

Book of Acts Series - Part 33 | Saying Goodbye

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon emphasizes the importance of church leadership, the need for vigilance against false teachings, and the transformative power of the Gospel as Paul bids farewell to the Ephesian elders.

Duration: 45:01

Scripture: Matthew 26:21, Matthew 28:19, Acts 20:27-28, Romans 12:16

Topics: "Book Of Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher praises the choir and acknowledges their dedication and hard work. He emphasizes the importance of having a double standard in the church, where members are expected to dress appropriately and pay attention during sermons. The preacher also shares a story about a couple who were struggling in their ministry because they were not called to do what they were attempting. He highlights the role of a shepherd in protecting and guiding the congregation, warning against individuals who may try to draw disciples to themselves instead of following Jesus. The preacher encourages the congregation to spread the good news of Jesus through conversations and interactions with others.

Transcript

We're gonna continue the series that we started in the book of Acts. And because every single Sunday we have visitors, and I saw quite a few, so we wanna just give you a little update. We've been reading through the book of Acts, not every single verse, but we've been following the story now for months of the birth of the Christian church as recorded by Dr. Luke, who became a convert, it seems, during the missionary travels of the apostle Paul.

And now we have come to Acts 20, where we've been staying for a while because of its deep interest to me, particularly, and I think lessons for all of us. So where are we? Paul the apostle, with different groups of people traveling with him, has completed three missionary journeys. What's a missionary journey? Well, he started in Antioch, in Syria, and the church there sent him out.

The biblical pattern is that a local church sends you out. And then although you meet other Christians, and other Christians are interested, you go out and you then come back and report because they're the ones that have helped maybe finance it and certainly have been praying for you. So upon the completion of every trip, Saul and Barnabas, Saul and Silas, Barnabas, Paul, and Silas, and whoever, they go back to where all the killing is going on now in Syria.

They go back to the church in Antioch. Then they go out on another. What's their goal? Well, back in that day, and it should be the same today, they're trying to spread the message that Jesus commanded them to proclaim, which is go into all the world and preach the gospel.

They're not asking anybody to join a particular church or denomination. Thankfully, no denominations existed back then. The Christians were one.

Ah, wouldn't you have liked to have been back there? Everybody was rooting for each other because there was only one body. That's what Paul taught in Ephesians. There weren't 20 bodies.

So they go out upon the command of Christ to spread the good news. What does that mean? Through conversation, in synagogues, as long as they were open to them, in other public forums, in marketplaces. Not just the apostles, but Christians themselves, the lay people, like all the choir here.

This is the soprano section. Those are tenors. The early church took it upon themselves.

Everywhere they went, they were looking for some place in the conversation to tell people about Jesus. What he had done for them, who he is, and why he died, and the fact that he rose again, that this is the Son of God. This is the Messiah that was promised to Israel.

So as they proclaim that message, that message, the Bible says in Romans 1, is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew and also to the Gentile. There's no two messages. One for Jewish people, one for Gentiles.

So they go and proclaim, and there's power in that message, and when people believe, their lives are transformed, and they fulfill what Jesus said. You must be born again, or born from above, possibly the Greek there could be rendered. Supernatural new beginning of your life.

I trust every one of you that are here, and call yourself Christians. You know what that is, not just going to church, not just what your mom and dad taught you, but that you've had a personal experience with Christ, and you have had a new life. You know a begin.

You know the Spirit of God is dwelling within you. That's what a Christian is, a supernatural new person. Nothing more, nothing less.

That's what a Christian is. So they went out and proclaimed that, and as they went out, they started new churches, because converts were made in the single digits, in the dozens, in the hundreds. Now where are they gonna meet? Well, they're gonna meet in things called local churches.

Jesus said, upon this rock, I'm gonna build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. So all believers make up the body of Christ, which is universal. No one has ever seen all the Christians in one place at one time.

No one's ever seen that. But they're in China, they're in Zimbabwe, they're wherever, and what do they do? They need feeding, they need guidance, they need teaching, they need protection, spiritual protection. So they meet together for encouragement in local assemblies, this is one, and they meet back then for a gathering on the Lord's Day, for sure, which was the first day of the week, not the Jewish Sabbath, but now Sunday, the first day of the week, and at other times for prayer, to study the word of God, and for fellowship and encouragement to find out who's hurting so that they could put their shoulder

to the wheel and help one another.

That's how God, through Christ, organized his people. No more nation of Israel, but something now called, that's the Old Testament, now something called a church made up of Jew and Gentile. Now, how do those meetings operate? How do churches operate? Well, they have leadership.

They have to have leadership, because anything that's gonna flow in a cooperative sense has to have leadership. So God has set in the church spiritually, miraculously, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists. He had five offices that he placed in the church.

Not that we're not all supposed to do evangelism. All of us are an evangelist like Dr. Billy Graham, who's still alive and had an illustrious career as an evangelist. Then there's local evangelists in the church.

They have a special gift that they just share Christ, and things happen. So God has put apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists flowing within the church of Christ, and in the local church, there are leaders. Well, called either pastors, bishops, elders, or presbyters.

We learn that the word bishop in the Greek, or presbyter, or elder, or pastor, all have the same office. They're to shepherd the flock of God, feed them, not be dictatorial, not abuse them, not take advantage of them, but serve them in the same spirit that the great shepherd of the flock exhibited, who is Jesus Christ, our Lord. Well, at the end of his third missionary journey, Paul stops in an island called Miletus, and he calls for the elders, presbyters, pastors, bishops of the church in Ephesus, where he had spent three years.

So who were these men? These were the men that he put in charge, that he recognized that God had gifted to be leaders. No organization can make somebody a pastor. You can call someone a pastor, but according to the New Testament, only God can gift somebody to do that.

Now, they need to be developed, they need to be trained, they need to learn from their mistakes, but all these ministries, God has put in the church. No organization can vote and make somebody a bishop or a presbyter. They can do that and call him, but if he doesn't have the gifting, he's gonna be in a lot of trouble.

This is a very dangerous thing that I've witnessed in South America, where couples have been sent out to areas where there's not much Christian witness. So let me, I used to analyze this all the time. It's done in other places, but I'm thinking now of some countries that I've visited extensively.

So what happens? There's no witness in this town. Well, there's a couple in the church. They're good workers, they're faithful, they've been working with whatever.

So let's lay hands on them and send them out, because there's no witness for Christ in that city. Some witness is better than no witness, isn't it? But a lot of times in that zeal, the question is not asked, are these people called to do this? Is that man called to be a pastor? I'm thinking about a couple right now, I see them. She was single when I met her and used to do some laundry for me while I was a guest in a house, sleeping every night in a little musty office, which had a cot, and she was a worker there at 17, 18 years old, and she would take my laundry and do it because I was there.

And then she met this guy, fell in love, and they went out as workers. I had a burden for them. 25 years later, I thought of them.

So I asked and gave them bus fare to come to meet me in the capital city of that country. And boy, life had been hard on them. And when I talked to them and I said, so how long have you been there in that city? They said, 27 years.

I said, good. How many people do you have in your church? You know, how's it going? They said, eight. I saw he had lost his teeth, had no money, strain on their marriage, problems with the children.

Why? Possibly because he was in a good spirit trying to do something he was never called to do. So to ask somebody to do something that God didn't call them to do, you're not doing that person a favor. How many understand? Say amen.

In other words, we can only do what we're called to do. It's like these are all good singers or they wouldn't be in the choir, but not all of them are a soloist. Not all of them can do what Karen just did.

It's just you have to know what you're gifting is. I've always been puzzled about that and watched and asked a lot of questions down there because the logic of it seems right. Some witness is better than no witness, but yet if you start a church and you're a pastor and you're not called to be a pastor, oh my goodness, it's hard enough to be a pastor if you're called to be a pastor.

Now to be a pastor when you're not called to be a pastor? Oh wow. And some of them, they get off into funny things and strange things. I met another one in that same circle.

I'm not sure he was ever called to be a pastor. So I was asking him a lot of years ago through an interpreter because then I couldn't understand as much as I do now and I can speak a little bit. So I asked him, so how's your church doing? Oh, muy bien.

Todo marchando bien. Gracias, señor, hermano Jim, si. Dios es bueno.

I said, so how's it going? Oh, it's good. On the last Sunday, two weeks ago on Sunday, the angel of the church came to the meeting. So I said to my interpreter who I saw his eyes starting to glaze over, I said, I didn't catch that.

What was that? So I said, brother Jim wants to know, explain. He went, oh no, you know, I'm the angel of the church. You know, the seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation, it says to the angel of the church.

So his understanding was there's an angel for every church. And he says, we know when ours comes. He stops sometimes for just half the meeting, then he leaves, but we know that he's here.

And one time when he left, he left a feather. We found a feather in the back of the church. That's not a joke.

So imagine what those people are being fed. No, think, people that Christ died for. We're talking feathers here.

So Paul now has called for the elders of the church and he is now giving his last speech to them, reminding them of his ministry among them and challenging them to be the right kind of leaders. And although this is directed especially at people like me and pastors around the world, it has valuable truth for all of us. Somehow, through the Holy Spirit, Paul knew that he would never see these people again.

He had spent three years with them and now we're gonna learn he's telling them, I'm never gonna see you again. How did he know that? He just knew that from God. You know, people have known when they were gonna die through the Holy Spirit.

They've said goodbye long before they died because they just had a premonition that they were gonna die. He knows he's never gonna see them again. So let's see what he says.

We're gonna just fast forward through the early part. I have gone about among all of you preaching the kingdom of God and now I know that none of you will ever see me again. So I solemnly declare to you this very day, if any of you should be lost, I am not responsible.

What does he mean? He's referring now back to the book of Ezekiel because God spoke to the prophet Ezekiel and said, if you don't tell the people what they need to know and they suffer it and they live wrong, you'll be guilty with them. That's why the Bible says don't wanna be a leader because leaders have worse judgment on them. I have worse judgment coming on me than you or shall we say a stricter look.

So he's saying to them now, if everything you need to know, I've told you. So if any of you are punished in the end and damned, it won't be because of me. My hands are clean.

How many followers say amen? Because if you hold back part of the Bible, you hold back part of God's truth. Now you're messing with the people. Now you're cheating the people.

And he says, no, I didn't do that. I told you everything about the gospel, about Jesus, everything you need to know. For I have not held back from announcing to you the whole purpose of God.

So keep watch over yourselves and over the flock which the Holy Spirit has placed in your care. Notice, not Paul placed them over them. Who placed them over them? The Holy Spirit.

That's the call of God. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he made his own through the blood of his son. Some translations have through his own blood.

I know that after I leave, now this is a very interesting part of scripture. I know that after I leave, fierce wolves will come among you and they will not spare the flock. The time will come also when some men from your own group will tell lies to lead the believers away after them.

Watch then and remember that with many tears day and night, I taught every one of you for three years. I know that after I leave, somehow by the Spirit, he knew that he not only wouldn't see them again, he says, I know that after I leave, there's gonna be some hard times. Well, why don't you pray and command it not to happen? Couldn't be done.

It's like part of the spiritual equation. No, bind that spirit, bind that thing. Prayer doesn't work that way.

There are things that can be bound and that we can escape and avoid and then there are other things like they that live godly lives will suffer tribulation. You can pray all you want, you're gonna be tribulated from month to month. How many have found that to be true, right? If we suffer with him, we'll reign with him.

No, I'm not gonna suffer. I rebuke that suffering spirit. You can rebuke all you want.

You will suffer as a Christian. This is one of these odd places now where he says, after I leave, there's gonna be some difficult times. No, I don't receive that.

Receive it, it's gonna happen. Notice what's gonna happen. Fierce wolves are gonna come in from the outside, not sparing the flock.

Who those fierce wolves would be? It's not something physical like physical wolves coming in to kill people, but these are spiritual wolves, many times who are dressed in sheep's clothing, but they're wolves who will mislead the people, lead the people away from Christ, take advantage of them monetarily and a lot of other ways. He doesn't elaborate, he just says, they will not spare the flock. If you've ever been around wolves, you do not reason with wolves.

I once had a wolf up in my grill down at the prison there in Louisiana that the warden, my friend, keeps as a pet. We need to pray for that warden because he's got a wolf running around in his yard. And one time he brought him in the house on a leash and his wife didn't appreciate it and I didn't appreciate it even more than she didn't appreciate it because I was trying to eat breakfast and there was a wolf.

And that wolf looked at me and you knew in a second that was no dog, that was not a parakeet, that was a wolf. He said, vicious predatory wolves will come into the church and that has happened for the last 2,000 years, not just in Ephesus, but around the world. How will you know that they're wolves? That's why you have to know your Bible.

You have to know your Bible because then you'll know a wolf, amen? You have to read this more than you read anything else. Meditate on it, not just read it, meditate on it. How will you know what's false unless you know what's true? How will you do that? But then he said another thing.

He says, from your own number, men are gonna arise. Wanting to turn people away from Christ, notice this, and draw away disciples after themselves. So here's the double attack.

Fierce wolves from the outside coming in, not sparing the flock. That's why, he said, you gotta be a good shepherd to protect the church from the wolves. The shepherd protects the sheep from the wolves.

He warns them, he prays over them, he weeps over them. Number two, he said, from your own number, the guys that I'm talking about, like Christ at the Last Supper, knew that one of the 12 would betray him, Judas. He says, some of you guys right here, you're gonna go get bent, you're gonna get skewed, and notice what they're gonna do, draw disciples after themselves.

Instead of following Jesus, they're gonna lift themselves up and say, I'm all that, and follow me. We have hints of that all the way through church history, and we have it today happening, where the congregations are more into the preacher than they are into Jesus. They read the guy's book more than they read the Bible.

They're quoting the minister more than they're quoting Jesus. They're hero worshipers following some man rather than Christ, and some of the ministers play to that. They call themselves high and mighty names, and they carry on like they're above the people, and people become followers of them.

So when you ask somebody, how you doing in your walk with the Lord? Oh, I go to pastor, bishop, so and such church. What's that got to do with Jesus? So those were the warnings, and then he gives himself in as an example. You remember that from three years, both publicly and privately.

Individually, with tears, I warned you, and I taught you the best I knew how. So follow my example. Don't be high and mighty.

Be low. You know, I wanna just share this verse with you. I read it in my devotions this week.

At the end of Romans, the Bible says this to all Christians. Learn to associate with lowly people. That's a good rule for all of us, because we live in a society of celebrity.

You know, like who do you know? How much money do they make? What degrees do they have? And the Bible says, if you wanna really exemplify Christ, associate with lowly people, poor people, non-entities. Learn to do that and appreciate it, because to God, everybody's the same. Associate with lowly people.

That means not that they're lowly and below anyone. It's just that society reckons them that way. I get very uncomfortable when I'm around people who only name drop who they know and where they went and who they're with.

You know, Jesus had a friend. Do you have any friends called this? Jesus had a friend that he went to eat at his house called Simon the leper. I'm so glad Jesus had friends called Simon the leper.

Paul says, you remember how I was. Now you do that, too. And now comes the one verse I wanna end on and talk about.

I'm gonna give it to you in two translations. The NIV and then the Good News translation. So look at it.

Now I commit you to God. Not gonna see you again, ever. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace.

Which, what's which? The word of his grace. Which can build you up, strengthen, edify you, and give you an inheritance. Make sure you get everything, every blessing that God planned for those who are sanctified.

Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Now the Good News translation. And now I commend you to the care of God and to the message of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you the blessings God has for all his people.

He's never gonna see them again. They're gonna miss their main guy, the guy who ordained them, the guy that discerned that God's hand was on them, the guy who built the church, the guy who risked his life in Ephesus, the guy who had an encounter with Jesus Christ years before on the road to Damascus, the man who is gonna rewrite a good part of the New Testament, which they didn't know anything about back then. That man will never be seen by them again and he says to them as a farewell, a godly farewell.

That's the name of this message, saying goodbye. He's saying goodbye to them, never gonna see him again. So now I'm interested, what's he gonna do? They've lost their supervisor, their superintendent, their overseer, they're losing everything now in terms of him leaving.

So listen to what he says. Is this language that you and I are familiar with? So now I commit you to God. My hands are off you now.

I can't, God's got other plans for me. I commit you to God and to the word of his grace. Not to his word, to the word of his grace.

I commit you to God and the word of his grace, which that word is able to build you up. It'll keep you strong. And by dwelling and meditating and living in that word of his grace, you're gonna inherit all the blessings that God has planned for his people.

So let's just sign off with that. Let's look at it. So now I commit you to God.

What's that mean to us? In other words, Paul is saying, I'm leaving and you won't have me to look to, but you're gonna have God to look to. And just like I've helped you in the past, he's gonna help you even more in the future. Just like you brought your questions to me, now you're gonna have to bring your questions to him.

Because I'm committing you to his care, his supervision. I'm out of here. I did my thing for three years, but now you won't see me.

So I commit you to God. You know, men are fine, but in the end, and women are fine, but in the end, you can't live your life unless you have a relationship with God. Unless you have a walk with Jesus, no minister can help you through it.

Ministers can do their part. A prayer partner can do their part. But you cannot put your eyes on the minister or the prayer partner or the mother or their father, because when the devil attacks you one day, none of them will be around, and you're gonna have something with God.

Come on, let's say amen to that. You gotta have a communion with God. You have the relationship with Christ, but more than a relationship.

You gotta have a walkie talkie relationship with Jesus Christ. Just Paul's saying here, just like you would come to me and ask me questions, go to him and ask him questions now, because I'm committing you to him. Just like you came when your heart was broken to me and you stumbled and you fell and I ministered to you, now you're gonna go to him, because I'm not gonna be around.

But you got someone better than me. You have Christ. You have almighty God to go to.

You can't lean on people. You know the Bible says, lean not upon your own understanding. Don't lean upon another person either, because they can disappoint you.

They can die. They can move. They can backslide.

You gotta have something with God. If we all do our jobs, we're trying to get you not dependent on us, but dependent on God. We're happy to counsel you.

You that are watching me, talk to your pastor. Have brothers and sisters in Christ that you pray with, but in the end, when push comes to shove, in the day of evil, you gotta have a walk with God. You gotta have a relationship with God.

Come on, let's all say amen to that. People come, people go. But God endures forever.

Come on, haven't we all had times where we went to someone who we thought would help us? They not only didn't help us, they made it worse. You haven't had that happen to you? I have. I've had some wonderful men and women who have helped me in my life, starting with my mom and dad.

And then my late father-in-law, who had a very powerful effect on my life. But he went and had a heart attack, and now he's with the Lord. So what am I gonna do? If I was only leaning on him, what's gonna happen to me? Everything you lean on, sooner or later, will be shaken.

So that you're gonna be left with nothing, but your walk with God. And if you have no walk with God, no talking to God, no listening to God, no spending time in God's word, if you don't have a walk with God, but you go to the tab on Sunday, how will that make it in the day of trouble? Just tell me. How in the world will you make it when trouble comes? And then you'll call, oh, I gotta talk to Pastor Cimbala.

You know, we have a hard time sometimes handling some calls, because people call and say, they call in my office, I gotta talk to Pastor Cimbala. Well, I am not talking to anybody else but Pastor Cimbala. Nobody else.

He's the man of God. Don't do that, because for sure I'm gonna refer you to another pastor. Who in the world is Pastor Cimbala? When the devil pot on your tail, oh, I'll do what I can do.

But come on, let's be real. Let's do real talk. You gotta have something from God.

Otherwise, you're gonna be crippled your whole life. Looking at men, look, I gotta be counseled, I gotta be counseled, I gotta be counseled, I gotta be counseled. You've been doing this for 30 years, and you're still being counseled.

When are you gonna get to the place where you can counsel others who are new in the Lord? That's a good point. Come on, let's say amen to that. And I wanna give public praise to God, because see this choir? This is the best choir my wife's ever had.

This is the best choir she's ever had. These are soldiers. I've watched them.

I saw what they went through when they went down to D.C. and sang at the inauguration. I'm not talking about music now. You know, she interviews them, then I interview them.

They go through, we go through a lot of stuff, and then they learn, you know, there's a double standard in our church. People can dress sensually and do all that stuff out there and read the Sunday Times while I'm preaching, but you can't do that up here. Right, isn't that the drill we went through? We have a double standard.

You're here to minister to the people, so you're not allowed to be in a mood. Oh, some of you in the balcony, you're in a mood today, right? You're hardly, you can't even wait to get out. Not them.

Not them. They're not, am I right? No mood's allowed. And you're not allowed to roll your eyes when she's directing.

And the practice gets late. No body language, no shifting the weight. None of that, no.

Because my wife's very, very sensitive. And if just like 5% would roll their eyes and everyone has two eyes that they'd be rolling, that's a lot of rocking and rolling of eyes going on. And then she'll be distracted and now we won't have a good practice for the Lord Jesus Christ.

So you're not allowed to have a mood. We don't care what you went through. We'll pray with you, but when you get up here, you'll like every song and you'll sing your heart out because someone just walked

in the building.

Wait, wait, wait, wait. Someone just walked in the building. They just tested positive HIV.

So they think they have a death sentence on them. And maybe we'll have one shot to get them. And God could use your music to open their hearts to the Lord.

So you can't be in a mood. When somebody comes in my office and a woman needs to be prayed for, I can't think for a second whether Fayola or Karen are in a good mood that day. They will be in a good mood that day.

I can't be maneuvering around their little petty moods or anything, which they don't have because we're doing God's work. You gotta get to a place when you're above all of that, where you have a walk with God, where you wanna be a blessing to others and not just help me, help me, bless me, bless me. You gotta get to another place.

Come on, let's all say amen to that. Amen to that. That is the best choir she's ever had.

These are soldiers. These are soldiers. And they're not allowed to talk about one another.

We let one of the choir members go about six, eight months ago because we found out they were talking, causing trouble. See, you all can talk out there. How are we gonna spot all of that? But you can't talk in the choir, talk about someone who's not present, spread gossip.

Oh, if we learn of that, we're coming. Why? How in the world are you gonna pray and practice and practice and pray and say God anoint us and then be grieving God by gossip and slander and all of that? Does that make any sense to anybody here? Why even do it? So Paul says, I commit you to God. You gotta grow up now in God.

You gotta have, you gotta get your props from God. And then finally to the word of his grace. And that word of his grace is able to build you up and make sure you inherit everything God has for you.

So he said two things. I commit you to God. He's gonna care for you.

Now walk with him. I say that to all of you. Can I help you? I wanna help you.

We wanna help you. I got the best pastors, associate pastors in the universe. No doubt about that.

No one like them. Got the best deacons. Got the best prayer band leaders and deaconesses.

But do you think we can walk your life through? No, we can't. I can't be with you on Wednesday at 6 p.m. Thursday morning, five o'clock when you get up. How in the world am I gonna be there? God's gonna take care of you.

And to the word of his grace. Not to his word. To the word of his grace.

So what is grace? What Paul is saying now is, he said this is what I want you to live in. This is what I want you to meditate on. Not that many Christians live in the word of his grace.

I have had years of my life where I was not living in the word of his grace. I was a Christian, loved the Lord, a pastor. But living in the word of his grace, being controlled, the atmosphere of my mind, the word

of his grace, the word of his grace.

No, no, no, no, no. So I wanna say something to help you as we dismiss. What is grace? Well, it's a hard word to define.

Let me give you some definitions. One definition of grace is God's unmerited favor. What is that the opposite of? Earning.

God's gonna do for you, not because you've been that way. He's gonna do for you because he loves you. He saves you not because you've been good, but because he loves you.

And you've put your faith in his son. It's unmerited favor. Every morning Paul says to these guys, I want you to wake up and realize whatever God's gonna do for you, believe it, receive it, be expected, not because of what you've done.

Don't look back and say, do I deserve this? Because we deserve nothing. If you're looking in and you're looking back, you're not gonna get what the blessings God wants you to have. Dwell in the word of his grace.

Unmerited, unmerited. I'm here, I wanna bless you. When my grandchildren, when Levi, my grandson, walks in my office, for those of you visiting, oh, so sweet.

Adopted by my son-in-law and daughter from Ethiopia through almost four years ago. When he walks in my office, he's not thinking anything. Well, have I been good? Did I do good in preschool? Did I keep my room? Was I naughty this week? When he walks into Papa's office, it's just hands out.

Come on, Papa. Where's the lollipops? Where's, come on, Papa. He's dwelling in the word of Papa's grace.

Am I right or wrong? But we're not like that. Because all legalists by birth, so did I pray enough, did I study the word enough, did I, you think you're gonna get to a place where God's gonna say, all right, now I'll give you something, never. Because then it won't be a gift.

Then you'll have earned it. Then he won't get the praise. You'll walk around and say, I did it.

Never, God won't give anybody anything except by grace. Oh, hallelujah. Can we say amen to that? He won't give anything except by grace.

Let's go one step further. Another definition of grace that's helped me over the years is this. Grace is God doing for you what you can't do for yourself.

God's grace means he does for you what you can't do for yourself. You're unable to do it. You can't get over that mountain.

But you just look to him and he lifts you and brings you over the mountain. You're gonna die in that trial. He says, no, you won't die.

I'm gonna bring you through the trial. I'm gonna do things for you that you can't do. So then instead of trying and stressing, Paul says, no, I commit you to the word of his grace.

Just relax and trust him. Song the choir used to sing. They better bring that song back.

He will do it for you. Why? Because he loves you. I don't give one thing to Levi because he deserves it.

I do everything I do for Levi because I love him to bits. I love him. If he's bad, I love him.

If he gets really bad, I love him more. Come on, how many know what I'm talking about? When love controls your heart, you love. Even if someone breaks your heart, when you love them, you keep reaching for them.

If they ignore you and don't respond, you don't stop loving? None of us would've got saved. Did we all run to Jesus or did he come after us? Come on. Deaconess Sylvia Glover came in this building and was living a life where she thought she was so far from God that she thought if she walked in the building, the roof would come down just by her walking in it.

But God didn't wanna hurt her. God wanted to save her. God loves you.

Paul is saying now, listen, you gotta dwell and live in the word of his grace. Unmerited favor and he will do it for you. Don't stress trust.

Don't run, rest. He will do it for you. He said I'm committing you to that word of grace, the word of his grace.

Unmerited favor, him doing for you what you can't do for yourself. But I don't have the money to pay those bills. All right, now you're in the driver's seat.

Because when you can't do it, you're gonna look to God. Don't you get it? The trials of life, unemployment, struggles, that happens, God permits it. So we'll learn how great he is, how loving he is, so that he'll get all the glory and praise.

Come on, can we say amen to that? That's the word of his grace. But really, what's the ultimate love, what's the ultimate word of his grace? It's Jesus. Paul is saying I'm committing you now to God and the word of his grace.

Wake up talking Jesus. Wake up looking to Jesus. If he died for you, listen to me, those of you that are in guilt right now.

If he died for you when you didn't know him 2,000 years ago, what do you think he feels about you now that you're reaching to him? You had nothing to draw him. Were you a nice person? I wasn't, you weren't. He loves us independent of us.

Paul says that word of grace, if you live in it, it will build you up. So when the devil comes, instead of reasoning with him, you'll say get out of here in the name of Jesus. You're right about those accusations, some of them, but Jesus paid it all.

Jesus paid it all. Satan, get behind me. Come on, let's say amen one more time.

Jesus paid it all. Jesus loves me. Someone ignores you, someone acts ugly toward you, but then you can say the word of his grace, he loves me.

He's with me. I'll never be alone. And when I stumble, he'll pick me up.

Oh, praise God. That's the word of his grace that he wants us to live in. Paul says I commit you to God and to the word of his grace.

I especially have a burden today for anyone who's being attacked by guilt because you've messed up and you've sinned. And you may be entrapped in something. Oh, the devil comes in.

The accuser, the accuser. And even though you repented of it, and you don't want to go that way, you think he lets go? No, he tells you you're not sincere enough. You got to pay some penance.

You got to do the stations of the cross or something. No, you don't. All you have to do is sing grace, grace.

God's grace. When we all get to heaven, you think anyone's going to be strutting when we get to heaven? We're going to walk in like this. Worthy is the lamb.

Worthy, worthy, worthy, worthy is the lamb. No one's going to walk in, I preached, I wrote a book, I was a prayer warrior. No one's going to even say those words.

To him who sits on the throne and to the lamb, be glory and honor and praise. Close your eyes. The devil's attacking you.

Those watching on the webcast, if the enemy's attacking you and you're living in the basement, sub-basement, no joy, no peace, you know why? Because you're not abiding in the word of his grace. The word of his grace will lift you up. Ah, you're looking inside to find something.

Inside your life, some performance, some good feeling, some spirituality, you'll look forever. You'll never find it. Only the word of his grace will strengthen you.

Saved by grace, kept by grace, victorious by grace, everything is receiving, receiving, receiving. But I'm not worthy. I know, neither am I, but let's get it anyway.

He's offering it. If you're attacked or going through a time of discouragement and condemnation, the enemy's bringing up stuff that happened 20 years ago, 20 months ago, 20 days ago. Hold on to that word of his grace.

If you're in that situation, just stand up where you are seated. Don't come forward, just stand up. Anybody in the balcony, anyone downstairs? That's it, right here in the auditorium, just stand up and say, pastor, that was for me, but I am standing on the word of his grace today.

Ooh, the word of his grace. He loves me. Satan, you're a liar.

Get out of here. I'm gonna trust in Jesus. Anybody else wanna stand? Because that's it, I'm gonna just say one prayer, especially for you.

Father God, I lift up my brothers and sisters that are standing. I've been there, I know that, been there, done that. Help them to be strong in the Lord Jesus today.

Not strong in themselves, strong in the word of his grace. Depending on his unmerited favor, relying that he will do what they can't do for themselves. Can a leopard change their spots? Lord, you said in your word, can a leopard change their spot? Can we be different than we are without you doing it? Never.

So we stop trying to fix our broken wagon, and we ask you to do a supernatural work within us. Make us what you want us to be. Not because we're worthy, but because you are love and full of grace.

Lord, help all of us to have a deeper walk and relationship with you. Even as Paul committed the elders, I commit you to God and to the word of his grace. And now may the grace of God and the fellowship of the spirit and the love of Jesus Christ be with all of God's people today.

God would grant every one of my brothers and sisters before me and behind me the shalom of God. Let perfect peace and blessing rest on us today. Not because we deserve it, but because you are the God of all grace.

You are the God of not just grace, of all grace. All blessing, all love, all mercy. All patience.

We thank you for it. Help us to love each other. Help us to encourage each other now.

We pray in Jesus' name. And everyone said.

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