

The Way of the Cross

by Devern Fromke

The sermon emphasizes the significance of the cross in Christianity, highlighting its role as God's final altar and the means of our forgiveness and deliverance, and encouraging listeners to apply the reality of the cross to their lives by being poured out for God.

Duration: 1:31:07

Scripture: Romans 8:35-36, 1 Corinthians 4:8-11, 2 Corinthians 4:8-11, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Topics: "Way Of The Cross"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience about the importance of giving thanks in all circumstances. While resting in a car, the speaker's car was hit by another vehicle, causing damage. In that moment, the speaker remembered the message about giving thanks and chose to thank God instead of reacting negatively. The sermon then delves into the concept of making vows to God and emphasizes the importance of fulfilling those vows. The speaker also highlights the need for sincerity and understanding in responding to God's call, rather than making impulsive decisions. The overall message emphasizes the sacrificial nature of God's work and the significance of the way of the cross in accomplishing His purposes.

Transcript

All around the world today, Christian people have been giving attention to the cross. This is the day that all Christendom has looked upon in its significance because our lovely Lord gave himself. Now, it's not really important.

I'm not too sure it was on Friday, but that part we're not going to get into. The important thing is that the cross has become very real to all the Christians, all the world, those who know the Lord. And as I've been waiting before the Lord this evening, I think we ought to take a look into some of the realities of the cross.

I really wonder, beloved, while we speak much of all that the cross means, I wonder how much of the reality of it has really gripped us. I tremble when I think of even trying to share from it because while I have given so many years to it, I realize we see through a glass darkly, just a dim peek at it, really. I remember back in 1947 and 48 when for the very first time we came to understand something of the cross and our identification with the Lord.

I got into the Overcomer message, lived for two whole years. I don't think I read anything but the Bible and Mrs. Penn Lewis. It was good.

It was good. But I remember in those days as the Lord began to work, every place I went in meetings and revival was working, I preached about the cross and I had folk come to me continually and say, you preach Easter all the time? I'm not speaking tonight about the cross because it's Easter. I wouldn't give place to a day because I'm not just keeping days.

I'm not against it necessarily, but I think there's something better than keeping days. This to me is the central reality, the place where God does something most significant. And I would have us bow once more tonight.

I surely do not feel that I'm able, but maybe the Lord can get something through to us. Shall we ask him to do that? You bow telling, Lord, don't let me live in just the outwardness of things, just to look at two old pieces that we call the rugged cross. But oh, tonight, Lord Jesus, we pray that somehow the Holy Spirit will come and bring us into some of the realities of what really is involved at the cross.

I am not able. Who among mortal men could ever unveil? Only thou canst unveil it by the Holy Spirit. And so we are shut up to thee tonight, Lord.

We pray that somehow it shall be something very personal that you apply to us. We believe that our fruitfulness unto thee, our life and walk and ministry, all of it needs, yea, it can be really adjusted as we understand the working of the cross. So be pleased tonight, dear Lord.

Be pleased in our midst. We come acknowledging this is a day all of the people who come to know you around the world have given great attention to it. And we join with the prongs tonight, not merely to keep a day, but to acknowledge the reality of something.

Thank you, Lord. We bless thy name. We look to thee with expectancy in Jesus' lovely name.

And everyone said, Amen. Amen. Well, just for a moment in getting started, I think it's good to look at the father of the faithful.

You know who he is? Abraham. And I would remind you tonight that all through the Old Testament, the cross is pictured as an altar. I have to say that many people have really misunderstood the fact that while we have many insights into the altar all the way through the Old Testament, one day God said, there'll be no more building of little altars as such.

I'm going to consummate it all in one. And there was the cross. Jesus accomplished the full and the finished.

That was God's final altar. And any meeting of him at any altar today, that is the altar where we meet him. I know churches and places will build altars and so forth, but I would remind us tonight that God's altar, in a full and final way, is right there, at the old rugged cross where Jesus died.

But it's interesting, as you look into the life of Abram, and you find the minute he moves into the land of Canaan, that having arrived there, and the Lord appearing unto him, he does something significant. Chapter 12, beginning with verse 7, it says, And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said unto thy seed, Will I give this land? And there built he an altar unto the Lord who appeared unto him. The whole of his life

from this time on transpires in the life of the altar.

Isn't that wonderful? The altar. He begins a rite, and I believe all through, you find various times when he is once again building the altar. You follow over in chapter 13, while we're reading there, look at verse 8. And it says, He removed from Thames unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent.

Having Bethel on the west, and Ai on the east, there he built an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. What does this altar back here, what does it really represent? Here is Abram, as it were, having an appearance of the Lord. What does it signify? I cannot help but believe, brothers and sisters, that if God appears to us, and we begin to see something of his worthiness, something of our obligation and our rightful relation to him, there's just one thing we can do, and that's give ourselves to him.

Offer ourselves to him. And that's basically what the altar represents. The altar, a burnt offering, is that place where having seen, having seen, I now present myself to him.

Oh God, what have you created me for? What am I here for? I present myself to him. And be sure of this, the life that has had some insight, that God has appeared to that life, I believe we can do no less than present, than give. It's interesting now that on each side here, there is something that I think stands in a very significant way.

I would like to believe that Bethel, on one side, represents when a man gives his life totally to God. For what God wants out of that life, he'll see just one thing, Bethel. What is Bethel? What does it mean? You know in the Hebrew that Beth means house, and El means God, house of God.

And it's interesting, right here at the very beginning, the father of the faithful, who gives himself, God, as it were, on one side, he looks, he will see that which is very significant to God. I believe that the thing that Abraham's life is going to find fullness in, is when through him God finds a house or habitation, the house of God, the house of God. A little bit later on in Jacob, we find El, Bethel, and we get to the God of the house of God.

But right for now, and I'm not wanting to divert our attention, I'm just saying that here we have that which is significant to Abraham. Can I say to you tonight, if you give yourself to that which will please God, and fulfill something through your life, I believe it will also consummate in living under the thing that Bethel really stands for. But do you know what's at his back? Well, let's put it this way.

If you turn your back on what God is really after, you'll have Ai. You turn your back on Ai and you have what? Bethel. Gets one or the other.

The question is, what does Ai mean? Heap of ruins. Wouldn't it be something to come down to twilight? Years of a lifetime. You'd miss this that God was after.

And what do you have of a lifetime? Ai. A heap of ruins. I don't think I'm old, in spite of some gray hair.

But I'll tell you, God keeps pressing my heart. After ministering 25 years for the Lord, there's something within that keeps crying out, Oh God, to get to the realities of things. You can preach, you can travel the world, you can do all of this and that.

It's good, it's helpful, it's for the Lord. But after a while, something begins. I believe it's the Holy Spirit's working within us to want to sharpen things down to that which is most important.

And so here we are before an altar tonight. Ours is the life of the altar. And I'd like to say that having really established our altar, what we give ourselves to, then you can pitch your tent.

Don't try to pitch your tent and set your altar accordingly. It's a real difficult thing to find fullness. I tell people who think they're going to move to Florida and retire, that's pitching your tent and trying to build an altar nearby.

You move to Florida, California, Arizona, or even lovely Virginia, just for climate, just to have a nice place to live. That's putting the emphasis on the what? Tent first. And God wants an altar first.

Now what does the altar represent? All the way through, I believe the altar represents what we give ourselves unto. Now it's true, in a sense, every one of us has an altar tonight. We're giving ourselves to something.

You're burning out for something, aren't you? At least smoldering. Burning out for something. Something has caught the passion of our life.

When the twilight hours come and life is about over, I have to say it will either be Bethel, helping to bring about that living habitation of living stones where God will dwell. A holy temple growing as unto the Lord. That habitation for God.

It isn't that. It might be a heap of ruins. Keep us from it, Lord.

And oh, isn't it blessed that when your altar is really the altar of the Lord, your tent goes right along. Any place should put me, Lord. Even an old bread truck.

A tent or a cottage, why should I care? It's something to consider. It is something to consider, beloved. Your tent is dwelling with the thing where your life is really poured out.

I remember reading back in the earlier accounts where John Chrysostom, one of the early fathers back in the early church, was being persecuted. Rome was making it so difficult for him. They banished him to an isle to get him away.

And he just laughed and he said, It's just as close to the Lord there as any place else. Praise the Lord. You can't hurt a fellow like that.

They said in trying to get at him, We'll kill you. And he shouted, Hallelujah. I'll be quicker with Jesus.

Getting the altar, you see. Well, what I'm concerned about tonight is this. And I do pray that God will help us to realize we have an altar.

We're burning out for something. May it be. May it be the right altar.

The right altar. Well, having looked at Abram, let's just look at a few more of the Old Testament pictures of what the cross really testifies, or what the altar back there really signifies. I think we'll turn to 1 Kings.

Take just a little glimpse there. 1 Kings. Chapter 18.

When I let my mind begin to peruse through all these places, there were so many. We could be here all night. But maybe just a few glimpses back into the altar.

You know, in chapter 18 of 1 Kings, we have the picture of a man whom God has raised up as a prophet in Israel. It's a dark hour in Israel because Ahab, king, is reigning. He has a wife.

Remember what her name is? Jezebel. And the conditions in Israel are very, very difficult. And there's a fellow by the name of Elijah, who is called a troubler in Israel.

I really think he's a healer. But everybody who looks upon him can only speak of him as a troubler. The reason is because he has prayed.

Remember what has happened? It's been dry for a long time. And so when he meets, when he meets king Ahab, it's interesting. Oh, I don't know where to start.

Chapter 18 and verse 17 would pick it up. And it came to pass when Ahab saw Elijah that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? Wouldn't you like a reputation like that? Could I tell you something? I believe that this man has the cross as a working principle in his life. You see, beloved, it is possible, maybe we'll get to it now as well as a little later, it is possible for us to look upon the cross here and to see man in his fallen condition and to see all that has happened at the cross for us.

I like to call this the work of the cross. When I look to the cross, I see that the precious blood of Jesus has been shed and it gives me forgiveness. In the work of the cross, I have forgiveness.

I look back at the cross again and I see that not only are my sins forgiven, but that when Jesus was nailed to the cross, I was nailed there in Him, with Him. And I tell you, this is a forgotten side of the cross all too often. So many, thank God, they know the substitutionary work of the cross.

They know that Jesus died for them, that there's forgiveness through the blood. Thank God. But I'll tell you there are lots of folk who have never looked back to see that there's the cross of Calvary.

In God's viewpoint, He saw you and I wrapped into Him in the death of Christ. His death was my death. I was one with Him in death, burial, and resurrection.

And it is true that this is the way God lays the axe to the root of all the old tree of Adam. He counts it out through death. So there are two things at the cross.

The blood that brings forgiveness and our death with Him that brings us deliverance from what we are in Adam. We need that. We need that.

Far too many of God's people have never looked back to see the deliverance that comes through our death with Christ. But I must say to you that all of this, the blood and our identification with Him still constitutes the work of the cross because it represents something that I get. Forgiveness, deliverance.

Whose benefit is that for? Mostly. It's for me, isn't it? Now let's just stop and realize. I think it's well to remember that in a sense the cross is an eternal principle in the heart of God.

Jesus is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. God was not caught off guard here when Adam was placed in the garden and he goes his own way into sin. And now through the work of the cross man is brought back into fellowship with God.

God was not caught off guard. I mean, he didn't have to set up some stopgap remedy to overcome the whole treacherous rebellion of Adam. I sort of believe that all he needed to do was open up his bosom,

pull back his heart and say, here, I have already the capacity, I have already that with which I can take care of man's rebellion, man's going astray.

Could I say in getting to the real point tonight that I believe that all that God does in all of his working has his cross in the heart of it. God's sacrificial, God's pouring out, God's giving. And there's a sense in which all the purposes of God, that which is headed toward the real goal, toward which he is working, needs to be accomplished by what I like to call the way of the cross.

The way of the cross. Now let me make this as a distinction for us. Everything that God does out of his own heart has in it the way of the cross.

What is it? Self-giving, pouring, sacrificing, sharing, giving himself. When Jesus came and walked among man in the way of the cross, he really was just unveiling the heart of God. God so loved that he gave.

God so loved that he gave. Now, when we first come to appropriate from the cross man in his selfish condition, man in his own need, I'm afraid most of the time we only see the cross and interpret it in relation to what it will mean to us. What is it? Forgiveness.

Joy. Blessing. Peace.

Deliverance. All of that accrues to who? To us. Thank God.

Thank God. We don't minimize it. Thank God.

I wish most people could get through at least the second aspect of what is involved at the cross. But, having arrived at this point right here where we're on the line of purpose and we're moving on toward the thing that God wants, there has been a real explosive work that has taken place at the cross. And from that moment on, he says, we become alive unto God.

Dead indeed in the sense, but alive unto God. And now the question is, as my life is poured out on the altar and I come to know what it is to be identified with the Lord Jesus, not merely in his death, but in his life as it were poured out along the way. It is then that we begin to see the significance of take up your cross and follow me.

Now, I have to be very honest with you tonight. All through the last 25 years, I've heard people say to others, what you need to do is take up your cross. And so far as I'm concerned, they get it in the wrong place.

They have not grasped the real significance of taking up your cross. Because all too often, they're taking it up, hoping thereby for some value for themselves. Did I lose you or are you with me? Taking up the cross, that thereby somehow, there can be deliverance for them.

That would be a miscarriage of grace and a confusion of the real issue. When I first began to share the cross way back, God began to show me that the reason most people were afraid, most good Bible scholars were afraid of identification with the cross because people approached it as though there was something vicarious, something efficacious, something of value that would come to us in picking up the cross. No, we must be very clear.

So far as the grace of God is concerned, when in our fallen condition, we look to Calvary and we receive the precious blood for forgiveness and our death with Him on the cross, God says by this work of the cross

that He has accomplished, He has brought us into a position with Himself. And now on resurrection ground, strange as it may seem, on resurrection ground, now we can take the cross in the way of the cross as a means by which God gets something out of our life. I hear people all the time, we'll get to 1 Kings a little bit.

I seem to be momentarily stalled. Turn to Romans. Turn to victorious 8th chapter of Romans, the place that most people talk about wanting to live.

Romans 8, verse 35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword. Is that too chilly? What? It is? Oh, I'm sorry.

I thought it was a little stuffy. Don't do it just for me. We'll get noise and everything else.

I'm sorry. Look at 35th verse now. Who shall separate us? And so on.

And verse 36. As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

The little phrase here, for thy sake, sticks out to me. The reason that I'm sure it is emphasizing what I want us to see tonight is that in appropriating what Jesus did on the cross in the work of the cross, it is always for whose sake? For our sake. I receive forgiveness.

I enjoy deliverance. But now that I am the Lord's, I've been delivered, and I start on the resurrection way to be poured out for him. Then I have the privilege, as it were, of being identified with the Lord in a poured out life.

He says, as he was a lamb that was slain, it's for thy sake, O God. I don't get a thing out of this except the satisfaction that God has satisfied. For thy sake we are killed all the day long.

Now, be very clear about this. The work of the Lord Jesus on the cross is always a finished thing. And the tense of it is always past.

I have been crucified. Crucified with Christ. I reckon on the finality of it.

What is it? Precious blood shed. Crucified with him. Past tense.

And then I always used to wonder when I would see this and I was not able to make the proper distinction between the work of the cross and the way of the cross. Here we are entering into something that's a continual progressive thing that God might realize out of our life. Turn over to 2 Corinthians.

You'll notice the same little phrase in chapter 4. 2 Corinthians chapter 4. Beginning with verse 8. He says, We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed. We are perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken.

Cast down, but not destroyed. Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are... What? Once at camp meeting time.

Huh? No. We are always delivered unto death for our victory. For our forgiveness.

Are you with me now? Lord, help us to get the distinction here. We are delivered unto death, what? For Jesus' sake. You mean I don't get anything out of this? No.

I receive through my oneness with Him at the cross, forgiveness, deliverance. But now, on the resurrection line, fulfilling God's purpose, we are daily delivered to death. What? For Jesus' sake.

Oh Lord, the privilege of being one with You in the way of the cross. It is what God gets. Who else gets something? Others do.

Others do. Here He says, notice now, verse 12, So then death worketh in us, but what? But life in you. I remember, oh, this is almost 20 years ago when I first began to get into the cross and began to realize some of its emphasis.

I don't know how to say it. But when a life begins to experience some of the way of the Spirit of God working, death working in you, life to others, it's so easy to want to somehow escape and take an easy way. And I'd get into a particular situation where death would really be working.

And I didn't know any better than to say, well, praise the Lord, two weeks from now I'll be over there and it will be a lot easier. That pastor, that church, or those people, they'll accept what I have to share. So I never unpacked.

I never unpacked. I'd always just say, I believe it will be better down the road. I was waiting for another day, a better day, a better circumstance, a better situation.

And then one day the Lord began to pull back the curtain here. And I saw that just while I cheer up, it was never going to be any different. Death works in us what? Continually.

And it's this way that life is squeezed out to others. And I remember in my hotel room coming to that wonderful discovery, and I wrote at the bottom of the page, cheer up Vern, unpack, face it today. If you don't face it today, you'll never face it tomorrow.

Death works in us continually. But every one of us are escapists when it comes to God getting something out of our life. Do you follow the principle of getting out? We'll reckon on the work of the cross because Lord, I need forgiveness, and I need deliverance, and I need to have the cross do something deeper in order to thank God.

I don't want to seem to minimize this. But there is a difference when finally the cry of the heart is, Oh God, that there might be a fruitfulness unto you. That you might have something.

Then this little phrase sticks out, For thy sake we are killed all the day long. For Jesus' sake we are the lamb led to the slaughter. Thank God.

Now just by way of encouragement, I remind you that every step taken along this way is a voluntary step with the Lord. He isn't there beating you over the head with a club saying, I think some folk would have heel marks all along the way if it were. It isn't that.

Thank God. It's voluntary. It's forgiving.

So I suppose until you're ready for it, you won't know much about it. But there comes a time when lives get sick, fed up with just what things can mean to them, interpreting the cross always in the light of what it

means to them. And I believe the cross has its deepest, more perfect work of dealing in our life.

And this is what it means then, we become dead indeed in the sin, but alive unto God. Oh God, for what you get. And I think that it is along this line then that we bear in our body the marks.

We are dying daily. I cannot see that dying daily fits here because I have to reckon on the finished work of His death. You follow me? Dying daily could never bring deliverance to me.

I reckon on the finished work of His death. The completed final work of His shed blood. That's grace.

If dying daily is going to bring me deliverance for myself, I'm frustrating the grace of God. And yet I suppose it's hard to keep these two separate because we are always needing deeper deliverance. And while death is working in us, it's doing some delivering, it I suppose at the same time is squeezing life out to others.

So, I didn't mean to get in all that. Somebody needed it. Go back to 1 Kings.

What I only wanted to say in passing was this. I believe that Elijah was a man who had the cross planted within him. That's all been said just for that.

He was a man who had the cross planted as a principle within. And while everyone looked on and said he was the troubler in Israel, he was the one that God was going to use. While death was no doubt working, there was a squeezing out of life.

It was a means by which God was going to do something in Israel. Don't think, beloved, that your life can really come to its fruitfulness for God. For what those who look on will count you a troubler.

Cheer up. But that troubler is the real healer, is the one who is really dispensing life. And so Elijah here represents that.

Art thou he that troubleth? Verse 18, And he answered, I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Balaam. Now therefore send and gather to me all Israel, under Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves, four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel and gathered the prophets together under Mount Carmel, and Elijah came along unto all the people and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? I like this.

I believe the man who has the cross planted in his heart knows how to get right to issues. The Lord seems to say to me, Your fuzziness, your soft sentimentality will dodge the issues and try somehow, but the more the principle really works, there is that discernment that says, How long are you going to halt? Now this is the issue. And I believe as we were saying last night, it will help us with a lot of strangers who will devour our strength.

I don't want to go into it anymore. It will help us. Coming right to the point, How long halt ye between two opinions? He said, If the Lord be God, follow Him.

But if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. Well, I can't go on in all of this.

Well, maybe we'll read just a little bit more. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks, and let

them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under.

And I will dress the other bullock and lay it on wood and put no fire under. And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the Lord and the God that answereth by fire. Let him be God, and let all the people answer.

And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. Now it's interesting that they make their altars. Notice, they make their altars, and they begin to offer their offerings.

And you know the story of how they cry and they shout. They go through all this exercise trying to get their God to answer by fire. Nothing happens.

But we get some lovely picture, insight into the altar here as Elijah sets up the altar. And I think there's some interesting things that are involved. We'll just pick it up with verse 30.

It says, And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. Now this altar that he begins to repair and establish right in their sight was made of rough stones.

The law of the altar that had been given previously was this. No handiwork or artifactory work of man upon these stones. Rough stones.

No hewing. No artistry. Do you know why? God is establishing the principle that it's at this cross where he meets man, man will have nothing in and of himself to glory in.

And when Jesus was nailed to that altar, finally remember, it was an old rugged cross. Now I have to say to us tonight one of the reasons I question that a lot of people really understand some of the realities, some of the realities of the cross is because the crosses that I look around at today have the handiwork of man. And the altars that I look at today are not rough stones, even what they're trying to typify.

I remember, just in passing, it comes to my remembrance, a number of years ago I was over in Hickory. I can go that far. I'm back in Carolina.

I remember staying in a home of a man who was very skilled in working in woodwork. That week he was kind of elated. He was a lovely brother, loved the Lord.

But he came home. I was staying in his home and he was all excited. He said, we have finished it.

I said, what? We have finished the altar in such and such a church. It cost them \$145,000 for the altar. And nothing would do but what I had to go with him to the church and look at that ornate thing around the front.

It was beautiful. You could see the carving. You could see all of the design and the handiwork.

But I'm afraid I couldn't engender any enthusiasm. He kept looking back at me. Finally, I had to be honest.

Dear brother. But he was a good brother. He understood.

What are you trying to get at tonight? Heading back here, way back in the Old Testament, there's some principles. I believe that when Elijah repaired this altar, knowing what it was to be, it was rough stone, no hewing of man. Do you follow me? Nothing for man to glory in.

And the cross later on was an old rugged cross. And any attempts of men today, down through the years, to somehow make it something that man can siphon off and glory in, it's a tragedy. There's something else that's interesting here.

Remember now, Ahab was king over Israel, which represented ten tribes. There was a split in the kingdom. Judah and Benjamin represented the other two.

And I love this man, Elijah, because right here, right in front of Ahab, he gives testimony to what the cross really does and what it stands for. Not only rough stones on which there's been no handiwork of man, but when he puts these stones together, let's read it. Verse 31.

And Elijah took what? Did you hear it? How many? Imagine what a way that must have spoken to Ahab. Twelve stones representing, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name. And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord.

In the name of the Lord. Oh, thank you, Lord. We look back, hidden way back here in the Old Testament, and we see that your altar back there stood for an altar that represented a unifying.

Do you remember at the cross what Jesus did? He took Jew and Gentile. There had been an awful middle wall, a breach, an awful partition between them. But what did he do at the cross? He literally wrapped the cross and the cross represents when he comes forth new, it's one new man.

Neither Jew nor Gentile. Let us remember, you get too close to the cross in its working and all the testimony of it. And it has a way of dealing with all of man's divisions.

It only stands for twelve stones. There it is. Thank God.

One body in Christ. It speaks loudly to us. And I thank God for an Elijah who right in the midst of the king without any hesitancy picks up twelve stones.

I wonder what he thought. We stand for the same. Thank God that when he approves of something, we can't read it all here tonight, when the offering had been placed on this altar and God approved, whereas before this, they had tried in every possible way to get the fire to come.

Here they put the water around, make it as hard as possible. You know the story. And God who answers by fire comes and consumes not only the sacrifice, but licks up all the water.

I'd love to have been there. Oh, to have God's approval upon the sacrifice that's given. The God who answers by fire.

I believe he does it today. To a life as with Abraham. Any life that comes to the altar and gives itself wholly to God for what God wants.

The approval is the God who answers by fire. He purifies only for himself. Well, this is what we call the testimony hidden way back here.

The testimony that issues out of the cross, out of the altar. Go on with me to another picture. Turn to the gospel of Luke for a moment.

Luke, let us just get a little glimpse here in Luke of what really takes place. I believe it's Luke that I want. Where in his prayer, Jesus is saying, not my will, but thine be done.

Thought I had that located. Yes, it's Luke chapter 22. Just for a moment, stop and consider with me now.

What really is the central issue in the cross? What really is the central issue? Here we have the elders we've been saying yesterday and this morning. Here we have the central thing that God is after. I think in looking into the agony of the Lord just before he goes to the cross, you get a little glimpse of the cup out here and what the cup represents.

And my concern these days is there are so many of the Lord's people, as we've been saying, are ready for sacrifice. They'll give themselves. The cup is the portion of suffering.

It's the sharing in what this sacrifice really means. But I wonder, if we look into this situation with the Lord Jesus, if we get really what is involved. I don't think when he says, not my will but thine be done, I don't think there's the unwillingness to give himself in sacrifice.

I don't believe that's the issue. I believe that the real issue with the Lord Jesus is the wanting inwardly to know that this that he's about to give himself to is really the will of God. The central issue is not the sacrifice.

It's the will of God. How can I frame this so that it'll have some meaning to you? I have thought, when I read of some of those who've been in communist hands, who've given themselves, I've thought, Lord, I believe there's a willingness to give myself to death for you. You'll give grace in that hour.

But as I begin to reason and think about it, always the thing that comes back to me is, I'd sure hate to waste my life with somebody's bullet or some insignificant insane fellow who was just mad. I'd be glad to give myself if there could be something of value for the Lord. Are you with me? But it'll always come to this reasoning, I guess, back in my own thinking.

I'd sure hate to waste my death and not have it really mean anything for the Lord. See if you can transfer this for a moment. I think, what little glimpse I've had into the willingness of the Lord is being attuned continually to the Father for His purpose.

I believe He would have quickly gone out, as it were, to take the cup, the sacrifice, the suffering. I don't believe that was the issue. I believe the issue was that He had to be very sure that even this sacrifice was what? The will of God.

And once He was sure of this, I will be there. No problem. Do you follow me? You see, our problem today, and we're going to get to it now, our problem today in all of Christendom is the same old thing.

People in their emotions, people in their enthusiasm, people in their zeal and their blindness will give themselves. They'll build a little altar. They'll jump up on it.

They will give. But oh, this coming to really know the will of God. Be one with Him in His will.

And I believe it's central, the central issue that we see in the Lord Jesus here. Nevertheless, all right, Father. When He knew He could go out to meet it with joy and confidence.

And I believe the same thing is true of us. All through our walk and our going on with the Lord, if we come to know the reality of the cross in our life, it is not just sacrifice. It is not just the outward giving of ourselves to a project, to a cause.

We have to continually, inwardly, know in our spirit, this is the will of God. I think when this can be settled, it brings a rest and no other rest. I'm faced continually.

I think after some years, you get to the place where the cry of your heart is, Oh God, just so that you will be pleased, that you will be satisfied. But to clearly know what the will of the Lord is. That's the issue.

That's the issue. Let's see if we can transfer that for a little bit. Are you with me then? The great majority of religious folk today, they'll take a cup, the sacrifice.

But it's knowing the will, the central issue of the cross. And I believe we see it in the Lord Jesus. You look again into the life of David and you see how different it was between David and Saul.

Somehow I believe that Saul must have looked on and many times when he saw all the sacrifice of animals. You know, it's quite a thing when they had a big sacrifice. Imagine a train pulling up.

Probably a hundred boxcars it would take. And then all of these animals brought out and slaying all of them. Everything in your natural interpretation would look upon that and say, boy, that's a waste unless God helps you to interpret something of reality.

Imagine at the temple all those animals slain. If you only live in the outwardness, in the form of it. The reason I'm sure that King Saul never got into the reality of the offering of the altar because when he was sent down to slay all of the Amalekites, he spared the best of the sheep and the oxen.

You know the story. He allowed the people to spare and he spared King Agag. And of course there's the twisting, the little rationalizing of the mind.

It's so hard to spare good things, nice things. We're glad to get rid of some bad things. That's not hard.

And all the bad, the vile, the refuse, they slayed. But they spared the good things. It's these good things that somehow that escapes the sword that we try to give to God.

Our reputation. We think that somehow God ought to be able to do something with our reputation. And I hear people say so often, oh, wouldn't it be wonderful if so-and-so would become a Christian? What a power and an influence they'd be for God because their reputation.

Could I disillusion you for a moment? That's man's reasoning. Influence as such never really accomplishes the way of the Lord. God's way is to take a life to the cross.

And all that we try to spare and use for Him, just a little rationalizing of our mind. God does not use man's reputation. The best example of it is the one who said he made himself of no reputation.

Your reputation is one of those things that is so difficult to let the sword touch. And so King Saul thought he could bring back these animals from the Amalekites. He takes them down to Gilgal and he begins to set up an altar to sacrifice to the Lord.

And then he meets Samuel. Imagine trying to sacrifice some animals that have come from the Amalekites to the Lord. He doesn't understand.

It's just an outward form to him. It'd be just like my reaching in to my sister's purse down here when the offering plate's going by, taking out a ten-dollar bill and putting it in. If I could find a twenty, probably I'd put that in.

What's the difference? Taking something. David knew what a sacrifice was. Remember when he had sinned? And he goes out to the edge of the city.

He has commanded that Joab will go through the country and number the people. And immediately God speaks to him and he says, Which do you want? Three years' famine? Three months of, what was it? Pestilence? Or three days of? He says, I think I'll fall into the hands of the Lord. Safer than that.

But here he is out at Ornon's thrashing floor. And when Ornon recognizes that it's King David, he says to him, Oh, King David, what is it you want? He said, I have come to make sacrifice to the Lord. And he offers him the wood for the altar.

He offers to give him an animal to sacrifice. And what does David say? I will not sacrifice that which has cost me nothing. Oh, I'd have a seat tonight.

You live in the outwardness. Live in the form what the cross has meant. You can take some animals from the Amalekites.

You can reach in your neighbor's purse. You can give that. The sacrifices of God are what? Something inward first.

A broken and a contrite heart. A broken spirit. Everything of the cross represents cost.

It cost God when he gave. And when we come to understand some of the reality that's involved in the cross, we'll not be bypassing, going through our little forms, our ceremonies. Oh, God, there's the cost.

And yet, having said this, I almost am frightened. Because there's such a strand within man, he'd like to have some cost. And yet, once again, it's not just sacrifice.

It's not just cost. God has to deal with this principle within us and bring us to hear him. An ear that's attuned to know what God wants.

It's the will of God, not rushing out to service. Let me just, in closing tonight, picture what I like to speak of as two different altars on which men, so to speak, give themselves. We can go through it quickly.

Sometimes I call this first altar our working for God. Our working for God. What is the sacrifice when we're working for the Lord? Turn for a moment.

Let's just look at one of the sacrifices that comes in Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes chapter 5. Verse 1. This is a strange verse. He says, But keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God and be more ready to what? Are you there? Be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools.

What's the sacrifice of fools? Let's just build here a little the sacrifice of fools on this altar. What's the sacrifice of fools? Be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools. For they consider not that they

do evil.

Be not rash with thy mouth and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God. For God is in heaven and thou upon earth. Therefore let thy words be few.

I believe that we have a lot of sacrifice of fools in the religious realm today. And I go back to what we were sharing last night and this morning. Some of you were not here.

Remember, we've been saying that in our spirit here, we learn to hear the Lord. It's in our soul out here, man's minds, his emotions, and his will. People can get all enthused.

I believe, I have seen individuals go to the meeting place, what he's speaking about. Now be careful when you go to church. Let me put it in my own interpretation.

Be very careful. You might hear a glib speaker who can really challenge your soul. And the first thing you know, you'll say, I will give the sacrifice.

He says, Oh, that we might learn to hear. That we might learn to hear. I don't know how to say this without being misunderstood.

But I know the tendencies in the church realm today. You just feel, so many men feel like they haven't had a good meeting unless they've got some scouts or some statistics or something that somehow appeals back to the speaker. I've been in a lot of missionary conferences.

And then I've seen individuals that I've had to deal with afterwards. You know, it's quite a thing for a young person under the enthusiasm of the moment to see a film, to look at the poor, bleeding, heathen with all their desperate need. And out of his soul, out of the emotion, out of the response, the young person goes to the altar and says, I'll go to Africa.

I give myself to the Lord. Well, thank God for sincerity. But all the frustration that comes.

And I've had young people come to me and say, I did that ten years ago and every year now, some sister comes along and says, I'm still praying that you'll get there. It's quite a struggle. What is it? What is it? I believe there are a lot of individuals who on the spur of the moment, the enthusiasm of their soul, they'd like to do something for the Lord.

And they offer the sacrifice of fools. It is that enthusiasm or that challenge, and they use the word right, that challenge which issues out of a soul that is being fooled. I heard a mission director tell me that they had concluded that one percent of the people who respond to their altar calls actually get to the field.

And I knew what he meant. I knew what he meant. We're not playing down lies that need to be challenged that God wants to work with.

But I'd say to you tonight, beloved, oh, to learn to hear with the inner ear. And to let God lead you along. You can make your decision.

You can say unto the Lord, Lord, my heart, my spirit is fixed toward you. And God will lead, and God will open. But some of these rash, well, here is saying, the rashness of the mouth.

Be not rash with thy mouth. I'm thinking of Peter. Lord, though all forsake you, I won't.

I guess the reason I see this is because I've been through it so much. I've been so steamed up at times I thought I'd go around the world for Jesus. Only trouble is Monday morning when I woke up, it's all gone.

And I've hated the fickleness of my soul life. I've despised this fickleness that was up and down. Up and down.

The rashness with which I've spoken. The sacrifice of fools. Then it is in the goodness of the Lord.

He's begun to show me. His ways are different. He would have us respond with our inner ear to hearing.

So, he says, verse 4, When thou vowest to vow unto God, defer not to pay it. For he hath no pleasure in fools. Pay that which thou hast vowed.

Better is it that thou shouldst not vow, than thou shouldst vow and not pay. There's nothing more ruinous of character and the developing of character than to say, I will, and then you can't do that very often before there's no strength of character within. Now, I won't get into all that's involved in vows.

We could go to the New Testament and I'd give you some of my conviction of what really is the best in the Lord's way. But just let me say this tonight. Be careful when you go to church.

I've got a good verse. That is, be more ready to what? Fear. Than to be quick with your soul to make vows that would be very difficult.

Very difficult to fulfill. I remember a couple of years ago, I was out in Washington, a little city, holding a series of meetings. And the last day after the morning meeting, I was getting ready to go.

The businessmen asked if they could eat together. And so we went over to a neighboring cafe. About 25 fellows gathered in a side room as we were eating together.

Pretty soon, one of them said, well, we really have you here for a purpose. We want to ask you a question. Then they told me about a year ago of a very high-powered speaker who had come through.

The man had had a vision and a dream the night before that God wanted him to raise \$100,000 in that group. And he challenged them. I guess he gave them some very interesting stories of other things he had heard, of folk who had entered into a prosperity covenant with the Lord.

That if they would do this, God would bless them tenfold. And he told stories about those who had had a rich relative die and how many times they had been helped and blessed. And then those fellows sitting around there looking at me said, when you make a vow, do you have to keep the vow? I'll never forget it.

Do you believe you have to keep vows? I looked at this fellow and he said, I pledged \$2,000. He said, I've been little by little been able to pay \$200 of it. But he said, I'm just having an awful time.

Next fellow said, I pledged \$1,000. I paid \$300. I pledged \$1,000.

I went around and I saw how that whole group of intelligent men had been swept along by the enthusiasm and I think maybe a little of the selfishness of give \$1,000 and get \$10,000 back. Who wouldn't, brother? And I wept as I sat before them that day. There are a lot of people who are being made merchandise.

I'd hate to think that we deal with precious souls, which is what it is, as mere merchandise, challenging or whatever it is. There's an awful lot of it going on in religious circles today. And I'm afraid a lot of it ends up

as nothing but the sacrifice of fools.

I didn't mean to get into that so far, but you study it out for yourself. When you're working for God, you can get all steamed up about doing things and sacrifice becomes more important than really knowing and hearing of the Lord. We said a little bit ago that when Saul brought the animals back from the Amalekites, I believe he was offering the sacrifice of the blind.

How blind he was, thinking that he could take the animals from the Amalekites and offer them to the Lord. It didn't cost him anything. The blindness of his sacrifice.

There's a lot of it today. The end seems to be the thing that's important. Just to get this amount, we'll hasten on.

There's another sacrifice the Scripture speaks of. It's the sacrifice of the wicked. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord.

I don't know how much to go into that, but I'm inclined to believe tonight that if we clearly understand the altar and the ways of the Lord in the sacrifice, we begin to see that God is very careful about sacrifice. He's very careful about those who help with his work. I believe that there's a wickedness.

There's a mixture. There's a looseness today. Men get projects.

Men get goals, things that they're doing for God, and they try to harness all the funds and all the means that they can. The end justifies any means. God is careful.

I think I may have shared this with some of you. Back in the days when I was in Youth for Christ, we had a big program going and a costly budget. I remember when the businessmen brought in, we were in a youth center, brought in a big budget for the year.

One of the fellows came bouncing in with great excitement. They'd been making a canvas of all the business places. This fellow was really alive.

He said, guess what? Six brewing companies have offered us \$25,000. It was a real achievement for him. I had three or four men on the board.

I saw their faces fall. One of them looked up and he said, what did you say? Six brewing companies? And he quoted this verse. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination.

All the lives that have been ruined by the liquor traffic, and now to think that some of this could be used in building something for the Lord. Well, the men got into a real tangle. One of them said, I'd use the devil's money if I could get it.

We finally decided we better pray for a while and it was put off for a couple weeks. But I sat the young fellow right in the midst of that. The project, working for God, the end seemed to be very important.

I'm afraid there are an awful lot of things today where the end that men set out as a goal seems so important that almost any means to get that end accomplished. I just believe that the real end of everything should be the glory of the Lord. It's God's glory.

Every lesser little project, every lesser little thing that we set up, it is for God's glory. But the glory of the Lord at the end means that our means must be glorified to Him along the way. And I've been thankful for that little experience because ever since it's helped me to realize that God's work done in God's way will not lack God's support.

I really believe that. But when we set up our own projects and we get our own dreams and some of our own, we have to make merchandise and use a lot of things and the wickedness of a lot of sacrifice. Well, one more.

When you're working for God, the sacrifice of fools, the sacrifice of the blind, the sacrifice of the wicked, and Habakkuk gives us a nice little picture of sacrifice. He calls it the sacrifice unto the net. Let's read it, shall we? Oh, this speaks loudly to you when you see it.

Sacrifice unto the net. Habakkuk. Chapter 1 and verse 16.

Let me ask you before we read it, what is a net? What is a net? A net is the means or the tool or the equipment that you use in getting the job done, right? Are you with me now? The net is the implement or the tool or whatever you have to get the job done. Wouldn't it be something to get so enamored, so wrapped up in your tool that you build a little altar and live under it and you get the thing all mixed up? I believe this happens. I think we'll see it.

We read it here. Verse 16. It says, They sacrifice unto their net and burn incense unto their drag because by them their portion is fat and their meat plenteous.

The Amplified Translation puts it this way. Therefore he sacrifices offerings to his net and burns incense to his dragnet because from them he lives luxuriously and his food is plentiful and rich. Well, you say, I guess it's all right for a fisherman to be really alive to his net.

But who are the fishermen? You and I. What is our net? What is our net? I'm sure my brother could verify what I'm trying to say. There's been many a man who began, as it were, an effective ministry for the Lord and he saw the need of a bigger place for God's people to gather. And when the new sanctuary or the new place was built, pretty soon the net, the place, got so big, so important, that he spent the rest of his life, what? Burning incense and worshiping the net.

Oh, the subtleness of it. Why not? After all, if the net gives you your livelihood and by it you live luxuriously or your food is plentiful. Do you see the principle? But you see, we're too spiritual to get caught with that kind of a net.

You think there's another? God has been speaking to my own heart. I think a man's ministry given by the Lord. The ministry that the Spirit of God, the gift, the enablement, whatever it is that God has given, can become a net.

And if he's not careful, he can live under the ministry or the net that he has. Because by it he what? Oh, it's a subtle thing. And God has just seemed to press me right back to the cross.

The central issue, what is it? What is it? Living off from the ministry? Living off from the net, so to speak? By it there's plenty? God forbid. The central issue of the cross is not sacrifice. It is not service.

It is not work. It is what? The will of God. Knowing God's will.

I don't know. I heard, I think it was Mr. Maxwell a number of years ago in one of his little books he said, oh, the tragedy today. He said, Jesus died on his cross, but most men today live off from it.

And I never got over it when I heard it. They live off from it. It's something you see.

It's something that we miss the heart and the center of it. Well, I must hasten on. When you come to this altar where the whole of the ambition is God needs workers, God wants helpers.

I give myself to the Lord. Working for God is very easy to get caught into these kinds of sacrifices. And I'm afraid sometimes even end up just worshiping the net.

What's the other sacrifice? I don't know how to put this briefly. But somehow I think when we come to this altar, the altar that God brings us to, we get a little glimpse of what it means to be one with Him in His sacrifice. Identified with Him in what it means to be a bond slave, a love slave.

What it means, let's just say, instead of working for God, God is working. God is working. How does God work? Most of the time I think He says, Son, you just sit down and be quiet.

I could get something done. But Lord, you need help. You see? We're just so wrapped up in what we can do.

And I really think that the central issue of our sacrifice is that when we see that we are one with Him, nailed to the cross, buried in the tomb, risen with Him, and then we get into what is called the way of the cross, and the experiencing of it, God literally makes us one with Him. And these are the offerings that we give. Ever hear the sacrifice of praise? The sacrifice of praise? Well, you see, it seems to me that all God is doing in every situation is to set up a nice little platform on which He can reveal Himself through every situation.

And we think it's working for the Lord, it's getting something done for God. I'll illustrate what I mean. We're putting out books, publishing.

It's very easy to get the idea that God's primary thing is getting books out. About the time you order a carload of paper and the fellas you've bought it from you discover that they have bought an inferior kind of paper. They want you to pay full price for something less.

There you stand, ready to help the Lord get His. And every time a situation like this has come, it's just as though the Lord has crowded me right to the point and said, Now, I have a lovely little platform to reveal myself through this situation. You're going to grumble, you're going to murmur, you're going to complain and get your eyes on books or my opportunity to reveal myself.

So, praise the Lord. I don't know how you're going to do it, Lord, offering the sacrifice of praise. Do you agree? If God wanted to get books printed and churches built and all this, He could summon a thousand angels and get it done with a lot less murmuring.

How many of you know that to be true? If that's what He was after. But you see, it's a lovely thing. He keeps us occupied with, I guess, what we think we're doing.

And He says, that's just busy work. How many of you know what busy work is? Any teachers here? In school we have what we call busy work. We give the child something to keep him out of mischief.

He may not learn much through it, but he's coloring and it's busy work. I'm afraid we get a lot of busy work. But the real issue is what? Oh, God has created a platform.

And every time I've been about to stand for getting God's, you know, full... The Lord seems to say, now careful, careful. I have to have a platform by which to reveal. I've been very hard on businessmen and other people out in the world.

I thank God for being pushed right out into the midst of it. It's the opportunity, the platform, to say, the Lord, I praise you. I'm so glad it's all yours anyway.

I don't believe in being loose. I mean, I don't believe in being careless. There's that which is right.

But, oh, to stay right in your spirit while you're holding for a right principle. To praise the Lord. I don't need to go on into it.

Now you've got the principle. He says, in all things giving thanks. And you can read how many places in the Scripture there's the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Thank you, Lord. This is an opportunity. I remember some years ago, I had been ministering one morning to the ladies' group on the sacrifice of thanksgiving.

Why, praise the Lord, in all things you can give thanks. It's real good theory. It's in the Bible.

On the way home that noon, the lady of the house where I was staying asked to stop at a supermarket to get an item for dinner. I was weary and I decided I'd sit in the car while she got the item. I just laid my head back to rest for a moment and wham! I looked up in my shock.

Somebody backed into the side of my car and I had a brand new car. Well, you know, your first impulse. And I sat over the steering wheel.

Just that moment, the Lord whispered, What was that you were telling the ladies this morning? In all things, giving thanks. For this is the will of God concerning you in Christ Jesus. And I remember saying, Lord, thank you.

Thank you. I don't know how you're going to get something out of this, but thank you. And I believe it gets easier when you only have one pocket.

How many of you have your pocket in the Lord's pocket? And you put ten percent over every, you know. And you keep pretty close books, don't you? It's a blessed thing in the Lord's hands. Lord, Lord.

It's all yours. You want to smash the car up? Go ahead. You'll have to pay for it.

One pocket. One pocket. Brings great rest.

I got out, walked back. Poor fellow got out of his car, shivering, expecting a tongue lashing. He said, my foot slipped off from the foot brake onto the foot feed and wham.

And I smiled and I said, you know, I'm sure that could have happened to me. We had a gracious time there for a minute. I know the Lord spoke to his heart.

I know what he did in my own heart. In all things, giving thanks. Aren't you glad the Lord's setting up little platforms to reveal himself? That's what they are.

An altar in which you can be poured out, cheap, counted for the slaughter, for Jesus' sake. The sacrifice of praise, the sacrifice of thanksgiving, the sacrifice of joy, all of it, I believe, is what he means in Romans when he says, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies in what? Living sacrifice. Now, we can get a martyr complex and we can pound our fist and say, I'm going to, but I have news for you.

In every situation, we'll climb down off the altar, that nice little platform. We once again live by the supply of the Lord, his supply to our spirit, or we'll faint. We'll never go through.

Or you might brace yourself for a couple situations, but then there'll come a moment when you're off guard. What am I trying to say tonight? I believe, beloved, that there's something very wonderful about the realities of the cross. It's something more than just two old sticks that Jesus died on.

He let the Lord unveil the central issues of it. You will see. You will see.

That God is bringing us through it into an intimate fellowship with himself. That's where we've been starting, you see. We are called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ.

And when Paul says in Philippians, that I may know him, and the what? Fellowship of his sufferings. You can know various fellowships with the Lord. Here we are in our spirit, fellowship with him.

But he's taking us on. The privilege, the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable unto his death. The only way you can understand that conformity to his death is not to make it the work of the cross, but to make it the what? Thank you, Lord.

I believe you've gotten it through to them. The reality of the cross. Oh, I've been asking all week, Lord, we come to this season.

Make it to be a new, something different this year. Let me enter in, in a whole new way, to the reality. Shall we pray? Here we are tonight, Lord.

We don't want just knowledge, but all we want, that we might truly know what it is to be one with thee, identified with thee in thy death.

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