

Having Mercy in the Coming Storm

by Carter Conlon

This sermon is a powerful call to prayer, repentance, and compassion for a nation in crisis. Drawing from the story of Paul's journey in Acts 27, the speaker emphasizes the need for ministers to find their voice in the storm, to lead with love and mercy, and to be willing to be vessels of God's compassion and grace. The message highlights the importance of personal repentance, genuine compassion, and a deep commitment to represent Christ in a society that is in need of spiritual awakening and transformation.

Scripture: Acts 27:23, Luke 23:34, Matthew 5:44, 2 Chronicles 7:14

Topics: "Prayer", "Compassion in Crisis"

Description

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Transcript

I want to just greet everybody this evening, and Pastor Dan, thank you for the burden that you carry for spiritual awakening in America. I know it's the burden of my heart, the burden that you and many others that are listening tonight, many that are in the ministry, many that are really just godly people, are really concerned about the day that we're now living in. And you are here on this conference, this solemn assembly, willing to pray, to hear the word of God, to seek God, to seek the face of God, for the sake of a nation that's so deeply backslidden that only the mercy of God can touch it now.

And I want to speak about that with you tonight a little bit. I'm going to go to the book of Acts chapter 27. If you have your Bible with you, I'd love you to follow along with me, because several years ago, the Lord spoke to me about this journey that Paul was about to undertake, that was going to end up in a storm, in a shipwreck, and some other things were going to happen.

And God began to speak to me that it was a pattern of what America was going to experience in the future. Now, keep in mind, this is about seven to 10 years now that the Lord's put this on my heart. And I've been so convinced that this is the direction that America was going to go in, that I had an artist actually paint a picture for me of the Apostle Paul on the deck of a sinking ship, breaking bread and giving thanks to God for the great privilege of serving Christ and for the great mercy that he was about to experience,

not just for his own life, but for the 276 people that were traveling with him on that ship.

We'll get into that in just a moment. Now, before we do, I would just love to pray, take a moment just to pray, that the anointing of the Holy Spirit would transcend the weakness of my physical body and the limitations of my natural mind and begin to speak to every heart. And especially those of us who are of influence in the culture, those of us whom God has given a voice, whether it's in your own home, it's in your community, it's in your neighborhood, it could be in, you're leading a church, you're leading a group of people.

It's so important now that the voice that animates us comes from the very heart of God. And that's what I'm going to talk about when we get to the end of where we're leading. And then we're going to spend the time in prayer together.

Now, I'm not coming to you from New York City, I'm in our North Jersey campus because Times Square Church, the larger facility is actually shut down. It's too dangerous for our staff to try to get in to the church on public transportation. So, we've been broadcasting here from our campus church in North Jersey.

And so, here's where I am tonight. So, God bless you. Let's take a moment to pray before we begin.

So, Father, I thank you, Lord, that your word tells us that the entrance of your words gives light, it shows us a path. Lord God, I know that my words have no power, but yours can create a universe. So, I'm asking Lord Jesus Christ for the grace tonight to be hidden behind your cross.

I'm asking for the frailty of my thoughts to be put away. And Lord, that you, by your Holy Spirit, would begin to speak to our hearts as we just look at the pattern of what happened in the life of the Apostle Paul and how his life affected the small group and the small society around him in his generation. So, Lord, thank you, God, for giving us the grace and the ability to take a look at your word tonight and to learn from it.

Give me the power, my God, to speak for you. Help me, Lord Jesus Christ, God Almighty, so that our hearts might be gladdened, that we might be all strengthened by your spirit and by the might that you are willing to give us. Give us your heart, Lord God, for this generation.

Our hearts will fail us. Our patience is limited. Our love does not have an inexhaustible supply, but yours does.

So, help us tonight to recognize not just our frailty, but your greatness and your willingness to show mercy when perhaps we wouldn't. So, thank you for this, Lord, with all my heart tonight. Minister, speak to every heart in Jesus' name.

Amen. So, I want to use Acts chapter 27 as a pattern, as I said earlier, of what I feel the Lord's been speaking to me. And I have actually been preaching a lot of this at Times Square Church for several years now from this passage of scripture.

So, I'm quite familiar with it, familiar with what God has been speaking to my heart. And it has materialized actually exactly the way he has spoken to me. And I do believe that when we get to the final part of this, it will also materialize the way that God has spoken to my heart as well.

So, we're looking at Acts 27. It's a historical narrative, but it's a pattern in the sense of where we're going today and what our present situation and future situation will be. Acts 27, beginning at verse 9, says, now, when much time had been spent and sailing was now dangerous because the fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo in the ship, but also of our lives.

And I just think about our nation of America, how when we began to take this distant voyage from God, from the heart of God, when we began to call evil good and we began to call good evil, the warnings of God were there. Voices like Billy Graham, for example, David Wilkerson and others, many others were raised up to warn the nation, as Paul once warned this group of people, don't undertake this journey because if you do, it will bring us to a place of incredible loss and not just our substance, the cargo, in a sense, that which we consider to be valuable, that's which we're carrying with us on this journey, that which is going to give us a prosperous future. This is, of course, why they're taking the journey in the first place.

It's all about commerce. It's all about prosperity. It's all about a glorious future, as they saw it, apart from the presence and the kingdom and the warnings of God.

And Paul said, not just that, but our lives are going to be in jeopardy. And so we now live in a generation where I think the reality of this is coming home very clearly to every heart. Many people's lives are now in jeopardy.

It is causing a turning, thank God. We ourselves have had over 300 people turn to Christ and decide to give their lives to him and accept his offer of salvation just in the last three weeks alone of just being on the internet and just broadcasting. So we thank God for that.

So the word of God was there. It's not like America embarked on a journey without any caution. The word of God was there, but there was this pushing away of the word of God.

And you know that and I know that. This is why our society is in the mess that it's in today. We were blessed of God.

We were founded by God. We were given a promise of God in 1620 that men, women, and children could worship Christ freely and according to conscience. And from that place of weakness in Plymouth, Massachusetts, where the pilgrims prayed, when they had no resource, they had no strength, they had no army, they had no plan, they were surrounded by enemies.

Half of them died the first year and the 53 or so that were left of them, all they had was a promise in the presence of God. But you see, that's all they needed. And the Lord blessed and gave them a nation, which they never could have even perceived in their minds that he would ever give them.

And that nation, of course, we and others before us inherited a nation that was greatly blessed by God, given giftings in intelligence of God that everyone with any kind of sound thinking has to recognize that only God could have done this. Technology, abilities. In just a few hundred years, God gave all of this to America.

But as Israel once did throughout their history, actually several times, when the blessing came, we forgot who gave us the blessing. And we began to walk away from him and walk in our own sense of reasoning and our own sense of righteousness. And we actually did everything the Bible warns us not to do.

And we pushed away the consequences that are in the word of God. It's clear in the word of God. If you turn, if we turn as a nation, as a people from God, this is exactly what is going to happen.

And Paul, of course, in his day, there was going to be disaster. There was going to be loss. There was going to be the cargo that they trusted in was going to be washed into the sea.

And there was a grave danger that there would be an unprecedented loss of life. Nevertheless, it says in verse 11 of Acts 27, the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than the things spoken by Paul. And because the harbor was not suitable to winter and the majority advised to set sail from there also.

And so that's exactly what they did to achieve their objectives. They denied and pushed away the word of God. They were clearly warned.

And they said, no, we don't believe. We don't believe that this warning of God is going to have any consequence for us. We believe we can chart our own course.

We can make our own journey. We can sail our own way, and there won't be a consequence to it. This abject ignorance has repeated itself all throughout history.

Places that have known God. I mean, it's just incredible when you realize that we are on the same trajectory that so many before us have already taken. In verse 13 says, when the wind blew softly, supposing that obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete.

So in the beginnings of this departure, it looked like, wow, everything is just going to go well. There's a soft wind blowing. In other words, everything seems to be going smooth because the judgments of God don't come immediately.

People's hearts become hardened and they start to think, well, that must be well with us and must be well as a nation. We're going to achieve our objective. And there's a lot of voices saying you can hear the voices on this ship saying it's going to be well.

It's going to be well. We're not going to suffer. Don't listen to this man, Paul, who says he speaks for God.

Don't listen. Let's take this journey. There are things to be sold.

There's places we want to go. There's things that we believe that we want to do. And so when the wind blew softly, when there was not this violent opposition against their direction, away they went.

And in America, not only did the wind blow softly, but we created, we crafted a doctrine to actually enhance this journey away from God. It's just amazing. This soft preaching of without any demand for righteousness, without any demand for holy living, it offered a cross without the blessing, the forgiveness, without the cost, without the pathway of the cross.

And so there's this soft doctrine came along that actually cradled this journey where the society itself was walking away from God at quite a rapid pace, might I suggest too as well. You know, there's in the American constitution, we have these inalienable rights to life and liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And what happened is the constitution of the society got into the church and the theological perspective of much, not all, not all, thank God, but much of the Christian church became about my life, my liberty, and the pursuit of my happiness.

Let everyone else perish in their sin. The thought of sacrifice or suffering or giving or being yielded or living for the sake of other people just left. It was like it was blown out the door of much of God's house by this soft wind that came in that aided America on this journey away from God.

I mean, it's not even debatable. If the church had been what we should be, this would not have happened. Our nation would not be in the condition it's in.

If preachers were preaching the word of God, multitudes, multitudes would have come to Christ by now and would be living righteous lives. And they would be in a position to influence the culture instead of the culture influencing and diminishing the power of the church of Jesus Christ. But I wanted you to show you in verse 14, it talks about not long after a tempestuous headwind arose called Ural-Clydon.

And when the ship was caught and could not head into the wind, we let her drive. It's the mercy of God that sends the storm. You and I need to understand this.

When the people of Israel were turning away from God and starting to worship the God of their cupboards and their fields and their provision called Baal, God sent a famine. He stopped the rain for three and a half years. If he had not done that, the people would not have responded and come to the top of Mount Carmel where Elijah was to confront the prophets of Baal over the reality of who is God.

And all through history, all through scriptural history, we see that God will send a famine. God will send the trial to cause his people to consider their ways one more time. And yes, it is the precursor to judgment.

I don't deny that. But the Bible also tells me that mercy triumphs over judgment. With the beginnings of the judgment of God comes this cry of mercy, this call of wisdom in the street.

As the book of Proverbs says, wisdom cries without. How long, you scorers, will you delight in your scorning? And how long will you live in your simplicity? And when will you hear and respond to the voice of God? He says in the book of Proverbs, turn at my reproof, I will make known my words to you and I will pour out my spirit upon you. These words have been cried out in the book of Proverbs at a time when society apparently is unwilling to listen anymore.

Verse 16, it says, running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. And when they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship and fearing that they should run aground on the Sardis sands, they struck sail and were so driven. Aren't we living in a moment like that in our country right now? We're living in a moment of fear.

We're living in a moment when we're driven by winds, when we're putting these ropes called bailouts or whatever you want to call them around the ship and we're tying them. We're trying to hold it together because of the ferocity of the storm that we're now in. And verse 18 says, because they were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship.

And on the third day, we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. And here we are right now, we are throwing overboard those proven things, the tackle as it is, those things that have enabled us for hundreds of years to get to the destination perhaps of righteous living and living in God, those things that have become foundational to the very cornerstone of this country called America, things like the right of religious association, the right to worship God according to conscience. We're now seeing in this present day, these things being literally thrown overboard, all under the guise of trying to preserve ourselves and preserve our society.

I don't know how many people really can see what is going on. God has brought us into this place. We're at a crisis moment now in the nation.

In my lifetime, I never thought I'd live to see a day like this. God spoke it to my heart, but I didn't know for sure that I'd ever live to see a day when we are throwing overboard the very rights and privileges, the foundation, the things that were actually given of God to this country through those who prayed 400 years ago for the inception and founding of this nation. In our arrogance, we thought we could undertake a journey and defy the warnings of God.

In 1973, we legalized killing children in the womb for convenience sake. Just we wanted to sin as a nation, but we didn't want to bear the consequences of our sin. So abortion became something that was largely.

I know not in every case, but largely just a matter of convenience. I want to sin, but I don't want to bear any responsibility for any consequence in my sin. Now we're having the discussion about murdering children outside the womb after they're born.

Unthinkable, unconscionable in America's history that we would even think of doing these things. We began to allow those that are godless to educate our children in this country. And now we have people who hate God.

Now we have people who are immoral, highly immoral, leaving our children, even in nursery school and daycare and kindergarten and such like things. We have this deliberate gender confusing of our children actually in the curriculum and going on in our grade schools today. In our high schools, we are mocking young people who try to pray and telling them there is no God.

And in our colleges, we're radicalizing our young people against both their God and their country. This is probably the most critical moment in the history of this country. This is the moment where the tackling is being thrown overboard.

We're being driven by winds and we're lightening the ship. And America is about to fall apart. I have no doubt about it in my heart.

This country, as we've known it, is about to disintegrate into something that is so foreign to our understanding that it would be terrifying, I think, if we could fully see it or understand it. Verse 20 of Acts 27, Paul says these words, Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up. This is where we're going in the not-too-distant future.

I personally believe that we're going to see a great distress come upon this world's economy. It's going to touch us. It's going to touch other countries in the world.

People's hearts are going to begin to fail them for fear for the things that are coming on this earth. We're doing everything we can to keep it together. But in the not-too-distant future, there are going to be events arise in this nation and throughout the world that are going to finally convince us that it's hopeless trying to save ourselves.

Verse 21 is where it begins to turn. And this is really what I want to talk about. I want to lay a foundation, as many of you have, I'm sure, online.

I want to talk about where we are. But now I want to talk about where we're going and what is the role of the church of Jesus Christ. You see, as this society of Paul's time, I want to speak about the 276 on this ship as a society.

As they were undertaking this journey of their spiritual ignorance, this ignorance and arrogance against Almighty God, this defying of the Word of God, trying to save themselves at any cost, they were taking with them this man of God called Paul, who's most likely as a prisoner in the belly of the ship. And that's the way some of us feel in America today, that this whole society is heading into destruction. And we, as the church of Jesus Christ, seem to be powerless to stem the tide.

We are going with it as it is. Many feel captivated by the moment. What kind of a difference can I make? What can my life do? How can I change this situation? Now, Paul is a prisoner.

He has no authority. He's been disregarded, as the church has largely in our generation. His word's not been listened to.

He's down in the belly of the ship. But the Bible tells us that Paul was in prayer. And this is where you and I need to go now.

And Paul was seeking God for his own life. He was seeking God for his own future, even though it looked bleak, even though it must have seemed to him like, this ship is going to go down. I'm going to go down with it.

These people have undertaken this ignorant journey. They're not listening to the word of God. Now, I'm relegated to a prisoner, and I'm being treated like a slave.

And you can just imagine, this ship is in a storm. You can imagine what was sloshing around in the belly of that ship. You can just imagine the smell.

You can just imagine the horror of that moment, of thinking he's going to go down. And it would be so easy to get bitter. It would be so easy to despise this society.

It would be so easy to wish for vengeance and judgment on the soldiers and the shipmen above who disregarded the word of God, and they were so mistreating this wonderful servant of God. But instead of this, Paul the apostle was in prayer. And this is exactly where you and I need to go in our generation.

He was down in the belly of that ship, and he was interceding for the glory of God, for the purpose of God in his own life. And I have no doubt he's asking for mercy on the 276 people that are traveling on this journey with him. Now, many of them were enemies of God.

Many of them were enemies of Paul in their own minds. They had harmed him. They discounted him.

They threw him down into the belly of the ship, and heaven knows how they treated him down there. And, but he was in prayer. And this is where you and I need to be right now.

We need to be in prayer. We need to be saying, as Paul did, God, what is my future? What are you going to do through my life? How are you going to use me for your glory? And as Paul began to pray, God began to speak to him about not just his future. He had to go to Rome.

He had to be, give testimony before the leadership there. But God began to speak to Paul also about the 276 people on that ship. That God was going to show them a moment of mercy.

And he was doing it because there was a man of God in prayer on the journey with them. It's amazing. It's not that they deserved it.

It's because God was willing to be merciful because there was a man of God in the belly of that ship who was in prayer. And the scripture says in verse 21, after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them. I don't know how it happened.

I have a feeling in my heart that suddenly the captain of the ship said, where is that man? Where's that man who said we shouldn't undertake this journey? Where's that man that told us that this journey was going to end in disaster and loss of the cargo and also our lives? Where is that man who said he heard from God? I want to hear from him again. And I can see somebody going in my mind's eye, going into the belly of that ship. And if he had chains on, opening his chains and say, Paul, the captain of the ship is called for you.

And suddenly, Paul is standing on the deck of a perishing ship. Suddenly, everyone's ears are now listening. They're listening because there's no hope.

They're listening because there was a word they knew came from God, but they didn't listen to it. They're listening because there's something about this man who's been in prayer that tells them they should listen. And so this is a moment like I just pictured in my mind's eye where Paul is standing there and he starts to speak.

All ears are now open. There's a roaring going on of the waves. They're so big, they're going to smash that ship to pieces shortly.

They're being driven. Their sails are in tatters. Their food supply has been thrown to largely over the side.

Their tackling is gone. They absolutely know there's no hope for their future. And it's at this point they call for the men of God.

I believe that if you and I will be in prayer, this day is coming our way. I believe there's a day coming when people are going to flood the house of God. But my question to you is, are we going to speak for God when they finally do come? Those who have discounted his word, those who have been consumed with commerce, those who have called evil good and good evil, those who have been backslidden, those who would not stand up for truth when the situation presented itself.

Paul stood, verse 21. I want you to follow in your Bibles now with me on this. And he said, men, you should have listened to me and you should not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss.

And now I urge you to take heart for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. So here's where Paul starts. You should have listened and you didn't.

Now repent of your ways, repent of your arrogance, repent of trying to live your own way, live by your own thoughts and do your own thing. And you'll notice he starts with repentance, but he doesn't stay there long. The people are already destroyed by the circumstance.

He moves immediately into that place of faith. It says, now you should have listened, you didn't. Now I urge you to take heart.

I urge you in a sense to have confidence in the words that I'm about to speak to you because I'm speaking about a mercy moment that God is willing to bring your way. There will be no loss of life among you, only the ship. In other words, that vessel that has carried you, carried the cargo, that thing that you took on this journey is going to be destroyed.

The place where you're standing is going to be completely different in the days ahead. I believe we're gonna land on the shores of an America we've never known. I think there's gonna be considerable difference in the days ahead from the America that's been America for 400 years.

I want to encourage those who preach the gospel. I want you to be careful that in this moment of mercy that you don't strike the rock as Moses once did. You see, it cost him the promised land.

The people were complaining in the book of Numbers chapter 20, as they always did. They couldn't seem to lay hold of faith. They couldn't walk with God no matter how much of the word or how many signs they saw.

It's just the frailty of the human heart. They were prone to backsliding, prone to complaining. And one day they complained and they said, we don't have any water.

And in chapter 20 of Numbers verse seven, it says, the Lord spoke to Moses and told him, take the rod, you and your brother Aaron, gather the congregations and speak to the rock before their eyes and it will yield its water. Thus, you shall bring water for them out of the rock and give drink to the congregation and turn their animals. Now, Paul says in the New Testament, the rock that followed them was Christ.

So it's a type, obviously. It's Christ who's following. It's Christ who's giving the water.

It's Christ who's showing mercy. Now, Christ was smitten once at the cross. He was smitten.

And after that, we are to come to him in prayer. We're to go to the throne of grace to find help in our time of need. We're to ask him for what we need.

We're not to smite the rock again the second time. And be careful, be careful, my friend. Be careful, those pastors out there, that you don't start speaking to those that Christ has washed in his blood as if somehow they need to come back and the rock has to be smitten again.

That somehow the sacrifice that was paid for their sin was not enough. Somehow there's more they have to do, more they have to perform. There's something other than the sacrifice of Christ that has to be given to them.

You see, Moses had an anger problem. It cost him going into the wilderness for 40 years when he was 40 years old. Now it was about to cost him again in his 80s.

And you and I have to be careful because our anger at the failure of God's people can start to try to manifest itself as righteous anger when it's not. It's just our anger. There's no other way to explain it.

And it can cost us the fullness of what God could have done through our lives. It can cost us the fullness of what Christ could have been in us and through us. We might be driving people to the cross as Moses, not

even get there ourselves, not even be able to appreciate or experience the fullness of what God has for our lives and our ministries on this side of eternity.

God said, speak to the rock and it will give its water to the people, not just for them, but for their animals. In other words, I know what the people are, God says to Moses, but I am willing to show mercy to them. Just speak to the rock.

So Moses took the rod from before the Lord as he had commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock. And he said to them, here now, you rebels, must we bring water for you out of this rock? And Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod and water came out abundantly and the congregation and their animals drank.

Then the Lord said to Moses and to Aaron, because you did not believe me to hollow me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore, you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them. You didn't believe that I would be merciful. You didn't set me apart as a merciful God.

You portrayed me as a God of anger before the people. You know, I was sitting with a minister one time several years ago and we were just sitting in lawn chairs outside of his house. And he was bitter at that time.

And he was telling me the church is this and the church is that and the church is this. All the failures of the church. The church doesn't do this and the church doesn't do that.

And I was sitting there listening to him for a little while. And then I looked at him and I said, you know, I said, your wife, she doesn't keep her hair very well. I've noticed that like, she doesn't do a very good job with her hair.

And I said, her clothing. I said, surely after all these years, she should be able to dress better than that. And I said, and their house.

I said, I mean, there's dust in every corner. I just never seen a house quite like this. And on top of that, her cooking.

I mean, don't invite me for dinner. I don't really wanna eat here. His cooking is terrible.

And he suddenly looked at me with a flash of anger in his eyes. And I looked back at him and I said, if I spoke about your wife that way, even if it were true, how long would I be welcome in your presence? And he looked at me and said, you wouldn't be welcome in my presence. And I said, so what makes you think you can beat on the bride of Christ at your discretion anytime you want and somehow still think you're going to be living in this proximity to God.

Be careful. Be careful about how you speak about the bride of Christ. Remember, the church is the bride of Christ.

Be careful that you don't beat on the bride of Christ. Lead the bride of Christ into the place where she needs to be, but be careful that you don't try to mascot your anger as the righteousness of God. It's a trap that ministers fall into.

Moses fell into it and it cost him his place in the place of God's promise to him and to his people. Now, Paul says in verse 22, he said, verse 21, you should have listened. You should have not sailed from Crete

and incurred this disaster in this loss.

But now I urge you to take heart. There shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of God to whom I belong and whom I serve saying, do not be afraid, Paul.

You must be brought before Caesar. And indeed, God has granted you all those who sail with you. This is the great heritage of those of us who are willing to pray.

Those of us who are willing to say, Lord, God have mercy on me and have mercy on the people. I ask you, Lord, that my life might be a representation of you who went to a cross and said, father, forgive them. They don't know what they do.

Lord, God, don't let me turn into a hardness of heart and start condemning the righteous. For it says in the book of Proverbs, that he who justifies the wicked and condemns the righteous, both are an abomination in the sight of God. Lord, don't let me start to condemn the righteous.

Paul says, therefore, take heart, men. It's the second time. One time he tells them you should have listened.

And when he saw that their hearts were broken, when he saw that they saw no way forward without the word and the mercy of God, he immediately turns and says, take heart, take heart, men. There will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. And in verse 25, he says again, take heart for I believe it will be just as God has told me.

However, we must run aground on a certain island. I can't overstress, especially to the ministers that are listening tonight. Don't condemn the bride of Christ.

Lead the bride of Christ. Don't condemn a man when he's already broken. You see, if you stay on the ground of turn and repent and turn and repent and turn and repent, that message is set like a hammer to break down the wall of those who live in self-righteousness.

But once the work is done, move to the mercy of God, move to that which Christ accomplished on the cross, move to the hope of eternal life and the hope of a purposeful life here on this side of eternity. Lead the people. I had a dream.

I was, I don't, I don't listen. I don't govern my life by dreams, okay? So I'm not one of those guys. So don't take this wrong.

But I had a dream one time I was preaching at a convention. I think it was in Iowa. And I had a dream and it was so vivid.

It just wouldn't go away. I couldn't shake it. I woke up in the morning and in the dream I had, there was a fire.

Fires had broken out everywhere. I was on a street and on both sides, both sides of the street, houses were on fire. And there were people trying to make it to high ground.

And I looked up and at the high ground, there was the cross. It represented the Christ and the cross was on the high ground. So I was there and I was telling people, go to the high ground, go to the high ground, flee the flames, flee the fire, the trial, the difficulty.

But along the path, there were voices that were raised up and they were pointing and condemning the people in their sin. When they were trying to get to that place of mercy, they already were broken. They already knew there was no hope, but these voices were being raised and they were pointing fingers at the people all the way up the street.

I was at the bottom trying to get them to go to the top and there were voices on both sides condemning those that were trying to get to a place of mercy. And one man in my dream, he finally got so discouraged by the condemnation. He just went into his house and closed the door and burnt down with his house.

It was such a vivid dream. God gave me a message out of it, which I preached in New York City called Beware of the Angry Watchmen. Beware of the watchmen that don't have the heart of God.

They're masters on defining the problem, but paupers when it comes to giving the people an avenue, a way to hope into a future. And if anything, in the midst of our storm, you and I now have to be like the apostle Paul. His message was not light, but there was life in it.

He didn't say there's not going to be trouble. He said, yes, there's going to be trouble. We're going to run aground on an unfamiliar place.

We're going to land somewhere we were not familiar with. And when the 14th night, Acts 27, 27 had come as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea about midnight, the sailors sensed they were drawing near to some land. And they took soundings and found it to be 20 fathoms.

And when they'd gone further, they took soundings and found it to be 15 fathoms. Then fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for the day to come. Now we are drawing close to something.

Everyone knows it now. Everyone in their heart senses it. People who are not believers feel it in their heart.

We're drawing to an unfamiliar place. We are drawing close to a fearful place, a cold place, a dark place, a place of hardship and difficulty. And verse 30 says, as the sailors were seeking to escape the ship when they'd let down the skiff into the sea under the pretense of putting out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.

And here's what I love about this particular passage is that Paul has gone from captive to captain in one moment of time. In a moment before he was in the belly, nobody's listening. That belly of the ship, nobody's listening.

Now Paul is on the deck and he's giving all the orders. Stay with the ship. Cut off those lifeboats.

Listen to what I say. And I do believe for those of us who have the heart of God for the future, those of us who care about the people and especially about those who are perishing in their sin, who are willing to even love our enemies, those who have persecuted us and despitefully used us, that we're willing to pray for them and stand and represent God to them. I believe that we will go, as Paul did, from captive to captain in a moment of time.

There's a day coming when the pulpits again are going to be listened to in America. There's a day coming when the voice of God will be animating the ministers who stand and not just in our pulpits, but also in our

homes, in our communities. Those of us who know Christ, people are going to gather as the apostle Peter once said, be ready in your heart to give the people around you an answer for the hope that resides within you.

This day is coming. This day of hope. In order to have it, you and I have to have a word from God.

We have to know where we're going and we have to have the heart of God on the way along that journey. Now, the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff, verse 32, and they let it fall. And as the day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, today is the 14th day you've waited and continued without food and eaten nothing.

Therefore, I urge you to take nourishment for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you. This is a moment in the pulpits of America, I believe, where you and I are going to be able to say, now it's time for some meat. It's time to open the word of God.

And as they once did, as the children of Israel were about to leave Egypt, eat the bitter with the sweet. Eat it with unleavened bread. In other words, with no hypocrisy.

Eat it all, not just the sweet things, not just the little promises that make you feel good, but eat the whole word of God and begin to understand there is strength if we're willing to take the journey that God has prescribed us to take. There's a day coming when people are going to come in. We're experiencing it now at Times Square Church, our online presence is exploding right before our eyes as people are coming in in their storms saying, give us meat.

We don't want this light fare that's taking us nowhere. Give us meat. Give us an understanding of the cross.

What does it mean to be a Christian? Help us to understand what it means to live the Christian life. What does God require of me? And this is where Paul says, now we're going to have to swim and you're going to need strength. The ship is going to break apart.

Everyone's going to have to grab onto a piece of wood and there's enough wood to go around for everybody. And they were about to experience a miracle. Do you know that? I've been near the ocean and I've seen a storm similar to this magnitude and a storm that's big enough to break the back of a ship as this one did.

The undertow is so strong going back into the ocean. There is no chance to swim to shore, but yet all 276 made it. You see, because God's hand was in it.

The promise of God was in it. The word of God was in it. And for you and I, we have to be able to tell the people, you grab hold of that cross of Jesus Christ.

You grab hold of the finished victory of the son of God. You grab hold of the mercy of God. You grab hold of his willingness to forgive you, give you eternal life and give you a purpose to live on the earth.

You grab hold of the will of God for your life in the future because the cross floats and there's enough of it to go around. And if you will grab hold of the cross of Christ, the promise of God is you will make it to this shore. Now, it may not be a pleasant experience when you get there, but you will make it to the shore.

This was the promise of God and this was the word of the apostle Paul. Now, we're coming to one of my favorite verses in all of the New Testament. I have a lot of favorite verses, but this is one of them.

And in verse 35, it says, when he had said these things, this is the apostle Paul, when he had said all these things, when he had given the instructions, when he had warned the people, when he had told them to take heart, when he had told them what God had spoken, when he had given them the promise that you're going to make it, you're all going to make it and nobody's going to perish. If you will listen to the word of God, if you will lay hold of the wood that's going to be made available to you, you will make it to the other shore that we're going to. And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all.

And when he had broken it, he began to eat. And verse 36 says, then they were all encouraged and took food themselves. The incredible power of one life given for God's purposes and given for the people, the incredible power of representing Jesus Christ in our generation, the son of God, who was also given for the purposes of God and yielded his life so that you and I might be saved and have eternal life in heaven with God and have a reason to live here on this earth for the sake of others that still need to know him.

Next to the last supper, this is the most profound communion service in all of the New Testament. I wish I had the picture that an artist painted for me. He did a beautiful job on it, by the way, of Paul standing on the deck of a ship that's actually breaking apart and going under.

All 276 are gathered around this man of God as he takes bread and he breaks it and gives thanks to God in the middle of the storm. You see, you can't do that if you're not given for the purposes of God. Paul knew that his life, as the scripture calls us in the book of Romans, was being given as a living sacrifice for the purposes of God, which was his reasonable service.

Paul knew that he was being sent to testify before Caesar about the reality that Caesar was not God. There was another God. His name was Jesus Christ.

He knew that in his heart. Paul knew that because of his presence on that ship, God was going to show mercy to 276 people, whether or not they deserved it, because there was one man on that ship who was seeking the will of God and willing to be given for their sakes that they were going to be spared. What a communion service that was.

I hope you can picture it in your mind as Paul has got a half of a loaf of bread in either hand. And I don't know how he prayed, but it probably something like this. Lord Jesus Christ, thank you for the great privilege of living my life for your purposes.

Thank you for the great privilege, God, you've given to me of bringing a vessel through whom life comes to those even in their ignorance who have resisted you on the course of their journey. Thank you for speaking mercy through my heart, through my life. Thank you, God, for your willingness to save these people from the storm so that they can have another chance to be saved from the penalty and the power of their sin.

And Paul gave thanks. And my brother, my sister, are we willing to give thanks for the great, great privilege of living our lives for the benefit of others. This is what Christianity is all about.

This is why we're called into the pulpit. This is where the power of God is in our preaching. This is where our lives can actually have an impact in our society when we are so thankful.

Now, it's so hard to be thankful. You can just imagine he had just been sloshing around. And you can just imagine what was down in the belly of that ship.

And he'd been sloshing around. He probably looks ragged. He's probably hadn't had a bath in days.

He's been mistreated. And they're looking at this man who should be bitter. This man who should be praying vengeance on his enemies.

This man who should have been striking the rock as Moses once did. I have no doubt there's probably some people on that boat that had some semblance of who God was, but chose to stay in hiding. He could have been so angry.

But yet he gave thanks to God that he could be an ambassador of the one who went to a cross and said, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they do. And when they saw this man and they saw him giving thanks, the scripture says they were all encouraged and they also took food themselves.

You see, we can't drive people into the presence of God. We can only lead them there. And it's a grave mistake.

You know, I had a sheep farm years ago when I was a younger man. We had 68 ewes and we had some rams and a pile of lambs. And every once in a while, they would get out from under the fence and they would go into my neighbor's field.

And I would have to go and I would gather my sons and my daughter and I would gather anybody that was around friends and family. We would bang on the ground with sticks. We'd yell, we'd clap our hands.

We'd try to get them to go back through the hole in the fence. And the poor sheep were so afraid. They'd be running to the left and running to the right and going north and going south.

And we would be exhausted. And finally, one would find the hole in the fence and then all 68 or 70 would follow through and they'd be back and I'd fix the fence. And one day I was on my way to work.

I worked as a police officer in the city of Ottawa at that time. And I looked out my kitchen window and about 40 of my sheep are in my neighbor's yard. And I didn't have time to gather people and bang on the ground and yell and scream at them to try to get them to go back through the hole in the fence that they'd found.

And I just prayed. I said, Lord, help me. What am I gonna do? How do I get these sheep home? And he just gave me a picture of something.

And as he answered my prayer and there was a little can, there was a little tin can in the barn. And he said, fill it with oats and go to them and they'll follow you home. And because sheep love oats, I mean, they'll tear the pockets off your jacket to get oats out, which I know from experience because I used to put oats in my pocket and they tore my jacket pockets right off.

So I went over to my neighbor's house about 2,000 feet away and I looked under the porch and I said, hey, yo, come on, follow me. And they saw the oats in the can and I walked home down the road and all 40 sheep followed me home. Amazing.

Years later, I'm pastoring a little church in the country and I'm trying to get people to worship. And I was a young pastor and a young pastor, you gotta do everything, right? You gotta greet the people, you gotta lead the worship, you gotta take the offering, you gotta preach the sermon and you gotta shake hands on the way out the door and vacuum the carpets when it's all over. And one Sunday, I was just so frustrated because I'm trying to lead worship and nobody is really wanting to worship and saying it's really mediocre at best.

And I was getting mad. I really was getting mad. And the Lord reminded me about the sheep and said, Carter, don't try to bang on the ground and drive them into my presence.

Lead them into my presence. And it's so simple, isn't it? He said, you worship me. Whether or not they do, you worship me.

And there was a transformation happened in my heart that day. And whether or not anybody would sing, I began to just worship God. And it was the beginnings of what turned out to be in our area, a revival.

By the time I left for New York City, we're having to sit people outside to hear the word of God. I just started to worship God. And people then started just to follow in.

You see, I was trying to drive them for years through the hole in the fence. And I forgot, he leads me beside the still waters. He gently takes the lambs into his arms.

I forgot, I forgot. And it's easy to forget. It's real easy to start beating on the people and trying to get them to find the hole in the fence.

When the call of God on a minister's life is to lead them to that place of safety. And see, this is what Paul was doing. He was leading the people into that place of safety because he himself had found it.

Then they were all encouraged, verse 36, and took food. And in all, we were 276 persons on the ship. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the weed into the sea.

And of course, they let the anchors go. And they found a place where the two seas met, verse 41. They ran the ship aground and the prow struck fast and remained immovable.

But the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves. And the soldier's plan was to kill the prisoners lest any of them should swim away and escape. But the centurion wanted to save Paul, kept them from their purpose and commanded those who could swim should jump overboard and get to land.

And the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was, they all escaped safely to land. Now, the scripture tells us that the place where they landed was cold.

It was raining. They had been in the ocean. They were shivering, no doubt.

And Paul started to gather sticks to help the people to get warm. And as he was putting them on the fire, a viper bit his hand. And you see, I believe the devil tried to poison that hand for a specific reason.

It's again a pattern, it's a type. Because you see, it was that hand that healing was gonna start flowing through. Remember the leader of that particular island had a father that was sick or father-in-law that was sick and Paul went in and prayed and the fever and the dysentery left him.

And then they began to bring people from all around this barren island and they began to be healed. Also in that hand, probably the same hand, a quill was gonna be placed there in the not too distant future. And Paul was going to start to write letters to some of his friends while he was in prison.

And he didn't know that he was writing the New Testament, a good part of the New Testament. He didn't know that he was establishing doctrine for countless millions of people throughout history. But you see, the devil knew and he went after that hand.

And he tried to put that, he tried to take that hand of kindness and turn it into a fist. Tried to take that hand of kindness and so cripple it that it would not be able to hold a pen. And if Paul had gotten bitter at the unthankfulness even of some of the people, you can imagine what these epistles would look like, how different it would be.

Of course, it would not be inspired. We probably wouldn't even have them. There wouldn't be inspired text if bitterness had succeeded in getting into his heart.

And so this is something that God's put on my heart today for those that are listening. For the Christian people, if your children maybe are not living for God the way you would like them to live, if for pastors whose congregations are not as committed as you'd like them to be, I wanna challenge you. I wanna challenge you to take the journey first.

I wanna challenge you to put away any poison that's got into your system. Any deep resentment you have even for the people of God. I wanna challenge you today to fight for even your enemies and those that have caused you hurt and pain.

Jesus himself said to pray for those who despitefully use you and rejoice in a sense when you are ill spoken of. I want to challenge you to be genuine ambassadors of the one who went to a cross. Yes, this is a solemn moment.

And yes, there's a brokenness that needs to happen. But it needs to happen in you first and me first. There needs to be this tearful assembly where we come before God and say, Lord, it's not about the people right now, it's about me.

It's about my heart. It's about how I'm presenting you when I stand before the people. It's about woundings maybe that got into my life over the years or disappointments even concerning your people.

It's about a potential anger that's in my life over this society that's so arrogant and so godless. It's about these things, Lord. You've got to heal me first as an ambassador of the cross so that my voice can count for you.

And I'm asking you to put the power of God back in my life and make my voice louder than the roar of the waves and the struggles, the trials and the storms that are all around us in our generation. It's about me. And that's where my tears need to be.

I will one day, no doubt, in a deeper way, weep over the sins of the nation. But I think first, I need to weep over every area of my heart that does not represent the Christ who went to a cross for all people. I want to represent him.

I don't wanna be the older brother in the prodigal son story that's just all in a knot without any joy who accused his father of not even giving him a goat that he could make merry with his friends. And he's offended that this son who went into the field and ate pigs or wanted to eat pig's food is now home fully clothed, fully empowered, fully received. And there's joy in the father's house.

He's offended at the joy in the heart of his father in restoring his brother. God in heaven, may that never be in my heart. I don't know about you, my friend, but I wanna represent Christ in my generation.

I'm 66 years old now. And maybe, maybe, I have 10 years left to speak. But in those 10 years, I want to speak for God.

I was in the church recently. I went to a wedding. And at that wedding, the pastor asked me, he found out I was there and he said, would you speak in my church on Sunday morning? And I said, no, I'm on vacation and I'm tired and I just don't wanna preach.

It was a church of maybe 180, 200 people. But yet that night, the Lord spoke to me, spoke to my heart and a message. So I called him and I said, if you still want me to speak on Sunday morning after the wedding, I will.

So he did. And the church was packed. It was full.

It was stand up only on Sunday morning. And I just took the text of the prodigal son and I spoke about the longing in the heart of the father to have people come home. It was such a simple message.

Spoke for maybe 25 minutes only. And at the end of the message, I said, if you're not living for God, come home to the cross. If you're not living, if you're backslid, whatever the situation might be, come home.

And when I gave the invitation, you had to see what happened to believe it. People stood. They were in the aisles on both sides.

A man who had mocked God for, he was in his seventies. He'd mocked God his whole life. Was so broken.

He was still crying 45 minutes after the service was over. A young lady who was a Muslim came to me after and said, what do I have to do to receive Christ as my savior? Another lady was standing there. She was crying and crying and I came to her and I said, what can I pray for you? She said, I'm a Catholic and I want to come home.

I want to come home to God. I want to come home. You see, that's the heart of the father.

That's the heart of God. That's the voice that we have to be in our generation. Don't get caught beating on the people.

Don't get so negative that you lose sight of the mercy of God. Let God speak through you. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved. Now I know that there are people who love darkness but there are also many people who want light. And may my voice and may your voice count for eternity.

I spoke a message two weeks ago from this pulpit called finding your voice in the storm. It was on thematically on this same passage but it was about finding your voice in the middle of the storm. And I talked about the fact that Paul the apostle finding the voice of God and finding his voice in the middle of the storm because of the 276 people were spared.

At the end of the message I gave an invitation. I said, if you have decided to receive Christ as your savior today I want you to text the word decided to this particular number we had. And if you're a young person that you decided to go all the way with God and you're going to leave your present life plan and you're willing to be biblically trained and apply to Bible school.

And I specifically talked about our Bible school in Pennsylvania. I said, I want you to text that to us too as well. I was called later in the week by our communications director.

When she told me this she said she almost fell off her chair. The number of texts that came in after that message was 276. Only God can do that.

Only God can give us a sign that we're on the right track and that people's lives are gonna be transformed if we are willing to speak for him and call the people to a commitment. It can't go any deeper than our commitment because you can't reproduce or you and I can't reproduce what we are not. But if we are abandoned if we love God if we love people they will melt in the presence of God.

They will yield their lives to the purpose of God. They will turn from their sin and want to live for Jesus Christ. And so father tonight in Jesus name I ask for my own heart and my own life.

Lord renew me in prayer. Renew my passion for you. Renew my love for people.

God renew the calling and gifting that you placed on my life over the years. I thank you for yesterday. I thank you for the great crusades.

I thank you Lord for the wonderful victories that we've known. But that's yesterday. Now we're in a storm again today.

Now there are hundreds of people Lord all around God who have no idea where they're going and they're afraid for their families and their future. God break my heart for them. Don't let me be hard or indifferent.

Don't let me ever point a finger and say well they deserve what they get. Don't let that get into my heart. I ask you Lord to give me more fruit at the end of my life than you have in the first years.

Lord your promise is that the glory of the latter house would be greater than the former. You also showed us at the wedding feast of Cana that the better wine is saved for the end of the wedding feast than at the beginning. So I'm asking you Lord for a greater glory and better wine.

I'm asking you Lord Jesus Christ to take my life and use it for your glory. Help me to abandon my plans. But God I don't want as Moses once said if you're not going to go with me I'm not going, I'm not interested.

I have to have your heart. It has to be your power. It's got to be your word.

You have to animate my mind. You have to touch us as preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. My God let's misrepresent you in our generation.

Oh God if we're going to cry tears let it be about ourselves first. I pray Lord Jesus Christ don't let people go to hell under my preaching. Don't let them die in their sin.

Woo them, bring them my God. Break down the barriers. You yourself Jesus said that you had been sent to the father to open prison doors to give sight to the blind to heal those that have been bruised in heart to have the treasure of God revealed to those who were poor in spirit.

Oh Jesus let it be Lord that my life is no different than yours was and why you were sent for you yourself said as the father has sent me now I send you. God almighty I pray for compassion. Your word says that you had compassion on the multitudes because they were a sheep without a shepherd.

Even when you were tired you still stretched out your hands and you healed. When the leper came Lord you stretched out your hand when he said if you want to heal me you can and you said I want to and you did. When Nicodemus came a ruler, a teacher who didn't seem to know the very things he was teaching he never had experienced what he was supposed to be teaching.

You showed him kindness. You showed him mercy. Oh God I pray Lord even the soldiers even the people around the cross the mockers Lord you said father forgive them.

This was your heart. This was your cry. And this is my heart.

And let it be the hearts my God of those who call people in your name. Deliver us from harshness. Deliver us from judgmentalism.

Deliver us from being those who can only diagnose the problem but can't bring a solution. Help us Jesus. Help us as ministers of the gospel.

To make a difference in our generation. I pray for their wayward. I pray Lord God for those who don't know their right hand from their left.

Lord there was a city called Nineveh. There were Assyrians. They were cruel.

They were known for their cruelty but yet you sent a prophet to them and he knew he knew that you were willing to be merciful. That's why he didn't want to go. God but you showed mercy to a wicked city and spared it for a generation.

Yes they did eventually reject you and they were judged but you spared them for a season. I'm asking for mercy on America. I'm asking God for a spiritual awakening on a backslidden nation.

I'm asking you Lord to forgive us though we've shed the blood of 60 million babies. I'm asking you Lord to forgive us as a people God for allowing for even electing people who hate you into public office. I'm asking you for mercy for letting the godless take over our schools and our colleges.

I'm asking you for mercy Lord for all the laws that have been passed that are so ungodly. I'm asking you for mercy for this nation redefining marriage as something that your word declares to be sin. Oh God have mercy.

God have mercy. God have mercy. Bring the people home and we are willing Lord make us willing to go through whatever storm we have to go through for their sakes.

Had there been no storm there would be no chance to receive you as savior. Had there been no storm the voice of God through Paul would not have been listened to. And so Lord I thank you for the storm.

I thank you God that you're not going to let this nation go back to business as usual. I thank you for this moment in history. Thank you God for the difficulty that we're going to experience in our cities, our society, our homes in this whole country.

Thank you Lord that we are on a trajectory where your voice can be heard perhaps one last time. I want to speak for you Lord. I want to speak for you.

I don't want to just speak about you. I want to speak for you. I want to know your will.

I want your life to be intertwined with mine. I want to stand my God and see men and women's hearts bend before you. Not to prove that I was right but because of your heart and because of the cross.

Have mercy Lord. Have mercy. I would like to stand before you one day with a basket full of fruit that's been born for your kingdom's sake in this crisis time in America.

Lord Jesus Christ I yield my body to you. Do with me what you will. I won't go if you don't go but if you lead me I'll follow.

And I thank you that when I get there I will have something to say because you put it in my heart first. Have mercy oh God on my brothers and sisters on this call this conference call. Have mercy on us Lord so that we in turn can be ambassadors of your mercy to a nation.

Oh Lord take our voices to a place maybe they've not gone yet and put something in our hearts that maybe we've not fully embraced yet. We recognize our need of you Lord. We recognize that without your Holy Spirit we're stuck in an upper room with nowhere to go.

Only you Lord can give us the power and the compassion and the passion and the vision to escape the confines of our own littleness and to come into this place where again thousands will bend their knee to you as Lord and Savior. Give us the courage of a David or an Elijah to confront this generation but as men and women with the heart of God. Give us the boldness of a man an Esther who went into the king when she felt unlovely and undesired and was able to rewrite a law of death into a law of life and to give courage to your people to stand up and defend their freedom.

Give us the grace Lord that we need to endure the storms the trials the sufferings the difficulties that we will all have to face. Give us the grace to find our voices in the middle of our storms. Give us the courage not to be afraid for your word tells us that you've not given us a spirit of fear but a power and of love and a sound mind.

Let the power of your presence being lived inside of us carry us. Let the love of your heart be in ours casting out all fear and give us a sound mind. Help us to be embracers of the truth that we bring to others.

Help us to be yielded before we ask others to yield. Help us my God to be ambassadors of your kingdom. Father I thank you with all of my heart.

I thank you Lord that there is a heavenly transaction happening in hearts that are listening tonight. It's happening in my heart. I am convinced by the words that you've given me that you have something deeper, better, farther, more fruitful than I've ever known in my life.

And I yield to it. I yield Lord. I thank you for the storms in my own heart and life.

Thank you for the trials and the difficulties that caused me to pray. They caused me to seek you and say Lord what is my future and who can I take with me? Thank you Lord God almighty. With all of my heart I give you praise tonight and glory.

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