

A Grain of Wheat

by Major Ian Thomas

The life of Jesus Christ demonstrates God's righteousness and provides a perfect example for us to follow, enabling us to live a life that is pleasing to God.

Duration: 52:26

Scripture: John 7:30, John 8:20, John 12:24, John 13:1, John 17:1, Acts 1:8, Romans 10:1

Topics: "Death To Self"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of surrendering one's life to Jesus Christ. He tells a story about an artist who becomes so engrossed in his work that he is unaware of the danger he is in. His assistant, realizing the danger, throws a bucket of paint to get his attention and save his life. The preacher uses this story to illustrate the choice between holding onto our own desires and surrendering to God's lordship. He emphasizes that the purpose of inviting others to come to Jesus is not just for forgiveness or to get to heaven, but to live a life fully surrendered to Christ, even if it means suffering or persecution. The preacher also highlights the righteousness of Christ and how he is the only one who lived a sinless life, making him the ultimate example of righteousness.

Transcript

There was never a moment of any day that ever dawned in which he was not completely at the Father's disposal, so that we read in the 15th of Romans in chapter 3 that even Christ could not please himself. Then how in this wonderful life could there have been one hour of greater significance than another? The hour is come. Was there then in the life of Jesus Christ one hour more significant than another? There was never a moment when there wasn't the complete, unsullied, unspoiled, unblemished expression of the will of his Father in terms of his yielded humanity.

And yet this hour was the hour to which he lived. It's an hour to which reference is made on a number of occasions. In the 7th chapter and the 30th verse, Then they sought to take him, but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.

In the 20th verse of the 8th chapter, these words spake Jesus in the treasury as he taught in the temple, and no man laid hands on him, for his hour was not yet come. In the 13th chapter and the 1st verse, before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come. In the 1st verse of the 17th chapter, these words spake Jesus and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour is come.

What hour was this? It was the hour without which the Lord Jesus would have been born to live in them. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the continuing verse in chapter 12, verse 24, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. I'd like to read that same verse to you out of the Amplified New Testament.

I assure you, most solemnly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, I want you to listen to this very carefully, it remains. It remains. Just one grain.

Never becomes more. Listen to this carefully. But lives.

Lives. It remains and lives by itself alone. It remains and lives alone.

So that but for this hour, the Lord Jesus would have been born to remain, and he would have been born to live forever, but to be eternally lonely. You see, the Lord Jesus, if he had never been God as he was, and he was never less than God, nor ever will be, he is eternally in equality with the triune deity. But had he never even been God as man, he could have remained and lived.

For it is sin that separates man from God. It is sin that are the cause of death as wages. And even in his sinless humanity, he would have had the right as man to enter into his Father's presence forever, even had he never been God.

He could have lived and remained forever, but to be eternally lonely. And I want to examine that with you a little more closely for the next few moments. You see, there are those who would have us believe that when the Lord Jesus Christ came into this world, he just lived the life of a beautiful man.

He gave utterance to the most wonderful philosophy of life, and that being a Christian involves gazing upon the matchless example that he set us, and seeking to emulate the pattern that he set. That if you and I muse long enough upon his teachings, then ultimately somehow it will rub off on us, and we'll be like him. Now, let us examine for one moment.

What would have happened if the Lord Jesus, coming into this world, had lived for thirty-three years that wonderful, sinless, spotless life that earned the just acclaim of his Father, in whom there was no sin, but he had bypassed the cross, followed Peter's advice, and having lived to give us this matchless example, had then returned to heaven? What would have been accomplished by the life that he lived, for you and for me, today? In order that we may find the answer to that question, I'm going to ask you to turn with me to the tenth chapter of the Epistles of the Romans. Romans in chapter ten, verse one. My brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.

For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God. They're deeply religious. They have very earnest convictions, and they practice religion with considerable enthusiasm and loyalty.

And that was true. And there's no question of a doubt but that many of them practiced religion with great sincerity. Though there were many hypocrites numbered amongst the Pharisees, there was a countless multitude of men and women who practiced religion in the best way they knew.

They had a zeal of God. But, says the apostle, not according to knowledge. It was an uninstructed faith.

It was an uninstructed practice of religion. When somebody acts in a way that is not according to knowledge, it means that they are acting in ignorance. They don't know the facts.

So we need to discover the nature of their ignorance. And he goes on to tell us, verse three, for they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, had not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. Because they were ignorant of the nature of the righteousness of God, it still seemed to be a valid possibility on their part to establish a righteousness of their own that would be acceptable to God.

This was the nature of their ignorance. The righteousness of God is absolute. And only an absolute righteousness can ever satisfy the demands of His righteousness.

When you and I seek to establish our own righteousness, it falls hopelessly, pathetically short of the utter demands of God's righteousness. That is self-righteousness. And must be repudiated.

Our righteousness is the best that man can do. Ours is filthy rags. I may remind you, you need not turn to it, but in the thirty-ninth psalm, we read this, Behold thou hast made my days as an handbread, and mine ages as nothing before thee.

Verily, psalm thirty-nine, verse five, every man at his best state, every man at his best, is altogether vanity. That is the word of God. Every man at his best is altogether vanity.

Hopelessly, pathetically inadequate in the light of the demands of a righteousness that is absolute as God Himself. Then the fourth verse of the tenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans goes on to say this, For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness. Christ Himself is the only other man whoever walked this earth before the first man fell into sin whom the law could not accuse.

In colloquial language, He was the last word in righteousness. He was everything that the demands of God's righteousness could make upon a man in utter consummation. He was without sin.

Sin is the transgression of the law. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. The Lord Jesus never took one single step nor spoke one single word nor did one single deed other than in an attitude of total, utter, complete, unquestioning dependence upon the Father.

There was in His person the complete fulfillment of all that the law of righteousness that had been penned by His own divine fingers upon tables of stone. This found its full fulfillment in Him. So we may discover this fact that the righteousness demanded by the law God's righteousness can be totally equated with the righteousness of the life of the Lord Jesus.

Whether it be the righteousness demanded by the law or whether it be the righteousness that was demonstrated by His life both of these righteousnesses were absolute. If I therefore want to know what the life that the Lord Jesus Christ lived 1,900 years ago can do for you and for me now all I need to ask myself through the word of God is simply this. What can the righteousness demanded by the law do for you and for me now? For the righteousness demonstrated by His life may be equated with the righteousness demanded by the law.

Whatever the righteousness demanded by the law can do for me now then the righteousness demonstrated by His life can do for me now. Is that a valid reasoning? Well, let us examine what the righteousness demanded by the law can do for you and for me today. In the third chapter of the epistle to the Romans, Romans chapter 3 and verse 19 Now we know that what thingssoever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law.

Imagine here's a man or a woman who looks up into the face of God and says I demand, I ought by my own deliberate choice I demand to be judged upon the basis of my performance in the light of the demands of your law. I don't want redemption. I don't want forgiveness.

I don't want all this stuff about conversion or being saved or regenerated or born again or converted. You can keep that. I demand to be judged on the basis of my performance.

You know that what the law has to say, it has to say that such a man is that. And it might well be that even in such a gathering as this there are some tonight who would seek to be justified before a holy God on the basis of their own performance. Well let us read on.

Now we know that what thingssoever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law to this end that every mouth may be stopped and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in God's sight for by the law is the knowledge of sin. In other words, all that the law in its utter righteousness can do for you and for me as guilty fallen men is to shut our mouths, expose our guilt, and prove us guilty.

The law teaches us that we are guilty. The law proves us sinners. The law stops our mouths and wipes the boast from our lips, exposes us in all our desperate depravity and need.

The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, the prophet, the priest, and the king, the redeemer, Jesus, Savior. But in our helpless loss this day we might find by grace alone acceptance in the beloved. Justified by faith, clothed with the wedding garment of His righteousness, for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes.

The amazing thing is this, that God was prepared to impute or credit all your guilt and mine to the guiltless Jesus Christ upon the cross, that to you and to me today there might be imputed or credited all the guiltlessness and righteousness of Christ Himself. You know as well as I do that this is the basis of our redemption. This is the basis of our justification by faith.

Justified. God looks at me just as if I never died because He looked on Him just as if He committed all my sins. The law proves me guilty, stops my mouth, exposes my sin.

It's the schoolmaster. It's God's plumb line. But the life the Lord Jesus lived demonstrated the righteousness demanded by the law.

If in the depravity of my heart because of what is called the flesh, which weakens the law, I cannot submit to the demands of the law. For the carnal mind is enmity against God, is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can the all-wretched man that I am. As we have heard already so vividly this week, who shall deliver me from the body of this death that is constantly within me, hostile to God my maker, that repudiates His claims upon me, that loves to transgress His law and takes the law as a delightful occasion to defy God to His face.

If the law weakened by the flesh finds me only guilty, then the life of Jesus Christ that He lived 1,900 years ago that is equated with the righteousness demanded by the law can only prove me guilty. The flesh that disqualifies me from fulfilling the law disqualifies me equally from imitating the life of Christ. I can no more follow His example than I can submit to the demands of the law.

Whether I compare myself to the demands of the law or compare myself to the demands of His life, both prove me built guilty. Both, both plunge me into despair. Isn't that right? So what can the life that the Lord Jesus Christ lived 1,900 years ago do for you and for me today? You may never just have thought of it this way.

The life He lived 1,900 years ago condemns us as soundly as the law itself. And if Jesus Christ had been born on that first Christmas day only to live that matchless life and go straight back to the Father from whom He had come, He would have left us only doubly condemned by the law and by His life. Then why did He live a life like that that can only condemn us now? The answer is very simple.

The life He lived qualified Him for the death He died. Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free. And God the just is satisfied to look on Him condemned and pardoned.

He knew how wicked man had been. He knew that God must punish sin. So out of pity Jesus said, I'll bear the punishment instead.

God made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin. That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He suffered the just for the unjust to bring us to God.

He was delivered for our offenses. He was raised again for our justification. The Bible leaves us in absolutely no doubt whatever.

He was wounded for our transgressions and He was bruised for our iniquities. And it was the life that He lived that could only condemn us, that qualified Him for the death that He died. That can't be deemed.

Now, that's familiar territory, isn't it? But that isn't the gospel. That is part of the gospel. That is the threshold of the gospel.

That, if I may put it this way, is the baby language of the gospel. He died historically, 1900 years ago, on the basis of the sinless life He lived that you and I might be acquitted on the basis of His vicarious atoning sacrifice. He paid the debt that we might go free.

But that isn't the whole story. Otherwise, we could dismiss and go home. I want to ask you this question.

Given that you've come to understand the statements that I have made, and I suppose the very vast majority of this great company of people here tonight can look back to the day when they not only came to recognize these facts as true, but acted in obedience upon the truth of them, and have entered into all the good of His redemptive acts, and can say, praise God, I know my sins are gone. But may I ask you this question. Given that you have received the Lord Jesus Christ as your Redeemer, who died for you historically, 1900 years ago, once and for all, by this one sacrifice for sins forever, to reconcile you to a holy God, would you tell me this.

Does the knowledge that your sins are forgiven for His dear sake in itself equip you for a life of God like that? Does the knowledge that your sins are forgiven because you have claimed Christ as your Redeemer, you have pleaded His precious blood, you've named His name, you've called upon Him, and you have been accepted by the Father in the Beloved, and your name has been inscribed in the Lamb's Book of Life, would this rich assurance of your eternal destiny and security in itself impart to you any new capacity to live a different kind of life from the life that you lived before you were redeemed? I'm going to submit to you tonight that the knowledge that your sins are forgiven adds absolutely nothing to your

spiritual capacity to be a different kind of person. It may create within you quite legitimately a holy ambition to be different. Out of a sense of gratitude and love and a sense of duty to the One who died for you, because of an emotional attachment and a sentimental regard and a deep sense of loyalty, you will want to be different, but the knowledge that He died for you, and your sins are forgiven because He died for you, in itself does not impart to you any new spiritual caliber of living.

And if all that Jesus Christ did when He came to this world 1,900 years ago was to live that sinless life, to qualify Him for that redeeming death, and then go straight back to Heaven, that wouldn't be much of a salvation. It would be a salvation that made you fit for Heaven and left you hopelessly inadequate for Earth. And yet all too often this is the gospel that is preached.

Come to Jesus and have your sins forgiven, now roll up your sleeves and show Him how you love Him. I have a deep regard for those who love the Savior and who in their misguided zeal would encourage you to do the impossible without the only One who makes the impossible possible. But I'm going to suggest to you that it has been the source of untold sorrow and bitterness and disillusion on the part of God's people.

We've got a long, long way farther. You see, if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, the historical fact, much more, here is the superlative of our faith, this is the dynamic that makes the Christian life a working proposition. If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, and much more being reconciled, we shall be, as a continuing process, saved by His life.

So we have to add a second statement. The first is the life that He lived qualified Him for the death that He died. But here is the second.

The death that He died qualifies you to receive the life that He lived. That's the genius of the gospel. This is what puts heart into it.

The life that He lived qualified Him for the death that He died. But the death that He died qualifies you as a forgiven, redeemed sinner, unquitted on a holy basis to become the recipient again, now in the present tense, of the life that He lived then, 1900 years ago. So we discover that the life that He lived then can only condemn you.

But isn't this brilliant? It's the life that He lives now, in you, that saves you. And the Christian life is the life that He lived then, lived now, by Him, in you, because He is the only person capable of living that kind of life. This is the good news of the gospel.

Faithful is He that calleth me. Come unto me. He'll do it.

He is Himself the dynamic of every demand He ever makes upon the redeemed sinner. It is God that worketh in you both the will and the do of His good pleasure. Christ in you.

The hope of glory, the only hope. Christ liveth in me. The source of all His own divine activity and the origin of His own image.

This was His hour. For except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains and it lives on and on and on forever, eternally lonely. But what happens when a grain of wheat goes into the ground and dies? Through death there is the release of life, and it isn't long before a new corn is passioning, and beneath blue skies and the warm rays of the sun, the golden swaying field of a ripened heart.

Every golden field of corn is a graveyard, life bursting through from death. And in that new beginning year of corn, thirty, sixty, a hundredfold, the life, the same life, the life germ there, life has been imparted into the heart of every new grain through the death of the origin. That's why the Lord Jesus died.

He said, I am come that you might have life. This is what baffled the disciples, of course, for the three years in which the Lord Jesus taught them. They just couldn't grasp it.

Why should He stubbornly set His face like a flake to go to Jerusalem? Why stick your neck out? Why deliberately go into the Lamb's den? They just couldn't see the point. Until after that appearance of the Lord Jesus, subsequent to His resurrection, He showed them His hands and His feet, and He began to unfold the Scriptures in such a way that at last their understandings were enlightened. Now He says you're going to see the point of it all.

It left you baffled and bewildered, disillusioned and afraid. Now, you tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high. And as a result of the life I live, which qualified me for the death I have already died, you now are going to be qualified to receive by my indwelling Holy Spirit the very life I live.

So that the things that I did you will do in greater works than these. Because you are going to be added to my new corporate body on earth, and the life that I have lived clothed with the sinless humanity that my Father fashioned for me in the womb of Mary, this new body my Father is going to present to me, a corporate body. Having been with you, I am going to be in you.

I will not leave you comfort. You will receive power from on high. And the power that you will receive from on high will be nothing less than my presence.

I will come to you and live in you. And Peter you're going to become my lips, and John you're going to become my hands. As members of my new body, each individually added to the other in the corporate whole, under my headship, possessing my life, I am going to continue to do and to teach the things that I began to do and to teach in my own humanity, in your humanity.

You know as well as I do that the Acts of the Apostles is the continuation of what Jesus began to do and to teach. The only difference was that he now did it in terms of that redeemed humanity that having been reconciled to God was now re-inhabited by God, for God. And the first ripened golden ear of corn was 120 grains strong.

As on that first day of Pentecost, 120 men and women received no body less than Christ himself. As he presented himself within them through the Eternal Spirit, as the Father for 33 years had presented himself in the Son for 33 years through the Eternal Spirit. So that as the Father was in the Son, now the Son was in them.

But as the Father had sent him, now he was going to send them. That his life in them might go on reproducing all down the ages. The hour has come.

Now you can see what a wonderfully rich gospel it is we have to preach. You never invite anybody to come just for it, forgiveness. You never invite anybody to come to Jesus just to get to heaven.

There's only one valid reason why you and I should ever invite any man, woman, boy or girl to come to the Lord Jesus and that is for the Lord Jesus. That he himself might step into their humanity and fill them with

himself so that their bodies might become temples of the living God. So that they might literally be baptized by the Holy Spirit into his body.

They might become living members individually of his corporate body in general. And that is why you see every genuinely spiritual church is an evangelizing entity. For the Lord Jesus is the one who came to seek and to save that which is lost and given right of way in any individual member however humble, however young.

He will be about his ancient business in and through every single living healthy member of that body. The total church evangelizing all over the world. Jesus Christ in action.

Jesus Christ in business. But just a minute. If there was an hour for him, that his life might be reproduced in others.

And that life has been reproduced in you and me. There must be an hour in your life and mine. If that divinely imparted job is to reproduce in others.

That's the right. Not only across on the hill, but across in the heart. For every belief that the latent lordship of his divinely imparted life might be released to the world around us.

For remember this. Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains. Just one grain.

Never becomes more but lives by itself alone. And it is possible for you and for me to be spiritually regenerate on the grounds of redemption and receive nothing less than the very life of the risen lord himself. And for that life to be indulged within our human spirits, never to find its way into activity through our souls, never to be released in terms of behavior, action and quest for a fallen humanity.

Did you ever hear a grain of wheat thinking? Did you ever listen to a grain of wheat talking to itself? It's quite an interesting experience. And if you just follow me with your imagination for a moment, we'll listen in very carefully. As a grain of wheat looks into the mirror.

And this is what it says to itself. I rather like me. I don't know that I've ever seen such a shapely grain of wheat.

Now, mind you, it says to itself. I did go to a special series of meetings. And I listened to some men preaching.

And you'd never believe the nonsense they talked. Do you know what they said? They said that unless you're prepared to let go of what you are, you will never become what God intended you to be. Now, did you ever hear anything quite so stupid as that? When I look at myself in the mirror and see what I'm capable of, see the caliber of my being, head and shoulders above any other grain of wheat I know.

And they tell me that until I'm prepared to let go completely of what I am, disintegrate, just die, I'll never become what I was intended to be. They talked about some indwelling principle of life that could never be released until I was prepared to die. Now, can you imagine anything quite so stupid as that? As if any person had the right to let go of what they were in the hope that some mystic something would develop through them.

Supposing I did die and something did happen, I wouldn't know what I was going to be anyway. It might come out a cabbage. Or a spring onion.

Or a carrot. No, no, says the grain of wheat. I know what I am.

I know what I'm capable of. Did you ever hear a grain of wheat? Talking to it, sir? Latent lordship of a hidden life, only released through death. Nonsense! Every man's got to stand on his own two big feet and stick out his own big chest and carve his way.

Even in terms of Christian service, it's what I am that counts. And God should consider himself extremely fortunate that he's got folk like me on his side. Did you ever hear a grain of wheat? Talking? Do you know what happens to a grain of wheat like that? It remains.

It does. Alone. And the longer it sits, insists on being itself and refusing to die, the tougher it gets, the harder its heart, the thicker its skin, and the more difficult it becomes to release the life that is.

I was in Santa Fe just a few weeks ago, a few days ago, and I visited the museum there, and the custodian explained that certain cobs of corn had been found over 800 years ago, and other seeds in some of the Indian graves. And he said every year they take some of these seeds hundreds of years old and plant them, and they grow. Mustn't that be a surprise to them? Can you imagine being a seed or a grain of corn for several hundred years and then suddenly discovering that you never became what you were intended to be? Can you imagine that? Mustn't that be a wonderful surprise? And can you imagine this grain of wheat after 10, 15, 20, 30 years of vindicating itself and being itself, justifying itself, capitalism? Suddenly it looks back over the past and finds there's nothing much to show for it anyway.

Looks at its face again in the mirror and it's become wrinkled and taut and hard. And it has second thoughts about those stupid preachers. Maybe they were right.

Maybe I was fool enough to be over-persuaded by myself or by my friends. Maybe there is a principle of life that would give me some real reason for being here that's never been released. Anyway, it's too late to hope for much.

There's nothing to lose now. Maybe there's everything to gain. And so at last that little grain of wheat decides to fall into the ground and die.

And the moisture begins to attack that tough, hard skin and break into that toughened, hardened heart. And strange things happen. They do.

There's a sort of tickly feeling around the back. And when the grain of wheat looks around, it's got a tail. Extraordinary thing.

I've been a grain of wheat for twenty years and never had a tail. Who would have believed that? But what do you do with it when you've got it anyway? Should it go that way or upwards or downwards? It's a bit curly at the moment, maybe it needs straightening up. And you know, while it's perplexed and baffled at this spontaneous expression of life that it never knew it possessed, it suddenly discovers that there is a principle in action that is already shaping its ends.

That a latent lordship is already being released because it has been prepared to die. And that little taproot begins to burrow its way down. And it's hardly got over the shock before there's a tickly feeling up top and it's got another tail.

And this is really baffling. Because this is obviously in the wrong place. Probably needs surgery.

And what do you do with this? But it discovers just as surely as the root goes down, the shoot goes up. Controlled by an unseen lordship that has been buried, unrecognized, unreleased, unrealized for twenty years. Listen, this isn't just a story, this isn't just a parable.

Men and women, I'm talking about you. Some of you men and women have been converted ten, twenty, thirty. Some of you may even have been preachers for fifty years.

And you've never yet discovered the principle of life that was buried within you in the day that you were spiritually regenerated. It's possible for you and for me in our pig-headed self-esteem, in our very sincerity and zeal in serving God, to enslave and to imprison the Son of God within our souls. And we become the dried-up, withered, useless things we are, on the shelf, remaining living, we'll get to heaven.

For the life has been imparted by the Divine Spirit, but we're quenching and prostrating and grieving the Spirit of God. Busy being ourselves, when the one thing that the Father wants is for the opportunity for His Son to be Himself. And just as the little plant is coming into being, a big, fat, clumsy farmhand comes along with his great big, fat, clumsy hoof and treads on it.

Turns it upside down. And you could imagine that little grain of wheat burying its head in its hands and sobbing. My little world all turned upside down.

Look at my circumstance. I knew I couldn't lie. It was too good to be true.

And do you know, in the midst of its tears, it discovers that the root begins to turn down and the shoot begins to turn up. It discovers that this principle of life, now released, knows exactly what to do even when its little world and all its human circumstances are turned upside down. This is the rest which is prepared for the children of God.

Nothing, nothing can confound you. For there is implanted within your soul the life of the One who is never less than adequate at any time for any situation. No matter what threat may come your way, no matter how dark the clouds on every horizon, no matter how fierce the storm that may break upon your head, you can be sitting in a dungeon with silence, in the dirtiest part of the dungeon, and you can have such a praise meeting that you keep the other prisoners awake at night.

And you can imagine the sort of conversation these two had. Paul looking to Silas, what do you think God has in store for us? Sometimes he puts us in the grand hotel, but he must have something very, very special for us to stick us in a place like this. I say, Silas, what do you think God has in mind? And Silas' things don't look too good and they don't smell too well, but I say, Paul, isn't this a thrilling life? To know that every day that dawns is a sheer adventure of God unfolding His eternal purpose.

And they've burst into song, and just as they're singing together, suddenly Silas says, Paul, look out! And they've ducked, and there's an earthquake thrown in. And do you know when the dust has settled and they rub their eyes? There's a man waiting in the inquiry room. Do you know, Christian men and women, that you and I have got to learn to live lives like that before and leave it to the congregation.

I find that in the Acts of the Apostles it was always the congregation that appealed, Sir, what must we do to be saved? Sir, what must I do to be saved? But you see, in those days the Holy Spirit was doing the work. All the preacher had to do was be faithful to the truth in a supreme, unshatterable confidence. But as he preached the truth in general, the Holy Spirit was making it the truth in particular to one another.

But you've got to be prepared to spend the night in a dungeon. You've got to be prepared to shipwreck. You've got to be prepared to sit with your feet in the stocks and have rotten oranges thrown at you.

You've got to be prepared to be stoned to death and left bleeding and dying on the gutter and look up in heaven and see your own Savior standing, not lifting one single finger to help you. Not one. Because he's planting you into death, that out of your blood flowing in the gutter there might come out of the soul a part of an apostle called Paul.

We've lost the art of living dangerously because we're too busy being ourselves ever to trust God to release his lordship in terms of our humanity. We don't know what it is to be expendable for God. And then at last the little shoot breaks through the hard, crusted surface of the earth and breaks out into the light of day.

And the warm rays of the sun begin to beat upon it and it grows. And it's not like any other single plant that ever grew for every spontaneous expression of life that is released when the lordship of Christ is released is always, always, inevitably a perfect original. God never intended you to be as a Christian any copy of anybody else.

God never intended that you should be brought up with a pattern imposed upon you that brings you out in a certain mold. God redeemed your soul that your body might be inhabited by Jesus Christ himself. That the life he lived then might be lived now.

And how he lives his life is his business and nobody else's. And your life will always be the perfect original of the divine expulsive expression of the life of Jesus Christ. Can you imagine anything quite so thrilling as that? I want to ask you this very simple question.

The moment a grain of wheat has gone to the ground and has admitted its need of dying, how much control does it have over the future? How far can a grain of wheat that goes into the ground and dies shape its future end? From the moment that it is prepared to die it has absolutely no say at any time about anything. The life within controls its destiny. And I want you to know this.

So long as you intend to plan your own program, insist on your own blueprint, shape your own end, you'll never know the spontaneous life of Jesus Christ making its quickening resurrection impact on the world around you. You may impose your pattern upon others but you'll never reproduce life. For, said Jesus, the flesh profiteth not.

Hath a noble the mould in which you may fashion them? It is the spirit that quickeneth. Only God raises the dead. Only God restores life.

I want to tell you this. That as there was an hour for him that his life might be imparted by his divine spirit to your spirit, so there must be an hour for you. And for that young man or young woman on the threshold of life here tonight, I want to tell you this.

That every horizon beckons you. Heavy golden with blessing. If only you'll be prepared through death to allow his life to be released.

To sign yourself away for God, in reckless abandon become expendable, in complete unquestioning availability to Jesus Christ. I cannot promise you what it will involve for you because I do not know. I know that he knows for he knows the end from the beginning.

And you and I are created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we, that we should walk in them. It may give you six years to live for all I know. That's all it gave Stephen.

Six months to live. It may give you a lifetime of suffering. It may send you to jail.

If God wants to reach some poor miserable sinner in some concentration camp, he has the right to put you there. Of course he has. Don't imagine that evangelists are simply men called to travel around the country in luxury.

If God wants an evangelist in a concentration camp, he simply takes one member of his body who has learned to die and become expendable for God. And he puts him there for three days or three years or thirty. And I wouldn't invite one man, woman, boy or girl to walk down any church to come to Christ who wasn't prepared for that quality of Christianity.

I would consider it an insult to Jesus Christ. Because I want to tell you this, the life he lived qualified him for the death he died. But the death he died qualifies you exclusively for the life he lived.

And he demands his lordship. And you not only rob yourself and impoverish yourself beyond all human description, but you rob him as you claim your inheritance in Christ. Fancy robbing Christ of his inheritance.

This is normal Christianity. This isn't fanaticism. This is the quality of Christianity that evangelized the world in one single generation.

They didn't have jet planes. They had donkeys. They didn't have electronics.

They didn't have loudspeaker systems. They were just flesh and blood inhabited by God. The artist, way up on the trapeze, stood back to admire his own handiwork.

He'd been painting the most beautiful picture on the underside of the cathedral dome. And as he paused in his work and stood on the platform, he was intoxicated. And he drank in the sheer genius of his own handiwork.

Beautiful. Beautiful. Could never have dreamed that it would turn out so wonderful.

And completely enraptured, he stepped back to take a better look, from a point of better vantage, and stepped back into his death. But he was totally unaware. He was intoxicated.

He was drinking it in. It filled him with himself. And just at that precise moment, his assistant, up on the platform, looked up.

Just at that identical moment. In one split second, he grasped the situation. One step, and he would plunge to his death.

And picking up a bucket of paint, he threw it against the ceiling. And the artist leapt forward in a rage. He said, you spoiled my picture! Said his assistant, quietly, yes.

I spoiled your picture. But I've saved your life. All right? Choose now.

Which would you like? Your picture or your life? That's your choice. Whatever picture it may be you have painted, whatever dreams you may have cherished, my invitation to you tonight is to die. Die.

Die. That the latent Lordship of His hidden life, Christ, living in me, may be released to an eating world.
This is evangelism.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/0/SID0281.mp3>

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