

Lengthening the Cords, Strengthening the Stakes

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a clear vision of the world, being motivated by compassion, and prioritizing communion with God.

Duration: 49:36

Scripture: Isaiah 53:12 - 54:4, Isaiah 54:17, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of coming near to God and having communion with Him in order to have a clear vision of the world. He contrasts the limited perspective of reporters who only see events from ground level with the broader perspective that comes from being close to God. The preacher urges the audience to examine their own vision and asks if they have a scum over their eyes preventing them from seeing things through the mind and eyes of the Lord. He also highlights the need for a total vision, clear vision, and compassion. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the constant rededication of our lives to God and the potential for getting stuck in the mud if we forget our purpose. The preacher references Isaiah 53:12 and Isaiah 54:1-3 to illustrate the ultimate victory and fruitfulness that comes from pouring out one's life for God.

Transcript

It is good to have a number of visiting friends among us this morning as at other times and we rejoice in your presence. The word that I have to pass on this morning is based upon Isaiah chapter 54 and verse 2. I have been diffident to turn to this again because I remember preaching on this text here before. I want to assure you it isn't the same sermon, but there are certain things in these words which have been, dare I say, haunting my mind and my soul as I have been thinking of this renewal of opportunity to serve our Lord right here in the heart of the city as the fall is upon us.

It is an awesome responsibility that is ours to be situated here and to contemplate the kind of thing that God requires of us as we come to this particular juncture in our year's calendar. And I found myself drawn to these words and I beg your pardon that I'm returning to a text which we've used before, but none of you would remember if I hadn't said so. Now we're coming then to Isaiah chapter 54 and verse 2. Enlarge the place of your tent.

Stretch your tent curtains wide. Do not hold back. Lengthen your cords.

Strengthen your stakes. Fellows and girls who've been in camp recently will know exactly what this means though some of us may not be as familiar with the language as they may be and as ancient Israel would be. But before we come to look at the text I would like you to notice where it comes.

It comes in a very significant place in the book of the prophet Isaiah. Chapter 53 is a chapter that describes the amazing sufferings of Messiah who at that time had not appeared on the scene but who was prophesied as coming in the name of the Lord. And in that very remarkable chapter which we were meditating upon earlier in the year you remember we are looking at the very sorrows and anguish of the one chosen of God to bear away our sins.

In a sense this is a chapter that strikes a chord of mourning and of sorrow. Of course we come to a victorious conclusion but before we come to that we have words like this surely he took our infirmities he carried our sorrows we considered him stricken by God smitten by him and afflicted but he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and with his wounds we were healed.

If ever there was a chapter that describes anguish and sorrow and suffering surely it is Isaiah chapter 53 but as I say before we come to the end of Isaiah 53 we come to the dawn of a new day and the prophet is not backward in telling us after the suffering of his soul he will see the light of life and be satisfied by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many for he will bear their iniquities and listen to these words therefore I will give him a portion with a great that's God speaking and he will divide the spoils with a strong because he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors for he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors he is to see of the travel of his soul the end is not suffering as far as the servant of the lord

the messiah was concerned he was to see of the fruit of the travel of his soul in a day then on board and then the first verse in chapter 54 sing oh barren woman you who never bore a child burst into song shout for joy you who were never in labor because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband enlarge the place of your tent stretch your tent curtains wide do not hold back lengthen your cords strengthen your stakes for you will spread out to the right and to the left your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities what have we here well it's poetic language some of us may love poetry others of us may hate it this is poetic language that describes something very very graphically and there are two applications to it an immediate

and an ultimate the immediate application of these words would be something like this these words were addressed to the faithful remnant who had returned to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon as well as some of the old people who had remained in the land had never been taken into captivity all the young folk were carried away many of them died in in captivity but the older people and they were all old who were now in Jerusalem and in the in the land the word comes to them who are beginning to wonder what's going to happen to their land it's it has very little population there's very little hope of anything good happening then comes the prophet with this remarkable word God has not said his last word to you prepare for an incoming and the men gathering men and women are going to come

back from distant Babylon however difficult it may be to come and they're going to come into your city and into your into your country and they're going to inhabit places that have become long deserted and so the prophet brings a word of hope to the remnant community of the Jews there in Jerusalem and in the land

concerning a day that was soon to come but there is another application of these words coming as it does especially in the wake of chapter 53 it has to do with a messianic age with a day when messiah will have arrived undergone his sufferings and his anguish on the cross especially and risen again and has the spoils of his victory to share with men and women in other words there is an application of my text of the day when jesus christ will have suffered died been buried

risen again ascended to the right hand of the father sent forth the dowry the holy spirit and all the gifts of grace to shower upon his people and i'm going to use it this morning in that particular context for our lord is risen and he has ascended at the father's right hand and he is lord of lords and king of kings and he has gifts to impart to man and i believe that this word comes as a very real word of god to any believing now mark this i want to underline that word any believing community of god's people any company of men and women of face who have the some dim notion of what messiah has done has accomplished as we may be starting upon another fall and winter's labors for our lord here is a veritable word from the throne god is telling us to get ready now the image itself is very

beautiful especially if you've been an old-time camper you see the picture is this enlarge the curtains here is a little tent it'll only take about eight or ten people shall we say the curtain doesn't stretch very far but there are myriads going to come in so you need to stretch the canvas out to cover them all so that they can all come under the roof and they can all come in and join with us under the same canvas stretch it out says the prophet but be careful of this he says there's a danger when you spread out the canvas in order to keep the canvas edifice if we may so speak safe and secure for those who come under it strengthen your tent pegs at the same time you need tent pegs that will go deeper into the soil so that when the wind blows the edifice will not fall and crumble now

that's the picture and i pray that the lord will help us as we come to it and apply it very especially to ourselves this morning and uh to the work of the lord as we are summoned to do it at this time now having seen this pictorial language this graphic word this poetic word let me now hasten to add this the word is poetic but let me tell you that the truths represented here are found everywhere in the new testament everywhere the new testament reflects a two-fold divine requirement of god's people wherever they are whether you're from toronto or the uttermost parts of the earth it doesn't matter the new testament requires two things from us evangelism of going out a stretching of the canvas to receive men and women into the fellowship into the christian home dare we say the church and at

the same time to strengthen the edifice which is edification sanctification growing up towards maturity and stability now that's the language of the new testament stretch out your canvas to bring in the wayward and the returning to make them at home to provide a place for them but at the same time see to it that the fellowship into which they come is strong enough to nurse them and bring them to maturity that the whole thing doesn't collapse on top of them and they crumble and they come into a tragic situation let me therefore share with you the call of the hour as i understand it the kind of rededication that the lord requires of us as the people of nox at this time and all god's people who may be worshiping with us this morning i want to say two or three things and i want to continue

this theme this evening first of all god calls us today to enlarge the cord of our vision manward but at the same time to strengthen the stake or the tent peg of our communion godward and these two things must go together now notice the balance here it is not either or it is both and we need vision of our duty but in order to have the kind of vision that god wants us to get we must concentrate upon communion with himself a vision of the need communion with a god who supplies that need let's take these two first and in

order we start with the vision manward that we need now it has been well said in the old testament that where there is no vision the people perish may god grant us the kind of vision that we need individually and corporately certainly if we do not have such a vision then the

consequences can be grave for the future of our own souls and of our own families as well as the church to which we belong a word of definition first what do we mean by vision in this context now i want to suggest that vision biblically understood has at least and i say at least there are other elements but it has at least two elements to it we can speak of them as sight and insight perhaps that helps us to remember sight and insight sight and insight a man of vision in the biblical sense is a man who looks at the world to see what's going on he's concerned for the world because the spirit of god is in his heart and the word of god is being read by him and he's in fellowship with god and god is concerned for the world and so he's looking out upon the world to see what's going on in the

world and he sees things he reads his newspaper he listens to the news he reads anything that will tell him about the world and its events and its happenings because he wants to know he wants a vision in that sense he wants to have a vision of the whole world because it's god's world but now that doesn't make vision in the biblical sense it's only the beginning of it vision is not just simply having things in view vision involves an insight an understanding not only of what is going on but why things are as they are and if things don't change what's going to happen and what does god got to say to the situation this is insight let me put it to you in terms of a very simple illustration a mother becomes concerned because she sees some pimples on the skin of the child takes the child to the

doctor perhaps the mother doesn't know what it is but when the doctor sees them he immediately doesn't has more than just external vision of what's there he sees what lay behind them what lies behind them he sees the cause he sees the disorder in the blood or whatever the case may be he his vision goes deeper he knows why and wherefore what's more he will know what will happen to the child if they don't deal radically with this and effectively and if he's a good doctor he will know what to prescribe now that's vision vision is reading and understanding what's going on in the world in the light of the word of god you see it's not pimples that we see on the body politic today we see more than that we see disfigurement we see decay we see the marks of sin upon the way people are thinking and

the way people are acting we see it everywhere a man or a woman of god must read the newspaper in the light of the word many people read their newspapers instead of the word i suggest to you if that is true of you it would be better to cancel the newspaper for a couple of weeks in order that you may know what the word of god has to say to the affairs of the day but ultimately you need to know what's going on in the world and then bring your knowledge of scripture to bear upon it so that you can see this is why things are happening in iran this is why certain things are happening elsewhere in the world in northern ireland or somewhere else and this is why things are going out wrong in our family or in our congregation or wherever i live that's vision vision in the biblical sense is never

simply concerned with the superficialities though it takes note of everything all the signs and the symptoms but it sees beyond it sees beneath brothers and sisters in christ what's the state of your vision this morning do you see things clearly at all is there a scum over your eyes that you don't see things through the mind and through the eyes of your lord are you short-sighted have you ever seen the world beyond your own doorstep and your own little circle or are you long-sighted there are some people who don't see what's near at hand but they see what's far away they read about distant things and they're very interested now it's an anomalous situation but there are people like that who will support the work of god in the distant

places but not at hand and they will never sought to

evangelize the man or the woman next door however pagan he or she may be but they're interested in distant needs where there is no vision that people perish we need to see in the distant scenes of course we do especially in the third world that is so needy in things material as well as spiritual but brothers and sisters in christ we need a full vision a total vision a clear vision and we need to be careful that we are not looking at the world with rose-colored spectacles on the humanist does that there are many so-called liberal christians who do that oh yes the world's in a bad state but it'll get better the kind of optimism that people had just previous prior to the first world war is a legacy of the past of the victorian era always expecting things to get better without any real basis

for it you and i need to have a vision of things but now you will naturally ask the question how are we going to secure that kind of vision and that brings me to the second part of this our vision manward can only grow in so far as we have communion with god communion with god you see ultimately there is only one person who knows what's really going on in the world and why things are as they are it's difficult for some of us to take that in because our conception of god is so small and so trivial that he is not worthy of the name but if you were a believer in the revelation that god has given of himself in christ jesus and in the bible then you will follow me here this morning there is only one person who knows what's going on throughout the whole wide world and there is only one person

who knows why things are as they are and we are going to catch his vision only in so far as we get near enough for him to be influenced by him to hear his word to see through his eyes to feel with his heart and to want to do what he is concerned we should do communion with god is the only soil that produces spiritual fruitfulness of any kind and particularly what we are speaking of this morning a vision of the world our world you know the fourth chapter of the book of revelations starts like this i'm taking i'm taking this out of its context really just taking the principle the word of the lord came to john and says john come up hither and i will show you things now stop there for a moment the book doesn't stop there the statement doesn't stop there but what god is saying to john come up

here he says and i'll show you things he goes on to say i'll show you things that must shortly come to pass but you see there's a principle there if you and i are to have the vision that god wants us to have we've got to come up to him we've got to come near to him we've got to draw nearer we've got to ascend into the hill of the lord we've got to have communion with him there are always two ways of looking at the world from ground level and from above the reporter's way standing alongside of the event you know the reporter comes rushing whenever there's been an accident or whatever it is here they come with their cameras and their pens and their pencils and their paper here they come and they see they don't all see the same thing because they're so close to it and they're looking at it

from ground level they never have the whole truth there is another vantage point it's taking your place with your heavenly father and it is sharing something of the breath of his spirit and looking from his vantage point upon the world and listening to what he says and sensing how he feels and discovering what he wants you to do and you see this is why there is nothing more important in the whole gamut of our christian disciplines than this it is learning how to commune with god how deep is your communion how real is it how effective is it has it given you a vision of the need of men living near or far can you read your newspaper understanding what's going on vision manward needs always to be accompanied by communion with god because it is only in that atmosphere that vision becomes clear

and strong and adequate now do i hear anybody say that this is very difficult well yes of course it is everything that's worthwhile is always difficult but you know the only difficulty is the difficulty of sanctification let me put it like this it's the difficulty of getting sin and its effects out of our lives and the difficulty of receiving the grace of god to beautify our lives and to strengthen the work of grace begun in us and if you and i are prepared to let sin and every semblance of evil behind us and to accept the word of god as it is and the commands of god as they come to us then at least the way is plain it may still be difficult but it is clear now that is the first thing and i believe this is a very real call to each one of us because you see you influence men and women

around you all of us do and if you have a clear vision of the need of the world you can communicate it to people that you sit with and talk with and commune with from day to day and you are part of the church of jesus christ now that brings me to the second main thing that i have to say this morning god is calling us today to lengthen the cord of our compassion for men but at the same time to see that it is tied to the tent peg of our utter dedication to himself compassion compassion for men now what is compassion someone has said that compassion is an intense fire in the soul that burns and burns and burns and burns until it disturbs our emotions and drives us into action well it is that at any rate compassion can be the most discomfoting of all human experiences it keeps people awake

it makes people unhappy when they live selfishly i have seen i have seen people unable to eat their meals i won't mention names but they're names that are known to you i have seen people unable to eat a seven course meal because of his conscience i'm thinking of one man particularly compassion is a disturbing thing when it gets hold of the soul there are certain things you can't do to heap riches upon yourself and to have pleasure for yourself and yourself alone you can't when compassion is in your heart when compassion is accompanied by a clear vision gained in communion with god then it will never be of the purely sentimental kind nor will it take the form of an indiscriminate activity a mere activism it will set afire all the energies of the soul and they in turn will serve like a fire

in the boiler of an engine to make us go and do what god requires see at the heart of the word compassion there is the word passion now what comes to your mind when you think of passion well i wonder whether it is this we speak of people who are subject to their passions what do we mean is it not something like this that they they're controlled by them and they seem incapable of saying no notice here it is come passion and the first part of the word come means passion alongside of or along with someone what is compassion i'll tell you it is passion that runs parallel with god's passion it is intense feeling and concern that runs in the same direction and has something of the same momentum as the passion the concern of almighty god that's compassion this deep feeling of which we're talking

then is something that is to be gained alongside of god and ultimately ultimately expresses itself in our beginning to feel for people as god feel now there may be someone here this morning who is wondering how god feels and feels that perhaps god is hard and callous and unjust who have never recognized that all god's dealings with us have to be understood in the light of the one cardinal and central thing in the history of the world namely this that god gave his only begotten son the only begotten of his bosom he gave him to die the death of the wicked the just in the place of the unjust god gave him because he was concerned for us and for a hell deserving world and everything else in the in the whole history of men and women has somehow to be understood in the fact that our god is a god

of grace he's the god who gave his son on calvary and he's a god who loves us with a love like that compassion is the passion of god seeping into me as i stand alongside of god and walk alongside of god

and think alongside of god god and i together move and he is impressing himself upon me so that his passion is in my soul but now compassion of this order however will always involve the compassionate in feeling or suffering along with the needy having gained something of this compassion by being alongside of god god will send us because of that compassion to stand alongside men in their sin in their rags in their need in their misery see this is what god himself did the creator of all the ends of the earth he to whom all the peoples of the world of the ages says isaiah are as but the

specks of of dust on the balances he who counts the numbers of the stars and as a name for every one of them thy almighty god the creator of the ends of the earth who is neither who is never weary never in need of a rest the almighty god the self-sufficient and self-sustaining deity he came into our world to stand alongside of us to live among us and you shall call him emmanuel was the message because god is with us that is the mystery of the incarnation it is a mystery but this is the reality within the mystery but god has come down alongside of men and ultimately on the cross he died in christ christ the son of god in our physical in a body physical like ours died between two thieves he couldn't come nearer to men than that he's come under the burden of men's guilt and shame i'll tell

you what would be most rewarding when you have the time to do it read the gospel stories again the gospel records and you will see something of our lord's compassion he sees jerusalem for example drawing towards the last week of his of his ministry he sees jerusalem and he begins to weep oh jerusalem jerusalem that killeth the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto you how often would i have gathered your children together as a hen gathers its brood under its wings but you would not your house is left to you i'll let you have what you want says jesus desolate or he sees or and hears the sound of of a man as he going into jericho for the first time son of david have mercy upon me was blind you remember how the people got excited because this dear man was shouting and making a noise

making as they thought a nuisance of himself but he couldn't be silenced and jesus said he had compassion on him we read he had compassion on him and he said bring him to me when he saw the people as sheep without a shepherd he had compassion on them what does that mean he he had a passion for their well-being akin to the passion of the unseen god god's passion was seen in him we felt the heartbeat of god in jesus christ and my dear friends this is something of the call to you and to me this morning oh we are to preach the word and we are to declare the gospel as correctly and as as balanced as we can and that is never to be abrogated in this age we are to make disciples of all nations but listen we are to be something we are to adorn the doctrine that we proclaim there is to be in us

something of the passion and compassion of god and his son in other words we are to have the fruit of the spirit and it all comes in there god is calling us today to lengthen the cord of our compassion that we feel for people at hand who know not christ whether they're rich or whether they're poor you see i don't really know who is most to be pitied is it the rich man or is it the poor man without christ there is no man to be pitied more than the man who drives in his marvelous limousine who lives in the most luxurious palace and is let me tell you on his way to hell and believes because of his wealth or his academic achievement that he's got everything when he's got nothing he's lost and i'm not so sure that that man is not more to be pitied than the people who grovel in the dust and

ashes they know they haven't got anything i'm not suggesting that we shouldn't look at them or feel for them not for one solitary moment but i am feeling increasingly that we should think of these dear men and women that are living in the castles of luxury and they feel they've got everything and they're dying without god and without his son and we think of them as if they have everything because we have become

materialistic in our outlook and because we see them in lovely cars and lovely homes oh they're all right my friends if the book is right they're not and we need compassion we need to feel we need the sensitivity of god and his son and his spirit within us for the rich as well as for the poor for the cultured as well as the untaught so much missionary effort and i i don't want you

to misunderstand this has been spent on their very very deprived and surely they've deserved it but the point that i am making is this that very often we have thought of them only and we have forgotten the rich man in his castle living in total ignorance of the things revealed in christ we need a total vision we need a clear vision and we need compassion my time has gone but can i just say this to close that long rope has to be has to be tied to the tent peg of a constant rededication of our lives to god i'll tell you why it is one thing to begin all right it's another thing to continue and you and i may have this vision clearly and we may have a sense of compassion that will will bring us to a point of consecration and we shall start moving out with god but if i'm not mistaken what

happens to every one of us at some time or another is this having started well we forget where we're going to and we get stuck in the mud you know this is true of every good and worthy establishment in history it's tragic to think of it and yet it's you can understand it if you read your word we are living in a world of evil and of said rampant evil satan is our arch for and within every believer there are still seeds of evil and so what happens is this yeah we acknowledge we acknowledge what god wants of us we'll do everything we can to procure this and to get it going in the lord's way but we haven't gone very far when we get cold again and we forget and we need to come back to the place of rededication let me illustrate this i was thinking particularly of the and i'll mention it

otherwise otherwise the point will not be made i was thinking particularly of the young men's christian association i do so because one of the things that stirred my soul as a young man was the story of how that dear man mr williams george williams was it was that his first name george i think it was started the young men's christian association in england it was a sheer heart burden for young men and women who were coming into the city for the first time leaving home had no friend nowhere to go to everything was new and the temptations of those days apparently were rampant and this dear man began to gather young men around him he was concerned for them if they had need materially he would share his needs his gifts with share his home with them share anything with them but the main thing

was he wanted them to become men and men of god and so he organized the young men's christian association but you see the sea has gone out of it by now and it's just a young men's association it's very rare nowadays in ymca circles to come across anybody that has a passion for the souls of young men things degenerate with time you see you can say the same about all our christian denominations let me speak of our presbyterian community which goes back to john calvin you go to geneva today and what do you find i have worshiped there in some of the deadest communities that i have ever known even in the church dear john calvin himself ministered come back to england where is the passion of wesley and whitfield what happens in our wesleyan churches in england today well i wouldn't like to tell

you come to my own country daniel roland's william williams of panther kelling and others with them were involved in the beginnings of the presbyterian church in wales where is the presbyterian church in wales today i'll tell you it's got rid of almost every evangelical from among its ranks because it made it impossible for them to stand for the truth of god and it is standing for such an anemic message that ill deserves the name christian having started so wonderfully you see the same thing happens in your life and mine how many times have you been in a situation where you put yourself on the altar to do anything that god

required of you and you started doing it then you got cold again what i'm saying is this the cord of our compassion for men needs to be tied to the tent peg of our

constant rededication of ourselves to god and i must end there this is a day this is a moment when god is calling upon us i believe to place ourselves on the altar oh there is work here in knox i really do not know what to do when i see everything there is to be done now we've got quite a number of people on the staff and so many who give of their time and their talents people who come in from distant places during the week to do this to go there but listen my friend we're hardly scratching the surface of it and this is the church of jesus christ i want to ask you have you got the vision do you know anything about his compassion then i ask you in his name come and put yourself on the altar afresh christ has died calvary has accomplished our redemption and the redemption of all who will

believe to the end of the ages we must gather them in we must go out and make disciples of all nations we must build them up and we need you as evangelists as teachers to do this to do that in one of the many segments or aspects of our work i ask you in the name of the lord come put yourself on the altar let us pray oh lord our god and our father a sense of privilege wells in our hearts this morning that we are called of yourself to be involved in your work whereas naturally we are so undeserving and unworthy of this high privilege we pray now that you will pursue each one of us with the claims of the christ upon us that during the course of these coming months this coming year if our lord should tarry there will be no department in this congregation that will lack workers or in the

congregations represented here but that men and women who listen to the word of god and read it have caught the vision of the need and of the peril of the danger and of the answer to that need and have sensed something of the compassion of god and have caught the spirit and are moving out with god into a new era of opportunity our father hear us as we place ourselves therefore at your disposal and lead us to the everlasting glory and praise of your holy name lead us that we may be worthy of the name we bear and fruitful in the places where we are for jesus sake amen

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