

When Compassion Offends

by Carter Conlon

Compassion can offend God when it is used as a means to justify our own desires and actions, rather than surrendering to His will.

Duration: 50:49

Scripture: Genesis 3:5

Topics: "Surrender To God", "Following Christ"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of not letting compassion lead us away from God's will, using the example of Peter rebuking Jesus for His sacrificial path. It highlights the need for surrender to God's plan, even when it seems difficult or goes against human understanding. The message calls for a commitment to follow Christ wholeheartedly, denying self, taking up the cross, and being willing to endure scorn for the sake of the Gospel.

Transcript

I'm going to speak to you about a time when compassion offends God. When compassion offends God. Father, I thank you for the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

I thank you, Lord, that you are unlocking Scripture in this generation. You're opening the treasure house and you're digging deep into things, Lord, that other generations have understood. And God, you're bringing it back to our understanding and the hour that we're living in.

I pray for great grace to speak this. I ask for an anointing that lifts me out of all the frailty of the flesh. Bring me into the life of the Spirit.

I thank you, God, that you will encourage and bless your church today. Help me to not lose my voice before this message is done. I thank you in Jesus' mighty name.

Amen. We're going to go back to worship again after this message. You'll understand why when we get there.

Matthew chapter 16, beginning at verse 21. From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee.

But he turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou art an offense to me. For thou savest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. What is a man profited if he gains the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

This is an incredible moment in the steps that Christ was being led on by the Holy Spirit and by his Father to Calvary. He's in the last moments of his earthly life as a man, and he's telling them the future. He's not speaking in parables anymore.

He's speaking it very, very plainly. Suddenly, this disciple called Peter stands up and begins to rebuke Christ. Can you imagine the audacity of it, of feeling in his heart that he has the right to instruct God and tell God the way things should be? And, you know, Peter had had a measure of ministerial success, for lack of a better way of saying it.

Jesus, in the previous verses to what we read today, had thrown out a question to his disciples, who do people say that I am? They started responding various things. Then finally, Peter comes up and he says, I say you're Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus responded to Peter and said, you are blessed because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you.

Then he says, you are Peter, and upon this rock I build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I'll give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Now, imagine this is a measure, I guess, of ministerial success, for lack of a better way of saying it. But success in ministry is a very dangerous thing if you still have an unsundered heart. And surely in our generation, I think we've seen a lot of men and women who started out perhaps with a genuineness, but there was these unsundered areas of the heart, because of youthfulness, because of a lack of understanding Christ as it is, that in the end, look at the scriptures and say, well, that's too severe.

Or that really can't be what we have to tell the people. And so for a season, we'll just kind of push that aside. And that's what Peter attempted to do with Christ.

Imagine now, this man is actually attempting to get him to stop from going to the cross. Now there's a plan much bigger than Peter can understand. The same for you, the same for me.

God has a plan for your life that is much bigger than you can understand. And when you start trying to figure it all out, when you start trying to reason it, you're going to end up in a place exactly where Peter found himself in. Remember in Genesis chapter 3 and verse 5, that was the sin of Satan.

And it was the very seed that he sowed in the human race in the garden of Eden. He said, if you partake of this, you will be as God or as God is, you will know good and evil. In other words, you also can know what is right and what is wrong and what should be embraced and what should be avoided.

And you have to understand, folks, we have that sin nature in us. And when that sin nature gets mixed in with the revelation of Jesus Christ in the gospel, and if there's something in the heart that doesn't want the way of God, then we will become, in a sense, as God's. And we will say, no, I know what it says, but I know a better way.

I know another way this can be done. Or I'll pick a certain dimension out of the word of God, and I will completely push to the side another part of God's word. And I'll become a selective Christian as it is.

There are certain passages I'll gravitate to. I will claim them as my own, but there are others that I'll just say for now I don't understand it, so I'll just push it out of my mind and put it by the wayside. In the book of Job, I just want to read it to you.

Please don't turn there. Job chapter 38. Now, here are men.

I'm not going to go into the whole scene, but here's a synopsis of it. They are sitting around, and they're discussing the topic of whether or not there can be a divine purpose in suffering. And the essential opinion overall is that there is really no purpose, because we don't understand it, because we don't see the full picture.

Then there really isn't a divine purpose. Now, Job doesn't, but he comes very close, very, very close to accusing God of being unjust because of the things he's gone through. His three friends are theologically out to lunch, really, and they preach if God's with you, you'd be wealthy.

If God's with you, you'd be healthy. And if God's with you, you'd be prosperous, and no trouble, no trouble would ever come to your door if God was with you. So theologically, they're very close to where a lot of our preachers are today.

Not all, thank God, but Job's comforters are very much alive and in the pulpit today. Then finally, the Lord himself appears on this scene, and here are the words that he says. He says in chapter 30, verse one, verse two, rather, he said, who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, for I will demand of thee an answer thou mayst.

So the Lord says to even Job, he says, now stand up and behave like a man. Stop your whining. I'm going to give you an answer.

And then he says in verse four, where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare it to me if you have understanding. Verse six, he says, where are the foundations thereof fastened, or who laid the cornerstone? Praise God. He says, were you there when I created the world? And how does it stay in place? Declare it to me.

How does everything in the universe work as it is with incredible divine order and clockwork? If you understand these things, he said, now tell me with all of your discussion and disputing about what is right and what is wrong, what should be and what shouldn't be. How does the universe stay in place? And then verse seven, he says, when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy. Now he's speaking of something that we don't understand at all.

We don't know what transpired there, but there was, there's, there's a sense of, of, of incredible magnificence when the universe was created. The morning stars sang and the sons of God, whatever, whatever that means, shouted for joy. God says, I was there.

Were you there? Do you understand how this happened? And what was the purpose of it, of everything? Then in verses eight to 11, he asks those that are disputing. He said, when I set the boundaries of nature and I said to various, I said to the clouds, this is where you stay. I said to the water, you go no farther.

I said to the land, this is where you appear. I said to nature itself, these are the balances and confines of how you're to operate in verse 12. He says, have you commanded the morning since your days or since you were born and cause the day spring to know his place.

Verse 13 to 15. He said, I've said to the wicked. In other words, he said it and to the, and from the wicked, their light is withholding verse 15 and their high arm shall be broken.

God said, I said to the wicked, you'll go this far and no farther. Were you there? Did you understand what I said? These boundaries in verse 17, he says, have the gates of death been open to you? Or have you seen the doors of the shadow of death? In other words, what God is saying, the gates of death have been open to me. I live forever.

You don't live forever while you don't in the capacity that you think you're going to, but he says, I'm created as an eternal God, not created, but I always have existed. I created man to live for eternity. And I declared the bounds of either.

Is it stopping point of evil? Evil is one day going to stop and everything is going to be re made and refashioned as God says it should be. What a day that's going to be. You're going to be there.

If you're a genuine Christian, I'm going to be there. What an awesome day that is going to be. When we see everything put in divine order, verse 40, chapter 40 verses one and two.

Moreover, the Lord answered Job and said, shall he that contends with the almighty instruct him and he that reproves God, let him answer it. In other words, the very same thing that Peter tried to do with Christ. The Lord says to Job, are you going to instruct me now? Are you going to tell me the way things it should be? Do you have as much understanding as I do? Were you there before the universe was created? Have you created the boundaries of not only nature, but of where men without God can go? We there job.

Do you know more than God? Because really that's always the dilemma that we find ourselves in. Now, listen, I believe in chapter 41, we see Christ. I personally believe this.

We see a type of Christ all the way through. As I read this, I want you to think of Jesus Christ going to the cross. Now he starts out by talking about Leviathan, which is a type of a crocodile, really a sea monster in that generation, a type of Satan.

He said, can you draw him out with a hook? Or can you, can you put a hook into his nose or bore his jaw through with a thorn? Will he make supplications to you? Can you tame this adversary that you have? Can you defeat his power? What do you have that's able to come against him? He says, will he speak soft words to you? Will he make a covenant with you? Will you take him for a servant forever? Think about it. Jesus at the last supper is making a new covenant with those who will turn to him, a covenant of redemption and a covenant of strength to walk through the, all the years of his life in a manner that God's called us to with his strength within us. Will you take him for a servant? Will Satan serve you? But Jesus, remember, came down and he said, the son of man did not come to be served, but the son of man came to be a servant.

He says, will you play with him as with a bird? Will you bind him for your maidens? Think of Christ when the God of the universe brought into as it is captivity by the wickedness of men made a mockery of all the time that from the time he was captivated in the garden of Eden, right through to the cross. Think of the mockery that he had to endure. Shall the companions make a banquet of him? Shall they part him among the merchants? Think of Jesus on the cross where they threw the dice as it is for his garments.

And he's speaking now. He says, you think you know everything? You think there's no purpose to suffering? You think Job and all your friends that, that God is unrighteous or unreasonable because you may have to go through some difficult times. And then verse seven, he says, can you fill his skin with barbed irons or his head with fish spears? You don't have to look very far to see this is Christ.

Can you put nails through his skin? Can you put pointed wood in his scalp? Can you do these things? God say, you think you know everything job and your friends. You think there's no divine purpose in going through difficult times and going through hardship. But he said, there's, you don't know everything.

You don't know the things that you need to in Philippians chapter three, verses 18 and 19. Paul says, I tell you now, even as I previously told you, weeping that many are the enemies of the cross. There are preachers that are enemies of the cross of Christ.

The scripture says, he goes on verse 19. He said, whose God is their belly and whose glory is their shame. And his mind is fixed on earthly things.

Their theology is all based on the here and now it's all based on comfort and the acquisition of wealth and never having to go through difficult times and never having to suffer even for the cause of Christ. The whole theological perspective is about themselves. It's to use Christ and to fill their own bellies.

And Jesus says, these are enemies of the cross through the apostle, Paul enemies of the cross folks, that's strong language. And you and I can either choose to examine it or run from it. Now, how are they enemies of the cross? They become enemies of the cross by turning men away from the pathway of God, which has already been clearly revealed in Luke chapter 16 verses four to seven.

The scripture talks about, Jesus talked about a man who had the privilege of representing his master, but he had wasted his master's goods. And because of it, the stewardship as it is was taken away from him. In other words, he was called, but he wasted the calling.

He would not deal honestly with the currency that the master had placed in his hands. He was dishonestly representing his master. The master called him in and said, you can no longer represent me.

I'm thinking of the preacher that's got no more revelation, has no more passion for God, has no more touch of heaven. Once new, but lost it through neglect, through laziness, through looking at the scripture and seeing what it clearly says, but like Peter trying to counsel God, coming to the people and not wanting to bring the people exactly what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. And so this man said, what am I going to do? I don't know how to do anything else.

And then he got an idea. He says, well, I'm going to go to the people and I'm going to bring them a message that will cause them to receive me into their houses. Not Christ, not the master me.

I'm going to turn the focus to man and they're going to love me. They're going to speak about me. I'm going to be the name that's on their lips.

They're going to, they're going to see me as compassionate. They're going to see me as kind folks for years now. I've from time to time sat with various people, not, not continuously, but once in a while, we're going way off track.

Theologically following ministries that I knew were not, they may have been, but they're no longer following the truth or the spirit of God. And their answer is always the same. They're so compassionate.

They're so kind. They're so nice. These people, how could they not be of God? There's so as if compassion is the litmus test.

If somebody's kind, they can tell me anything they want as long as they're kind, as long as you're compassionate. And that's become the test I fear in North America, at least in our generation. And so he goes out to those that know they have a debt to the master.

And he goes to one man and he says, how much do you owe the master? And he says, I owe him a hundred measures of oil. In other words, he's poured so much into me that I, it's, it's reasonable that I should pour out for him now. It's reasonable.

He, a hundred measures speaks of fullness. It speaks of completeness. He's touched me.

He's changed me. He's called me. And so I feel, I don't know where, but I feel that God's calling me to be poured out for him.

And so he says to the man, take what you owe and sit down and write 50 measures. In other words, just pay back half. You're too extreme.

You don't have to go that far. Surely, surely this is not what God intends for your life. So write out 50.

And I can see this man suddenly leaving and saying, oh, how, how kind, what a good man he is. How compassionate he is to me in the representation of his master. And he goes to another man and says, what do you owe the master? And the man says, I owe him a hundred measures a week.

In other words, he's, he's given me so much in the way of provision. I have so much in comparison to the rest of the world around me, especially the impoverished that I feel that everything belongs to him. I've been moved by God.

And this unjust steward says, well, that's a little extreme. Take this bill of what you feel you owe the master and sit down and write 80. And I can see this man walking away and saying what a good man he is, how kind and compassionate he is to me in his representation of the master.

Oh, he's so kind. Might be leading you right out of the life of God. Might be taking you fully away from what God intended your life to might be saying, well, listen, you'll suffer there.

You know, folks, it was amazing when the holy spirit came on me and God started to call me into the ministry. It's like I had to get through a hazing of Christians along the way that had made a choice not to do this. They would say, where are you going? Why are you leaving your employment? They said, I don't know where I'm going.

I just know God has called me. I can't tell you how many people along the way said, this is foolishness. This is extreme.

Think about your children. Well, I was thinking about my children, but the call of God was strong in my heart. How do you know this is God? They said, I don't know.

I just know. I feel like he's calling me to be poured out for him. I don't understand it.

But every time I look at an airplane, I feel like one day I'm going to be on a lot of those traveling to a lot of places. And they would look at me like I just escaped from a mental asylum. And these are Christian people.

They were older in the Lord than me. And what have they sat under that's taken this passion out of their heart? What kind of a message, what kind of a representation of God has come to them? What kind of a steward stood in the house where they were sitting thinking they were hearing from God. And they were, all that was happening is they were being sold as it is a false bill.

They were, they were wanting to give to the master. It's not so much as the master was standing there and demanding that they were wanting to give. And this unjust steward took it out of their heart.

And folks said, we've seen this where, where this, the theological perspective in much of our day has turned from what can I give to God to what can I get from God? And that's why you have so many people. They will attend a certain measure of time in a specific church. And then when they feel that they've gleaned everything from that field, they can get there and move on to the next place.

It's offering them more. And they'll just follow trends and fads. You're seeing it all over the world now.

No stability anymore. So much coming in the front door as it is. And so little going out to the mission field.

So little in the way of true compassion. So few in our generation nailing at an altar somewhere and saying, you have everything God that I am. You have everything I ever will be in sorrow or in joy, in sickness or in health, in safety, or if I lose my life, Lord, you have it all.

What would be the point if I hang on to it all for 80 years and missed the will of God? Tell me what have I gained in the long run? Just a momentary stupefying of my mind, somehow convincing me that I'm enjoying the blessings of God while all the world around me goes to hell. And I'm not fulfilling what God called my life to be. In Matthew chapter 16, verse 22 says, then Peter took him and began to rebuke him.

Now I want you to see this because I really went into the original New Testament text and dug this thing out. And there seems to be an agreement among those that have commented on this passage of scripture that Peter did this compassionately. You know, the King James uses the word rebuke.

He knew enough not to rebuke God, the son of God. He just had the revelation that he was the Christ. Now he's trying to instruct him.

Imagine that. They say he took him by the arm gently and kind of led him over into a corner in the room where they could have a private conversation. He could instruct him.

I want to read to you what he said to him from eight different translations, authorized translations of the New Testament. Mercy on thee, Lord. In no wise shall this befall thee.

Another translation says, God forbid, Lord, this shall never happen to you. Another one says, Heaven save you, Lord. This shall not be your fate.

Another one says, God forbid, master, that shall never befall you. Heaven shield you, my Lord. This must never be your lot.

Another one says, God bless you, master. That can never happen to you. Lastly, or second to the last, God be merciful to you, Lord.

This must never happen to you. And lastly, he said, master, please, God, that this shall never be your fate. Chapter 16 verse 22, King James says, Peter took him and began to rebuke him.

It's a quiet, tender moment. It's something, it's compassion. It's a caring.

He loved Christ, loved him with all his heart. I have no doubt about that. But he's sincere, but he's sincerely wrong.

He's compassionate, but he's compassionate. Can you imagine if he had a measure of success in what he was telling Christ? God forbid, have mercy on you, Lord. Heaven shield you.

God bless you. God be merciful to you. As if God was somehow being unmerciful because he had to go to a cross.

And he said, be it far from you. And the word in the Greek is hilaos, and it means literally, be merciful to yourself, Lord. It's an invocation to mercifully overturn evil.

That is to cancel the consequences of what others are planning to do. Peter is saying, Jesus, be merciful to yourself. You don't have to do this.

If you pursue this path, and if what you're saying is correct, I clearly understand that others are going to betray you. They're going to mock you. They're going to spit on you.

They're going to crucify you. He says, Lord, let this be far from you. Don't proceed with this.

Now, Jesus, you and I would anticipate that Jesus would turn to Peter, still in this secretive kind of corner, and say, Peter, you know, I love you, but you don't understand yet all the things you need to, and you've got to trust me. But the text indicates in verse 23, it says, but he turned. And in the original text, it means he turned abruptly.

He ripped his arm away from Peter's grip, and he actually turned his back on Peter to the rest of the room. The other disciples would have been there to witness this. And he says, get behind me, Satan.

He knew what was animating this man. You see, Peter was not yet surrendered. He was still unstable.

He was going to eventually deny that he even knew this Christ. In spite of all his boasting, in spite of his appearance of dedication, there were deep unsundered areas in his heart. And Jesus turns his back and says, get behind me, Satan.

You're an offense to me. The title of this message is when compassion offends God. You're an offense to me, Peter.

He said, you don't savor the things that be of God, but the things that be of men. The word offense is scandalous. That means tempting one to pursue a course that would lead to ruin.

You're tempting me to embark on a path that will lead not only to my ruin, but the ruin of countless hundreds of millions. He said, how could Peter ever have known this? And think about in the garden of Eden, what was the temptation of Satan? What did he come with? You shall not die. You shall not die.

You shall not die. You shall not die. And Jesus knew who was animating this man.

Satan is standing right there. He's got access to this man's heart and he's speaking to the son of God, trying to turn him from the very act of obedience to God that had brought about today, your redemption and my redemption. Had he listened to Peter's voice and not the voice of his father, you and I would have no hope.

We'd be here today singing songs, just absolutely deceiving ourselves. There'd be no gospel to talk about. There'd be no cross to talk about.

There'd be, there'd be nothing to talk about. There'd be no hope for the future. He says, get behind me, Satan.

You're an offense to me. Your words to me are scandalous. You're attempting to turn me as it is from the higher will than your own understanding.

And he says, you savor not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men. What it really means is your wills and your affections are set upon that which has fallen. You're not a heavenly minded man, Peter.

You're still thinking like fallen men think. You still have that seed in you that was sown in Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. You have the nature of the serpent in you.

The serpent that just did not want to do what God said to do, did not think that God's reasoning was good enough and had to set his thoughts above the thought of God. Had to begin to instruct without knowledge. And Jesus goes on in verse 24 and he says, he turns to his disciples and says, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Now this speaks about abandonment to the will of God. Whatever it is that God has for your life. He said, if you're going to be my disciple, follow that which God has for your life.

The cross speaks about embracing the pathway which fallen men scorn. They deride it and consider it to be shameful. That's why when you became a Christian, especially if you're a vocal Christian, in your workplace, people around you are constantly lying about you, constantly attacking you from all sides.

They hate the cross of Christ. They hate this concept of being abandoned to the will of God and to the ways of God. And there's that voice that is always saying, no, you don't have to endure this.

Why not just be one of those positive, happy Christians? Why not just say that God wants everybody to be rich, everybody around you will be happy then. They won't find much that's offensive with that. Why not just start confessing a lot of the positive stuff and leave this whole cross out of your theology? Why? Why talk about abandonment to the will of God? Why talk about a right way and a wrong way to live? Why are you so narrow? Why don't you just broaden out a little bit in your theological perspective? No, Jesus said, if you're going to follow me, he said, look, you're going to endure scorn.

When he was on the cross, they stood there and they said, he saved others himself he cannot save. Let him come down from the cross. If he's the son of king of Israel, and then we're going to believe him.

He said in Matthew chapter 10, verse 25, if they've called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household? You ever wondered what Beelzebub means? Here's what it means according to hunger's Bible dictionary. It's an evil spirit. It's the God of the dung, the God of manure on the street and out in the field.

That's what they called him. And he said, if that's what they called the son of man, how much more they're going to call those of his house. Folks, just get over it.

You're not going to be well-spoken about when you live for God, just get over it. You're not going to fit into a society that's fallen. And don't listen to these voices that try to tell you that Christianity should be popular, that Christianity should be riding this crest that makes the whole world envious.

When Jesus himself said, they're going to call you not just the Lord of the dung, but you're going to call you the dung that's given themselves to the Lord. You're not going to be well-spoken up. A world that hates God is not going to have pleasant things to say about you.

You can be sure of that. But Hebrews 12, two says who for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross and despised the shame. The joy praise be to God that is set before them.

The joy of you and I being here, the joy of fellowship. That's not just for time, but it's for all of eternity. God's joy of knowing that the veil was going to be read.

Everything that stood between you and I in life is going to be moved out of the way. That's why rocks split to the moment. He said, it is finished.

That's why the earth shook and the sun moved out of its place and everything became dark in the world. Because Jesus was given, there was a display in the heavenlies that the one who was in absolute control of all things has now decreed that the reign of Satan is over. The reign of sin, the power of hell is finished.

There's no prison door that can hold anybody captive any longer. There's no blindness that can keep a person in obscurity and darkness when they choose in their heart that they want to see God and walk with God. There are no limitations anymore by education or race or culture or class or language or any other thing.

The hungry heart gets the fullness of God. We are raised out of obscurity. We are brought into divine life.

We're set upon a hill as a city that cannot be hidden from this generation. We're not well spoken of by a fallen world. We are scorned and derided by those who hate God.

But who cares? In the long run, bless God. As I've often said in the past, let the man with five cents in his pocket mock the man who's just won a million dollars. Let him mock all he wants.

Bless be God. We have the treasure of God through Jesus Christ in these earthen vessels. Verse 28 of Matthew 16, he says, Verily I say unto you, there'll be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the son of man coming in his kingdom.

Now that's in part why that generation believed that Christ's second coming was going to be in their lifetime. They lived it. They moved it.

They breathed it. They said, well, if there's some in this room that are not going to die before they see the son of man coming in his kingdom, then he's coming very, very soon. And they lived that way.

And we should live that way. They sold everything they had. They had a compassion one for another that was truly born of the divine.

But really, the word see is key here. And he says, they'll not taste of death till they see the son of man coming in his kingdom. And the word see in the original text means to know intuitively or to understand.

It doesn't mean that we're going to live for 2000 years, but it means an embrace in obeying God and embracing the shame and whatever personal costs may be ahead. It means to see and experience the coming of God to proclaim his kingdom in me. They will live to see it.

And they did live to see it on the day of Pentecost. They were there. And all of a sudden God came and he took up his kingdom.

Folks, the kingdom is not a physical place. It's you and me. He came to his kingdom.

He came to his church. He came in and dwelt a body. And he said, I'm going to be God to you.

Now I'm going to be God in you. This is what Pentecost was all about. I have a kingdom.

Yes, it's going to culminate in a marriage supper. It's going to culminate in the recreating of heaven and earth and such like, but the kingdom began when Jesus died on the cross. The kingdom began when the holy spirit was freely given after he rose from the dead.

I am in his kingdom. His kingdom is in me. His kingdom is in you.

This should be the most exciting life. It is the most exciting life on the face of the entire earth. Praise be to God.

Folks, you got to get this. Why would we limit God? Why would we try to theologially redefine him? Why would we say this far and no farther when he's the one who sets the limits? The greatest favor I could ever do to you as a man who said to this pulpit to speak to you is to convince you that it is better to follow God and lose everything than to keep everything and lose God. It's better to follow God wherever that leads.

Whatever it means, it's better to follow God. Now, you don't get under a burden of thinking I've got to go out the back doors of the church today and get a plane ticket to somewhere. That's not what this is about.

You just start following by reading this book, going to your prayer closet every day and say, God, I want to read it as it is. And I pray that every day, Lord, I don't want to skew the truth. I don't want to see it through a screen of what I think acceptable service to God is.

I want to read it, and I want to read it the way you wrote it. I want to hear it the way you spoke it. I want to understand it the way you said it, and I want to follow it the way you're leading me.

Hallelujah to the Lamb of God. Praise be to God. Isaiah, listen to the words of Isaiah the prophet.

I believe he spoke. I know he spoke about our generation. I know that something of God's spirit is coming to the hungry now.

Oh, folks, what days we're going to be living in. Days of great hardship, I have no doubt in my mind. Hardship is coming our way like you've never been able to imagine.

It's going to be difficult in the physical sense, but glorious in the spiritual sense. If the focus of your heart is the winning of the souls of men, then we're about to move into one of the greatest times the world has ever known. If the focus of your heart is just to stuff your own belly with spiritual things and to create a God that is palatable to you and to the masses, then you're going to be confused in the days ahead.

You're going to be among Job's and his comforters, sitting down with an endless theological discussion about whether or not there's any purpose to suffering. That's going to be your lot in the coming days. You're going to be gravely disappointed.

Those who are sitting under ministries and messages of endless good times and prosperity and health, you're going to find that these things are going to fail you. You're going to be among the foolish virgins who all of a sudden at the midnight hour found out their lamps were empty. They thought they had a living relationship with God.

They were having experiences with what they thought was the Holy Spirit of God, but all for the wrong reasons. Just an experiential Christianity is all it was about. It wasn't about going to the lost.

It wasn't about going into the prisons. It wasn't about helping the widows and the orphans. It wasn't about being there to answer the questions of the stranger.

It wasn't about going into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and all the ends of the earth, telling a fallen world that there's hope. There's hope not just for time, but for eternity. Isaiah said it this way, arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

I see a visitation of God, folks. I see it coming. Just as Pastor David spoke this summer, I see a visitation of God coming to the true church of Jesus Christ.

You read in Isaiah, he says there's going to be a bride that's going to lift up her voice in the midst of the fires that are coming. She's going to be giving praises to the righteous one, not captivated by the things of this world, not running around terrified by the things that are coming to every the shore of every nation. He says, behold, darkness will cover the earth, gross darkness the people.

We're living at that time now, folks. This is an hour of gross darkness, deep darkness. Oh folks, and it's on a slide now.

It's on a very, very swift and quick slide. Goodness sakes, man, in Canada, they've just given one of the highest awards in the country to a man who's dedicated his life to murdering babies in their mother's womb. That's where we've come to as a society.

God help us, we're on a slide down, folks. A deep, dark slide has come and is going to get even worse. Gross darkness will be upon the people, but the Lord shall arise upon thee and his glory shall be seen upon thee.

His glory is coming to a people that say, Jesus, whatever you have for my life, that's what I want for my life. Where you lead me, I will follow. I don't have to have all the answers.

I don't need to know all of the whys and the ifs and the ands and the buts, but God, I'm going to follow you. I'm going to follow you, Lord. You speak to my heart, I'll follow you.

I'll do what you tell me to do. He says, Gentiles will come to your life and kings to the brightness of your rising. Folks, leaders will come.

They'll come to the true church of Christ and say, listen, you've got to tell us what to do. You've got to help us in this time of declension that's all around us. Lift up your eyes round about and see.

They gather themselves together. They come to you. Your sons will come from far and your daughters will be nursed at your side.

Praise be to God, there'll be an end gathering of mothers that are here, fathers that are here. You've almost lost heart for your children. God says, no, don't lose heart.

Follow the real Christ. He said, I'm going to gather them to you. They're going to come in the days ahead.

They're going to want to know who your God is. He says, then you're going to see and flow together and your heart will fear and be enlarged because the abundance of the sea will be converted to thee. The forces of the Gentiles will come to thee.

The multitude of camels will cover thee. The dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, they shall come. They shall bring gold and incense and they will show forth the praises of the Lord.

There will be a people come while converted who believe it's reasonable to give your all to the purposes of God. There'll be a releasing of the things of this world in those who truly know Christ. And the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together into thee.

The rams of Nebaioth shall minister to thee. They will come up with acceptance on my altar. They will come and bring in a sacrifice.

God says that I accept on my altar. They will come as Christ did in the last supper. They will come dedicated to the will and to the work of God.

And he says, and I will glorify the house of my glory. The new English Bible says it this way, and glory shall be added to glory in my temple. Paul said in second Corinthians three 18, we all with open face, beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.

As you and I make the choice to look to the real Christ, the Christ of the Bible, the Christ who went to Calvary, the Christ who said to us, if any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. When we look to this Christ, we will be changed into that image. We'll be kept by the same power.

We'll be raised from spiritual death. We'll be given authority over demons in the power of hell. We lay hands on the sick and they shall recover.

Praise be to God. Praise be to God. Praise be to God.

Bless the Lord. My altar call is simple today. It's an altar call for those who are not looking for a soft message or not looking for an escape from the pathway, which he's called us to walk in.

The Lord told me to invite you to an altar and just say to you, come and receive strength. Come and stand before the Lord and say, thy will be done in me as it is in heaven. Praise be to God.

As the worship team comes, I'm going to ask as we stand momentarily at the annex in the main sanctuary, if you'd make your way, we're going to worship for the next 15 or 20 minutes and God's going to infuse you with strength. Come to this altar. Just say, Lord, I'm not looking for an easy route.

I'm looking for the will of God. Let's stand together. Please make your way here.

We're going to take a moment to praise God together. Every backslider, get home. Get home quick.

Get back to God as quick as you can. If you're lost, make your way here. If you know that you're a sinner and you need a savior, get down here.

God will receive you. Folks, we don't have forever. There's an urgency in my heart.

Get right with God and determine you're going to follow him no matter what the cost. How many here today that are listening in the annex can say, honestly, if ever there was an hour not to play games with God, it would be this one. Say, I'm not a Christian.

I'm not a follower of Christ. I'm a religious person, or maybe you're just an absolute sinner and you know it, which means for those who don't understand the concept of sin, that you live in rebellion to what God says you should be. You lie, you steal, you cheat, you commit adultery, you fornicate.

You live as a sinner. And Paul, the apostle said, don't be deceived. People who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

I don't care what kind of a silver tongue preacher preaches to you, you will not inherit the kingdom of God. Those that are Christ's have been given a new spirit. Doesn't mean you don't struggle, but there's in that struggle, there's conviction.

And with the conviction comes promise. And with the promise comes change. That all happens by the power of God.

I want to ask for an honesty today, folks, because this is the difference between heaven and hell. For those who can, with an upraised hand, say, I'm a sinner. Today, I need a savior.

I'm going to open my heart. I'm not playing the religious game. And I'm going to invite Jesus Christ to come in.

Would you raise your hand, wherever you are. Just look around, folks. There's dozens of people, the balcony, the main sanctuary, coming through to Christ.

Praise be to God. I'm going to pray a simple prayer with you. And then there's people downstairs in the lower rotunda that will pray with you and give you a Bible if you don't have one and help you just understand where you go from here.

There'll be no pressure put on you to join anything. Let's pray this simple prayer. Those who raised their hands.

Lord Jesus, I'm a sinner. God Almighty, I deserve to be punished forever for what I've done and how I've lived. But I thank you today for the understanding that you so cared about me, that you came to the earth and took my place.

The full punishment for everything I deserve, you took upon yourself. You were crucified and you died and you were buried by the power of God. You were raised again to newness of life on the third day.

And you promised me today that as I am sincere in opening my heart to you, that you will cause my old way of living to be buried and put away. And you will raise me up and make me a new person because of Jesus Christ. God, thank you for loving me.

And thank you today for receiving me. Help me to live a new life that will bring honor to your name. Lead me, guide me, open truth to me.

Show me your promises and show me the path that you have for my life. In Jesus' name, amen. Praise God.

Now, for those who were in this church before September 11, 2001, you know that we were warned of the Holy Spirit. And it was such a delight to, as one of the pastors of this church, to see so many from everywhere around the city running to the church when the towers came down, not because they were terrified, but they were prepared. And to see people, I saw executives, I saw Wall Street people, I saw people from every sphere of life heading out the door with carts, buying sandwiches, getting water, praying with people that were coming in who were terrified.

A church prepared, a church ready, a church that doesn't live its entire existence to escape difficult times. Praise be to God. You know the Holy Spirit is here today, and you know God is speaking to every heart.

What I want to tell you now is that you will not be triumphed over. You'll not lose your joy. There'll be a joy that is supernatural, will have nothing to do with what's going on around you.

This joy of being kept by God, this joy of walking with God, of knowing the life of God, there'll be a joy so far beyond anything that your eyes can see. Praise be to God. And may you be an instrument of His grace in this city.

Father, I pray a blessing of the Holy Spirit on those that have responded in heart today, whether it's a physical response or a heart response at this altar. I pray the blessing of heaven on those who truly love you, Lord. God, I ask you for strength that we may stand in whatever storms are coming our way, God, that we may have the power and will have the power to stand.

I thank you, Lord, for a song that cannot be taken away. Though the mountains be moved, David said, though the seas roar, he said, I will trust in God. My eyes are fixed.

I thank you, Lord. God, I thank you for this song, this incredible song of grace that you give to your church in Jesus' mighty name. I'll give him, give him appreciation.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/Ebm149EgrVo.mp4>

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