

A Story Within a Story

by Dennis Kinlaw

God created humans to be compatible with himself, but humanity's fall led to a story of movement from a garden to a wilderness, until God became one of us in Jesus Christ to turn the world around.

Duration: 45:41

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-28, Psalm 8:4-5, Isaiah 59:14-15, Jeremiah 23:21-22, Daniel 3:16-18, Acts 16:25-34, Romans 1:26-27

Topics: "Story"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the brutal and violent realities of the world we live in, including the rape and murder of innocent people. He shares a story of a girl who was raped multiple times but found solace in God's presence. The speaker emphasizes that despite the darkness and suffering in the world, believers should not be discouraged but rather be the vessels through which the gospel can reach others. He concludes by urging the audience to focus on their role in God's plan and to praise Him for the privilege of knowing Him.

Transcript

Our Father, we've sensed your spirit with us tonight, and we've sensed something of what you're doing in our world, and we have sensed, felt, something of how your heart beats for a world that is without you and in need of you. And we have the privilege of knowing you. So let these moments, closing moments, be moments when we, our attention gets focused even more sharply where you want it to be focused, in terms of how we fit into what you are doing in the world now, and we will give you praise in Christ's name.

Amen. It's interesting to get old, and when you get as old as I am, you wonder some days why you're still here, and you wonder how many more you've got ahead of you, that kind of thing. I've had interesting notions across the years how an old person ought to feel.

An old person is supposed to sort of wear out and get weary of the whole thing and sort of look for the day when maybe it would be over and he could quit. But the greatest emotion that I find in myself in these days and in these years is, I think I find more excitement about what's going on in the world now than I've ever found in my life, because it seems to me that we have the privilege of living in what is without any question the most exciting moments in human history. Now I don't know how much you know about world history, and I don't know as much as I would like to know, but I'm grateful for every bit of knowledge that I have about human history.

And what I do know and what I've learned across the years makes me feel that we are the generation of all generations in terms of privilege, and that we live at the most strategic moment in human history. Now, we as Christians sometimes tend to forget that we live in a story that's bigger than we are. And we live in a story that's bigger than the group of which we are a part and the friends that are ours.

We live in a story that's larger than the world as we experience. And the reality is that we live in two stories that intersect. One of them is biblically, if you'll let me talk scripturally, is the story of creation.

And it's sort of an unbelievable story that God in his infinite goodness and in his aloneness decided he wanted company. And so he created, spoke into existence, the creation. And when he had finished speaking the creation into existence, he looked at it and said, it's good and it's what I want.

Now, the climax of that whole creation were people like you and me. And the evidence that I get is that the creation was for you and me. Because if you read Genesis 1 and 2, you will remember that human beings were created last.

They were the climax of the created process. And then God said to us, the whole business is under you and you're the stewards of the whole thing. You've inherited this whole thing and it is your world and it is for you to enjoy.

It's amazing to me how the scripture looks upon the nobility of man. That when he made us, he made us remarkably significant. The reality is that sometimes we sing the hymn and speak about God's grace coming to such a worm as I. But the reality is that the scripture says that we're not worms, we're just a little less than God himself.

Read the 8th Psalm. He made us a little lower, our translations all say angels. But the reality is that the word there is not a word for angels.

It's not the Hebrew word for angels. It is the same word which is used in Genesis for the creator. He made us a little lower than God.

In fact, he made us for himself. When you get to thinking about it, he made us incredibly compatible with himself. He made us compatible enough that we could stand in his stead over his creation so that Jesus could say that there's a sense in which we're called gods because we're the ones that, and I never knew what to do with that passage in the Gospels, we are over the creation that he put here, he put us over it.

And he put us there for communion with himself. So compatible that we are the real temples for God. All the religions of the world have temples practically.

But in Christianity, you don't have a building, you have human persons. And we are to be temples for God himself. But he was not content to make us just temples.

Now let me see if I can say what I want to say, communicate what I want to say. He made us compatible enough that he can not only identify with us as friend to friend or God to worshiper, as lover to loved one, this kind of thing. But he made us compatible enough that God could become one of us.

Now the radicalness of that concept the world has never called. He made us, and you're not going to tell me that there are any surprises for God. He knew what was going to happen before it ever started.

So I don't think there's any question but that when he created Adam and Eve, he had Bethlehem in mind. And in Bethlehem, God himself became a human person. We are compatible enough that there is one place in existence where if you touch one person, you touch God.

When you touch Jesus Christ, you've touched God and human persons, and they're compatible enough that they can be in one creature. And that's what you have in the incarnation. Now that's the kind of intimacy that he wanted to have with his world, with his creation.

I heard an Anglican not too long ago giving some lectures on tape that were given to me, an Anglican New Testament scholar. And it was obvious that there were a lot of people from different segments of the world in the crowd when the questions and answers started. And one question that was given was given by somebody, I'm sure he was either black or very brown.

At least that's what I gathered from his English and his tone of voice, his voice. And he said, are you suggesting that the incarnation would have taken place if man had never sinned? And I waited to see what the Anglican New Testament scholar would say. He said, are you suggesting that the incarnation would have been necessary if man had never sinned? And the Anglican New Testament professor from Oxford said, well, if I had to answer yes or no, I'd say yes.

But he said, I'd be unhappy about the word necessary because God never does anything out of necessity. He only acts out of love, not necessity. So, he has made us with that kind of compatibility, not out of necessity, but out of love, because he wants to be one of us.

So that the climax of the creation is Adam and Eve walking together in the garden. And the only people that you seek for companionship when you don't want to get something out of them is people you enjoy. And the picture that I think is there is God created us for his enjoyment because he likes us.

And the way that's described in the book of Genesis is it's a garden. And we use the word paradise, and the Hebrew word is Eden. And we think of Eden and paradise, a garden, and that's the way the creation was completed.

That was the climax of it. But the interesting thing is, and a garden is a significant place, isn't it? A garden is a place of order, isn't it? That's the difference between a garden, say, a flower garden, and a jungle. There's order, but there's not only order, there's beauty.

Because you don't have to be very aesthetic to appreciate a proper garden. And there's not only beauty, but there is something right about it. And the Hebrew would say there is shalom.

Everything is in its place, doing what it ought to do, and it is all good. The final word on the creation was, God looked at it and said, It is good, very good. Now that was the way our world was supposed to be.

But something went wrong. Now it's interesting that what happened was that we just turned away from the one who did all this. We just turned our backs on God.

Now the unfortunate thing is that when you lose God, you lose more than God. You lose all the things that go along with God. And do you know how lost we are and denied we are? We like the things that go along with God better than we like the one from whom they came.

It's like marrying a girl because she's wealthy. I can't figure any more unhappy position in the world for a man to be in than to have married a woman because she's got money. You've got a relationship that's gone before it starts.

Now we are like that. We like the things that go with God. Like for instance, when Adam and Eve turned their back on God and turned to their own way, they lost truth because all truth starts with God.

And He is the source of it. And when you lose truth, you walk into, you can say untruth, but really what you do is you walk into illusion because truth is reality. And so you walk into illusion, which becomes delusion.

And delusion is when you get to the place where you think illusion is reality. And that's where we are. We say this is the only world there is, you know, but it isn't the only world there is.

So when you lose God, you lose truth and you end up in illusion and then delusion. But when you lose God, you also lose light because He's the source of all light. About Jesus, you remember John said, in Him was life and the life was the light of men.

And when you turn away from the light, you start into shadow. And the end result is darkness. And so when we turned away, we ended up in darkness.

That's where we are now. And you find yourself, when you get into that, you find yourself in confusion. Not only did we, when we turn away from Him, do we turn away from light, but we turn away from what binds us together.

I hesitate to use the word love because we've used it so much that it's become cheap. Christianity is the only religion in the world that says that God is love. You can have other religions where God's love is their favorite, but this is the religion that says God is love.

So when you lose God, I don't care who, you lose love. And anywhere you find love, God is present. He may not be present in saving grace, but He's present if there's love there.

So you get two pagans that love each other. And what you've got, that story we heard today about the guy who gave eight cows for his wife, that's prevenient grace. That's the grace of God present.

And when you lose love, then what you get is, love is what binds us together. Then you get alienation. And when you get alienation, the end result is hostility.

And what you're getting now is a picture of human history. Illusion and delusion. Darkness.

Alienation. That's what history is about. What did you learn in most of the history courses? You learned all about the war.

But in addition to that, when you lose God, you lose life because He's the source of all life. Now when you turn your back on Him, you don't die like that. You just start dying.

And the road that you walk is the road into death because all life comes from Him. And when we turn away from it, we're turning into death. Now that's what we did.

And do you know how the Bible describes it? And I'd never quite seen it this way. It is movement from a garden to a wilderness. And you can use the word for wilderness.

You can spell it jungle. And what do you get in a jungle? There aren't any paths. So how do you get through? You don't know where to go.

Now he knows more about jungles than I do, but I'm the one preaching. When you get into a jungle, there are no paths. So you don't know where you are.

There's confusion. There's not only confusion, but there's opposition. It's a struggle.

And there are always dangers. And with the dangers come apprehensions and fears instead of security and peace. And that's human history, isn't it? When we turned away from God.

Isn't it interesting where Jesus began His ministry? He began it in a wilderness with the devil and the wild beasts. So you get the story of Scripture with the creation. The first story is a story from a garden to that wilderness, the wild beasts and to the devil.

And that's the story of the creation. Now God looked at that and said, how do we turn it around? And how do we save this thing? It has become clear and clear to me that the Scripture says it couldn't be done from heaven. And that was a shocker to me because I thought God ought to be able to do anything.

He could sit on His throne, take care of that little problem down there. But when we corrupted His creation, we created a bigger problem for Him than I ever was willing to consent to. Do you know what He had to... God said, if it's going to be turned around, it's got to be turned around down from within the middle of it.

It cannot be turned around by detachment, objectivity, and distance. I've got to get into the midst of it and turn the process around from the worst point. Where the disease has hit its deepest infection and its deepest seriousness, He says it's got to start from there and turn around and work backwards.

So He looked for somebody to help and He looked for human beings. He tried Noah and that didn't work very well. And so the end was confusion, battle.

Then He tried Abraham. And now the contribution of Abraham in Israel is one of the most significant stories in human history. It may be, apart from Christ, it is the most significant story.

Because there is where modern science is really based on what the Hebrews gave to us, though most scientists don't know it. Because there's where you get the conception of the oneness of the world and the rule of law because it all comes from one God. You get the concept of one God.

And every religion in the world that has a dominating concept of one God is exclusive. It comes out of Abraham. And so you get that.

We could talk about the cultural, intellectual products and the moral products that come from that, the Decalogue and the other thing. But God started. But what happened to Israel? If you'll look sometime at the 22nd chapter of Ezekiel, you'll find that this is the climax of Israel's life before it goes into exile.

And why to go into exile? Because it had failed the same way Adam and Eve failed and the same way Noah's family failed. Now they're ready to go under the judgment of God in exile. And Ezekiel describes.

He says the princes are preying on the people, the political leaders. They are not in positions of political leadership to take care of their people. They're in positions of political leadership to take care of themselves.

Does that sound familiar? The priests, he said, no longer know the difference between the sacred and the profane. It's interesting you call a person a priest when he still doesn't know, when he's reached the point where he doesn't know the difference between what his business is, to draw a line between the sacred and the profane. And that's where we are at the Episcopal Church's meeting this week in Indianapolis.

And I just came from Indianapolis, read a fascinating story in the Indianapolis paper yesterday and Sunday. I was traveling and been going hard and I needed something to keep me awake so I kept the radio going and I heard a very impressive sermon by the Episcopal Bishop in downtown in the cathedral in Indianapolis explaining that we now know that nobody can tell anybody else really about his sexual orientation, all that kind of thing. And the Episcopal Church now this week is in controversy over whether you marry homosexuals and whether you ordain homosexuals, this kind of thing.

Now that's when you don't know the difference between the natural and the unnatural and you don't know the difference between the sacred and the profane. Now he said the prophets say God has spoken when he said I haven't said a word. And when the word that they do speak is not my word.

And he said the people are looking for a chance to take advantage of the weak ones in their midst, to live and gain for themselves by one who's a little stronger oppressing one who's a little weaker. And God says I looked for one person and couldn't find one person. That's interesting when in the whole creation God can't find one person.

There's a similar passage in Isaiah 59 and in that passage he says justice is perished in the streets, truth is gone, the culture is so morally wrong that darkness prevails at noon. You have to light the lanterns at noon so people can find a way. And people look for a wall to stumble through society to guide them like blind men looking for something to guide them.

And God says I looked for a person and couldn't find one. And then he says when I couldn't find one I became one. Now that text I never heard anybody preach on.

But now it is one of the most significant texts in scripture. And what God is saying when I couldn't find anybody I became one. And so you get Bethlehem, you get the manger, you get Jesus and you get another story started now.

And that's a story within the big story. And that's the story that turns it around. Now we don't have time to go into all of this, but let me just very quickly say isn't it interesting that Jesus took 12 people which became 3,000.

They added five more thousand to it so you get 8,000. And then in the book of Acts it jumps from the Jews to Samaria with Philip. And then through Philip it jumps to the Ethiopian eunuch and it goes to Africa.

And what you get is starting out of Jerusalem and Jesus, what you get is a stream that turns the other stream around. And it is a story that is the reverse of the other story. Now you and I have an opportunity to see that more clearly than any generation in human history.

Do you know the greatest explosion of Christianity in human history has been in the last 50 years? The story of what has happened in China, there is nothing like it in Christian history and the history of the world, the development of the church. Now they tell me, Bill, that there's been more conversions in Africa than most of us know about. Then look what we've heard about in Russia.

It is God as it were. And I find myself saying, wait a minute, we're seeing God doing more today than any generation that has ever lived. Now you say, what about America? That's a different story isn't it? Look at what a mess we're in and we are coming apart.

But I've gotten optimistic about that. Do you know the issue only becomes clear when things are crystal clear between black and white and evil and good? And we're getting there in the United States. God is clarifying the issue in the United States.

Now, so I find myself watching America collapse and say, not bad. Now that's not because I don't love America, but because I'd like to see America saved. But it'll never be saved with what we've had for the last 50 years in this country.

Because we've had a pseudo-Christianity and all you've got to do, now we're finding out what we've had in this country for 50 years, inside the church it's coming out now and it's becoming manifest. We've walked down a road which is an alternative to Christ. And you know, when you start away from Christ, the distance is so thin that people think you're with him.

When you start away from Christ, you're so close to him that people can think you're with him. You can think you're with him, his shadow's still over you and you're getting the benefits of his presence. But you've already separated.

The most hopeless place in the world is to be almost there, but not quite. And the best place in the world is to be where the issues are clear. And God is letting the issues clarify in our society.

It's interesting to me the way he's getting his witness in. And he's getting it in places that, you know, they can yell all they want to about the religious right, but let me tell you, everybody in Lexington, Kentucky, and almost everybody in Kentucky knows Tim Philpott. And if you don't know Tim over here and his story, you shouldn't leave until you get his story.

Christmas, picked up the newspaper and here was a big ad for one of these night spots, nude shows and all the rest. And in the middle of it, in big letters, don't let Philpott see you buy your ticket. It's in a secular newspaper.

So everybody has to say, well, who's Philpott? Well, he's that senator who's the son of Ford Philpott and he's a Christian. The issues are getting sharp. Now, there's always a certain amount of pain and discomfort with it, but you never get healed without it.

You need a hospital and a doctor and usually pain is a part of the process of getting rid of disease and getting rid of infections. I want to share something that I shared with, at the assembly that's moved me profoundly. I try to read, oh, two or three times a week, the New York Times just to see what's going on from the people that are supposed to know more about what's going on in the world than anybody else.

And, you know, that's the newspaper, it's what used to be all the news that fit to print. They've changed seriously on that. But it's the most influential newspaper in the world, no question about that.

But it is as hostile to Christianity as can be. Now, it's not, you know, the crusading type, it is just hostile. And it breathes between every line in that newspaper, every day.

Anytime an issue comes, it is hostile to Christianity. And, you know, I would read it and get irritated and I'd read it and get sick and read it and get disappointed and saying, Lord, Lord, Lord. And then one day I'd laugh.

Do you know what's interesting? On the front page of every issue of the New York Times, every day there's a witness to Jesus. Every day it's on the second line. Today it had, August 24th, 1984.

Bethlehem's manger marks everything. What I love is that the New York Times can't even tell a story, report an event without reporting it in terms of the birth of Christ. So it's there.

Now they don't know it, but it's going to be interesting when they report in to the one who was born in Bethlehem's manger, the one that they marked everything by, isn't it? But now I ran across a book review this spring that still profoundly affects me. It was a book review of a guy writing about the insurrection in El Salvador. You know that the U.S. government supported the government to suppress the radical left-wing movement, the rebels in El Salvador.

Your tax money and mine went to help in that. And this guy, sympathetic to the rebels, was writing that story. And so the New York Times was reviewing it.

But in the book, it tells one incident that I think is a parable for us as well as a historically accurate historical event. He found that there was a city, a village, where the government troops came in and killed 437 people and buried them in one grave. So they found the corpses and the skeletal remains of 437 men, women, young people, children, babies, all of them in one grave.

So the guy who wrote the book said if there was a tragedy that great, there are bound to be some people somewhere who know something about it. And so he began checking everywhere he could. He looked to get some clue.

He finally began to get some details on this event. And he recorded what he found out about it. And he told about how they killed them, how they butchered them, and how they raped all the women.

And it was very interesting. He said, the women screamed and yelled, kicked as if they had never been touched by a man. I thought that was an interesting comment.

But he said there was one girl that was different. I gather she was a teenager, and I gather she was a virgin. And she was raped multiply.

But she responded differently. When they beat her, and the first guy began to rape her, as they beat her she began to sing, quietly to herself, Christian hymns, hymns of praise to God and hymns of faith. And as the first guy raped her, she just quietly kept on singing.

And as the second guy raped her, she quietly kept on singing. As the third guy raped her, she just quietly kept on singing her hymns. And when they had spent themselves, she just kept on singing her hymns.

And so one of the soldiers was irritated, so he shot her. And she just kept on singing her hymns. So a second soldier, irritated, shot her.

She just kept on singing her hymns. So they chopped her head off to stop the music, the hymns. You know, as I read that, I don't think I will ever get over it, reading that.

Because what went through my mind was, how far will God let his body go to let the world know the difference between truth and falsehood, salvation and lostness. How far will he let his body go? Because God stood by and let that girl go through with that. And you know, we want to say, where was God? But of course, what you've got to do is remember that's what he let his son go through.

And we mercilessly slaughtered the Lamb of God. How far will God go to save his world? How much does he love us? He will let it get, he will pay any price he can to redeem his world. And the price has to be paid in his body.

I dare you to read the New Testament on the body of Jesus. Our salvation is in the body of Jesus. Now, you see where I'm going with that.

It is the one who died on a cross who said to that girl, follow me. And following him meant she got an opportunity to bear witness to millions of people all over the world. Do you know how many people read New York Times? You cannot fly into a major airport in the world where you can't get a New York Times.

You can't fly into a minor airport in most of the world without a copy of the New York Times. Now, when I read that and got to thinking about it, I remembered Helen Rosevear's story in Africa when that happened to her. She was brutalized, had her bones broken, and they raped her.

And in the blackness of that, she cried out, oh God, where are you? And she said he spoke and he said, thank you, Helen, for letting me use your body. It isn't you they raped, it is I. Now, that's the world in which we live. But that's not a reason for being discouraged.

That's what's going to win the world and turn the whole story around. Paul said he rejoiced in that God had caused us to walk in triumph in the following of Christ so that through us the aroma of the gospel could be given to all the world. The aroma of the gospel could go to all people.

Now, how does it go? The only way it goes is through us. And so we can't be detached from the world, we've got to be in it, and we've got to be a part of Christ's sacrifice for it. But here's what I want to tell you.

The end result is the devil doesn't win. Do you know what the end result is? Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. He's not going to give up on this world.

He has not given up on this world. I remember an old Southern Baptist preacher who said when he was a kid he loved to read stories about heroic figures. And he loved to read novels that had a lot of excitement about them where there was danger and adventure and this kind of thing.

And he said he'd get lost in his novels sometimes. And he said his hero would be in great difficulty and there was no earthly way out, and he'd get so involved. And he was so identified with that hero that he thought, I can't wait.

So he said he'd turn and read the last chapter and find out that the hero won in spite of all the things. So he said, I'd go back and all the way, every time he got in trouble I'd say, keep at it, you're going to win it. Keep at it, you're going to win it.

Now God has given us that kind of information. So when the worst comes, we know how it's going to turn out. And the worst is going to be the means of producing the best.

The worst is going to be the means of producing the best. I don't think we want our situation ameliorated. I think we want the conflict intensified so that Jesus can get to the center of the stage because that's the way the story is going to end.

He's going to end center stage at the end of the day. And what's it going to be? A new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth that passed away. There's no longer any sea.

I saw the holy city. It's interesting. A city today in America is a jungle.

There's going to be a city that's right. He's going to transform the city. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He'll wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things that's passed away.

Did you notice it says that new Jerusalem will be prepared like a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband? I've been working some in Jeremiah, and it's interesting in Jeremiah, the sign that God has been lost is when nobody can hear the rejoicing of a bride and a groom over each other. And in Jeremiah, the symbol that God has come back is when the groom is rejoicing over his bride, and the bride is rejoicing over her groom, and all society is joining with them in their joy. Now, that's the way it's going to end.

History began with a wedding, and it's headed for one, and it's going to be the right one. Now, he who was sitting on the throne said, I am making everything new. That's good news, isn't it? That's what he's doing now.

He is remaking the world. I am making everything new. Then he said, write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.

You can count on it. I'm making everything new. He said to me, it's done.

I'm the alpha and the omega. I'm the beginning and I'm the end. To him who is thirsty, I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.

He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God, and he will be my son, she will be my daughter. Isn't that interesting? That's where we are. Now, the value of times like this is to get our thinking clear.

Maybe some of the things that we want to run from, we ought to embrace. The beautiful thing is that God never lets us into anything that he doesn't have adequate grace for. Paul lived in prison and loved the prison and rejoiced in it.

I heard a tape that John gave me, a man who has done mission work in India. He told about these Christian seminary students that were being sent out, graduates, to start new churches. So this guy was sent into a community for three months.

When he decided to go to that area, all of his Christian friends said to him, you don't want to go there, they'll kill you. He said, yes, that's where I want to go. That's where God wants me to go.

So he went and he started preaching. When he started preaching, they came and arrested him and put him in jail. So he said in jail he'd pray.

He said, Indians don't pray like Americans. He said when they pray, they pray at the top of their voices so everybody can hear them and pray with great passion at the top of their voices. So here's this guy in his jail cell, praying away as hard as he can pray for his jailer and for all the people there, for God to love them and bless them and take care of them.

He creates such a commotion in the prison that the people come, the town officials come and say, what is it makes you like this? And so after a month in prison, he's turned loose. And then after three months, he's got a church on fire going in the town. And he goes back to report on his thing.

And they said, he says, well, when I went, the first thing they did was throw me in prison, throw me in jail. And they all said, see, that's what we told you, you shouldn't have gone there. Oh no, he said, I've learned a new way to plant a church.

He said, the fastest way to plant a church is get thrown in jail. Now that is biblical. And we want to find some other way.

But we're, it's interesting. We're in a game that if we're his, we're not going to lose. We're in a war that we're not going to lose.

He's going to win. And we should be rejoicing in that. Let me quickly, I read years ago and I've never gotten over it, one story that I'd almost forgotten and I got to thinking about this and I remembered it.

There was an Indian Christian by the name of Sundar Singh. He was a Sikh priest who had been, was converted. And he went into one of those regions of India where they were hostile to Christianity.

And so they threw him in jail. And when they threw him in jail, they stripped him bare. And when they had stripped him nude, then they took a bushel basket full of leeches and poured them over him.

The leeches crawled over him and fixed themselves in his flesh and began to suck his blood, to suck his life out and to kill him. And at first the pain was excruciating. And they watched him and they laughed and sneered, you know, as he began to get into the pain.

And then suddenly they saw him relax. And he looked up and his face changed and he quit grimacing. And he began to tell them about Christ quietly and joyously.

And they said, we can't kill a guy like that. So they began pulling the leeches out of him. And when they had pulled the leeches out of him, they said, what happened to you? You were in excruciating agony, dying.

And suddenly you changed. Well, he said, yes, I was in excruciating pain. But he said, when it reached that point, when I thought it was unbearable, I looked up and Jesus walked right down the corridor of that jail and right into my cell and into my heart and flooded me with joy unspeakable.

I forgot all about the pain. Now, that may be a fairy story, but it sounds remarkable like Daniel and the three Hebrew children, doesn't it? And it sounds like Helen Rosevere, who said in the midst of the blackness, there you are saying thank you. And she said, what an honor, what an honor.

Now, do we run from the things we ought to embrace? Do we scorn the things that we ought to value? The main thing is for us to be close enough to him that we've got his mind and we can be forthright, forthright Christian citizens. And maybe that's why God gives us time like this, to help us to see more clearly, open ourselves more fully to his grace, come to know more of his power and his presence within us, come to know more of his love controlling and dominating us, and then we can step back into the situations we come from. They may not rape us.

They may, you know, just treat us with a little contempt for something else, but we shouldn't curl under that. We shouldn't curl under any of it. We should look up and say, great.

Okay, that's what I felt led to tears. Let's take a few moments and pray together before we go. You've been very patient and thank you, but we don't get many opportunities like this, and what a privilege to hear the Dijonets and to hear Everett and Russia.

We need to pray for these places. We need to pray for France for that witness there, for their witness there. We need to pray for Russia, pray for those two interpreters that may come to the United States.

Pray for God to strengthen everyone that's doing that. Pray for God to strengthen every witness in country, every preacher that's standing, every layman that's clear in his witness, and get us off the defensive and make us forthright, joyous, loving witnesses to the one who reigns because he does reign. Our God reigns.

Father, we thank you that we're not in the dark about what's going on in our world. You've given us the privilege of having a vantage point where we can see. The world around us is in confusion and chaos, and we can see your hand at work, and you're redeeming your world, and we have the chance to be a part of that.

Thank you. We want to get close enough to you that we won't miss an opportunity, and we will welcome your will for us so that through us the aroma of Christ, the fragrance of Christ, may be spread to a world that is lost, bewildered, confused. And we'll give you praise in Christ's name.

Amen. you

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