

How Could God Allow This?

by David Guzik

The sermon explores the question of how God allows evil and suffering in the world, and argues that God values redemption more than innocence and that the best possible world is the world of redemption.

Duration: 44:06

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 9:1-6, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Suffering And Evil", "Life And Death"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the book of Ecclesiastes and how the writer argues from a perspective that is ultimately wrong. The writer develops his ideas and themes as if life is lived under one set of circumstances, but at the end, he brings in the true set of circumstances. The sermon then relates this to the recent events of the World Trade Center attack and emphasizes the importance of understanding the reality of life and death. The preacher quotes Ecclesiastes 9:1-6 to highlight the idea that both the righteous and the wicked face the same events in life, but ultimately, there is hope for those who are joined to the living.

Transcript

Let's look at Ecclesiastes chapter 9, verses 1 through 6. For I considered all this in my heart so that I could declare it all, that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred by anything that they see before them. All things come alike to all.

One event happens to the righteous and to the wicked. To the good, the clean and the unclean. To him who sacrifices and to him who does not sacrifice.

As is the good, so is the sinner. He who takes an oath as he who fears an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun.

That one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil. Madness is in their hearts while they live.

And after that they go to the dead. But for him who is joined to the living, there is hope. For a living dog is better than a dead lion.

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing. And they have no more reward. For the memory of them is forgotten.

Also their love, their hatred, their envy has now perished. Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun. Some of you are surprised that the Bible says such things.

Well, what we've done this morning is taking a selection from an interesting book of the Bible. It's rightly been said that the Bible is more of a library than it is a single book. And this morning we've walked into the library of the Bible.

And we've seen a single book standing on the shelf, the book of Ecclesiastes. And it's a unique book in all of the Bible. Different than almost every other book of the Bible.

Because for much of the book of Ecclesiastes, the writer of Ecclesiastes, argues from the standpoint of somebody who's dead wrong. He develops his ideas and his themes and his case as if everything in life were lived under one set of circumstances. And then at the end of it all, he brings in the true set of circumstances and informs us. But what he talks about this morning is real.

It's relevant to what's happened this last week and the momentous occasions that have struck not only our nation but the whole world. You saw it, didn't you? You'll probably remember where you were when you first heard the news. That two large airliners striking into each one of the World Trade Center towers.

Or the plane crashing into the Pentagon. Or the incredible fervor of finding out who did these things and how can we protect ourselves and what will we do as a response. You will remember all that.

But for many people, the question that some have deep in their hearts but they're afraid to ask. And others, they're not hesitant to ask it at all. They ask it all the time.

They want to know how could God allow this. Where are you, God? Did you take Tuesday morning off? You know, were you asleep that morning? Maybe you just don't have the power to stop such things. Or maybe you do but you just sort of like to see mankind suffer and so you allowed it.

This is a troubling question and a legitimate question. And what I want you to see is the Bible speaks very pointedly to this question. Now when thinking about what I was going to say to you this morning I had to kind of decide whether or not I was going to speak to you from a text which described the answer to the question or a text which described the question itself.

And this morning, as you can tell from the passage in Ecclesiastes that I've read I've put before you a question, or excuse me, a text that deals very much with the question itself. But it's a relevant question, don't you think? I mean, the whole nation is asking this question. The whole nation wants to know how could God allow it.

It's deep in the hearts of people. They want to know. And might I add as well that I believe it is an important question.

This isn't a side issue. This is a relevant question for us to answer today. And in my mind, it's extremely important because our life will be shaped by the answer.

Our life will be greatly affected by how we answer this question because how you answer the question is going to answer what kind of God you really believe in. We want to know what the God of the Bible believes. We want to know what the God of the Bible comes down relevant to this question.

How could God allow it? I also want you to see this morning that this is a question that's really asked every day. Now, we've had the incredibly unique and terrible occasion this last week of seeing thousands or tens of thousands of people perish at one time, virtually in one moment perish. But I want you to know that if you just sort of take it out in your mind, this question is asked every day in a lot of different circumstances.

If you think of a father and mother who have an adult son or daughter and their adult son or daughter lives in New York City and works in one of the floors high above on one of those trade center towers and they hear the terrible news of the collision and they wonder and they wonder and they're still wondering because they haven't heard a thing from their son or their daughter. They're holding out hope against hope but now they're just sort of trying to face reality that theirs is among one of the tragically killed in this horrific attack upon our nation. But when you think about what they're going through and the questions they're asking and the agony that they're facing, it's really no different from another hypothetical family whose son or daughter just perished in an automobile accident because a drunk driver swerved across a lane and crashed head on into them.

Now the accident with the drunk driver, that's the kind of thing that happens several times a day, every day in our nation. And the loss to that one family feels no less than the loss to the family who lost somebody in one of these great occasions that we saw this last week. So the question is asked every day.

But now, now the question is painted with such bold, powerful strokes before us that it's a relevant question, it's an important question, it's a question that people want to know how, how could God allow this? And might I say as well that I believe it's an accurate question. Accurate in the sense that I did not phrase the question, how could God do this? Because ladies and gentlemen, God did not do this. The Bible tells us very plainly that God is not the author of evil.

God did not speak to the heart of those terrorists. God did not direct him by his active will to go out and to do those terrible things. God did not do this.

But as strongly as I would say that from the biblical standpoint of saying that God is not and can never be the author of evil. Still, we must say that God certainly did allow it. God wasn't on vacation Tuesday morning.

God certainly could have stopped it. It was within his power. It was within his sight.

Yet God did not. God chose to allow this to happen. And we have to ask why.

How could God allow this? It's not a new question, it's really a very old question asked in the book of Ecclesiastes. Did you notice that in chapter 9? Look at it again in verse 1, it's really very striking. He says, For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all, that the righteous and the wise and the works are in the hand of God.

Well, we believe that, don't we? The righteous and the wise and the works, they're in the hand of God. Do you believe that you are in the hand of God this morning? That God upholds you and manages you by his hand? Friends, that's something that for some of us, or maybe for many of us, it's fairly easy to believe. But then that's where the problem comes in.

Because look at the end of verse 1. He says, People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them. In other words, I believe that I'm in your hands, God. I believe you're upholding, I'm in your hand.

But the problem is, as I look at the events of my life, I don't know whether you love or hate me. I don't know either love or hatred. Because God, as I look at it, and what happened to me, or my family, or my friends, or my possessions on that Tuesday, you could just consider somebody asking, What, God, do you love me or do you really hate me? I mean, if you love me, why did you let it happen? Maybe you really do hate me.

Now, some people think that they let God off the hook by altering what the Bible says about who God is. There's a very famous book written several years ago by a man named Harold Kushner, and the book was titled, *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*. And the basic premise of Kushner's book, which was a very wide bestseller, the basic premise of his book was, I'll tell you why bad things happen to good people.

It's because God just isn't in control of everything. And so, what can he do? He can't fix everything. Some things slip through his fingers.

And so, you know, you've got to cut God a little bit of slack. He can't just be everywhere and do everything. Well, that is not the God of the Bible.

The God of the Bible is described for us in verse 1. The righteous and the wise and the works are in the hand of God. But God, that's where the problem is. If we're in your hand, how come these things happen? As well, does it really matter if we're righteous or wicked? Did you see what it says in verse 2? All things come alike to all.

One event happens to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good, the clean, and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and to him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner. He who takes an oath, as he who fears an oath.

Does it really make any difference? Righteous? Wicked? What does it matter? Both lives are taken in a moment, in a horrific accident. If it's so worth it to be righteous, then how come it wasn't only wicked people who perished? How come some righteous people perished as well? Two men go to work on a Tuesday morning in an office, and they follow the routine just like they follow every day. There's nothing really unusual about it.

They drive the car, they take the public transportation, they get to their building, they walk in the same elevator, and because they get there the same time every day, they see the same faces. Maybe they stand beside each other oftentimes in the same elevator, and they know what's going on. They know each other's faces.

But one man, he's a godly, righteous man. He loves God. He trusts in what Jesus has done on the cross on his behalf.

For him, the death of Jesus isn't just an interesting historical fact, but he's put his trust in the fact that Jesus died as a substitute for him on the cross, and he rests in that. And God looks down upon that one man, and he says, this man is righteous. And he's not just righteous by the decree of God, he's righteous in his life as well.

You look at his family, you look at his marriage, you look at his business dealings, this is a righteous, godly man. And the man standing beside him in the elevator, making their ways up that tall skyscraper, the man standing beside him, he's a nice enough fellow, and you could have a pleasant conversation with him, but truth be told, he's a wicked man. He's a liar and a cheater.

He cheats in his marriage, he cheats on his taxes, he cheats in his business dealings, whenever he can get away with it. He's a wicked man. He's selfish.

Why he might be pleasant enough to speak to for a few moments, if you got to know him and his life for what it really is, you'd know that he's a wicked man, and they both ride up to their floor in the elevator, they get off when the doors open, they go to their workplaces, and in a moment, a moment that seems to come so quickly that there's no time to even react, there's no time to even be afraid, both of them perish, both of them die, you say, well what good is it whether you're righteous or wicked? Two people board a plane Tuesday morning. One of them is a godly woman. You'd look at her and you'd say, there's a Proverbs 31 woman, because Proverbs 31 describes the character and the standing of a godly woman.

Well, there's a godly woman. She loves her family, she's devoted to God. Look at her, what a godly woman, and she gets on the plane and she settles in, and she's thinking, great, I'm going to be on this plane for a few hours, I can just sort of sit back and use this time to pray, and maybe sleep a little bit before I get to my destination, I want to be well-rested, and she's just settling into the plane, and enduring the whole routine of the pre-flight business, you know.

I mean, if you've flown very much at all, it loses its romance pretty quickly. I mean, the first few times you fly someplace, it's very exciting, you know, it seems very adventurous. Then after a while, the luster kind of goes off of air travel, and it just seems like a big bus, and there's the same flight attendants in front of you all the time, teaching you the emergency business, and telling you how to buckle a seatbelt.

Can you imagine? This is how you buckle a seatbelt, and they're going through the whole business, and they're tuning it all out, and this godly woman is just preparing for the flight, and a few aisles over is another person who boarded that plane, and that man is going to hijack that plane. That man is a wicked man, and he doesn't pay attention to what God would speak to his heart, and instead, he would rather go his own way, and drag down the lives of not just himself and those around him, but as many thousands as he can take out. Both of them get on the plane, and both of them die.

Both of them die in a terrible, terrible accident. You get the feeling of the question asked by the writer of Ecclesiastes. Now, might I say that, even though this is an old question asked in the book of Ecclesiastes, it's also a question that is never asked when the answer is easy.

I mean, we understand why the wicked die, but why do the righteous and the innocent die? We might say, well, Lord, maybe the people in those trade towers, maybe they were particularly wicked people. But a moment's thought says, well, that's not true. They're a cross-section of people.

Their share of the wicked, their share of the righteous. It wasn't as if God or anything had some particular vendetta of judgment against those particular buildings or those particular floors. I mean, it would be easy if we could say that.

Well, it was just the wicked who perished. But you can't say that. We never ask the question when it's easy to answer.

Nobody's agonizing. Nobody's scratching their heads. Nobody's saying, God, how could you allow those hijackers to die in the plane crash? Nobody's asking that.

But when the question is hard, then it really is hard. So I can say finally, just on the idea of this question itself, this is a question that doesn't have a simple answer. You know, when we're asking the question,

how could God allow this, there isn't a simple answer for us.

It's something for us to consider soberly. I can't give you one catchy phrase, one pat answer that will make us go, oh, well, then that's it. Gee, I never heard that one before.

Gee. But what I can do is communicate to you this morning two principles that I think will really put this question in proper perspective and bring some peace to your heart and enable you to answer others who have the same question. The first principle is this.

God values redemption even more than innocence. Let me say that again. God values redemption even more than innocence.

In other words, I want you to consider humanity in two states. You have humanity in innocence. And for that, why don't you picture Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before they had ever sinned.

That's innocence. Sin has not yet touched their existence, has not yet touched their lives. And in many of us, that is the ideal state of humanity.

Why can't we just get back to the Garden? It was paradise lost. Why can't it be paradise regained? Many of us think that way. So that's one section of humanity.

Innocence. Then I want you to think of another category of humanity, redeemed. And for that, we don't look at the Garden of Eden.

We look at the very courts of heaven. You know, the book of Revelation describes for us a multitude of gods redeemed around the throne of God, singing and declaring His glorious praises before His throne. That's redeemed man in the fullness of his redemption.

Now, which is more valuable to God? Which is God's desired conclusion or finish? Innocence or redemption? My friends, the answer is simple. It's redemption. Let me read to you from Revelation chapter 5. And they sang a new song saying, You are worthy for you were slain and have redeemed us to God by your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation and have made us kings and priests to our God and we shall reign on the earth.

That's redeemed man in all of his glory. In the completion of his redemption. And God says, that's, that's more valuable.

Even more valuable than innocent man. Now, here's the trick. You can't have redeemed man unless there is something to redeem him from.

You see, the Bible tells us that God is all wise and all powerful. We trust in His eternal purpose and plan, but we don't always understand it. And we ask, why did God find it necessary? Or why did God find it good to allow evil to happen? Why? And why does He allow it to continue? Well, that's a question that's troubled a lot of philosophers, a lot of thinkers throughout all the centuries.

But when we address this question biblically, we should start out by admitting that right now the world that we have is not the best possible world. It's not. That may shock you to hear a preacher say that, but it's true.

The best possible world is not the one that we live in right now. If there was one less murder, if there was one less theft, if there was one less terrorist act, friends, it would be a better world. This is not the best possible world.

And so we ask God, God, why don't you make it the best possible world? Come on, where are you? If you're so powerful, why don't you do it? Well, again, part of our problem is that we think we know what the best possible world would be. Most of us, when we think of the best possible world, we're thinking of the world of the Garden of Eden, the world of innocence. Instead, God says, no, the best possible world is the world of redemption, the place where redeemed man is brought into his fullness and into his glory, if you will.

Friends, here, in God's eyes, it's important to see that the best possible world is not the world that has never experienced sin and evil, but the world that has been redeemed from sin and evil. In that scene I quoted to you from the book of Revelation, where God's people are surrounding His throne and worshipping and crying out in majesty and glory to God. First, they start out declaring God's praises and honor and glory for His work in creation, but then they go on to cry out and glorify Him for His great work in redemption.

Friends, that's what I want you to see. As we follow the course of God's entire work of redemption, we're driven to see that His work of redemption is greater than His work of creation. Man, as He stood in the garden of Eden, was one thing.

Man, as He stands redeemed in the fullness of His redemption in the courts of heaven, He is even greater than innocent man in Eden. See, and that's important. Because if the innocence of the original creation was most important to God, He could have made a bunch of worshipping robots to declare His praise.

Just sort of, you know, like when you go to Disneyland and it's a small world, and all those little puppets and dolls, you know, they're all singing the song. You know, God could have done something like that and they're all worshipping Him. It's all to worship music.

And God could have been very, well, look, here, they're all singing to me. But God knows, as well as you and I do, how empty and futile and vain all that would have been, what God wants from us is the allegiance of creatures who are more than robots, who have willing, thinking hearts. And for Him to have that allegiance, you have to allow sin and rebellion.

If you don't have a choice, then it's not a chosen allegiance. And the greatest work of God is in redeeming rebels who, by His grace, turn their hearts to Him. That's why God allows it.

Now, when we look at the eternal purpose and plan of God, as we look at it as it works out in daily life, you can't help but be pained at the magnitude of sin and evil. And we admit that it's not the best possible world. It would have been a better world if that horrific event would have never happened on Tuesday.

But friends, we absolutely believe that even though this is not the best possible world, it is the best possible way to the best possible world. And God knows what He's doing. He has allowed the presence of sin and evil to ultimately work a redemptive purpose and to bring man to that place where He has the glory of redeemed man in heaven.

You see, the best possible world is that world where all things are resolved, where all true righteousness is rewarded, and where all true evil is properly judged. It's the resolution of all things in Jesus, and that world

is promised, and right now we are in process towards that promise. And it's going to come.

So friends, God values redemption even more than innocence. But secondly, and might I say this is another aspect that's very important to our understanding of this, that God values eternity even more than time. Let me repeat that.

God values eternity even more than time. You know, this is where we come back to the book of Ecclesiastes. Our writer really brilliantly analyzes the human condition.

Take a look at it again in verse 2. He says, all things come alike to all. One of it happens to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good, the clean, and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and to him who does not sacrifice. Well, listen, if going to church isn't going to keep me from a disaster like that, then what good is it? Then he goes on, look at him in verse 5. For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward.

For the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished. Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun.

Now the writer of Ecclesiastes brilliantly analyzes the human condition if, if this life is all there is. That touches on a phrase that's used repeatedly throughout the book of Ecclesiastes. It's that phrase, under the sun.

Did you notice that in verse 3? This is an evil that is done under the sun. Verse 6, nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun. No, not under the sea.

That's from a Disney musical number, from a cartoon. Under the sun. And what it means is, in the life we live right now, in the here and now, with no thought of eternity, just life as we see it, life as we face it right now.

And friends, if this life is all there is, then he's right. If this life is all there is, then you have no other choice. And they say, well it is no better to be righteous than unrighteous.

Because look, you'll perish just the same in some horrific accident. But you see the problem, and trust me, the writer of Ecclesiastes gets to the point at the end of the book. The problem is that life under the sun isn't all there is.

There's more to life. This life as we know it isn't the end of it. There is more beyond.

We live not just in time, but in eternity. So go back to our two people. The two men going up in the elevator in the office building.

They went into the office last Tuesday. And they went into eternity together in the same moment, but they went to entirely different destinations. They left behind different legacies.

One of them left behind a legacy of sin and damage and wickedness. Another one left behind a legacy of godliness and the upbringing of his children and the conduct of his house. That will reverberate through time, but in eternity they have different legacies as well.

One will come and will be greeted by Jesus and will walk the streets of heaven and will be in his Father's house forevermore. That one will hear from God the Father, Well done, my good and faithful servant.

Enter into the joy of your Lord.

And the other one? The other one will face eternity in separation from God. You see, it isn't all the same. Under the sun it might seem all the same, but it's not all the same when we consider eternity.

For the two people who boarded the plane on Tuesday. They have an entirely different eternity. That woman, that godly woman, who perished in the plane crash, she's instantly ushered into the presence of the Lord because the Bible tells us to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

And she's present with the Lord. And you know what she sees immediately? What she sees is her dear, sainted mother and grandmother who led her to the Lord. There they are in heaven and they've been waiting for her.

Oh, won't that be one of the greatest joys of heaven? To meet with loved ones who have gone before us. To meet with the saints of old. And to be there with them and commune with them and to be with them together forever, never to lose them again.

How glorious, how glorious it'll be for that woman. And then you have the man who sat in the seat and rose up and hijacked the plane. Well, that man was told that when he passed from this life to the next, he was told that he would pass into an existence of pleasure and opulent luxury.

He was told that he would be waited upon by beautiful young women and that every whim, every desire would be satisfied and the rest of eternity would be one luxurious, indulgent party. What a rude awakening that man faced the moment he passed from this life to the next. When he stood before the righteous court of a holy God and when he was faced with the enormity of his evil, wicked act, not just in taking his own life or the lives of the people on that plane, but in the wickedness of taking the thousands of lives involved with it, when that man stood and was held accountable for that before God and sentenced to hell, might I say, into one of the lowest places in hell.

Because let me inform you of something. Many people think that everybody has it equally bad in hell. That's not true.

Jesus said in a few different places, he spoke of a greater condemnation than some would have within others. Believe it or not, some people have it worse in hell than others. Now, nobody has it good.

Don't think that for a moment. But you better believe that some people have it worse than others. And you would have to believe that men is evil to do what they did.

Something which God and nature and their conscience itself cries out against. Those men will spend eternity under greater condemnation. Well, that man faced that in a moment.

So you can't say that all are alike. You can't say, as he says in verse 2, all things come alike to all. Yes, for right now the writer of Ecclesiastes is speaking as if life were lived only under the sun.

But the point is that it isn't. You see, each of those people, the men going up in the elevator, the people boarding the plane, each of them was already going to die. They just didn't know when.

You know, that's true for every one of us here. That's a sobering thought, isn't it? Unless the Lord Jesus returns first, which I am wholeheartedly in favor of. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

But unless the Lord Jesus comes first, every one of us will face death. You know, it used to be that they used to bury people in churches. Have you ever been in a cathedral in Europe? And I don't know if they've ever done it in some of the old churches back east, but in many of the cathedrals in Europe, you walk around and there's tombs everywhere.

There's people buried everywhere. Now, we don't do that in our churches. That's good.

We want as few dead people among us as possible. But there is an upside to it. There is an upside, because everywhere you would look, you'd be reminded they're dead and you're going to die someday too.

You're going to be faced with eternity. You see, every one of those people was going to die. They just didn't know when.

And friend, might I say, you don't know when you're going to die. Oh, you assume. Every one of us assumes it will be years from now.

20, 30, 40, at least 4 or 5. Years from now. But it won't be soon. I feel fine.

You see how foolish that thinking is. You see, every one of those people who perished had reason and opportunity to prepare, I should say, for eternity. Some of them made good use of that opportunity.

Some of them did not. So what will you do? Friends, if all of life is lived under the sun, then the discouragement and the cynicism of the writer of Ecclesiastes, it makes perfect sense. But if eternity is real, then he's wrong.

And he's asking it from the wrong perspective. And friends, he corrects this at the end. He speaks about it at the end.

He says, wait a minute. I've understood now that all of life is lived not just under the sun, not just time, but in eternity as well. And friends, this is the principle that you have to grab a hold of, is that time is important to God.

God cares about the here and now. But eternity is even more important to God than time. One event happens to the righteous and the wicked.

It simply isn't true in the scope of eternity. Because for one person, death may be a graduation to glory. For another person, it may seal their eternal doom.

For one person, it means that every pain and suffering and agony they ever experience in life, that's the worst they're ever going to know for all of eternity. It means for another person, that whatever scant pleasure or good thing they could seize on earth, that's the best they're going to know for all of eternity. Because they go to a place devoid of pleasure or satisfaction.

Did you see on some of the internet things, the emails or websites or something relevant? Did you see the devil's face in the smoke? It's going around on the internet. People will email you the website link and all of that. You go to it and you see the shape, the shadowy outline, either in a color or in a black and white photograph.

And it's kind of one of those things, they show you the face of a man on Mars or something like that. But you can see the shadowy outline. And I'd put about as much credence as that, as I'd put on the face of Jesus on a tortilla, that kind of thing.

You'll find those as well. I mean, it's just one of those chance occurrences that'll come up. If you looked at a thousand photographs of different cloud formations, you'd see all different kinds of things.

Well, there's a ducky, and there's a horsey, and there's the face of Satan, you know. But friends, I believe that over this whole event, something was written. And it wasn't a depiction of the face of Satan.

God was writing something over this event. Earlier this century, a strange man. He was a petty criminal and a vagrant.

He lived in Sydney, Australia, and he happened in on a preacher having an evangelistic meeting. The preacher was one of those good old-fashioned hellfire and damnation preachers. And the evangelist was shouting during the sermon.

And he said, I wish I could shout eternity through the streets of Sydney. And the strange man who heard the sermon, his name was Arthur Stace. And he remembered that man, and he spoke about the sermon that he heard later on.

And now I'm quoting from Arthur Stace. He said he kept repeating himself and kept shouting, eternity, eternity! And his words were ringing through my brain as I left the church. Suddenly I began crying, and I felt a powerful call from the Lord to write eternity.

I had a piece of chalk in my pocket, and I bent down there and wrote it. The funny thing is, is I could hardly have ever spelled my own name. I had no schooling, and I couldn't even spell eternity for \$100.

But it came out smoothly, and in beautiful copperplate script. I couldn't understand it, and I still can't. The man, Arthur Stace, for the next 40 years, went all over the streets of Sydney, Australia, and he wrote it on the sidewalks.

He wrote it on the streets. He wrote it on the walls with his piece of chalk, He tried writing other things, but it was like God wouldn't let him. For 40 years, dozens of times a day, he wrote that one-word sermon.

Eternity, eternity, eternity. And it is very interesting. He was an absolutely uneducated, illiterate man, and he could hardly write his own name legibly.

But when he wrote eternity, it came out in the most beautiful script. Friends, that is what God is writing over this event. Now, an event of this magnitude has more than one lesson.

There is no one lesson. But nevertheless, God has written eternity all over it for us. So, friends, it's time for us to take stock.

And to not be foolish about this massive wake-up call that God has given to us and to our nation. Are you ready for eternity? Are you ready to face it? God values eternity even more than time. Do you? God values redemption even more than innocence.

Do you? Time for us to bring our values in line with God's. Now, right now, I want to give an offer, a call, a challenge, if you will, to those who feel that they need to make a commitment to God. You need to come to

God on the terms that He has laid out.

You need to come humbly to Him and say, I'm a sinner and I want to receive the sacrifice that Jesus made for my sin. If you want to make a commitment to God based on what Jesus has done for you, I'm going to give you the opportunity in just a moment. But I know that there's many others of you.

You feel like this is a morning when you need to recommit your life to God. You have flagged and failed in your commitment. Your heart is weary because of it.

And you even maybe came to church this morning both hoping and fearing that the preacher might ask for something like this. Well, he is. And I want to give you the opportunity.

I'm going to pray, and in the midst of my prayer, I'm going to give you an opportunity to talk to God about it in your own heart and to simply stand up from where you're sitting to demonstrate your commitment or your recommitment. Because, simply put, trusting in God is more than believing something in an abstract sense. It's doing something as well.

So I want to give you something to do. Let's come before him right now in prayer. Lord, we say as a nation, be merciful unto us, God.

Give us and our leaders great wisdom in this time of trial. Help us, Lord, to have your love, your awareness, your kindness towards others. And, Father, bless those who are charged with the responsibility of protecting and defending our nation.

Father, those are important things to pray for and things that you command us to pray for. But, Lord, it is not the greatest or the heaviest need upon our heart this morning. God, we want to be right with you.

How could we ever ignore such a powerful wake-up call to our nation as a whole and to us as individuals? And so, Lord, we want to respond to you this morning by saying that we've woken up. So I pray, God, that you would put it upon the heart of many to either commit or to recommit their lives unto you. Now, if that's what you would like to do right now, to commit or recommit your life unto God, won't you tell him so right now in a silent moment before him? Won't you tell God of how you want to come to him through Jesus and what Jesus did on the cross for you, not on your own merits, not on your own righteousness, but on what Jesus did for you? Tell God that right now in your heart and ask him to give you the new life that Jesus has.

Now, friends, if that's you and you want to or have made that commitment or recommitment this morning, would you stand right now just from where you're sitting? Father, bless those standing before you. Bless their reaching out to you in faith and their willingness to do something, God. Father, I pray that you would pour out upon them your transforming love, your empowering grace to see an incredible work done in them.

Lord, to bring them and to keep them in Jesus. Father, help those around them to offer up a word of prayer and gratitude for your great work. Father, help us as a people.

Help us for the greatness of your work among us and in us. We pray this, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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