, For then shall be great tribulation. Such has not been since the beginning.

And then in John 1.1, 1 John 1.1, that which was from the beginning. So we have here, in the beginning, at the beginning, since the beginning, and from the beginning, and they all mean the same thing. So I want to remind you now, when some fellow comes along and tries to hang you high and dry on a preposition, you tell him, you heard a little guy say one time, that no matter what God uses in the beginning, from the beginning, at the beginning, it's all talking about the same thing.

It talks about the time when the God who dwelt alone and lived and loved alone, uncreated, the Father in love with the Son, and the Son with the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Ghost with the Father and the Son, dwelling in the tranquility that had no beginning and can have no end, that when God began to create, that was the beginning. And that's what it means. And the beginning and the foundation are identical, because it says in Hebrews 1.10, Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundation of the earth.

So when we learn about the foundation in the Bible, we know that it means the beginning, the time God started things. Now that makes foolish all inquiries about God. When I was a youngster, what seems like several hundred years ago, one of the stoppers, one of the stoppers, when some fellow wanted to stop you, bring you up with a jar, make your teeth rattle, he'd say, where did God come from? And when he said that, he asked a question only a fool would ask, because he knew not the scriptures nor the power of God, for the simple reason that the preposition from can't apply to God, for from means that it was somewhere else and came here, whereas God is everywhere.

Heaven and earth is filled with his glory, and God can't come from anywhere, but all things came from God. Now, I want you to notice, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

And in that pre-creation void, that word void is a good word, it's a most useful word, it's a utilitarian word. When you don't know what else to say, we say it's a void. And the pre-creation void, there was no void there.

Pre-creation times, God was there, and God is not a void. God is all there is. God is the triune God.

And back in that pre-creation time, God was already busy, busy with eternal mercies, busy thinking, and his mind was stirring with merciful thoughts and redemptive plans for mankind. So that we read in Ephesians 1 and 4, sometimes when I preach I worry the Calvinists, and sometimes when I preach I worry the Arminians. This is the Arminian's night to sweat.

But here in Ephesians 1 and 4, we were chosen in him before the foundation of the world. Now somebody will run me around a lie like bush and say, how do you do it? How do you make it? How can it be that you were chosen in him before the foundation of the world? How can you ever think of a time when you didn't exist? How can you think of a time when your grandfather didn't exist? How can you explain a time when there was no matter, no law, no motion, no relation, and no space and no time and no beings, only God? And if you can explain that to me, then I can explain to you how God chose me in him before the foundation of the world. I suppose it is by the foreknowledge of God, for it says in Peter that you are elected according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

Then there is 1 Peter 1.20 that says Christ's death and the blood he shed, that Christ was foreordained before the foundation of the world. Now it says, in the beginning God created, but that was not God's first activity. God had been busy before that.

And God had been busy in choosing and foreordaining from the beginning. I wrote a little squid several years ago called, We Travel an Appointed Way. And I said that we're not orphans in the world and we're not accidents if we're God's children, but that our Heavenly Father is going before us and the shepherd goes before and leads the way.

And I got a very wonderful and very serious letter from some dear man. I wrote and said, Dear Editor, I read your, this was reprinted then recently, and I said, I read your article, We Travel an Appointed Way. Now he said, I was brought up a Methodist.

And he said, Do you mean this to be foreordination? Or just exactly, what do you mean? He said, That's what the Presbyterians preach. And I was brought up a Methodist. And I wrote back and I said, Dear Brother, when I said, We Travel an Appointed Way, I wasn't thinking about foreordination, predestination, or eternal security.

They're in the eternal decrees. I was just thinking about how nice it is that if the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and if a consecrated Christian will put himself in the hands of God, there'll never be any accident, but God will turn every accident into blessing. And He will make the devil himself work for the glorification of these saints.

If we are in the will of God, that sour old hen-pecking wife will buck you down and polish you up and smooth you over, and you will be better off for having married the gal. And if you're in the will of God, that which looks like tragedy and loss will turn out to be gain in the end. That's all.

I wasn't going so deep as all that. I was just saying that our Heavenly Father leads our way. The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.

So when you go down the pathway and look back, you'll see where God has been all the time. You see, Brother, when you're looking down, you can't see God's footprints. But when you look back, you'll see two sets, yours and God's.

God never makes a footprint ahead of time, but He always leaves one when He's gone by. And so you look down the path and it looks like just sand. But if you've gone a century or so and look back, you'll see two footprints, yours and God's.

So the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and my poor, worried Methodist brother can go to bed tonight knowing that he doesn't have to turn Presbyterian to get the blessing than to know that God is looking after him. I don't know how that part got in. That wasn't in my notes, but I thought I'd like to tell you that anyhow.

And then it says in Revelation 13, 8 that the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. And that says from the foundation of the world, and that was before ever Adam came into the world. You know, Brother, I'd hate to be the servant of a God that got nervous.

I would hate to be a worshiper. In fact, I don't quite think I ever could worship a God who ever was caught unawares. And yet sometimes it's made out as though God was always in a dither, and that somebody was always jeopardizing God's plans.

I couldn't get on my knees to a God I had to apologize for, could you? I couldn't get down and say, Now, Father, I know that things are going tough for you these days. Things are tough everywhere. And I know that Communism is a serious threat to thy kingdom.

And I know that modernism is making it tough for the saints. And I know that you really need my help, God. So I offer myself to you.

I couldn't offer myself to a God that needed me, Brother. Now that's all the reason to it. Brother Hare, if God needed me, I couldn't respect him.

And if I couldn't respect him, I couldn't worship him. So don't come to me and base your consecration on the grounds that God needs me so desperately bad. Some of our missionary conventions are simply whining sessions.

I told them in New York, I didn't believe that we ever ought to go to people and say, Let's engage in missionary work because God needs us so bad. The fact is that God is riding above this world and the clouds are the dust of his feet. And if you do not follow him, you'll lose, but God will lose nothing.

He'll still be glorified in his saints and admired in all them that fear him. And in that great day, that consummation, all that we've called matter and law and time and space and angels and spirits and mind, all organized into a redeemed cosmos, they'll gather us around a maple and dance and sing and glorify God who made us and say, Worthy is the Lamb, for by him were all things created. And he by his blood has redeemed us out of all kindreds and tribes and nations.

So come and give yourself to God because you want to do it and because God is infinitely worthy to have you do it. But never come to God as a gesture of pity because poor God needs you. Oh no, no, my brother.

God has a hell for people that don't want to serve him. Anywhere from the covering cherub that walked up and down in the stones of fire to the bishop or the pope or the pastor that would rather serve his flesh in the devil than serve God, God has a hell for that kind of thing and doesn't need anything. God unsupported, unserved, needing nothing, dwelling in holy perfection, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

By the good kind impulse of his own unstimulated heart, no propaganda, no pressure, not even any prayer was made. But out of the impulse of his own heart, he said, I'll make me a world. And so he made the world.

And then he said, now I've made it all. And now I'll make a being, that wondrous being capable of appreciating me as the angels cannot even do. And I'll call him man.

And I'll give him a mate and I'll call her woman. And so God made man in his own image, male and female made he them. And said, increase and multiply.

And the dirty-minded fellow that says that increase and multiply is itself sin is too dirty even to be washed with ordinary detergents. He needs something else. For God commanded increase and multiply so that the world will be filled with others like you that can gaze at the stars and say what is man that thou madest him, that can kneel on his knees and say, our Father who art in heaven and who can admire and worship and adore.

And that was out of the kindness of God, not out of any necessity laid upon him. No greater being could lay necessity upon him. He did it because he wanted to do it.

Did you ever think a little bit? I recommend don't open the old tribune tomorrow morning. Don't open it. Just let the things lie there.

Don't turn the radio on to see who assassinated whom. No, don't bother. Just think a little bit.

And say to yourself before God, I'm glad I'm alive. You know what? I am delighted that I was ever created. I'm delighted that I was ever born.

I'm delighted that God ever thought of me before the beginning. I'm utterly and completely delighted that God ever made me. But you say, didn't you, haven't you suffered a lot, old brother? You knew how much.

A sickly boy, frightened of everything that moved, scared of company, people, lightning, wind, mice, strange dogs, the future, the past, and the present. And then aches and pains and three sieges of rheumatic fever that nearly killed me. And toothache that I think I was never free from until recent times.

And all that, yes, sir, and disappointment and heartache and grief and pity. Yes, I tell you, I've suffered. I've suffered until my heart is scarred in my body.

But that's only a temporary thing. Why should I care about that? I have long, long, long to live and love and laugh and rejoice and worship and serve and travel. There was an old English preacher of Puritan days named John Flavell, or Flavell, whichever they pronounced it.

And as a kid way back on the farm, somebody put into my hands a copy of Flavell's sermon. And one of his sermons sounded so wonderful to me that as an unsaved boy I thought it was absolutely wonderful. He said, you know that heaven isn't an end in itself.

Said when a Christian goes to heaven, God doesn't put a period after him and say, all right, now you're all set. This is the end. He said, we are of a nature.

We are so created in God and so renewed in God that through all the endless ages of eternity we'll develop and grow and learn and increase. And I think he's right because it says in the book of Revelation, he that is holy, let him be getting holier still, one of the ages go on. So going to heaven isn't simply like the modern novel that if the lady gets her man, that's it.

The old novel used to carry them down the years and give them three or four children and give the reader a chance to think about how nice it was they'd ever met. But nowadays they just, they mate and suspend them in space and they leave the rest for your imagination and usually it turns out to be divorce. But we think heaven's like that, that heaven's a place where you finally get to.

I remember one fella, God help his ignoble soul, one fella said one time to me in my presence, he said, if I can just get inside the gate, just get in, I'm willing to sit with my back against the wall and never go any further. He probably will get his wish all right. And God never intended anything like that to be, that you and I should go to heaven and sit with our back against the wall and thank God we ever got in.

Some of you have read Robert Burns' famous funny and hilarious poem, uh, uh, Tam O'Shanter. Tam O'Shanter, you'll remember, was the Irishman, or Scotsman that was, that got on, yeah, Scotsman, pardon me brother here, who got on a horse named Old Meg and he was coming home from a pretty wild party and he was rather more or less, uh, stimulated, had a few glasses of apple and, uh, was feeling a bit high and he passed an old church and the witches were dancing there in the old church and he was so taken with it that he got off of Old Meg and went and looked in and they saw him and started after him. And he jumped back on Meg and started at a dead gallop, crossed the water, and they said that if you're cross-running water, the witches couldn't follow you.

And, uh, one witch, a little livelier than the rest, was making time on Meg and just when her hoofbeats were drumming over the wooden bridge, she grabbed Meg's tail and with one mighty superhuman bound, Meg got loose and after that she had no tail but she at least carried Tam to safety. And, uh, that isn't funny but, uh, I'm thinking of some people I've, I talk with, their idea of getting saved is just exactly that. You accept Jesus and as the last jump just before the devil gets you and, uh, you leave maybe something in the devil's hands but thank God, breathless and panting, oh, and covered with perspiration, you get in at last.

How unutterably silly the whole business is, brother. When God Almighty before the beginning of the world thought about you and planned your redemption and in the pre-creation times, God was thinking loving thoughts about you and when you and Adam and you in fact grieved him by your sins, he still didn't turn you over to hell. But a lamb slain from the foundation of the world came to save you and redeem you.

Now, when you get converted, you've only just started. When you get converted to Christ, you're a new creature. You've come up out of the old Adamic crash, you've crawled out of the wreckage by the grace of God and been made new.

God introduces you into his royal family, gives you of his Holy Spirit and in increasing measure, if you'll let him do it, and throw your heart away. And then begins that glorious growth upward and onward and that happy and holy pursuit of God and holiness and wisdom that'll never end. Begins in conversion, is greatly stimulated and accelerated when you're filled with the Holy Ghost.

We'll be still further perfected in that glorious day when Jesus comes, but it'll never end as long as God remains infinite and man remains finite. Growth through the ages, expansion of heart and mind and knowledge and imagination and appreciation, brilliance of vision and penetration and worship and adoration while the ages roll along. Now, I don't know what it all means to you, but it makes Chicago pretty dirty to me.

It makes money look like a pretty sordid thing to me. It makes the praise of man to be a pretty cheap thing to me. And it makes me pretty careless of whether anybody likes me or not, or whether they're willing to follow me or won't come to hear me.

I'm pretty careless about the whole business. In the light of eternity and the long, long thoughts of God and the plans of everlastingness and perfection and the consummation and the coming of Jesus, I wonder what it all matters, whether they like me or not. And yet there are Christians who are in mortal fear of offending some carnal old fellow.

They wouldn't draw blood lest somebody would say they're fanatic. There never lived a good man in all the world yet. But some son and child of the devil didn't say he was a fanatic, and there never was a holy testimony given by the breath of the Holy Ghost yet from the beginning.

Somebody didn't say the man was a fanatic, and some people would rather die than be called a fanatic. There are hungry-hearted people around over the South Side that if they could take the stigmata of coming to a church like ours, they'd do it, but they can't take it. Well, we've got more strikes on us than Mickey Mantle.

First, we're fundamentalists. Then they say, and they're not only fundamentalists, but they're pre-millenarians. They actually believe that Jesus Christ is coming back.

I'm silly. That was all right for way back there, and now sometime in a few million years in the end of the world it'll be all right, but imagine it. No culture, no education there.

That's strike number two. And then they say, why, those people actually believe in the fullness of the Holy Ghost. They believe that a Christian ought to be filled with the Spirit and walk in power.

Then, brother, that's mighty close to being fanaticism, and I'm not going around there, but in the light of eternity and the long, long reaches. I wonder if it matters very much. Just down on a common political level, it didn't make much difference really what they thought about Lincoln, did it? The ages have justified Lincoln.

Doesn't make too much difference what they thought of Martin Luther. Not too much. Now who cares now? He's with his Savior.

So the Lord Jesus Christ is calling you. He's calling you out. If you were a heathen, I'd have to explain, but I can only quote John 20, 31.

These things were written, you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing you might have life through his name. So Christ has every claim on you, and I tell you, this is the hour, the very hour. You're dying everywhere, falling out of the sky, blown up on battleships, dropping over with heart disease.

Nobody knows what tomorrow will bring forth or even tonight or the next hour, but there walks one among us who walked among the ancient trees. There walks one among us who walked before the world was. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God. And he came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them he gave power to become the Son of God, even as many as believe on his name, who were born not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God.

So the claim is mighty strong, stronger than anything else in your life, the claim of Jesus Christ to your life. This would be a good time. I understand that last Sunday night a couple of people were saved here in the city of New York, quite a number, I didn't count them, some from the galleries came down and went into the prayer room to be saved.

God is still saving people. What about you this evening? Our God, our hope in ages past, help in ages past, our hope for years to come, we lift our hearts to thee. We thank thee thou didst ever create us.

We grieve that we ever marred that creation by sin, but having done that, we rejoice that thou didst find a way through love to save us the sacrifice of thyself. He who was from the beginning yielded himself on a tree that he might die, we thank thee, Father, we can never thank thee enough. We pray thee for those who are lost and in our midst this evening.

O Holy Spirit, do thou draw and win and pull. May the unsaved hear the voice of Jesus say, come unto me and rest. May the thirsty hear him say, come unto me and drink.

May the blind hear him say, come unto me and see. May the dead hear him say, come unto me and live. O Lord, have mercy.

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