

The Preaching of the Cross

by Carter Conlon

Carter Conlon's sermon emphasizes the transformative power of the cross and the necessity of self-denial in the Christian life.

Duration: 45:35

Scripture: Genesis 2:2

Topics: "Cross of Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of living a life of true discipleship rather than seeking personal gain or instant spiritual experiences. He highlights the emptiness and spiritual bankruptcy that comes from not fully surrendering to Christ as both Savior and Master. The preacher warns against being led astray by exploitive preachers and selfish desires, which ultimately leads to divisions and contentions within the church. He encourages believers to align their hearts with God's heart for the poor and needy, and to be a source of love and help to those who are struggling. The sermon concludes with a reminder that true signs of God's power are seen in selfless acts of giving and sacrificing for the sake of others.

Transcript

The Preaching of the Cross, 1 Corinthians chapter 1, again we'll begin at verse 18. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness.

But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men. Now last week we saw that perhaps the deepest root problem in the Corinthian church was that although they were willing to embrace the cross as the answer to their personal need.

And folks we have a lot of that today and it's legitimate. If you're living in captivity, if you're dealing with this ever encroaching sense of hopelessness in your heart, the cross of Christ is the answer. It's everything you've ever been looking for.

I'm not talking about the wood itself, the cross, I'm talking about what God did for you through his son. He took the weight and penalty of your sin upon himself. He paid the price of all the wrong that you've ever done and asks only that you will believe that he took your place, open your heart to him and let him come in to be your personal Lord and Savior.

Now the Corinthian church heard this through the apostle Paul and I'm sure that many people gladly, they said this is awesome. We've been living with this incredible depth of need in our hearts and we've been wondering what truth is. And now you've come and you've told us about this Christ who died for us and rose again on the third day.

You've told us that there's power to triumph over our enemies, a newness of mind that's promised in the scriptures, a newness of heart, a newness of spirit, that it would be as if we're born all over again, given a second start as it is in life. And so they embraced this. But the Corinthian church were unwilling to embrace the deeper implication of what kind of a lifestyle in Christ that the full embracing of the cross would lead them into.

And this is the dilemma that faced this church and it's the dilemma that faces many who profess Jesus Christ, especially in the Western world today and other parts as well I'm sure, but particularly in the Western world. The church has embraced one side as it is of the cross, one aspect of the cross. I want all the forgiveness, I want the peace that comes from knowing God, I want this assuredness of a sound and a solid future, I want to be free from all oppression, but I'm not willing to go any deeper than this.

See, the Corinthian church brought into its congregation the thinking of the society all around it. Now the society around it, people don't live for other people. It's not the norm of society.

When is the last time you heard somebody on a talk show saying, folks, I found the answer, get out there and live your life for other people. Now it may have happened once or twice, I suppose in the last several years, but not too often. Jesus said, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me.

Now Paul said in verse 18 of 1 Corinthians 1, the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness. Now, the cross is not only the sufficiency of the atonement. God gave himself for you as a sacrifice, and he calls those who embrace him to walk in a similar manner.

He calls us as the people of God to not only embrace our conversion, but to embrace what this walk with Christ really means. The son of God came and hung on a cross. Now he could have procured our redemption some other way, or he could have just sent us all into an eternity without any hope.

But he came down as a man, went to a cross, poured out his life, virtually to the last drop of blood and water, that you and I might be forgiven all the wrong things that we have done. And he calls us to walk in a similar manner. Now we can't obviously give our lives as a redemption.

Only God could do that. But we can let this love, this essence of God's heart that caused him to do this, we can allow this heart to pour through us in the power of the Holy Ghost to fallen men and women all throughout this world. That's the part of the cross that the Corinthian church was not getting.

They're not embracing it. And it was exposing them to all types of error, up to selfishness, exploitive preaching, division in their ranks. All types of things were coming in.

You see, the giving of oneself for others is foolishness to those who are pursuing a pathway that leads to spiritual death. That's what the apostle Paul is saying. The preaching of the cross is to those that perish foolishness.

Not just the salvation through Christ, but what that salvation leads us into is foolishness. He says in verse 19 and 20, in other words, I'm going to paraphrase it. It's written, I'll destroy the wisdom of the wise, bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

Where's the wise? Where's the scribe? Where's the disputer of this world? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? Paul is saying, in essence, this is not conventional wisdom. He's saying to us today, tell me, where in the world are you hearing this spoken? Where in a fallen society that has rejected God, where every man is living for himself, where people step over one another to get to what they believe are their goals and objectives in life. Where are you hearing this spoken? Who is preaching it? And sad to say, even in much of the Christian church today, where are you hearing this spoken? Where are preachers who are telling the people, this redemption is not just to make us feel good, we are called to walk with Christ into this world.

And as he was to be poured out for the needs of others, and yes, even to the death if necessary. Even into foreign fields to follow those who for 2,000 years have walked with Christ and have endured much difficulty as they've walked with him. Do you know yet that what Christ has spoken, shown us reveals the philosophy of every man for himself to be both foolish and powerless.

It is both foolish and powerless. Where has that philosophy led this world to? When people have bought into this way of thinking, and now look at the mess the world is moving into, and how quickly it's happening all around us. Go with me to put a marker in 1 Corinthians, and go to Genesis chapter 3 please with me if you will.

I want to show you when Satan came to Eve, when he tempted, now Adam and Eve were I guess technically the first people of God, you could say so, they were walking with God, and they were in right relationship with God. And Satan had to get a hold of this somehow. He had to pervert the thinking of those who are called in a sense to be co-laborers with God.

And in Genesis chapter 3 and verse 6, Satan came to Eve and with his own dark wisdom, now he induced her to believe that to chart her own course independently from what God had spoken. Firstly, look at verse 6, and the woman saw that the tree was good for food. In other words, Satan says, No, you do it my way, and it will satisfy the deep inner need in your life.

And that it was pleasant to the eyes. It would be a delightful journey. The devil says, No, just do it my way.

You don't have to listen to what God says. God's ways are too narrow. There's a bigger way.

There's another way that you can follow to get through to what you're looking for. No, no, what I have for you will satisfy you. Chart your own course.

Determine your own destiny. And the journey will be pleasant to your eyes. And she saw in verse 6, that it was a tree to be desired to make her wise.

In other words, in the process, you're going to become much wiser. Now, verse 7 says, They went this way, both Eve and her husband. They partook of what God said you should not touch and how you should not live.

And the next thing that happened, their eyes were open and they knew that they were naked. In other words, they were led by the devil into spiritual bankruptcy. And when the devil succeeds in causing God's people to look in a different direction than what God has shown through the cross of Christ and tells us that this way is good.

This way is pleasant. It's not quite as difficult as the one that Christ is speaking about. You'll get smarter and smarter as you travel on this journey, only to find out you've lost the covering of God.

And that's exactly what happened to Adam and Eve. They lost the covering of God. They were spiritually and at that point morally bankrupt.

They had no power now to stand against their enemies. Where once the glory of God had been their covering, the devil could not touch them. The moment they bit into his logic, now they had to make clothing, coverings for themselves.

As ridiculous as those coverings would have looked back in the Garden of Eden. Somehow thinking this is going to protect them and this is going to keep them. When we're not walking God's way, we have to start figuring out how we're going to win the battle.

We have to start cultivating devices out of our natural minds. We have to start creating coverings for ourselves. Battle strategies, plans, steps to this, and pathways to what we perceive to be victory.

When all we've needed all along is to obey God and to let the covering of God in Christ be ours once again. Praise be to God. Thanks be to God for the simplicity of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Paul spoke to the Philippian church in chapter 3 in verse 18 and he told them these words. Now he's talking about in what was the professed church now. He said many walk of whom I've told you often and now I tell you even weeping that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

Now Paul is speaking about the church or at least the professing church. He's speaking about some were standing in pulpits and they were in Corinth in the days of Paul and they were the enemies of the cross. They were bringing another Christ as it is to the people.

Another way of walking, another way of thinking apart from the ways of God. Verse 19 he says, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly and whose glory is in their shame, whose mind is on earthly things. In other words they stand but their minds are filled with the wisdom of this world.

They've never made a break from the thinking of this world. The strategists and planners and all these other types of things they lay before the people the same traps that Satan laid before them in the garden of Eden. You don't have to do it this way.

Now close the Bible. Listen, God's speaking something else. Close the Bible.

This way is too narrow. Oh, I've got something from the Lord. I've got this incredible revelation now and that's how they lead the people astray.

Plant that seed of independence from what God has spoken in the heart and ultimately lead them into destruction by causing them to move in the direction of their bellies as it is. Looking always just to be satisfied. What's in this for me? How can I prosper from this? How can this better my life? How can it give me a bigger slice of the economic pie? How can I get more power over men around me? And they begin to move in this circle, this realm which is the seed of Satan himself because Christ and his church are moving for the betterment of society around them.

Not the betterment of self. The betterment of society. The betterment of others.

The seed of human corruption is that we use all things even Jesus Christ solely for the advantage of ourselves. That's the seed of human corruption. That's the corruption in Eden.

That's the corruption that was standing at the doorway of Corinth that Paul was writing about and warning the church about. It's using Christ for yourself. Folks, it's all through the professing church now.

Use Christ for some new thing that you need in your life today. James chapter 4 you can read it later, verses 1 to 7 describes this inner lust of self as the very essence of internal fighting. Remember Paul came to the Corinthian church and he said it's rumored among you that there's contentions among you in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 11.

James said divisions come because of inner lusts that are not satisfied. That's where contentions come. That's where divisions come into the Christian mind and into the Christian body.

These things, James says will cause all kinds of difficulty in the Christian life. In verse 7 he says resist the devil. In other words, flee from this corrupted inner nature that has been planted by Satan himself.

Resist this. Resist this. He says you come to God, James said, and you ask but you don't receive because you ask to consume it upon your own lusts.

You're not asking for things from Christ that can be used for the betterment of others. You're asking it for yourself. And James says for these reasons just to consume on your own lusts.

I'm not talking about legitimate prayers that say Lord, I just need you to give me peace. I need you to help me. I'm struggling in my mind.

I'm not talking about these things. I'm talking about those who come and there's an inner lust to it's something that is not like Christ and they're coming to the throne of God and asking God to feed this lust as it is. And James says you ask but you ask amiss and you don't receive because you're asking to consume it upon your own lusts.

As an example of this in verse 22 of first Corinthians chapter one Paul says the Jews require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom. Now go with me back from first Corinthians to the gospel of Matthew chapter 12 please if you will and just put a marker in in Corinthians Matthew chapter 12 in verse 38 the scripture says then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees these are the religious leaders of his day of that day answered saying Master we would see a sign from thee now we ask ourselves the question why did they want to see a sign? What was the point? They already had heard a report. They knew that this man could do miracles.

He was the incarnate son of God. He was speaking to them in a way they could hear him. You see here's the reason why people want to see a sign.

In their case it says Jesus is willing to do things at our bidding then we're willing to form an association with him for our advantage. If we can get him to work for us then we might embrace him as the one that he says but we have to get him to work for us. You see we're not willing to work for him.

He's got to come and work for us. This was the issue with the scribes and the Pharisees. Now here's what Jesus says to them in verse 39 and 40 He answered and said an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign but there'll be no sign given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly so shall the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Here's what he's saying the only sign you're going to be given is the sight of someone giving his life for others. That's the only sign I'm going to give you. You're going to see a man who's unlike what you are.

You are wanting to use the power of God for your own advantage but you're going to see a man who truly has the power of God and he's going to use it for the advantage of others. For whosoever will he's going to use it for the advantage of the drug addicted the prostitute the immoral those that are struggling in any fashion of life the imprisoned the destitute are going to be able to come. You're going to see a man who's giving his life that others may come to know eternal life through him.

And then he says something really incredible in verse 41 he says the men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah and behold it greater than Jonah is here. Now Jesus says you're going to be Nineveh itself a city of 300,000 wicked people that turn to God are going to condemn you because when Jonah arrived a man who was simply abandoned to the will of God towards them they saw it and they heard God in it and they repented. They saw it.

The very thing that you're looking for you're looking for a sign but there's a whole society saw something that you don't see. An abandoned man comes onto their shores nothing really to look at. He's been three days and three nights in the belly of a whale but when he opens his mouth to speak the power of God is with him.

There's something about God in this man and a whole society even the king himself saw it. They heard God in his voice and they turned from their sin. And he says now you have the one who actually empowered him standing before you but you will not bend your knee to me.

In 1 Corinthians 1.22 Paul says the Greeks seek after wisdom. Now they think increased knowledge is the key to ultimate power. Paul warned in 2 Timothy 3 verses 7 and 8 in the last days that people will be ever learning and not coming to the knowledge of the truth.

They will be attending seminars they will be studying and perhaps they will have memorized more scripture than possibly some previous generations. But even all that study will not have brought them to the truth of what is the Christ life. What is the church of Jesus Christ? What are we called to be? What are we called to do? And then in verse 8 he says he mentions two men that used their form as it is of spirituality.

It was a false one but it was a form. They used it to get close to power. They were close to Pharaoh.

There are people who use Christ to get close to government thinking this is going to change or at least better themselves and perhaps bring about some form of change. And these men who were standing close to power withstood Moses. They stood against him.

They were resisting the very way that God uses to bring people to freedom. Before them is a man who has lost his natural ability to speak. He has no military plan.

He has got no army behind him. He is a weak and foolish man in the sight of that society but yet God chooses him. He stands before the most powerful king of his generation with nothing more than a stick and a one line sermon in his hand.

And he says, let my people go. This is what the Lord says. And this was too simplistic for this priesthood.

This was too foolish for them. You see the way of the cross is foolishness to those who are moving in another stream. And they stood against Moses.

But Paul says their foolishness will be exposed just like the ones who stood against Moses was exposed as well. In verse 42 he says, the queen of the south, that's the queen of Sheba, will rise up in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it. For she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

Jesus said, the queen of the south will rise in judgment because she came from the far reaches of the world only to discover a wisdom that is not of this world. It is a wisdom given by God. And Christ is saying to the leaders at that time, you have the very source of Solomon's wisdom standing before you and you refuse it.

Why do you refuse it? Why do people refuse the simplicity of Christ? What is it about the human condition? Why could Satan attempt Adam and Eve and get them to move away from a lifestyle as it is and a life plan given by God that was going to lead them to nothing but just further glory? Why would they move away from this? Why would they not hear the preaching of Christ? Why would they despise the simplicity of simple obedience? What was the reason? Why were they refusing this wisdom? And here is the answer, folks. It is in every human heart, in every person who is outside of these doors and tragically perhaps a few that are inside, who is simply unwilling to embrace the fullness of the cross of Jesus Christ. It is because you are completely unattracted to where it will lead you.

That is the answer. That is why they would not embrace it. That is why they could not hear Jesus Christ.

Because they were unattracted to this. If this is God, there is nothing in it for me. How is this going to give me fine robes and the best seat in the banquets? How is this going to bring me to a place where people will call me teacher, teacher in the public sphere? How is this going to get me closer access to power and other things that I am looking for in this life? Isaiah chapter 53 describing Jesus Christ.

He said He is like a root out of dry ground. He has got no form or attractiveness. When we see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him.

He says we hid our faces from Him. We esteemed Him not. It is amazing.

If you look in the original Hebrew, what it really means is the word esteemed is that we made a judgment. And it also refers to skill in art or military inventions or it is also an accounting term. And if you put it all

together, it is that we looked at Him, we made a judgment in our hearts and we said this doesn't make a very good picture.

This is not what I want my life to be. I don't want to be ordinary. I don't want to be given to the needs of others around me.

I don't want to walk on the side of being misunderstood. I don't want to endure persecution everywhere I go. I don't want to be evil spoken about.

I want to be popular. I want to have fame. I want to have riches.

I want people to look at me and say, oh, there is a man of God. There is a woman of God. It says, but we esteemed Him.

This is not much of a picture. This is not what I am looking for in my life. Military inventions, it means this is not much of a plan.

If this is your plan, God, they couldn't cope with it. They knew the Scriptures but they couldn't cope with the plan. When the plan finally appears, the Pharisees look and say, this is not much of a plan to win the world.

This ordinary looking man, he is not even handsome. That's what the Scripture says, not even handsome. At least if he was handsome, they might have been willing to consider it.

And it's also an accounting term. They looked at him and they say, this is not worth much. This is of no value.

As a matter of fact, they sold him for 30 pieces of silver. I was talking with Pastor Neal this morning, saying, I wonder in that day what that would buy. What did they esteem him to be worth? A month's rent? Ten loaves of bread? A donkey? What did they esteem him to be worth? Oh, folks, many, many people look at the real Christ of the Bible and they get the same response.

They make a judgment. They say, no, this is not the picture. This is not the picture.

We don't want our church to look like this. We don't want the people of our church to be like this. God's plan of using the foolish and the nothings and the nobodies and just empowering them from heaven, we don't like that plan.

Because then, in other words, to get into that plan, we have to admit that we're nobody and nothing. And we're not wise, and we're not of noble birth, and we're not willing to do that. We're not willing to walk that humbly before people.

So therefore, we write this plan off and we esteem it to be worth very, very little. Amazing. When the way of Christ is rejected in Matthew chapter 12 again, in verse 45, he says, I'll return to my house from whence I came out.

And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and garnished. Now, this is a type of a people who have received Christ. They've received a form of Christ, at least.

Perhaps they've received him as their savior. They're not willing to walk with him as their master. And so the end result of that is an emptiness.

It's singing nice songs on Sunday morning, but there's a spiritual emptiness inside. There's a bankruptcy. There's nothing of God's life pouring through them into the society around them.

And so what ends up happening is there are contentions in the house of God. There are divisions. Exploitive preachers get into the pulpits and begin to preach them.

They start to be led down a pathway of selfishness, an empty pathway that never satisfies. And this is exactly what happened. This is what... In verse 44, he says, I come and I find my house empty and swept and garnished.

In verse 45, he says, Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself. They enter in and dwell there. And the last state of that man is worse than the first.

Even so shall it also be unto this wicked generation. Amazing. You see, there's a seven in the Bible that speaks of rest.

God created the world in six days, and on the seventh day, rest came. Proverbs talks about what God builds has seven pillars in it. There are seven churches in the book of Revelation.

I could go all through the sevens in the Bible and prove to you it speaks of the perfection and the rest of God. But when we reject the way of Christ, he says, then comes back. Whatever that man was comes back to him again.

Whatever that woman was comes back to her again. And she ends up worse and he ends up worse than they were in the beginning. There's another pathway, another seven as it is.

It takes seven spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there. And the last state of that man is worse than the first. Paul says it's better to not have known the way of truth than to have known it and go back to what you left behind.

Oh, folks, why would you do that when there is such a fullness of Christ awaiting you? The division Paul spoke of was between the Corinthian churches and his worldly perspective of the Christian life and the way of God through the testimony of Jesus Christ that Paul had declared to them. He says in chapter 1 verse 23, We preach Christ crucified unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness. We preach a savior and those he has saved dying to themselves and being raised in newness and life by the power of God.

Paul goes on in verse 25, and he says, Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. Now, what is this foolishness of God? How could we even describe God as foolish? And if God could be described as foolish or weak, what is the foolishness and weakness of God? Well, the only thing I can think of is that God would come and work with me, that God would come and save me and live inside of me with all of my frailties and all of my struggles and all of my trials and all of my often questions and he would come and partner with me and partner with you and that his life would flow through me and that through me as part of his church that is alive on this earth, he would reach out and begin to touch human need all over the world. Oh God! Folks, that is where life is.

I preach in the pulpit and I thank God. It's nice to be called of God. But this is not really where life is.

Where I find life is when I go into Africa and go into these villages. I told you last year the greatest, I think the highlight of my whole year. I've been in the sanctuary when the glory of God has come down.

I've been here when we've just wanted to shout and dance all over the house. I thank God for that. But the glory of my whole year, the high point, is carrying two goats up into a village in Burundi to a dear old sister in the Lord.

Praise God! That's the height of my year. To a dear old lady who had found Christ and had led one of the most poverty stricken villages I've ever seen in my entire lifetime. In the world, she had led them to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

And they had cried out. And they were asking God for provision, folks. And when they asked God for provision, it wasn't like us.

They're not asking for Cadillacs and bigger houses and fame. They're asking for food because they don't have any food. They're asking for water because they don't have clean water.

And what a privilege to be part of a team that pulled up with a truckload of goats and chickens and to be able to go up the mountain. And these kids, they were little kids dressed in strips of cloth, just rags. And they sang for the longest time.

They sang one song. They said, only God could do this. Only God could do this.

We asked Him to help us and help us come. Only God could do this. Oh, bless God.

We have so many people today in the pretending church running all over the countryside looking for revelation or a touch from some man of God that's going to instantly zap them into being a holy, caring, proficient, and full person. When the way to this life and power of God has been made clear to us right from the beginning. Take up your cross daily and follow me.

Let your life be poured out for the benefit of others. There is hope in this. There's healing in this.

In verse 30. Let me read the rest. He says, You see, you're calling, brethren, not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised as God chosen, and things which are not. In other words, we're struggling people who just have the guts to say it.

Struggling people. All of humanity is frail and failing. Struggling people are just sick of the pretense.

They're just sick of the games. They're sick of the wisdom that says every man for himself. They're saying, I'm not living my life like this anymore.

If I've got to be identified with Christ, and I don't care if the whole world doesn't think He's a good plan, I know He's the Son of God. And if the only ones that can follow Him are weak and confused and feeble, I will join the prostitutes and drug addicts and the stumbling and bumbling of this world, and I'll count myself

in as one of them, and we will march in the glory of God and the victory of God. We will know the life of God in our generation.

Praise be to God. Let the rest gather around their books and study, and look for some new little corner of the diamond, but never understand what it's to be used for. Let them prophesy.

Let them play their stupid games in the house of God. But those who know Christ, those who walk with Christ, are reaching out to the poor, the leper, the maimed, the blind, the hurt and the confused in this world. Verse 30 says, But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made to us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

Now here is where Paul says the preaching of the cross is the power of God. It's the power of God, folks. It's not just mental agreement with the fact that a Savior died on Calvary.

No, it's wisdom to know the way. When we have embraced the cross of Christ as a personal lifestyle, there's a wisdom that comes from God, and God begins to speak to us and says, this is the way, walk in it. There's a righteousness, in other words, to be clear and clean from the penalty of sin.

There's a knowledge that I can't be condemned anymore. The devil has no right to me because the covering that Adam and Eve lost in the Garden of Eden is now mine again through Jesus Christ. My frailty and my failing is covered.

God looks at me and sees me as clear and clean. God the Father sees me as righteous as His own Son, who sits today at His right hand. Paul said, it is sanctification.

It's to be free from the besetting power of sin and redemption to be fully alive in Christ. So many people today are looking for power. They're looking for victory over sin.

They're looking to escape the constant depression that is just increasing by the hour in this world. Jesus said, men's hearts will fail them soon for fear. Ambassadors of peace, as I said, will weep bitterly as every attempt that man has made to govern himself without God fails.

But those who know Christ, those who walk with Christ, will know where they're going. They will have a clear and clean conscience. They will be free from the besetting power of sin and fully alive in Christ.

Praise God. The moment you and I begin to walk with Him, the moment we take that step to say, Lord, not just for my salvation, but I'm giving you my life, my life. I remember when I came to Christ as my Savior, I was about 24 years of age.

Spent about two years kind of just waffling, for lack of a better word, as a Christian. Then about 26 years of age, I said to my wife, I said, I want the whole thing or nothing at all. I want everything that Christ is calling me to, or I don't want any part of it.

And the Lord began to open my heart and my life, began to lead me. Amazing, when I cried that out, do you know what He did? He started to lead me to feed the poor. And the moment you begin to move in the direction of where God's heart is today for all people, to be kind to the unthankful, to help those that need help, to be a stretched out hand in God's name and with God's power to a generation that, like Nineveh, don't know their left hand from their right, spiritually speaking, anymore.

You find the prison doors start opening. Besetting sin starts being broken in your life. Your mind starts to change.

Things that bound you all of a sudden just fall away because you're moving now in the life of Christ. And there's a life that's given to you. You're fully alive in God.

Fully alive. Praise be to God. That's where I conclude this morning.

And I'm going to give an altar call for people who just, you say, Pastor, I hear this. I've been looking everywhere for victory over depression and besetting sin. I've been struggling.

But today, you've come to the place where God speaks to you and says, if you want to be fully alive in Christ, embrace the cross. Embrace the Christ of the cross. Embrace the fullness of God.

Begin to let God use you to be a blessing to others. Now, you don't have to leave this sanctuary today and go and get a ticket to Africa. Don't misunderstand me.

It starts where you are. It starts with the people that are closest to you. It starts in your own family.

Then it moves beyond that to people that you work with and travel with and live with. And then God just starts leading you. He puts burdens on your heart.

And He starts leading you into places. And you don't know where you're going to end up. I never know where I'm going to be one year to the next, what country we're going to end up in, what God's going to have us to do.

I just tell you, it's an incredibly fulfilling and exciting life to be abandoned to God. And if I die overseas one day, because we've been in some pretty dangerous places over the years, then so be it. So be it.

That's just the way it needs to be. I am fully alive in Christ. If you're here, well, you are here.

You know, we say these things all the time. We don't even think. If you're here and you don't know it, you really need prayer this morning.

It's good to smile, lest you think I'm angry. I'm not angry. I'm very passionate about this.

This is where life is, folks. If you've never fully given your life to Jesus Christ and you'd like to do that today, or you're perhaps among those who've embraced one part of the cross, you've embraced your salvation through Christ, but you've never embraced the life that that leads you into. That was the Corinthian problem, and it opened the floodgate to spiritual trouble.

If you embrace the life of Christ through you, you will know immediately who speaks for God and who doesn't. Discernment will come immediately into your mind. You'll know those that are living for the Lord, those that are not.

You'll know which way to go. You'll have this cleanness, and you'll watch the power of hell broken off your life and off of your mind. Praise God.

If you have the humility to say that you need God today, that's where it all starts. I remember one day, I was up in the balcony, up in this section over here in the church, not quite this large, but pretty close. An altar call was given, very much like this one.

Thank God this church understood the cross. And as far as I knew, I was the only one that got out of my seat. It turned out there were two of us.

It was a long walk down through the exit all the way down the stairs. And the preacher kept saying, we'll wait, we'll wait, we'll wait. I knew I'm on the way.

And it's hard to make that choice, but I thank God to this day. I thank God to this day for the... How many today, I just want to ask a question, would be willing to be identified with Jesus Christ? It starts, well, praise God. It starts with opening your heart and saying, Lord, I'm a sinner.

I can't save myself. I can't change myself. No matter how many times I try, I fail because there's a corruption working inside of me.

And the Lord says to you, I know you can't change yourself, that's why I died for you. I died to pay the price for your sins. And then on the third day, by the power of God, I was raised from the dead as living proof to you that if you will trust in me, you too will be raised from the power of this death.

You'll be given a new life. And then to be able to be identified with Christ, praise God. Praise God, praise God, praise God.

Thank you, Lord. For those who'd like to receive Jesus as your savior today, I'm going to ask a simple act of obedience on your part. It's an act of surrender that you just lift your hands right now, wherever you are.

Those who want to receive, whether you're at the altar or in the sanctuary, in the annex, just raise your hands to the Lord. And we're going to pray together. Pray this simple prayer with me.

Lord Jesus, today, I open my heart to you. I admit I'm a sinner. I can't save myself.

I can't change myself. I deserve to be cast away from your presence for all of eternity. But I understand today that you love me so much that you died on a cross to pay the penalty for the wrong things, all the wrong things that I have done.

I'm sorry for my sin. I'm sorry it put you on a cross. I don't want to live that way anymore.

I believe that this very moment I'm being forgiven for all the wrong because you said you would. I believe that Jesus, you're going to live your life in me and through me as you promised you would. I will be a new person.

I'll be set free from the power of evil and from a selfish heart. And I'll begin to know this new life that you have promised me. I am willing, Jesus, to be identified with you.

People didn't think you were worth much. And I'm willing, God. I'm willing to walk in that path.

I thank you for forgiveness with all my heart in your precious name. Give him thanks, just give him thanks. Hallelujah, hallelujah.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you, God. Thank you, God.

Thank you, Father. Praise God. Praise God.

Praise God. Praise God. Praise God.

Praise God. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Jesus.

Thank you, Lord. Bless God. Bless God.

Bless God. Bless God. Bless God.

Thank you, Lord. This is not an unusual thing. If you hear somebody cry out like that, great, great deliverance happens.

Great deliverance happens when we turn to Christ. Pastor Neal, if you could hold this for one second. We're going to dedicate some babies this morning and then you can go and fellowship.

We meet again at 3 o'clock this afternoon and 6 o'clock this evening. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

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