

# Better Late Than Never

by Jim Cymbala

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of making decisions with prayer and seeking God's guidance, being careful about who we associate with, and acknowledging and working on our structural weaknesses to grow spiritually.*

**Duration:** 30:07

**Scripture:** Genesis 39:7-12, 1 Kings 22:48-49, Psalm 34:17, Psalm 101:3, Psalm 121:1-2, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, 2 Corinthians 6:14

**Topics:** "Consequences"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the power of decisions and the consequences that come with them. He shares a story of a Christian brother who made a series of bad decisions, starting with using drugs and eventually leading to a violent crime. The preacher highlights the importance of recognizing our blind spots and praying for God's guidance and deliverance from temptation. He also emphasizes God's grace and willingness to help us even when we make mistakes. The sermon serves as a reminder to be mindful of our choices and to seek God's wisdom in all aspects of our lives.

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## Transcript

There was a culmination of decades of verbal fighting in our country over slavery. Would slavery be kept or would it be abolished? Some of the southern states said, no, you know what? We're not going to give up slavery, so let's have two countries. The Confederacy in the south, and then you can call yourself what you want in the north, but we're going to have two countries.

Abraham Lincoln became president suddenly and unexpectedly, and he said no. These are the United States, United States, and you just can't leave. You can't form another country.

And then we had the terrible four years of the Civil War from 1861 to 1865, where more Americans died killing each other than in all the wars put together since the Civil War. More Americans died by our own hands than in all the other wars, Vietnam, World War I, World War II, the Persian Gulf War, and all that. Now, when King Solomon died in Israel, they had a civil war, and they divided into two countries.

The northern kingdom was Israel, ten of the tribes, and then there was this little tiny southern kingdom called Judah, which included the tribe of Benjamin. All the kings in the northern kingdom were bad kings from the beginning, idolaters, turned away from God, left his word, did hideous things, worshiped Baal,

Ashtoreth, and other filthy, idolatrous practices. In the southern kingdom, there were some good kings like Jehoshaphat, Josiah, King Hezekiah, King Uzziah.

And they were both coexisting from the same bloodline. They were all children of Abraham, but they would fight sometimes, and it was a mess. The worst king ever in the northern kingdom of Israel was a king named Ahab.

He had a son named Jehoram, and the only thing the Bible says about Jehoram that's good was this, he was evil, but not as evil as his father. That's a bad testimony to have. You're good for nothing, but not quite as bad as your father.

At the same time, in Judah, there was a king called Jehoshaphat, who was one of the more godly kings, but he had a problem that a lot of us have. He had a weak spot in his armor, his spiritual armor. So, when Ahab died, Jehoram became king, and one of the countries that he had control over was a country called Moab, which was east of Israel, across the Jordan River.

And the Bible tells us that Moab had to pay money, or in this case, sheep. They had to pay dues every single year to Israel. But when Ahab died, the king of Moab said, you know what? I've had enough of this.

We're not paying them anymore, and this young Jehoram is a king. This is a good time to break away. So, no more paying tribute to them.

We're tired of being under their foot. When that happened, Jehoram panicked and said, you know what? Moab is going to break away, and my kingdom is going to be smaller. I'm going to look bad because they'll say, wow, you're not as strong as your dad was.

So, what he did was he decided to go to war against Moab to make them pay up. He went to the king of Edom, which was another kingdom on that other side of the Jordan and the Dead Sea, and said, come and fight with me against Moab. They said, we're with you.

And then he did a strange thing. He called the king of Judah, this godly king, Jehoshaphat, and he said, would you join with me too so there'll be three kingdoms going against Moab? And out of nowhere, Jehoshaphat says, I'm in. I'm like as strong as you.

My strength is your strength, and my men are like your men, and all we have. We'll stand with you. And he made an alliance with this ungodly, idolatrous loser of a king.

Well, they set off to go fight Moab, which means going into the desert over there on the other side of the Dead Sea. Look what happened. Second Kings, the third chapter, it says, so the king of Israel set out with the king of Judah and the king of Edom, the three of them, with their armies.

And after a roundabout march of seven days, the army had no more water for themselves or for the animals with them. What, exclaimed the king of Israel? This is Jehoram. Has the Lord called us three kings together only to hand us over to Moab? In other words, we're going to die.

But Jehoshaphat asked, is there no prophet of the Lord here that we may inquire of the Lord through him? An officer of the king of Israel answered, Elisha, son of Shaphat, is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah. Pour water on the hands means he was his servant.

Jehoshaphat said, the word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him, the prophet. Elisha said to the king of Israel, Jehoram, who he knew was up to no good and was an idolater, what do we have to do with each other? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother, Jezebel.

In other words, they worshiped all those false gods. Why don't you go to them? See, those gods can't help because they're false. No, the king of Israel answered, because it was the Lord who called us three kings together to hand us over to Moab.

Elisha said, as surely as the Lord Almighty lives whom I serve, if I did not have respect for the presence of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, I would not look at you or even notice you. But now bring me a harpist. While the harpist was playing, the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha as he worshiped and heard music and probably began to sing, he became very open to the moving of the spirit upon him.

And he said, this is what the Lord says, make this valley full of ditches. For this is what the Lord says, you will neither see wind nor rain, yet this valley will be filled with water and you, your cattle and your other animals will drink. You're not going to die.

This is an easy thing in the eyes of the Lord. He will also hand Moab over to you. You will overthrow every fortified city and every major town and you will cut down every good tree, stop up all the springs and ruin every good field with stones.

You see, back in those days, folks, if you didn't have water, you died in those desert areas. There was this formula, water equals life. No water equals death.

And now you've got three armies and you've got all these horses and you've got all these pack animals and you've got the kings themselves, they're ready to die. They're ready to die. They're going to go down.

Jehoshaphat's going to die, his wife's never going to see him again. His children are going to lose their father. And you wonder why, what is he doing there? What in the world did he make a decision to link up with two kings that are blasphemers against God, don't love God, don't trust God.

And now he's made a treaty with them and he's in the soup now himself. He's ready to lose his life because of a bad decision. So let's just stop here and say, notice the lesson here from God's word.

Every decision we make has repercussions. Every decision. And I see nowhere where Jehoshaphat prayed, Lord, should I go with this king who hates you and join together and make an alliance with him.

He didn't pray, he just acted. And then he acts without asking God and now he's close to death, he's going to die. Every decision we make has repercussions.

When I counsel people and last week I counseled for three hours people, one after another, and some of the heartbreaking things I heard and then over the years hearing things. And you hear heartbreaking things and when you step back and analyze it, it all began with the decision that someone made, no consultation of God, no looking in the Bible, is this what God planned for my life? Just make a decision because it feels like it's the right thing to do. And then what a man sows, as one of my mother's sisters used to say, I used to hear my aunt say, you make your bed, now you have to sleep in it.

But you made it. A woman is heartbroken, the guy used her like an animal for just sexual purposes but told her, sold her a bill of goods, no more, he wasn't a Christian, didn't want to go to church, but she's in some delusion, no, but I'm going to win him to the Lord. And anyway, I'm getting older and I might end up lonely and I got this fear that I'll be single the rest of my life.

So without consulting God, without praying with anyone, without looking in the Bible, don't be unequally yoked, only marry a believer. No, she's going to do it her way, but then that decision has repercussions. And then she comes heartbroken and you cry with her.

Every decision we make has to be prayed over and we have to look in God's Word. God, is this part of your plan for my life? Because whatever decision you make, it has repercussions. If I decide to leave this building at the end of the day and go home, that means I'm not in the building anymore.

There's a result of every decision. There's a guy that serves food to me down in the prison, he's a Christian brother of mine now in Christ in Louisiana and his story, very dramatic, but it shows the power of decisions. Somebody when he was 19 years old said, why don't you get high, smoke a little weed, do a little crack cocaine.

So he does it, he makes a decision. So now he's high and he's high with his friend, but they run out of money. So his friend says, we've run out of money and I want to buy some more drugs.

So let's go outside to the edge of town and hold up the convenience store. He's spaced out and he makes another decision. Yeah, that sounds good.

Let's hold up the convenience store and we'll get some more money because we might as well really party. So the guy goes out and he just drives the car, this friend I have named Gary. He drives the car.

So the other guy has a gun and he goes in and he's going to hold up this convenience store guy in the back, in the outskirts of some two-bit town somewhere in Louisiana. But he doesn't know that the guy who runs the store thinks he's Wyatt Earp and has a gun himself and he goes for his gun and says, you're not going to rob me. Then the other guy panics and blows him away and kills him.

And in Louisiana, not only are you guilty of murder and that guy will never see the light of day in Louisiana, the laws are very strict that if you drive the car, they charge you with murder. So now he's 34 or 5 years old serving me food, sitting and praying with me and he hasn't seen a free day since 19 because of a decision. We're all the product of decisions.

And the Bible tells us that one of the key decisions you have to make, we need to pray about them all, but who you hang with. The New Testament says bad company corrupts morals. Bad company corrupts morals.

Say it with me. Bad company corrupts morals. Say it again louder.

Bad company corrupts morals. The Christianity will not rub off on them. The wickedness will rub off on you.

That's the strange thing about Christianity. The Bible is very honest about it. There are people to love and witness to.

But who you run with and who's in your posse and who's your homeboy and all of that, they're going to have an effect on you and your children too. You meet parent after parent who have no idea who their kids are running with, what they're watching on television and who they're with. And then they get in trouble and they throw up their hands and go, God, where are you? Where are you? I wrote a Bible and I gave you a verse, not only for you, but for your children.

We have to be diligent. Talking to this young 12-year-old that I'm 13 years old now in our church here, just chatting with her, and she prayed with the prayer band before I came down here, and she goes to some school, some middle school, can you imagine? All girls school that glorifies homosexuality. It's part of the agenda.

They had just had a week called Alley Week, where that's what they celebrated, is lesbian relationships. But another teacher in the prayer band told me, oh, that's even in the grade schools now, and you dare not say a word. In fact, they warned her, this girl, Nadifa, who's 13, they warned her, if you say you're a Christian and that that's wrong, we'll suspend you for two or three days from school.

You can't say you're a Christian and what the Bible says, or they'll suspend you. So, we have to watch who they're with, and I have to be careful of that, because I failed in that. I went, a lot of tears, a lot of brokenness in here that you don't know about, because I took my eye off of my oldest girl, and she hooked up with someone and met some people right in the church, and I'm running around starting other churches, and we're renting Radio City Musical, and I'm trying to win the world for Christ, and I took my eye off.

Remember that. You keep your eye on your girl. You know who they're with.

And the next thing I know, she put a wall up between me and her, and our friends influenced her, and the next thing you know, we have a two-and-a-half-year-long nightmare. But it all started with that simple verse, bad company corrupts morals. Now, you can't get out of the world.

If you only want to work with Christians, you'll never get a job in New York. If you only want to rub shoulders with Christians, do not ride the number three train or the number four train. No, the Bible doesn't mean that.

That's the old monastic movement. All the monasteries were formed to get people away from the world, because the world was wicked. Jesus said, you're in the world, but you're not of the world.

So bad company corrupts morals. I wonder why Joseph did it. Maybe he did it because it was a fellow Hebrew.

You know, that's how we get blinded. Because they're in our family or from our island, or they're Polish like me. Or they're Puerto Rican.

Or they're Trinidadian. Or you don't understand, that's my posse. That's who I hang with.

I was friends with him before I was a Christian. I wouldn't care if it was your family, my family. Some people are like poison to our lives.

And if you hang with them, they're going to influence you away from God. How many tears in this room would have been spared? How many heartaches? If we weren't just more careful about who we're going

to hang with. So Nadifa told me a good thing.

She has a friend who just lost her mother to breast cancer. Cancer somehow went to her brain from what she told me. And her friend told her, you know what? I'm not ending up like my friends.

I'm going to serve Jesus, telling this girl who comes to our church. I don't care if I have to lose everything. I'm going to follow Jesus.

And you know what? The days are becoming now so dark and horrible that now you're either radical for Jesus or you won't serve Jesus at all. Come on, can we put our hands together and admit that, say that? There's no middle ground. There's no middle ground.

You're either for him or you're against him. That's the way everything's sorting out now as we reach the end of time. So Jehoshaphat, maybe he said it.

You know, I hear people say that all the time. You know, I'm from Haiti and they're from Haiti. I wouldn't care if they're from Mars.

If somebody is bad, they're bad. They're going to have bad influence. Witness to them and then pray for them.

But be careful because Jehoshaphat's about to lose his life because he's running with the wrong people. Listen to that. And this is a godly king.

But just sewing it all together, this is another example of something else that we all have to face. Jehoshaphat, this is not the first time for him. He has what we call a besetting sin, a structural weakness like we all have.

For the Bible tells us at the end of 1 Kings that when Ahab, Jehoram's father was alive who was more wicked according to the Bible, he once called Jehoshaphat and said, I'm going to war. Will you fight with me? And Jehoshaphat who loves God, prays, goes to the temple, worships God, he joins with Ahab. And then like something's wrong with him.

He has like a senior moment long before he's a senior. And he's there and before they go to battle, Ahab says, I got this great idea. I'm going to dress in a disguise in battle.

I'm going to dress like a soldier, but you put on my garments, the real bright ones and frilly ones, and wear the big crown that shines when you go into battle. Like putting a bullseye on them. And you know what Jehoshaphat says? Yeah, it's really good.

Yeah, give me the robe. Oh, and the pretty colors. And he's about to be killed in the battle, but the Bible tells us he cried out to God and God helped him.

And now he's doing it again. What's that an example of? That's an example of a besetting sin, a structural weakness. And we all have them in different areas.

There are some Christian women, they would never use drugs. You mention crack to them, they detest it. But their mouth, they'll kill 20 people in a week.

But listen, and another person who's tempted by crack won't talk about people. I've met drug addicts, minister to them, they will not talk about another person who's not present, they won't do it. It's live and let live with them.

They have more mercy than people go to church sometimes. That's the truth. We all have structural weaknesses.

A lot of it has to do with how we grew up and the life we lived and the grooves of sin that were formed and what we grew up around in the house. There are some people, alcohol, they wouldn't touch, they're afraid of it. Because like myself, my father was an alcoholic for 21, 22 years.

I saw hell on earth in my house because of the drink. But they're racist. They grew up in a racist home.

They got prejudice against, they look down at other people as if they're somebody, when we're all nobody. They look down at black people or black people, racist black people. They look down at white people, look down at Latinos, Asians, say nasty things behind their backs.

And then they go to church and lift their hands to God. They have a structural weakness. They're blind, they don't see it.

We all have blind spots. Asian prejudice, Latino prejudice. Some people won't steal, but they'll lie.

Other people who won't ever lie, you better tie everything down when they visit your house or it might disappear. I had a friend in college who was a kleptomaniac. He stole things he didn't even need.

One day he hauled something into my room. I was 20, 19, 20 years old. And I said, what is that? He said, it's 10 pounds of walnuts.

I said, where did you get that? He said, I stole it. I said, would you steal 10 pounds of walnuts? Do you like them? He said, no, it was just there, I had to take it. That's his weakness.

But brothers and sisters, let's stop laughing as we conclude this. Is that not true? Don't we all have structural weaknesses? Pride, laziness, sloth it's called. Just do nothing.

Wouldn't pick up a Bible if your life depended on it. But got time for everything else. Just blind spots.

No can quote verses, grew up in church. Know how to pray even, but a blind spot. Unsociable, unkind.

We all have blind spots. That's why we have to pray like Jesus taught us every day, Lord, lead us not into temptation but deliver us. And what evil, the one that sticks to us easiest.

Some people sin with their tongue, others their tongue isn't so bad, but their mind is a sewer. Others they defile their bodies. We all have something that's not convenient for us.

So did Joseph. And he was one of the godliest kings. That's the whole point of this story.

This is not a loser. This guy's a winner. But what's he doing there? And it's the second time.

He went out with the guy's father, almost got killed, and now he's with the son. Like, Jehoshaphat, hello? The text message for you, wake up. You're about to die.

Ah, but the story ends this way. You know what? This is so true of human nature. When we make simplistic judgments, we're really doing harm to the truth.

He says, as he's facing death with the other kings, he says, but wait a minute. Can't somebody get a word from the Lord? The Lord can help us. The Lord can help us.

You're the guy who put yourself in this jam. You're the one who didn't pray about it. What are you doing out in the desert with this guy? But that's the way we are.

And you know what? You know what God says? God doesn't say, what? Oh, I'm so happy God isn't people. Anybody here with me? Because what people would do is say, what? Like my aunt, you made your bed. Sleep in it, pal.

You didn't pray about it. How do you like it, dying of thirst? No. You know what God says? I'll help you.

Come on. Isn't the reason we're all here today and praising God is because God's mercy was greater than our weakness. God's love was stronger than our mess-ups.

Isn't that the truth? And we're complex creatures, aren't we? One minute we're calling God as an answer, but before that we weren't even thinking of Him. And God, instead of condemning them and throwing them away, says, no, I'm going to help you. How many times has God done that for me? Didn't pray properly, wasn't submitted to God like I should have been, and instead of turning me away and saying, sorry, I'm tired of your shenanigans.

I'm tired of you not listening. I'm tired of you being Jim Cimbala. Instead of that, God says, I want to help you.

He reminded me again yesterday, babysitting my grandson from Ethiopia, the one adopted for those of you visiting by Pastor Petri and my daughter, Susan. And I'm holding him. He'll be two years old on December 14th.

Y'all better buy him a present on that day. And I'm holding him, and he doesn't understand my love. He can't fathom that.

He's 22 months, 23 months. And I'm just holding him, and I'm just kissing the back of his head, and I'm whispering in his ear, I love you. I love you.

I have such a love for him. I love all my grandkids, but that little boy, I don't know what it is with him and me. No matter what mood I'm in, if he walks in, he just sees me and goes, Papa.

I go, yeah, here's all my money, everything. You can have everything. Just take it.

Here. Credit cards. Buy whatever you want.

And you know what the Lord spoke to my heart yesterday? You think you love him? I love you a million times more. And he loves you a million times more. No matter how messed up, jammed up you are today, no matter what mistakes you've made, if you'll just ask him and humble yourself and say, Lord, I need you today.

Help me. Give me a word. Show me what to do.

Forgive me of my sins. Take away this waywardness, this whatever besetting sin you have. He will help you.

And here's the beautiful part of it. Listen. Listen.

Everyone, focus. The word of the Lord comes to King Jehoshaphat and says this. You will get water.

You won't die of thirst, but listen, you won't see any clouds. There'll be no wind and there'll be no rain, but there'll be water in the morning. In other words, everything you think you need to have the water, I will not give it to you.

I'll just give you the water my own way, because a lot of us, we only believe when it looks like it's going to happen. When the wind is blowing and we're seeing a few clouds, hallelujah. But God says, no, sometimes I'll give you no hints, no helps, no signs.

I'll just do it. Can you trust me? Will you dare to believe me that I'll do it without the way you think it should be done? And to somebody here today, I want to tell you, God's going to take care of your situation. Don't worry how.

Just trust him. Keep your eyes on him. I was telling the church real quick, we were jammed up six, what was it, seven, let's see, 2003.

Two years after 9-11. Oh, I forgot what we were trying to complete. We needed all kinds, hundreds of thousands of dollars, whatever it was, a million dollars.

And someone tells me, I'm bringing my friend to church. He's worth between 700 and 800 million dollars. It's close to being a billionaire.

Not 700,000, 700 million. And he was sitting right over there. And when I heard he was coming, I was going, ooh, yeah.

I could just see all those zeros on that check. And we were jammed up. I said, you know, this is just like God.

I would meet a man almost worth a billion dollars. I've never met anyone. That's the richest man who ever walked in this building that I know of.

He gave nothing. Worse than that, or better than that, God dealt with me. And said, right there while I was praising God, I said, who are you looking at? You looking at him? Is he your source or am I your source? I'll supply it, but not in the way you think.

And God did. But not in the wind and the rain and the clouds that I wanted to see. God's going to help us today.

Close your eyes with me. Close your eyes. If you're here today and you want to acknowledge to God, God, you brought me to the Brooklyn Tabernacle today because you wanted to encourage me with a word.

And that word was the one I needed. Maybe you needed the warning of bad company corrupts morals. Maybe you're getting sucked into something that God's trying to protect you from.

Or maybe you're here and ready to quit and give up. And God's saying, no, trust me. Or maybe you're saying, I've messed up so bad, he'll never listen to me again.

He will listen to you today. His ear is open to your cry. I don't care how many times you've messed up.

His mercy endures forever. God, I was listening today. I heard your word.

I receive it. I'm trusting you. I'm listening to you.

I might have to break off some relationships, but I'll do it. I'll do it. Jesus, thank you for your word to us today.

Save us from bad company that will pull us down. Give us wisdom and discernment. Help us to pray about every decision we make because decisions have repercussions.

Thank you that you don't throw us away when we mess up. Thank you that your ear is always open. Thank you that you're going to help my brothers and sisters here in the front.

You're going to help my sister. You're going to dry these tears coming out of her eyes. You're going to show yourself great on her behalf, Lord, and my other friends here in the front.

Let your face shine upon your people now, Lord. We're happy in you, Lord. We're rejoicing in you, and we're trusting you to hold us in the palm of your hand.

And the blessing of God will be upon us all day. And everyone said, Amen.

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