

A Great Company of Witnesses Surrounds Us

by Carter Conlon

Carter Conlon's sermon emphasizes the faithfulness of God and the encouragement we receive from the witnesses of faith who have gone before us.

Duration: 58:18

Topics: "Cloud of Witnesses"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher talks about the story of David and Goliath from the Bible. He emphasizes how David, a young boy, had the courage to face the giant Goliath when no one else did. The preacher encourages the audience to not let their hearts fail them in the face of challenges. He also highlights the importance of relying on God's strength and not quitting, using a personal example from a hockey game. The sermon concludes with a reminder of God's faithfulness and the assurance that He will fulfill His promises to His people.

Transcript

This message is one of the Times Square Church Pulpit series. It was recorded in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in Manhattan, New York City. Other tapes are available by writing WORLDCHALLENGE P.O. BOX 260 LINDALE, TEXAS 75771 or calling 903-963-8626.

None of these messages are copyrighted, and you are welcome to make copies for free distribution to friends. Hebrews chapter 12. A great company of witnesses surrounds us.

A great company of witnesses surrounds us. Father, I thank you so much this morning for the abiding presence of your Holy Spirit. God, I thank you for your goodness.

I thank you for your favor, which is constant and never fails. O Lord God, I ask for an unction of the Holy Ghost today that you'd quicken me, quicken my physical body, quicken my mind, quicken my inward parts. And Lord, you would bring the living word that you have planted within my heart, that you would bring it out of me, O God, this day in a way that every person who's in this house can understand, can hear it, and take it home, and it can become part of their life experience in Christ.

Father, I stand against the spirit of heaviness. I stand against sorrow that the enemy would want to inflict on so many on such a joyful time as this that we're living in. God, I ask, Lord, today that you would enable us to set our affections and our eyes upon high.

Lord, that we would worship you. And God, by the time this day is out, there'll be a shout of joy and victory in every heart, in every life, in every soul that is called by your name. Father, I thank you for this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Hebrews chapter 12. The writer of Hebrews begins in verse 1 by saying, Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us.

Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your mind. Now, the writer of Hebrews chapter 12, beginning at verse 1, begins this particular chapter of this book by telling us that we are compassed about or surrounded with a great company of witnesses.

Now, these witnesses, at the end of their lives, tell us who live today that through every trial and difficulty, God is not only able, but God is faithful to bring through to victory all who place their trust in him. I hope that issue is once and for all settled in your heart today. If you have trusted in Christ for your salvation, if you are walking with an honest heart before God, it doesn't mean you're perfect.

It doesn't mean that we are without struggles and failings. But if you have placed your faith and trust in the finished work of Christ on Calvary, and you've turned to God with an honest heart, saying, Lord, I want to live for you. I want to walk with you.

I don't want to walk a deceptive walk. I want to serve you. God is not only able, but God is faithful.

He'll bring you through every trial. He'll bring you through every heartache. He'll bring you through every difficult time that you'll ever, that you're facing today, and any time you may be facing tomorrow.

And he's going to bring through to victory all those who place their trust in him. Brethren, that's what this great company of witnesses is all about, that is around us. If we look back in Hebrews chapter 11, just talk about a few of them just momentarily.

In verse 7, it talks about a man called Noah, a man that endured the scorn of his own self-seeking generation. He obeyed God, and God faithfully delivered him and his family. The scripture says, By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house, by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Noah, this man of God, prepared, God gave him a sure word. God said, You prepare, you build it the way that I told you to build it. And when the flood of God's wrath, the flood of wrath comes in on the world of the ungodly, not only you will be saved, but your family will be saved.

And Noah is among those witnesses that are in heaven's balcony, if there's such a place. Right this afternoon, looking down at Austin, they're saying, God is faithful. Every word that he spoke to me, he did.

And folks, I'll tell you something. If you're trusting for your family, you can trust God. Your sons and daughters might not even be under your own roof right now, and circumstance and situation might have brought you here this morning with a lot of heartache in your past.

But I want you to remember something. If you will turn to God, He is faithful to His word. He knows where your sons are.

He knows where your daughters are. He knows what it takes to turn their hearts around. And I believe with all my heart that He's well able to do it.

Hallelujah. Verse 8 talks about a man called Abraham who believed in the promises of God and followed, not knowing where he was going. He's not charting his own course, but rather entrusting himself to God.

The scripture says, By faith, Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place where he should afterwards receive for an inheritance, obeyed. And he went out, not knowing whether he went. Abraham entrusted himself to God.

And was God faithful to Abraham? Was he faithful? It must have been a fearful thing when God came to Abraham and said, Pack up your stuff. I'm taking you to a land of promise. He goes to the land of promise, and after a very short journey, God says, Here it is.

Take a look at it. This is the place of promise. Then He sends a famine into that land and drives him out into Egypt.

He goes into times of real trial and hardship. But God was faithful. There was a purpose in everything that God did in Abraham's life.

And if you have entrusted yourself to God this morning, even though you might be going through trial, even though sometimes we don't understand all of the things that God is doing, I tell you this day that God is faithful to those who place their trust and confidence in Him. Those who make a choice like Abraham, not to chart their own course in this life, but rather entrust themselves to the living God. Jesus Himself said, God is able to keep those.

He has sealed us in the hand of the Father, and nobody can take us out of the Father's hand. And if Abraham is in that balcony in heaven today, he is also there with Noah saying, It is true. I trusted God.

I trusted Him with my future. I trusted Him with my every hope that was in my heart. I gave it to God.

And God was faithful. And He brought me through. And we see today the fulfillment of the promise that God made to Abraham.

That's why you and I are here. God said, Abraham, I'm going to bless you. And through you and through your lineage, all the nations of the world are going to be blessed.

That's why we're here in this house today, because God was faithful to the promise that He made to Abraham. We see also in verse 11, talks about his wife Sarah. And the scripture says, Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

Along this journey, we see the miracle working power of God, and that He gave a barren womb the power to bear life. And I know that there are many of us here today that you can honestly say, When I came to Christ, I was a barren womb. There was no life in me.

I was past. I was so entrenched in my ways that there was absolutely no hope that anything within me was ever going to change. But you know today that God got a hold of your life.

And it was through faith that the hopelessness, there is a new life that sprung up within you. Jesus himself said it. He said, If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink.

He that believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. Where there was only once dryness, now life came into your very inward parts. Where there was confusion, all of a sudden there was a soreness of direction.

Where you began at one time used to halt in your steps, and now God gave you an absolute clear pathway for your life. We began to see that God is able to do anything in anybody's life that he will ask him to do and allow him to do. Later on, we see Abraham's descendants in verse 29, for example, the children of Israel says, By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, which the Egyptians are saying to do, were drowned.

Abraham's descendants, also walking in the power of God, were able to pass through impossible places. Folks, I've got to tell you today that I have known this kind of power of God in my life, because God has taken me time and again to places where it was absolutely impossible for me to go forward without the power of God. But I have seen and lived to know his faithfulness time and time and time again.

And you know what it produces in your life? It produces a trust, it produces a faith, it produces a confidence, the end result of which is a joy the Bible speaks about that is unspeakable and full of glory. A joy, a trust, a confidence in God that is not dependent on circumstance, but a joy that is birthed in a living relationship with the living God. A joy that can look adversity in the face and say, God, you never failed me before.

You've brought me this far, and you have never failed me, and you will never fail me, because you are not a God who can fail. Hallelujah. Walking in obedience to God, in verse 30, they saw that nothing was impossible to those who believed.

By faith, as Scripture says, the walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days. And what shall I more say? Verse 32 says, For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, and Samson, and Jephthah, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets, who through faith subdued kingdoms, brought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, brought valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens. The writer of Hebrews says, Seeing that we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.

Some of the other translations of the Bible put it this way. With such a crowd of witnesses about us. Another one says, Knowing that there is on every side of us such a throng of witnesses.

Another one says, Such a crowd of witnesses who have borne testimony of the truth. And this is my favorite. There's so vast a crowd of spectators in the grandstand.

Hallelujah. That might be a kind of a liberal translation, but I love it. There's so vast a crowd of spectators in the grandstand.

Let us lay aside every weight, the sin which so doth easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. If you can picture this in your mind, if you will, the writer of Hebrews is likening the Christian walk to a race that we have to run. And even Paul the Apostle says, Run as if you're the only one that's going to obtain the prize.

Run it with all of your heart. With everything that God puts within you, run that race. And it's not like we're left alone to run the race.

On either side of us, as we begin our race and we head out of that starting gate, there are people that have gone before us. This is what the writer of Hebrews is talking about. There are those that have gone before us.

And they're not just saying, Run, run, I hope you make it. I hope you get around the final steps. I hope you don't burn out before you reach the finish line.

But these are living witnesses who have run the race before us. And they know that the strength and the power to run this race comes from God Almighty Himself. And they are standing on the sidelines and they're saying to those of us who are running in this generation, God has been faithful.

God carried us through trial. There are voices that are still, even though they're dead, they still speak to us through the living word of God today. God took me through trial and God will take you through trial.

God gave me, Elijah is up there today that says, There was a time when I was so down. There was a time that I was so full of despair that I asked God to take my life. But God came to me and with a smile filled voice spoke to me.

And he sent food to me and he gave me a sufficient food so that I could stand and begin to walk in the strength of that food. And he gave me a friend to run the race with me. And he carried me through.

God is faithful. In your hardest time, in your most difficult hour, God will take you through. He'll not forsake you.

He'll not fail you. Hallelujah. Moses is standing somewhere along the line.

And Moses is saying, I stood before Pharaoh, not with a sword in my hand, not with any weaponry of my own, without any natural wisdom. As a matter of fact, I had a stammering tongue. I wasn't even a good speaker.

And unfortunately I brought my brother Aaron along with me. But I stood before the most powerful king of that generation with nothing but a staff in my hand and confidence in Almighty God. And God did not fail me.

Hallelujah to the Lamb of God. That's why the writer says, Time would fail me. Time would fail me.

He says, Consider that we are surrounded by such a great crowd of witnesses that have gone on before. That have proven and lived lives that are testimonies to the truth that what God promises to His people, He will fulfill. He will take us through, no matter what happens in this society.

No matter what we are going through today or what tomorrow holds for us. God is faithful. God is faithful.

We may be holding one another up by the arm. We may be bearing one another's burdens in a manner that is brand new to us here in North America. We may be walking, some may be limping.

Some may be running like gazelles filled with an incredible strength of God. But in any event, we're all coming around that corner together. For I see the finish line.

I see the finish line in my heart. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Maybe it's because I'm getting older. I'm not sure. But I see the finish line.

I'm coming around the corner. I don't run near as fast as I used to. But I run stronger than I've ever run in my entire life.

Hallelujah. Jesus, then the writer says, let us lay aside every weight. Every weight.

You know, could you imagine? There's a marathon every year, I suppose, here in New York. And could you imagine how foolish you'd be if somebody showed up at the starting line to run? I don't know what they run, maybe 20, 30 miles, whatever it is. Imagine showing up at the starting line with lead shoes and, you know, like just heavy winter clothing and things like that and saying, what are you doing here? I'm here to run the race.

And we would look at him in the natural and say, well, if you're here to run a race and considering it's a long race, you'd be very wise to cast off the weight that you're carrying so that you might be able to finish that race. There are many, many weights that I could speak about this morning. I was thinking about this as I was preparing this weekend.

I was thinking about the weight of worry about tomorrow. So many people worry about what's going to happen tomorrow. But Jesus said, he told us to cast off the weight.

He said, take no thoughts for tomorrow. Don't worry about tomorrow. He said, your heavenly father, you see these sparrows? He said, your heavenly father feeds them.

Are you not worth much more than they? Which of you by worrying, he said, can add one measure of height to his stature? He said, you can't do that. He said, don't worry about these things. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

We worry about the weight, I suppose, of, uh, about how the victory in our lives will come. You know, that's, uh, that's unbelief and that's a terrible way to begin to carry. Folks, wouldn't it be nice today if we could just all lay it down and say, I'm not worried anymore.

No more worry. Wouldn't it be wonderful today if you could come to the altar and once and for all put worry at the feet of Christ where it all belongs and say, Lord, I give my future over to you. Every situation that I'm facing, my employment, my finances, my family, Lord, I just lay it at your feet.

See, that's where Christ wants us to put it. But the weight that I want to focus on today is I believe one of the most potentially disabling weights in the running of this race that God calls us to run. And it's the weight of trusting in oneself, trusting in ourselves to arrive at a place of victory in our walk with God.

And I'm surprised at how often people take that weight back on again. Come to salvation through the knowledge of Christ. Have an understanding that it's all about Jesus, that he's the one that died for our

sins.

He presents us righteous before the father and start out like Paul said to the Galatians, you started out so well. He said, who did, who hindered you? How is it that you started out in the spirit and you're ending up in the flesh? And so many people start out with an understanding of God and what, who God is and what he has done for us through Christ his son. And then somewhere along the line in the race, they begin to take up, I think one of the most notorious weights of all.

It's, it's attempting to, it's attempting to arrive at the place of victory in our own strength, in our own strength. Pastor David calls it the, the can-do man. We put him off when we come to the cross and so many people in the church of Jesus Christ end up putting him back on.

And the focus subtly begins to shift from God can do all things, or I can do all things through Christ to simply, I can do, I can do all things. And people begin to walk and they take on this weight. And if it's never dealt with the end result of it is failure in the Christian life.

Now go to second at first Samuel with me, please, if you will, in the old Testament, first Samuel, when you get to Kings, just keep going left. You'll hit second Samuel. Then you'll get first Samuel chapter 17 from the other end.

It's a, I think Joshua judges and Ruth then first Samuel first Samuel chapter 17. Now this is a classic epic battle. The scripture speaks about where the Philistines were gathered together against the armies of God.

You know, most of you know the story about this giant called Goliath that stepped out and challenged the armies of Israel, challenged really in effect, the heart of every man that was representing God, the God of Israel. There should have been, you would think when this giant stepped out, there should have been any one of the number of mighty men that were in Saul's army that should have rose to the occasion and ran down to face him because he was defying the armies of the living God and bringing an insult against the God of Israel. But something had happened to the people that, that they were not able to rise up because there had been somewhat of a focus shift come into their lives.

Chapter 17, verse one says the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle and were gathered. And, uh, they pitched between Soko and Zekah and verse two says, and Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together and pitched by the valley of Elah and set the battle in array against the Philistines. Now verse four says, there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits in a span.

He had a helmet of brass upon his head and he was armed with a coat of mail that's a armor. And the weight of the coat was 5,000 shekels of brass. Now the weight of his coat was 200 pounds.

If you want translated into, into, yeah, wow is right. That's a heavy coat. And he had greaves of brass upon his legs and a target of brass between his shoulder brass is a heavy metal.

And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam and his spear's head weighed 600 shekels of iron, that's 25 pounds. And one bearing a shield went before him. And so this Goliath is the epitome of someone who trusts in oneself.

He trusts in himself. He's a self-made man. Here he comes down the mountains to challenge the armies of Israel with a 200 pound coat on and a 25 pound spear.

And folks, if we're going to trust in ourselves, that's about roughly the weight that we're going to have to carry. All his defense is self-made. All his ferocity is self-made.

Everything about him is his weight. He has weight on his legs. He has weight on his head.

He has weight on his back. He has weight in his hands. Everything is weight.

And he's coming down he's lumbered about with all this tremendous weight, the epitome of a self-made man coming down to do battle. Now we look at the people of God and we say, well what about the people of God? We look at them and we see that they were not much of a better spiritual condition. Their trust gradually over time shifted.

They were once, they are the descendants of those who were once a part of the cloud of witnesses that had testified to the faithfulness of God. And now they are bearing the weight of men's ingenuity. They're sitting on the hill with self-made armor.

It happens, folks. It happens to any one of us. What had begun as a walk of faith, what we read about in Hebrews, an absolute delight, an absolute joy just to obey God, to walk with him, to know that they were weak.

And in the knowledge of that weakness, to just stand in faith and see the power of God unleashed in them and through them and for them, to see the kingdom of God advance. And you would think that if a people like Israel had had that kind of a heritage, that they would do everything in their power to hold on to that heritage. And to say, let's not ever let the ways of the heathen come in and encroach themselves upon us.

Let's never begin to trust in the things that the heathen trust in. But over time, people came in and people just got good ideas, I suppose. It must have seemed very noble.

You know, in the event that we should be pierced through the heart, let's make some armor to cover us. As opposed to the breastplate of righteousness that God gave to his people, they began to put on some different types of shiny armor and helmets, and they began to carry probably more intricately designed swords and things like that. And without even realizing it, their focus, their trust was shifting from God to their own armor, their own devices, their own schemes, their own plans.

And we're living in a generation like that, where the church of Jesus Christ, having been birthed in the Holy Ghost, having moved forward by ignorant and unlearned men that stood in the power of God, they weren't mighty in themselves. They were mighty in their relationship with God. They understood who Jesus Christ was.

That's why Peter, after having even denied him and making a fool of himself, was able to stand after then having a face-to-face confrontation with the risen Christ. He was able to stand, and he was able to declare the love of God to his generation. And people's hearts were picked, and the kingdom of God moved forward, and thousands came to the saving knowledge of Christ.

I hear story after story after story read biographies of men and women that have been used by God like that over their generations and over the years, and then all of a sudden we begin to see this

encroachment of men's ideas. We live in an age now where everybody's networking. Everybody's borrowing somebody else's ideas.

It's all theories and conferences on how to grow churches. It shows that we're going nowhere. We're heading backwards, because everything we need to know is already in this book.

The pattern has already been set. There's already a cloud of witnesses all the way around us that say it's not in strength, it's in weakness. It's not in smartness.

It's in whole-hearted dependency on the living God. It's not in the covenants of man. It's in the power of God working in surrendered vessels.

Always has been, folks, and always will be. It will never change. We see the people of God, the army of God, standing up on the hill, and their hearts are failing them.

They're trembling. They're not able to fight against this giant that is threatening the kingdom of God, until a young boy called David comes. A stripling, Saul calls him.

I mean, just a young boy, perhaps just a teenager. And David says, don't let anybody's heart fail him. When I get to heaven, if there's a video section, I'm going right there, because I want to see this battle.

And David comes. He says, don't let anybody's heart fail him. Running around.

This is no kid. These men all standing there with all their muscles, all their training, all their power, their helmets. They look so powerful.

They look, they've got it all together. They're smooth. They march in unison.

I can just see them when they're doing their drills, and people looking. Whoa, look at that army that they've got. But not one man had the courage to fight this giant.

The whole focus had shifted. And this little boy comes in with little skinny arms, and I think he was freckled-faced and ruddy, it says, and red hair. And he comes in and says, don't let anybody's heart fail him.

I'll fight him. I'll fight him. You know what a sting that must have been to that army? To have this little kid come in, and his own brother says, go home, go home, go home, get out of here.

I know the naughtiness of your heart. Isn't it amazing that his brother Eliab didn't know the naughtiness of his own heart? That he had turned from God, that's why he had no courage. And David says, no, he said, is there not a cause? Is there not a cause here? Look at this.

Who is this? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should challenge the armies of the living God? And so David is running around, speaking this thing, until Saul finally hears about this kid that's running through the camp, says, I'll fight him. I'll fight him. And so finally Saul calls him to himself, and David says to Saul, he begins to recount his relationship with God.

You see, David's power was in relationship. It was, David had no power in military might, or no military skill, or anything like that, but he had a relationship with the living God. It's something in his life that he never lost.

That's why he could say, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He restores my soul.

David could say this because he had a living relationship with the living God. Saul says, finally gives in and says, all right, you go and fight him. And in verse 38, it says, Saul armed David with his armor, and he put a helmet of brass on his head.

I can imagine Saul putting his helmet on David's head, and the thing comes down probably below his nose. You can't hardly even see out of the thing, let alone fit it on his head. And he armed him with a coat of mail.

That's, that's the type of coat that Goliath had. In other words, Saul was trying to put upon David the things that he had come to trust in. And folks, that's the type of the old nature.

The old nature will always try to come back and dominate and captivate the hearts and ways of man. We start out trusting in God. We start out knowing that it's a love relationship that we have with God that gives us our strength.

We start out knowing that it's in weakness that we're made strong in the power of God. But the old nature is very subtle, and the old nature will always come back and try to put back on us, put back on those things that we should have passed off and never put back on again. The end of shifting our trust to oneself or our own ideas or ingenuity is a trembling heart and confusion of direction.

It says, when Saul and Israel heard all these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and they were greatly afraid, even if those things seemed to have a noble purpose. Like armor certainly seemed to have a noble purpose, but the end result of trusting in that armor was a fearful heart and confusion and the inability to fight anymore. Now the Apostle Paul, in attempting to see the early church established in truth, this is truth which David knew instinctively by his relationship with God.

He taught this early Ephesians church. I'd like you to go to the book of Ephesians, please, with me, in the New Testament. And he taught some incredible truths that we are wise to visit and revisit continuously in the word of God.

Ephesians chapter 1, beginning at verse 3, Paul taught us that we are complete in Christ. Would you say that with me? I am complete in Christ. Blessed be, verse 3, chapter 1, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

Now, Paul taught this early church that he had established that we are complete in Christ. There's no need to look away from him for any need that we have in our lives. There's no need to look to anywhere else, to anything else, to anyone else.

Everything that you and I ever need in our lives, we find in Jesus Christ. And folks, if you don't believe this, you'll end up looking to the flesh for your strength. Now, the word blessings, he said, he has blessed us with all spiritual blessings.

The word blessings in the Greek is eulogia, which means to declare as indwelt by God and therefore fully satisfied. Paul is saying we are indwelt by God through Jesus Christ and therefore we are fully satisfied in that relationship. Everything that we will ever want, everything we'll ever need or long for, is found in and through Jesus Christ.

It's so simple the natural man can't perceive it. It's foolishness to him. The natural man says, well, maybe I need Christ to be saved, but I need all these other things now to finish the walk.

No, we are complete in Christ. God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ. And verse 4 says, 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.

And this is the second thing that Paul taught is that we are accepted and loved of the father because of Christ. We're accepted and loved because of Christ. Folks, we're not accepted and loved with God the father because we had a good day.

We're not rejected of God the father because we had a bad day yesterday. We are accepted and loved because we have placed our confidence and our trust in Jesus Christ. He is the one that came and died for our sin, who triumphed over the powers of darkness.

He is the one who now presents us righteous before his father in heaven. That we should be holy and without blame before him in love. Now love, the word love is a Gabriel, which indicates the direction of the will and finding one's joy in something.

Now it's used of God's love towards man and vice versa. So really what Paul is saying that we should be found holy and without blame before God the father through Jesus Christ in a love relationship with Christ. A love relationship.

The understanding that God loves us and we love him. And it is the understanding and the embracing of that love relationship that brings us into a place of understanding that we are holy and without blame. Now I'm talking to those who are living for God, who want to live for God.

Verse 5 says, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ himself according to the good pleasure of his will. That scripture verse tells us that God desired to have us as his children. It is God's desire that we be his children.

Did you know that today? God is a loving father. Man kind sinned against God. And if God were an indifferent father he just would have simply written off his creation, his children.

But no, he sent his son to die a horrible cruel death because it was his desire that we should be restored to him as his children in the fullness of relationship. To the praise of the glory of his grace wherein he has made us accepted in the beloved. Now verse 15 goes on.

Now Paul wants us to know that the power of Christ is exceedingly great towards those who believe. And Paul says, wherefore I also after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and love unto all the saints cease not to give thanks for you making mention of you in my prayers. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the father of glory may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened that you may know what is the hope of his calling and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints. Paul is just simply saying folks that your eyes would be open and you would see how much God loves you. And you would see how much power he has to change and transform and sustain and keep those who place their trust in him.

In verse 19 he says, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us who believe according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places far above all principality power might dominion and every name that is named not only in this world but also in that which is to come. And has put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church which is his body the fullness of him that filleth all in all. All that Paul says just to make the point that his power is exceedingly great towards those who believe.

And in chapter 2 verse 1 it gets even better. Paul says, and you has he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins. He says you who have trusted in Christ have been made alive by the power of God working within you.

God has come and made his abode in you and he has quickened you. He has given you the power to have victory. Does the power to have victory come from anything that we are apart from Christ? No.

Does it come from anything we can concoct in our own mind? Does it come from any weaponry we can put on of our own making? No. The power to have victory comes from the understanding that God loved us, died for us. He has given us of the Holy Ghost.

The Holy Ghost is a quickening spirit. The Holy Ghost is the one who brought Christ alive from the dead on the third day and that same spirit of God now is resident in you and I. Hallelujah. He shall also quicken our mortal bodies, the scripture says.

In verse 4, Paul teaches that the basis of all we do rests in our abiding in the knowledge of his great love for us. But God, verse 4 says, who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ. By grace are you saved and has raised up together and made us sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

Then the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are you saved through faith and not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

And lastly, in chapter 3, in verse 16, Paul teaches us that he's not only able but he desires to do more than we ask or think. Folks, we've got to get this truth into our spirit. We've got to get it into our heart.

God's not only able to do, but he desires to do more than we ask or we think. Think about what you'd like God to do in your life right now. Just take a moment and think about what you'd like God to do.

Think about a child that you'd like to see saved. Think about something that you'd like to see yourself set free from, or whatever the situation might be. Now whatever you've thought of just right now, God is able to do not only that, but he's able to do more than you can think, beyond what we can even ask for.

Paul says in verse 16 that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all the saints. Who are all these saints? All this cloud of witnesses that have gone on before us, that you'd may be able to comprehend it, what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of who? Christ, which passes knowledge that you might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus

throughout all ages, world without end.

Amen. When I was a younger man and just saved, I remember one night I was at home lying in bed and I was weeping and my wife said to me, what's wrong? And I said, I want to know the love of God. I want to understand this love of God.

I'm reading about it here and I see how much God loves me. I see it on paper, but I can't seem to lay hold of it in my heart. And I want to know this.

Now there are several ways when we ask God to do something that he can reveal something to us. He's not limited to one or two simple avenues, but I want to talk to you for a moment about the way that God really revealed to me how he loves me as a father. And the revelation of that love has given me courage to change, has given me courage to look at things in my heart and not be afraid of them, has given me courage to try what would be physically or humanly impossible to do apart from the grace of God.

That love has lifted me out from under the voice of the condemner, because I know now he has nothing on me whatsoever. He cannot condemn me because my righteousness is not of myself. My righteousness is of Christ Jesus, my Lord and my Savior.

But the way that God helped me to understand how much he loves his children is that he made me a father. He made me a father. He gave me three children of my own.

And folks, I'll tell you something. I delight in each of my children. I delight in them.

I don't know how to put into words what's in my heart for them. I delight in them when they do good. I delight in them when they do bad.

When they succeed, when they fail, I delight in them. There's an inward delight in my heart for my children that just never goes away. Every time I think of them, I delight in them.

The memories I have of raising them, there's a delight in my heart. And especially today as I see them growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, there's a deep, deep abiding delight in my heart. My eldest child is a boy.

His name is Jason. He's a soldier. He's a Marine.

He's in, he was in Africa. I don't know where he is now. I think he called from Spain or someplace like that yesterday.

But he's a soldier now. And we write, we correspond from time to time. He phones, more so he phones, I write, and he writes back once in a while.

And he's a man now. And he's put away childish things and he's ready for battle. He wants to live for God.

And there's such a delight in my heart now because I'm able to sit down and I'm writing him doctrinal letters now. Just like the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, his son in the faith, and I'm exhorting him and encouraging him. And I wrote last week on putting on the full armor of God and what that really means.

He's learning things as a soldier that are going to fare him well in the kingdom of God. He's learning tremendous discipline. He's learning perseverance.

They go on 50 mile marches in their training where they push them to the brink of virtual exhaustion. And as they're going down the road, if one man falls, then they pick him up and they carry him. And some other man carries his, these packs are a hundred pounds.

And somebody else picks up his pack and begins to carry that. And they say, as they keep going, never give up, never give up, never quit, never stop. And I thank God that that kind of training is coming into his life.

And I'm able to write to him as his father and tell him, son, endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No matter what kind of trial you ever face in your life, never give up, never quit, never stop, never abandon any child of God. Use your life for the glory and the honor of God.

And it's so much a delight in my heart to see the maturity that's coming into his life. There's a delight in God's heart, in us, when we get to the point where we put away childish things and we become serious about the things of God. And God's word begins to open to us and he begins to speak to us as a heavenly father because he delights in us.

He delights in seeing his nature and character formed in us. He delights in watching us advance. He delights in knowing that it's in our heart to fulfill his desire and his plan for our lives.

My youngest child is a girl, her name is Katie. Now I've asked permission of two, I couldn't get ahold of Jason, but I've asked permission of the other. I never really speak of my family.

You must know that by now. I've tried always to protect my children from all the undue pressure that happens oft times to preacher's kids. But I've asked permission to share about them today and they've given me that.

And so I'm not taking a liberty that's going to embarrass them or anything like that. But I delight in my daughter. I delight in her.

She has become one of the cheapest joys of my life. I mean, she's a wonderful child. She comes home and I'm watching her make choices now.

And you know, you get to the teen years and you have to start making choices. You've got friends at school who want you to do one thing and the Lord's pulling you to do something else. And I'm watching her struggling through the process of making choices and I'm watching her make the right choices.

And God has given her a gift of music and she sits down at the piano at home and she begins to play and she's now writing songs. She's writing some beautiful songs of worship to the Lord. Just beautiful.

And she'll call me in quite often to sit down and listen to her songs. And so she'll sit down, she'll sit at the piano or the guitar or whatever and she'll start playing and singing another song. And I get so caught up in it because I so delight in her.

And I start singing and she's always telling me, Dad, stop singing, just listen. She's cute. Yesterday, yesterday morning I was sitting in the family room and I was studying the Bible.

She come in with a lampshade on her head and sang, You Light Up My Life to me. But I have a child who's a soldier. I have another child who's, who's developing and growing as a young woman of God, making some right choices and beginning to write songs of praise and worship.

Do you know how delights the heart of our Father when we worship Him? And you know, it's not just because we've had a good day. God delights in the praises of His children, even if we've had a, even if they, we've had a bad day, that we just make the choice to lift up our voices and begin to worship Him. What did David say? He delivered me because he delighted in me.

And then my middle child, his name is Jared, and he's a student and he's a very good athlete. He plays hockey and I love to watch him play. As his father, I love to, I used to play hockey years ago, years and years and years ago.

I tried to carry on a few years back before I came to New York and play on a church community team. But you know, you get to the point where you know it all in your head. You know what to do, but your body just won't move.

You know, you're in trouble when everybody's fighting over who gets the old fella, you know. But I love to watch him play and to develop his skills. When I go out, I would, I go out to see him play often during the year and I wouldn't really be there if my son wasn't there because I'd have not much interest in it if it wasn't for him.

I don't go because I want to see a hockey game. I go because my son is there. My son is there.

Do you know that God delights in everything that we do? He doesn't just delight in us when we come to church, you know, and when we're having a good day or we're singing in the fire or worshipping at work or we've just witnessed something. He delights in us in everything we do. All throughout the day as you're waiting on the, to get the subway or you're going to work or you're making toast in the morning.

There's a delight in the heart of God. He's there. He lives in you.

He lives with you. He's all around you. You can't escape him.

And there's a, there's a delight in the heart of God in watching you and I develop into the men and women that God wants us to be. And my son, he's a very, very good hockey player. Now I don't care what you think or what you say.

That's my opinion. I'm his father. I'm entitled to that.

It doesn't really matter. John the Baptist, some people may not have liked him, but Jesus was bragging about him to the people. He's always, he faces some very formidable opponents.

There are some very, very talented, very good hockey players on opposing teams. And he's always into this thing about getting lighter and lighter equipment. And you know, it's a very, very rough sport.

And oftentimes I, I'd rather see him go out there dressed in armor, clank, clank, clank, clank, because I'm always afraid he's going to get hurt. And I'm sitting in the stands and he's, he's wearing all, he's into this paper thin stuff now. I mean, he wears equipment that you virtually can lift up the whole bag.

There's hardly any weight to it. And, and some of these guys are big. There's some giants out there.

They, they, they get some, I don't know where they're making these kids, but there's some big kids on. And one time I talked to him, I said, son, I got to get you some better equipment. You need something a little heavier.

And he said, dad, I don't need heavy equipment. I need lighter equipment and lighter equipment. You see, cause he's fast.

He's a very, very fast skater. And he said, the lighter I get, I get an extra step on my opponent. I just need an extra step to get around.

I need an extra step. If I can get lighter, he said, I get just a little bit faster. Isn't that what the writer of Hebrews is talking about? Laying aside every weight, every weight and the sin that so doth easily beset us.

I was in a tournament in a place called Avon last winter, and I saw, I saw the fruit of what he was talking about. You probably, a lot of you don't know how a hockey game works, but anyways, a defenseman passed the puck up to him and, and he was gone. And two Goliaths that were standing at the blue line, he just left them looking like their skate laces were tied together.

They just, they were just, he just lost them. Went down the ice all by himself and just put a beautiful goal in the top of the net. And I was just, oh man, I was just in a, was everything, was everything within me that I, I wanted to jump around and say, that's my boy.

That's my boy. Hallelujah. He doesn't always make it folks.

You know, he gets clobbered quite often, but I want to tell you something. He doesn't quit. He never quits.

He gets up and he keeps right on going. Even plays hurt sometimes. And I thank God for that.

There's a delight in my heart. And I want to tell you something. I move with him.

I move with him. You should just see me in the stands when he plays. Other kids come up, other lines, other kids come on.

I just sit there and bored. I drink, sip my coffee. I just, I just watch and it's, it's, you know, back and forth, back and forth.

And then all of a sudden my son comes out and I have fallen off of the bench in a hockey game, standing up. And then when he, when he moves, I move with him. I'm standing there and he's, and I know exactly what he needs to do.

Cause I skated a little bit, a little bit years ago. And when he's moving, I know how to move with him. Come on, come on.

Just a little bit over here, a little bit over there. And people around me may watch, but I couldn't care less what they think. That's my boy out there.

You see, you see, there's something of me in him. That's why I delight in him. I don't delight in the other kids out there like that, but I delight in him because there's something of me in him.

What did, what did the writer of the New Testament say? In him we live and move and have our being. God delights in you. God delights in you.

When you're walking down, when you're walking down Broadway, some of you guys after leaving the service today, maybe midweek and, and, and you, you just skate right by that peep show or whatever

these things are. Isn't that a dumb name, peep land? Can you imagine that you skate by and God's there saying, yeah, I'm with you. I'm not just way up in heaven, just looking down, condescending, looking to make, watch, see if you're going to make any mistakes.

I'm with you. I'm walking with you. I have an investment in you.

And it's all because I love you. You see, there's something of me in each of my children. I love them.

It's my heart's desire that they would never doubt that love. There's nothing within my power to do for their good that I wouldn't do for them. I don't just love them on the battlefield or when they're worshiping, but I love them in everything they do.

As a father, I want to encourage them. I'd like to offer correction and sometimes just hold them. My heart's desire is that they would find comfort and strength and rest in my love.

And through this, I began to understand the love of God. Let me just close with this now. Don't, I don't want you to turn there, but this Ephesian church, later on, not too many years down the road, Jesus wrote to this church through the Apostle John.

And listen to what happened to them. They were rooted and grounded in the love of Christ. And he said to the angel of the church of Ephesus, write, these things saith he that hold the seven stars in his right hand and who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.

I know your works, your labor, your patience, how you cannot bear them which are evil and have tried them which say they are apostles and are not and has found them liars. You born and had patience and for my name's sake have labored. You've labored and you're not fainted.

Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee because thou has left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen and repent and do the first works or else I will come unto thee quickly and remove thy candlestick out of its place except thou repent. Here's a church that is doing all kinds of good things.

These are Christian people. They're laboring, they're testing doctrine, they're working with patience, yet as good as they are, without an abiding love relationship with God through Jesus Christ, they have become a weight. The writer of Hebrews says, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily besets us.

Now listen, listen to me carefully. It's easy to sin against the weight of religion when living for God becomes a weight, when we have lost the understanding that it is it is first and foremost and always will be a love relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ. Everything God does for us is because he loves us.

When we begin to replace that with works, even good works, it becomes a weight. And when our relationship with God becomes a weight, it becomes an easy thing to sin against that weight. But it's not so easy to sin against an abiding relationship of love.

My son told me, Jared, he said, Dad, it so bothers me when you come to watch me play. He said, because there's little things that I do once in a while, little tricks that I've learned. And he said, I feel so guilty when you're there that I can't do it.

You see, I have a love relationship. He knows I'll not judge him. He knows I'll not condemn him.

Matter of fact, I won't say anything about it, but I have a love relationship with him. And it's not easy to sin against the love relationship. That's why Jesus said, come to me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden.

I'll give you rest. It's not just sin, folks. It's the weight.

It's the weight that we take on ourselves in trying to serve God. Come to me, he said. I'll give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you. Learn of me. A meek and lowly in heart, you shall find rest for your souls.

I want to give a very simple altar call this morning for those who are here today and say, Pastor, you're preaching my life. I started out understanding this was a love relationship with God, but somehow, somehow it's become burdensome, and I'm weary, and I'm tired. And I want to get back to the place of casting off all the worry, the fear, all self-made righteousness.

I want to cast it at the feet of Christ. And by the power of Almighty God, I want to come back to that living relationship with God once again. Please stand with me in the balcony.

You can go to either exit and come down to this altar and the main sanctuary. If the Lord has spoken to you today, just slip out and come. We're going to pray together.

If you're backslidden, I encourage you to come back to Christ. If you're lost, you can be saved in the education annex. You can get up in the ushers.

We'll show you how to get through the door of the balcony and to come down here. We're going to pray together and believe God that what began in a love relationship will continue in a love relationship, and it will finish in a love relationship with God. Hallelujah.

Those that have come to the altar this morning, I want to ask you a simple question. There's a great, great cloud of witnesses surrounding you. They have told you and they told me about how God is faithful.

He's a loving God, a keeping God. Are you willing to open your heart now to that love? Are you willing to open your heart to it, let all the walls fall, let the Holy Ghost take all the debris out of the way and everything that separates you from the love of Christ, the understanding of that love? Put off all thoughts that you have to work to earn God's approval and just let Him love you. Just let Him love you.

Are you willing to do that today? Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, thank you for your great love for me. Thank you for your power that you give to me that I can walk with you in an abiding love relationship.

I thank you, Lord, that you give me the power to have victory over my sins. Thank you, Lord, that you give me the power to become a new person, that all things pass away and all things become new. I thank you, Lord, that you're giving me an understanding of how much you love me.

You love me with all of your heart. Father, you wouldn't even withhold your only Son. You gave Him for me that I might have life and have it more abundantly.

Today, I ask you for the grace to give back to you all of my heart that everything that would come into my life, every strength, every change, every victory would be because of you and because of my understanding of the depth of your love for me. Now, Jesus, thank you for loving me, for walking with me today and being with me every day of my life. Thank you for delighting in me and presenting me clean and holy before God the Father.

I thank you from the depths of my heart. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

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