

Waiting Out the Storm

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon 'Waiting Out the Storm' by Jim Cymbala emphasizes the importance of endurance and faith in the face of persecution and difficult times, and warns against the dangers of false teaching and the pursuit of happiness and prosperity on earth.

Duration: 46:30

Scripture: Matthew 24:6

Topics: "Waiting"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of staying true to the teachings of the Bible and not succumbing to the temptation of telling people what they want to hear. He warns against false teachers who will cater to people's desires and promote legends and made-up stories instead of the truth. The preacher encourages Timothy, who is a pastor, to endure suffering, preach the good news, and fulfill his duty as a servant of God. He also emphasizes the need for every church to be a soul-winning church, with everyone sharing the message of Jesus. The sermon concludes with a reminder of the challenges in the world and the church, including anarchy and rebellion against authority, as well as apostasy and the departure from biblical doctrines.

Transcript

So let's open God's word. I'd like to start by introducing my remarks. Wading Through the Storm.

And it kind of relates to the book I wrote, Wading Out the Storm. If you went to a travel agent, and he was trying to sell you on 10 days to an island in the Caribbean or in the Mediterranean, and you had never been there or didn't hear much about it, and you said, so what's it like? Oh listen, you're going to be gone for 10 days. But let me tell you how it'll be.

First of all, you're going to fly out of Kennedy. You're going to be on this airline. Their food is terrible.

In fact, they might not even serve you food if you're in coach. They're going to just give you some peanuts, and they're stale, they're not even good peanuts. And then you're going to get there, well what's the weather like? It rains most all the time there where you're going to go.

And the hotel, it's got a nice view, but the bathrooms really aren't that clean. And if they were talking like that to you, you would say, what kind of marketing is this? Do you want me to buy the ticket? Do you want

me to go? Anybody would say, that's terrible marketing. If you want to sell a piece of property, you want to sell a trip, you want to sell a car, you tell people, hey, it's the best, it's the bomb.

This is, you've never had anything like this. You'll love everything about it, there's no downside. No negatives, there is no downside.

But of course we know in life, there are downsides to some things. And certain things have a very real difficult part. And if people are honest, they can't market it, or else they would be guilty of false advertising if they left out some parts.

For example, a lot of years ago, at Erasmus Hall High School, I was an all-city basketball player and recruited by some schools. But because I had skipped a grade, the schools that were interested in me wanted me to catch up and play against guys my own age. So they said, you got to go to prep school for a year.

We think that's best. And the school that recruited me strongly was the United States Naval Academy. And because I was a kind of off-the-wall Brooklyn kid, and my parents knew that I was a little bit out there, they thought, wow, a military school under lock and key and with a uniform? Yeah, you get the idea, I can tell.

This is a safe place for our son to be. I went to prep school for a year. And while I was there, I met people who, of course, were going to go into the Naval Academy with me.

It was a great prep school in Silver Spring, Maryland. I was then talked to by people at the Naval Academy, the coaches, they dummied up an appointment for me from some senator or congressman in Utah, because that's what you need, and I couldn't get it from New York. But I was there to play basketball, but it didn't matter that I was there to play basketball.

The Naval Academy is the Naval Academy. When you graduate after four years, you're going to be an ensign in the United States Navy, and you're going to have the distinction of being one of the 3,800 of the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, where all these famous people went, and so on and so forth. So what happened was I would talk to these guys, and they were telling me, now you know what you're getting involved in.

The Naval Academy is going to give you a phenomenal education, it's free, it's paid for by the government. And we want you to know that when you graduate, you're not only going to be an ensign, you're going to have a degree from the United States Naval Academy. And that is a ticket to a lot of excellent things in life, because there's not that many graduates.

And to go through that kind of discipline, and to go through that kind of difficulty, and withstand it, but it's not going to be easy. Here's what it is. You will graduate, but the first year is going to be like this.

You're going to have to go there at the end of June, and you're going to have to go through plebe summer, which is July and August. You're going to go through July and August with just plebes there, and a couple upperclassmen. And upperclassmen mean guys that are sophomores, juniors, or seniors, except they're called third classmen, second classmen, first classmen.

So you're going to go through that, and you're going to have to learn how to get a military bearing. You're going to have to learn how to shine your shoes. You're going to have to get up every morning at 6.15 at the latest, and you're going to have to learn how to wear your uniform and how to stand.

You're going to learn how to eat properly. You're going to be in the largest mess hall in the world that feeds 3,800 people at once. And you're going to learn how to handle a rifle, and you're going to learn all of these things.

And you're going to be tested physically. They're going to make you jump off a diving board that just is very, very high, and you're going to be forced to swim, and show that you can swim and a lot of other things. And you're going to learn how to tie knots and all that kind of stuff.

But then the worst is going to come. The upperclassmen return in September, and then you're going to go through what is called plebe year, the first year as a freshman, and they're going to haze you, and they're going to try to break you, and they're going to yell at you, and you have to obey everything they say. Ours is not to reason why, ours is but to do or die.

You need immediate obedience to every order. If they say jump down and do 65 push-ups, you're going to do 65 push-ups. If they spit in your face, you're not going to do anything except, thank you, sir, yes, sir.

You're going to have to sit at a meal on the front three inches of your chair, braced up. You can never look around, and you're going to have to lift your spoon and eat square meals like this, sitting on just the front three inches, braced up with your neck in like that, and they're going to be firing questions at you and yelling at you, and you're going to have to know the answer by the next meal, or you're going to get put on report, and you're going to be in trouble, and they're going to make you come around to their rooms at 6.20, which means you're going to have to get up at five o'clock and shine your shoes, and when you walk in their room, they might say go back and put on a different uniform, and you're going to have to race back and in. They're going to try to break you down, and you're not going to get much sleep, and sometimes, which happened to me, and I saw it in classrooms when we were studying some math course, the tendency was to fall asleep because you're under such stress and strain, because these guys can walk in your room and mess up your day, and some of them just get a dislike for you.

They don't like New York. Then they find out you're from Brooklyn. They don't like Brooklyn at all.

Now they're on your tail now, and you can't avoid them. They are looking for you, every moment is just stress. In classrooms, you're falling asleep, so I saw guys, professors would say stand up.

If you're going to fall asleep, stand up so you don't fall asleep, because if you don't learn, you'll flunk your class. If you flunk your class, you're going to be tossed out of the Naval Academy and then have to go home and explain why you couldn't make it, which nobody wants to do, so I saw guys not only stand up, but I saw a guy fall asleep standing up, which I had never seen before. He crashed down, almost busted his head open.

I saw other people biting themselves to stay awake because the pain would keep them awake for a certain amount of seconds, so you'd see guys just chomping down on their own hands to stay awake, just stress, stress, stress, but then when plebe summer is over, you're going to make it through that, which everyone has had to do it. You'll be then a sophomore, and then there'll be nothing of that kind of hazing. Then you'll be a junior, and if you want, you can torment the plebes that are in the school then.

Then you're going to graduate, and you're going to be an ensign, and so on and so forth, and that's just the way it is. We're going to tell you the truth. There's a great end to it, and there's great prestige, but there's plebe summer.

There's plebe year. It's hard. Oddly, Christianity has the same kind of approach of truth in advertising.

There's no marketing anywhere in the Bible. Jesus, nor his apostles that followed him, never sold Christianity. They never made it sleek and glossy, and like, this is beautiful, with no downside.

No, the forgiveness of our sins is promised. How many say thank you, Jesus? Amen, and God will be faithful, and he will be with us, faithful to the end, that all things will work together for good to them that love God. There's a heaven awaiting us, and that should this place be blown up while I'm speaking, we know where we're going, amen? And we're not going there for a few years.

This is not 10 days in St. Lucia. This is heaven forever. How many are looking forward to going home to heaven? But there's the journey.

There's the journey, and the Bible is very honest about the fact that endurance is needed, and it gives us warnings, so we won't be surprised or thrown off guard about some of the things that will go down in between the two comings of Jesus. His virgin birth through Mary, which we celebrate at Christmastime, and his second coming. These are the two pivot points in God's view of history.

His first coming, and now he's coming again. Now, many die before he comes again, but that's another way of his coming to you when you die. Everything is gonna be resolved then, but then he's gonna come when one generation is alive here on the earth, and it could be ours.

So watch what Jesus and others say about the difficult side of it, so you'll be ready for plebe summer. You'll be ready for plebe year. We won't be thrown off.

Let's look at Matthew 24. Jesus answered, watch out, and don't let anyone fool you. Many men claiming to speak for me will come and say, I am the Messiah, and they will fool a few people.

No, what? Many people. You are going to hear the noise of battles close by and the news of battles far away, but don't be troubled. Such things must happen, wars and rumors of wars, but they do not mean that the end has come.

Countries will fight each other. Kingdoms will attack one another, and there will be famines and earthquakes everywhere. In another account of this same talk, it says that new and strange diseases will appear, pestilence.

All these things are like the first pains of childbirth when the woman gets her first sign that the baby's gonna be born. Then you will be arrested. What a way to sign up people to be your followers.

And then you will be arrested. Oh, great, this is great news. Then you will be arrested and handed over to be punished and be put to death.

That will be the course for some Christians. Everyone will hate you because of me. Many will give up their faith at that time.

They'll say, I'm caving, I can't do this. They will betray one another and hate one another. Then many false prophets will appear and fool many people.

Such will be the spread of evil that many people's love will grow cold. Even his own followers will say, listen, this stuff is so nasty and ugly, I don't wanna know about people. Their love will grow cold.

But whosoever holds out to the end will be saved. And this good news, the gospel about the kingdom will be preached through all the world for a witness to all people. And then the end will come.

Much of this applied locally to what they would go through up until 70 AD. Let's say Jesus said this in the year 35 AD. Let's just round off numbers.

35 years later, the Romans came in and destroyed the temple and Christians escaped because they listened to what Jesus had told them. And there was a lot of stuff happening in that period of time. But obviously, this has relevance to the very end because it says, and then the end shall come.

So there's probably a double application. So what does Jesus tell us here? Because I don't wanna go into detail. I wanna get to how do we weather the storm? How do we wait out the storm? So he says, there's gonna be wars and rumors of wars.

Not maybe, not possibly, take it to the bank. There will be wars and rumors of wars. Imagine, Jesus said this 2,000 years ago.

And boy, has it not come true. And right now today, with all the education we have and all the peace movements that have gone before us, people are being buried alive, children being crucified. So there's wars and rumors of wars.

He then talks about the fact that there will be persecution to his own believers. You're gonna be hated, people will not like you. You're not gonna fit into the world system.

Neither did I fit into the world system. That's what Jesus is saying. You'll be hated by all men for my sake, because of my name.

There will be diseases, there will be earthquakes, there will be signs, physical signs, rocking and rolling on the earth. Physical phenomena will be accentuated. Then he talks about the fact that among his own people, many will give up the faith because the pressure will be so much, they're gonna say, hey, I'm done with this, I'm out.

Then he says, even those that stay close to him and follow him, days will get so evil that it'll crush their love for humanity, and they're gonna get hard, and a wall will go up blocking their compassion, and instead of weeping over people, they're gonna be mad at folks. That's what Jesus said would happen. What kind of advertising is that, to be his follower? This is why whenever you hear Christianity marketed by the prosperity teachers or others, just serve Jesus, and you're gonna drive a Bentley, and all of that foolishness.

It's total denial of the word of God. But Peter goes further and says something else we need to take into account. Let's look at it.

Peter says in 2 Peter, first of all, you must understand that in the last days, some people will appear whose lives are controlled by their own lusts or desires. They will make fun of you and will ask, he promised to come, didn't he? Where is he? Our ancestors have already died, but everything is still the same as it was since the creation of the world. The NIV has, as King James has, there will come mockers.

This is another kind of truth in advertising. If you're gonna follow Jesus, you're gonna be made fun of. This was said 2,000 years ago.

How would they know that? How would they know that Christianity would be a religion that people would make fun of? How do they know that? Because they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. You will be mocked and made fun of. Do you wanna fit in with the world? You wanna be liked by everybody? You wanna be cool, thought cool, and part of the crowd? You can't be a Christian.

Oh no, you can't. They're gonna mock you and make fun of you. You can say the most ridiculous stuff on television and in the media, people accept it, even if you say two and two is five.

You just mentioned Jesus, how many know what's gonna happen? There'll be a mocking, there'll be a change, it's happened to me, but you will be made fun of. You will be mocked. So if you wanna be in with the world and down with the world, and you wanna fit in with everybody, Jesus is telling us here, no, you follow me, you follow Christ, you're gonna be mocked and made fun of, and people are gonna say, where's his coming? He didn't come yet, where's his coming? And when they say that, they're fulfilling something said 2,000 years ago, but now worse.

Remember, the upside is peace that the world can't take away. Joy unspeakable and full of glory. All things work together for good to them that love God.

I will lead you and I will guide you. And when you close your eyes the final time or when I come, you are gonna go home to your reward. Your reward is not here on earth.

If you're looking for payoff here on earth, Christianity's not the religion for you. Because here we have a fight. Am I right or wrong here? Here we have a battle.

This is according to scripture. I'm not making this stuff up. But worse and more insidious is Paul in the last letter that he writes says two different things about the last days.

And it's worse because it's not about earthquakes and famine and pestilence and Ebola-like things and ISIS. It's about within the church among the Christians. There's also warnings about that in the last days.

Let's look, 2 Peter 3. Remember that there will be difficult times in the last days. Why would he say that? Yo, Paul, sell the thing. Sell the thing.

Don't be talking so honestly. Some are gonna back away. He doesn't care.

Remember that there will be difficult times in the last days. People will be selfish, greedy, boastful, and conceited. They'll be insulting, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, and irreligious.

They will be unkind, merciless, slanderers, always talking, violent and fierce. They will hate the good. They will be treacherous, reckless, and swollen with pride, huge egos.

They will love pleasure rather than God. They'll wanna have a good time rather than worship God. They will hold, here's the killer.

They will hold to the outward form of our religion but reject its real power. Keep away from such people. In other words, these folks are not out in the world talking trash.

These people are in the church. They have a form of godliness. They seem like they're devoted to the truth but they know nothing of the power of Christ to change their life, to make them more like Christ.

So Paul says this is gonna be a difficult day because folks are gonna have religion without God, religion without Christ, Christianity without Christ, or they'll be talking about Jesus but it won't be the Jesus of the Bible. They'll be making up other Jesuses. White Jesus, black Jesus, prosperity Jesus, whatever.

Jesus wants you happy. That's his main thing in life is just to make you happy. He said this is difficult times because this will be happening within the body of Christ, within the visible church.

And then in the last chapter, as we call it, that Paul wrote, it's the end of his letter, in 2 Timothy 4, he goes even further and pushes the envelope to this. Timothy, the time will come when people will not listen to sound doctrine, he's talking about in the church now, but will follow their own desires and will collect for themselves, what are they collecting? Not stamps, more and more teachers who will tell them what they are itching to hear. Notice, more and more teachers who will tell them what they are itching to hear and the teachers will respond to that.

They'll know the itch and they'll scratch it. They'll give them what the people wanna hear. They will turn away from listening to the truth and give their attention to legends, made up stuff.

But you must keep control of yourself in all circumstances, Timothy. Endure suffering, do the work of a preacher of the good news and perform your whole duty as a servant of God. As for me, the hour has come for me to be sacrificed.

It's gonna die. The time is here for me to leave this life. I have done my best in the race.

I have run the full distance and I have kept the faith. And now there is waiting for me the victory prize of being put right with God, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day. And not only to me, but to all those who wait with love for him to appear.

Now boy, you talk about straight talk, but that's what you want when you go to a doctor. Right? If you got some signs of Ebola now and you go in to a doctor, do you wanna hear the truth or do you wanna hear what you wanna hear? No doctor, don't tell me the truth. Just tell me everything's okay.

No doctor, I don't wanna hear anything negative stuff. I'm paying you a lot of money for this appointment. Do not tell me negative stuff.

No, I took a Hippocratic oath. I have to give you the truth. This is what the truth speaking is here of the scripture.

So Matthew 24, lot of stuff happening in the world and among God's people. People folding their tent and walking away. In second Peter, we see their last day, mockers will come.

You're gonna serve Jesus? You're not gonna be popular all the time. You'll have the body of Christ to get support from. You'll have peace and joy inside, but it can get real hostile out there.

It can get real hostile. Paul in his last letters, what does he tell us? He tells us that things are gonna be bad because there's gonna be a fake Christianity. There'll be people whose lives have never been changed, but they just go to church.

They have a form of godliness. They have a form of religion. Listen up everybody, starting with the speaker.

They have a form of religion. They go to church, but they're strangers to the power of God. They've never had that born again, life changing thing where they become a new creation in Jesus Christ.

But they have a form of religion. This is what makes it so insidious and deceptive. And then finally, he says, people are gonna have itching ears.

They don't wanna hear the truth. People do not wanna hear the truth. So they're gonna, rather than stop going to church, they're gonna get people who will tell them what they wanna hear.

They're gonna make up their own religion. It'll have Jesus in it, but it won't be the Jesus of the Bible. It's gonna be a mixture of a lot of stuff.

And teachers will cash in on it because they'll give the people what they wanna hear, most times to get money from them. But you, Timothy, you be strong. You be a good soldier.

Endure suffering if you have to. Do the work of an evangelist. Keep telling people about Jesus.

Endure hardship. Because remember, my time is ending now and I'm gonna receive my reward. And remember, brothers and sisters, one second into eternity, and you won't remember any of the junk down here.

You think you're going through something and it's hard? Listen, Paul says, what we go through here, it's not even worthy to be compared in the same sentence for the glory that's waiting for us up in heaven. Come on, how many say amen to that by clapping your hands? Like those guys that told me about plebe summer and plebe year. Jesus, Paul, it's all in with the truth they're gonna tell us.

So what are some prescriptions here that we have from the scripture? Someone once said, I just read it in the last month, a great spiritual writer, he said, the way the Bible sums things up is in the end times, here's what's gonna be. Anarchy in the world. Anarchy in the world.

Rebellion against all authority, fussing, fighting, wars, rumors of war, anarchy. In the nominal church, apostasy. People moving away from the doctrines of the Bible and making up new stuff.

Many times in the name of being relevant. We gotta be relevant. But you can't be so relevant that you change what God said.

How many say amen? That's not relevancy, that's foolishness. Anarchy in the world, apostasy in the nominal church, and then even among the choir and the pastors and the congregations, apathy. This has to be guarded against.

The love of most will wax cold. They're gonna lose their fervor for Jesus. They believe in him, they've had an experience with him, but it's so easy to lose your fervor.

Am I right or wrong? And to lose your love for people, like you don't wanna hear it anymore. You don't wanna hear it anymore. I've had that, I confess to God and before you, God knows, sometimes I hear so many problems and I hear so many nasty stories that I'm tempted to get angry.

I'm talking to someone who's hurt their wife or hurt a child and I lose the compassion. I have to ask God to help me. Because it can happen, you just like circle the wagons, turn on the television and let me just live in another world.

But that's totally not an option if you're gonna be a real follower of Jesus Christ. We gotta be in, all in, am I right? All in. What if Jesus would have said after he saw the disciples fumbling and the world hating him, like, you know what, I'm outta here.

I'm going back to heaven. Forget the cross, forget Calvary, I'm out. There's gotta be a better option than this.

No, he endured the cross. Did he not? Paul tells us, because of all of this, and remember it now, there's a race that has to be run. You're in it.

You up in the balcony, you're a Christian, you're in a race. Choir member, I don't care how long you've been a Christian, you're still in the race. Nobody gets an award for starting the race.

What do you get the award for? Finishing the race. This is what the whole warning is about. It's not those who start, it's those who finish.

We're in a race. Paul says that. I have run the chorus, I've run the race.

I didn't start and then stop. I ran it all the way through, now I'm gonna die. I'm still running.

There's a fight. Notice Paul said, I have fought a good fight. There's temptations, there's evil approaching us, there's satanic attacks to discourage us.

There's heartache, there's heartbreak, there's all kinds of things, and you gotta fight the good fight of faith and keep, no, I'm gonna still keep believing Jesus. I don't care, I don't figure it out, but I'm still gonna believe in Jesus. I know there's tears in my eyes.

I'm gonna wipe them away. I'm still gonna praise Jesus. Can we say amen to that by clapping our hands? That's the fight.

It's the fight of faith. It's not a fight against people. It's not political.

It's not against the Democrats or the Republicans. It's not against culture wars and all of that. That's not found in the Bible.

We're not fighting culture wars. We're fighting against principalities and powers. And finally, I've kept the faith.

You gotta keep the faith. The faith that's in this Bible, the faith that God revealed to you when you became a Christian, you gotta keep it because Satan wants to rob us. He wants to rob us of the faith.

Why would Paul say I've kept the faith unless that was a battle? You gotta hold on to the faith. Others are gonna lose the faith. I'm told by someone who knew him back then that Jim Jones started out as an evangelical preacher and believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ and prayed for the sick and believed God could do miracles.

And look how he ended up. He obviously didn't keep the faith. So what do we do? How do we wait out the storm? So here's three things I want you to remember as I close.

Summing up Scripture, what it teaches us as a reaction to Matthew 24, Peter reference and the two in 2 Timothy that we read. Here's what all the choir members have to do. Here's what we all have to do.

No one's above this. This is for all of us. You have to maintain joy.

You have to maintain joy. The joy of the Lord is our strength. So wars, rumors of wars, pestilence, diseases, earthquakes, air pollution, whatever, persecution against us, people mocking us, whatever, you have to maintain joy.

You can't get bewildered. You can't lose. One of the versions says, keep your head.

You got to remain calm and joyful. You can't get into anxiety and into shock and awe in your own life. You got to say, wait a minute, the Lord said this was going to happen.

How am I going to throw up my hands and say, why is this happening? The Lord said it would happen. Well, I don't know why that would happen. Listen, when we see him, we can ask him, he'll tell us.

But right now we just got to get through it. How many say amen? I don't know why storms come. I just want to get through it.

You got to maintain joy. You got to keep a sweet spirit. You can't let the stuff around you affect you so that you get full of anxiety because then the world will see you're just like them.

You have no deeper peace. You have no deeper joy. Christians now have to shine like lights.

And while everything is going crazy around us, we're going to stand, praise God. I know my sins are forgiven. Oh yeah, I don't know what's happening around the world.

Ebola, I don't know all of that, but I know this. I know my redeemer lives. I know he is with me.

Can we say amen? I know my sins are gone. I know I'm going to heaven. Amen.

Many things about tomorrow I might not know, but I know who holds tomorrow. Many things about tomorrow I don't understand, but I'm going to be joyful. That's why the Bible says over and over again, rejoice always.

And again I say, rejoice. Be joyful because the joy of the Lord is your strength. You're not going to be able to stand in faith if you're depressed.

Let's get out of that. Let's be joyful. Let's be full of hope.

Jesus is on the throne. He is king of kings and Lord of lords. In the end, the mockers and the demons and everyone, every knee will bow.

Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Do you believe that? Say amen. You have to maintain joy.

You can't be shocked. We can't give in to anxiety. We can't give in to fear.

We can't give in to bitterness. We can't get into getting mad at people who mock us. We need supernatural love from God so that people who even mock us and are acting ugly, we maintain our equilibrium spiritually speaking and we're full of joy.

Praise God. Oh, praise God. Isn't it great to be around someone just so full of joy? They walk so close to Jesus that no matter what happens, they're just full of joy.

Praise God, he's on the throne. Oh, did you read this though? Praise God, he's on the throne. My God is able to deliver me and keep me and walk me through whatever I have to be walked through.

Number two, you gotta be careful. You gotta maintain a joyful attitude. Keep joyful, but you gotta be careful.

What do you have to be careful about? Based on all the scriptures I gave you, first of all, be careful about yourself. Don't be ignorant of Satan's devices. You don't wanna be one of these shallow people who have a form of religion but don't know its power.

I'm talking straight now to you. I'm not yelling at anyone, I'm not condemning anyone. I'm saying as a brother in Christ to you, pray for me, I'll pray for you, but we gotta make it.

Come on, how many are planning you're gonna make it? We're gonna make it? That's why Paul says, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For it's God who works in you, both to will and to do according to his will. He works in you according to his good pleasure.

So where's Satan tempting you? Where's your structural weakness? Might not be drugs, don't look on down on drug addicts, that just happens to be their weakness. Yours might be a mouth that hurts more people than the cocaine hurts. It could be racial prejudice, it could be immorality, it could be stuff done in secret that is shameful.

Examine yourself, Paul says, to see if you're in the faith. In other words, check yourself. We gotta do that every day.

Why else would these warnings be in here? We gotta be careful. Be careful how you talk. Let's be careful how we walk.

Let's be careful what we read. Let's be careful what we watch. Let's be careful because you see what's at stake here.

This is not written to us just to fill up pages in scripture. This is written with real purpose. You gotta be careful.

Careful about your life. I can't run your life, you can't run mine. You've gotta work it out with God, but be careful.

Don't have a form of religion. Be real about the thing. Be in the prayer meeting.

Be all day on Sunday in church. I wish there was a fourth service like there used to be. I used to be in all four.

I was so tired at the end that they just would get a body bag and ship me by FedEx to my house. But you know what? I was a happy little camper because I'd been in the presence of God for like eight hours. Not even thinking about myself.

You know what the biggest joy in life is? To stop thinking about yourself. I would have whole days as God is my witness where I would be so consumed with what I was doing, worshiping and preaching and praying with people that I would only be thinking about God and people, the best days of my life. You know what the worst days are? When you're thinking about yourself.

Me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me, me. What I'm going through and nobody knows. I don't like her.

I don't like the way she looked at me. And then watch what you hear. Don't believe every preacher, including the ones from this pulpit.

Listen to what I'm saying now. Be smart about this thing. You hear all these warnings about false prophets and false teachers? Why do you think that God put that in the Bible so we should just believe everything we hear? Listen to what Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians.

Do not restrain the Holy Spirit. Do not despise inspired messages. Put all things to the test.

Keep what is good. How many things should be put to the test? All things. Every sermon.

Every sentence Jim Symbolus says. And any other pastor who speaks here. Or any visiting speaker.

You don't believe anything anyone says unless it's in the Bible. But how will you know it's in the Bible unless you know the Bible? How can you test everything if you don't know what the test is? Come on, do I get an amen from this? The trend is now of just feel-good religion. Pastor Delene and I were talking about it before I came down here.

Just a juvenile feel-good religion where it's not about God and serious study of his word. It's just I feel better when I go to church. Well, Christianity's a little deeper than that.

So study. Take these classes. Know what the Bible says.

If someone performs a miracle or they levitate on the platform, say, yo, that is nice. But listen. Listen to what they say.

And if they say something not found in the Bible, walk out while they're preaching. While I'm preaching. Listen, I'm dead serious.

Turn off the computer the minute you hear anyone here say something that's not backed up by scripture. Turn it off, don't listen to it. We've lost our minds.

We've gone off the trail. And that's happening everywhere. Test everything.

Try the spirits to see whether they be of God. Because there's all kinds of mixing and syncretism and it's not obvious. It's not Jesus never lived.

He was never born of a virgin. He's not the son of God. No, it's a different Jesus, but it's very subtle.

Look at what John says. My dear friends, do not believe all who claim to have the spirit. But test them to find out if the spirit they have comes from God.

For many false prophets have gone out everywhere. But listen, he's writing that to Christians. Test everything.

Don't believe anybody. Unless it's found in the word of God. Don't have any heroes.

There is no pastor who's a hero. There's no evangelist who's a hero. There's no Bible teacher who's a hero.

And if you see someone playing to themselves and showing off, turn it off. Don't listen to it. A real man of God wants to be like Jesus.

Jesus was not a show off. He was meek and lowly. Listen, but anything you hear, test it by the word of God.

The craziest things are going on. I saw that crazy lady that calls herself a prophetess on TV. And the guy said, now pray that the people will get the financial blessing.

It was a scam. They were collecting \$1,015 from everyone. It was a game.

It was a con. She said, no, I can't pray yet until I put on my prayer shawl from Israel. What would a prayer shawl have to do with God answering your prayers? How many are happy we don't need a prayer shawl? Lift your hand.

How many believe the name of Jesus is all we need and faith in the living God? Listen, this is on a major Christian network and people are watching this and sending the money into this con game. They don't know anything about the Bible. They have no discernment.

Oh my goodness. Think of all the men and women over the ages who have loved God and diligently studied his word and given up everything to go on the mission field. And now we're gonna sell blessings with a prayer shawl on? That's a black magic principle that a physical object has some power with God.

Jesus has power with God. Jesus, the name of Jesus. Jesus, our Savior, Emmanuel, God with us.

Test everything. I'm telling you for myself because I could go off the beaten path, but I love you so much. Don't follow me over the cliff.

Is it in the Bible? That's what your rule is. Is it in the Bible? Or is he just talking smack? Is it in the Bible? Is it in the Bible? Every song the choir sings, when they open their mouth, say, what are they singing? Is that in the Bible? Is the blood of lamb in the Bible? Is God working out in the Bible? Then rejoice. Don't rejoice because it's moving music.

Be intelligent. Study it. Listen to it.

Because what goes in is what's gonna come out. Maintain joy. Be careful.

I'm telling you as someone responsible for your souls, the judgment's gonna be stricter on me than on you because I'm not only responsible for myself, but God is gonna hold me responsible whether I told you the truth or whether I showed off and just told you what you wanna hear. Lastly, share Jesus. When all this craziness is going on, Paul says, Timothy, do the work of an evangelist.

Now, Timothy was not an evangelist. He was a pastor. But what Paul was saying is every pastor, every church must be a soul-winning church.

You gotta be talking. You gotta be yapping with your mouth about Jesus. Some have a gift of evangelism and God's gonna call them and raise them up and they'll be specially devoted to evangelism.

But everyone, everyone in the choir, that's your calling. Who can you talk to tomorrow? Who can you invite to church to hear about Jesus? Who could you share Jesus with right now? Now's the time to talk. Now's not the time to be quiet.

Oh, this is the perfect time. With terrorist attacks, with red alerts, with ISIS, with Ebola, and nobody knows who's gonna get it. I mean, this is a good time to talk about Jesus.

How many say amen? Amen. Because we're the only ones who can say, death, where is your sting? Amen. Where's your sting? You ain't all that.

No, you ain't all that. I have Jesus. He conquered death.

He holds the keys of death and hell around his waist. If I live, I'm living for Jesus. If I die, I'm gonna be with Jesus.

I mean, that's just the way it is. Now's the time to talk about Jesus. So let's go over it.

Maintain joy, say it. Maintain joy. Be careful.

Be careful. Share Jesus. Share Jesus.

How many wanna sign up for that? Just lift both your hands up. Lift up both your hands if you wanna sign up. Now, here's how I wanna close.

Maybe you're fighting the fight and you're getting punched out. It's hard right now. Maybe your position isn't right.

Maybe you're not in the word. Whatever's happening, the fight is really, you feel it really hard. It's hard right now.

Maybe you're holding onto the faith, but you're losing something there. Maybe you're running the race, but man, you get tired. You get so tired.

I remember running in the Naval Academy early in the morning. They had me at five o'clock running for an hour from five to six. And boy, about quarter to six, 10 to six, we had to go X number of times around the track or other times running elsewhere.

And I would see the final end there and oh man, you're so tired. Everything's aching in you. You're saying, why did I ever come to this school? We wanna help you.

Every eye closed. If you're getting really spiritually fatigued, if your arms are getting heavy because you keep fighting and fighting, and listen, we've all been there. This is not a walk in the park.

This is spiritual warfare. This is running the race. Don't let the enemy steal your faith and the faith that you believe in.

Or maybe you're here today and you just say, pastor, I heard enough, I need Jesus. I just need Jesus in ways I can't, I don't have to tell you, but I need Jesus. He knows.

What you've been talking about today, wow. Wow. The verses you read, wow.

And if you'd like us to just pray for you just in the quietness of this moment, get out of your seat and come quickly to the front. If two of you are just feeling the heat of the day, the roughness of the fight, just come out of your seat, stand there. That's right, come up right with your walker.

Lord, we thank you for your word today. We have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back.

Keep us joyful always. Anybody despondent or sad or distracted today, fill them with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Stir up that river of life within them, Lord.

Clear out all the stuff that clogs up that joy from manifesting itself in our lives. Forgive us of our trespasses. Forgive us of our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Teach us to be careful, not only about our own lives, but about everything we hear, everything we read of a religious nature that pretends or purports to be Christian. Help us to test everything, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. Finally, help us to share Jesus, to talk about Jesus.

Not to be ashamed, not to be backing up, but to be bold and loving and kind. And even if we're mocked and even if we're rejected, we just go to the next one. Just go to the next one.

Let our words be seasoned with salt, full of grace. Fill us with love, one for another. I thank you for the friends that I, my brothers and sisters who came forward.

Strengthen their arms right now. They're gonna keep fighting. Put strength in their legs.

They're gonna keep running the race. Spiritual legs, spiritual arms, make them strong. And now in this moment where they feel under attack, show what your word says, that in our weakness, your strength is made perfect.

Let there be a manifestation of your power in their lives this day, this week, like they've never experienced before. For what Satan meant for evil, God, you turn around and work it for good. And let everybody know it's not us, for we have this treasure in earthen vessels.

But the glory will all go to you, God. Thank you for the family of God. Help us to be better friends to one another.

Encourage each other, one another, every day. We pray your blessing now as we dismiss in the sweet name of Jesus, and everyone said. Amen.

Now I want all the ladies to hug about five or six ladies in the building. All the men, come on. Hug a couple men, will you please?

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