

What Makes a Church

by Major Ian Thomas

Major Ian Thomas discusses the critical evaluation of a church's relationship with Christ, emphasizing that activity alone is insufficient for spiritual health.

Duration: 1:22:18

Topics: "Church"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of seeking God's grace and finding balance in the Christian life. He highlights the concept of God's lavish provision for those who seek Him. The preacher also discusses the significance of the golden lampstands in the Old and New Testaments, symbolizing the witnessing church. He explains that just as the lampstand needs oil to sustain its light, Christians need God to live a fulfilling life. The sermon concludes with a personal story of a man who realized his need for Christ and experienced a transformation in his life.

Transcript

I appreciate the opportunity of this informal spending together. Some year or two back, at an institute, and I was sharing the ministry amongst others with a man called Fred Smith, whom probably some of you have come across. He's a businessman, heads up a big business analysis firm.

They move into some of these great empires, and their commission is to evaluate their efficiencies, and discover whether things could be improved or why things have gone wrong. A very fascinating speaker, one whom I enjoyed immensely, and in particular I was fascinated by what he had to say on that particular occasion, in this particular context. Because he explained to us the nature of his business, how almost from coast to coast they've had the opportunity of evaluation in various business enterprises.

And as I said, when there is inefficiency, almost always one or two causes. Either one, ignorant, or two, conceit. One or the other, as he reads.

Ignorant or conceit. He said in the first case, if it's ignorant, we can do something about it. We conceit.

When he said the cause is the second, conceit, we write it off as a dead loss. There's nothing we can do. And that's interesting, because by and large, this is equally true in the spiritual life.

And there's an immense amount of inefficiency. As well, you and I are aware, within the context of evangelical Christendom, and, to be honest enough, recognize the fact in our own hearts, and in our own

lives. And, by and large, the inefficiency derives also from one or other, or a combination of both.

We've got ignorance, which is a very, very large factor, because of the theoretically inadequate presentation of the gospel to which we have settled in our pragmatic age, and very often conceit. Preconceived notions, prejudices, rigidified forms and patterns for which we are not prepared to diversify. And it's good for us sometimes to pause in the middle of whatever we may be doing, and take time to evaluate.

But for evaluation to be valid, there's got to be a norm against which we can evaluate. And this, by and large, of course, is the tragedy of our age, that we've settled for dialogue. In other words, there is now nothing absolute.

There's no norm. This is the society in which you and I live, and it's on this premise, of course, we have developed the convenience of a productive society, where there is nothing absolute, and therefore nothing is wrong. It's quite obvious.

If there's no such thing as truth, then there's no such thing as a lie. I've got nothing to worry about. If there's no such thing as honesty, there's no such thing as being a thief.

I've got nothing to worry about. If there's no such thing as morality, there's no such thing as immorality. It's a marvellously convenient hypothesis.

And we've settled for it because, by and large, all the moral guts and moral fibre has been disintegrating in human society. And nobody ever really wants now to be right or wrong, because it demands a moral choice. So we run away from it, and settle for something which is pseudo-intellectual, but is really a moral escapism.

And we hide in our little funk hole. Well, where shall we find a mall? Where shall we find a yardstick, whereby we may make a valid evaluation? Well, of course, there is only one ultimate, the timeless and eternal absence. If we depart from that, we've lost everything.

And for this reason, I thought it might be interesting, just for the first few moments at least, by way of an introduction, to turn to the second chapter, the last book in the Bible, the Revelation, and meet there the Lord Jesus in company with the church in Ephesus. For here, the Lord Jesus himself is making an evaluation. And he is the only one who has the right.

For he is the timeless absolute, the one who is the same yesterday, today and forever, who never changes. As timeless and intangible as God himself. For he is God.

In whom there is no variableness. The revelation as well you recognize is not the revelation of St. John the Divine, as the title would tell us, for some strange reason. The first sentence of the first chapter tells us that it is the revelation of Jesus Christ.

To St. John the Divine, of course, we've given the privilege of recording for our instruction that revelation. The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him. To show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass, and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John.

So John was sent to describe to whom this revelation was signified by an angel, a revelation of Jesus Christ. Now, he says in chapter 2, verse 1, to the angels of the church of Ephesus, These things said he

that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candles, or lampstands. The seven stars, explained in the 20th verse of the first chapter, are the angels or the ministers representing the proclaimers.

Those are their testaments of the seven churches. The seven golden lampstands here describe the candlestick which is our source of the seven churches. Just a picture of the church of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ, that human vehicle through whom he makes himself articulate and visible in the world in which he is placed.

The sevenfold golden lampstand. A beautiful picture, of course, both in the Old and the New Testaments of the witnessing church, because we recognize that the golden lampstand itself has nothing to give. Absolutely nothing.

It's only the oil flowing through it that provides that which sustains the light. Which is, of course, immediately an elementary picture of the basic principle of the Christian life, that it takes God to be a man. And that's why it takes Christ to be a Christian, because Christ in the church can put God back into the man.

It attacks the man from God, and he's got nothing. That's why when the Lord leads us out of deity, he steps into time to become man. And he made himself exactly what a man is without God.

How much is that? Nothing. Let's look into two facts. That this mind being used, which was also in Christ Jesus, to being in the form of God.

Didn't consider it, what would it claim, total and eternal, timeless equality with God? Made himself of no reputation. Don't see himself. Made himself, in the English Bible, nothing.

All that a man is without God. And then prophetic creators both demonstrated that often. So the church is always described as the lampstand through which the oil must flow, representing the life of God in the soul of man, which is indispensable to the likeness of God in the character of man.

What gives him the divine dynamic to fulfill the functions which God as creator created him as his priest. And the Lord Jesus, of course, now is the one who, by his indwelling Holy Spirit, walks, as it were, in the midst of the seven falls, golden lamp. And then in the second verse, he says something which is immediately frightening.

Just two words. I know. I know.

And that shatters all the premise of a philosophy that's based upon mere dialogue. Here, somebody actually dares to stand up and say I know. Well, that's shocking, isn't it? And that's just not allowed.

This is proclamation. But this is God. Because God is absolute.

That's why you and I are called upon as his emissaries, as his voice, to make proclamation. Said the Lord Jesus. I know.

I don't surmise. I don't pretend. I don't think.

I don't hope. I don't just believe. I know.

Because you and I, at this very moment, share the life of the Lord Jesus. If we don't, we're not Christians. If that isn't true, we've never experienced that spiritual new birth that has made us, again, by the exceeding great impression upon us of God, partakers of his divine nature.

We're still as bankrupt as the day we were born, said the intercessor to Jesus. But as those who claim redemption through his blood, reconciliation to God in that spiritual new birth, by the restoration of his holy spirit through our human spirit, we are, at this moment, in the presence of, and sharing of, the life of Jesus Christ. We are in the presence, right now, of the one who has the right to say, and to know that it is true, is nothing that I don't.

Well, what does he know? Well, he, he has a good look at this church. He said yes. And he tells us some of the things he knows about this church.

He says, I know thy work. I know thy labor. And I know thy faith.

And how thou canst not bear them which are evil. And thou hast tried them which say they are apostles in armor, and have found them lying. I know.

I know that thou hast borne, and hast patient, and for my name's sake, hast labored, and hast not fainted. I know. Well, let's pause there for a moment, and consider the things that he knows about this particular church community.

He says yes. First thing he says is this. I know your work, and your labor.

I know that you are an extremely busy institution. You're constantly on the job. I know it.

I've sat in on only too many meetings. I'm always there. Sometimes you behave as though I wasn't.

But I'm still there. I listen to your aside. I read your thoughts.

I know the motivations and intentions of everything that you suggest. The side currents and the cross cuts. I know.

Read it like a book. I look through it like a pane of glass. I know.

The first thing that the Lord Jesus tells us that he knew about this church was that it was a church that sustained extremely heavy progress. Everybody was busy, busy, busy. And, of course, there's nothing intrinsically wrong in that.

It was incumbent upon every member of this particular church community to be on the job. He says I know. Nobody was expected to be unemployed.

Everybody, with any capacity whatever, was expected to find their niche and be an ant. That's the first thing we know about this church. They probably sustained a wide missionary interest, an evangelistic class, constant variety and ingenuity in their means of outreach.

In every conceivable way, they were on the job to make the gospel known. To be busy and active in the service of God and his Son, Jesus Christ, their Savior. He says you're busy.

I know. That's the first thing we know about this church. Now, the second thing he says he knew about them was this.

He says I know you can't burden them with your evil. In other words, not only was it a church which sustained a very heavy program, it was a church of strong convictions about right and wrong. They drew a very specific line.

They had high values and strong, deep convictions as to the standard to which they should submit themselves. He says I know. There's nothing ambiguous.

There's nothing gray about the standard you take. If it's a question of a voice being raised on the question of public morals, your voice rings out loud and clear. You've taken your position.

I know it. You cannot bear them with your evil. So added to the fact that it was a church that sustained a very heavy program, we recognize the fact that this church in Ephesus was one that held strong convictions about right and wrong.

There was no compromised tolerance in Ephesus. Now, the third thing that the Lord Jesus said to me about this church in the second verse is this. Thou hast tried them which say they are apostates and are not, and found them lost.

In other words, a church that sustained a very heavy program, one that had strong convictions about right and wrong, and one that was utterly sound in its doctrine. It was biblically there. It was a Bible church, if ever there was a Bible church.

He said, you've tried them which say they are apostates. You've listened to their propositions as those who claim to be the theological and hierarchical bigwigs of their day and generation. And in the light of the revelation given by divine inspiration as holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, you've exposed them to the priests and the liars and the counterfeits that they are.

Doctrinally true. Is that it? I listen to all the sermons preached from your pulpit. I listen to all the lessons taught in your Sunday school and Bible classes.

I'm always there. I participate in the discussions that you have in your homes. Heavy program, strong convictions about right and wrong, and doctrinally sound.

That sounds like a pretty good church to make an evaluation. Spoken, you were a stranger in town. You had a wife and family and you're looking around for a church home.

How about the church method? You say, I want the kind of church where I can roll up my sleeves and get busy. I don't want to sit on the sidelines and just walk. I don't want to be a spectator.

I've been to churches like that. The one-man band type. I want the sort of church where there's real cooperative effort.

Everybody's expected to play their part and be a harness, as it were, to the machine. Well, that's it. I want a church where I can send my kids away for a weekend up in the mountains.

Entrust them to a youth club leader or a counselor and feel absolutely certain that they won't take place unknown to me anything that would be ambiguous, gray, that smacks of compromise. I want to feel that they're safe. OK.

That's it. I want the sort of church where whether it's I who sits under the minister or my wife or my children, no matter who it is that gets up to speak, they will be exposed always, without exception, to the pure, unadulterated Word of God. You've really got the church you want.

Let me show it to you. What you see is that there's a church that by the Lord Jesus Christ's own evaluation was on the very threshold of its being. Just about to be written off as a total loss.

Nevertheless, he said, verse 4, I am somewhat against this. Something gone wrong. So wrong that it's almost without remorse.

Thou hast blessed thy church, Lord. In all your busy activity you have departed from the one fundamental basic principle that makes any church to God's satisfaction a working population. I like the rendering there of that verse in the Amplified New Testament.

It says you have compensation, programs. Yes, you've got programs. You've lost me.

Rules and regulations, convictions, rights and wrongs. Yes, they were all tabulated, listed, analyzed, double-checked, and underwritten. You've lost me.

Doctrine? It oozes out of your fingertips. It drips out of your ears. You've mastered the law.

You've memorized whole chunks of the Bible. And you've preached it with no little skill. You've got everything except this part of it.

Easiest thing in the world. Within the evangelical context of Bible-believing belief to substitute the best and all that is legitimate and right and sacred for Christ Jesus. And you've lost everything.

That's why, of course, the only valid basis of evaluation is not to the program, not even to your basis of morality, or to the doctrines that you've mastered. There's only one valid basis of evaluation, and that is your relationship to Jesus Christ. Because you can have all the rest and not have him.

And all too often, you see, we have learned to equate a person's relationship to the machine, to the program. We've learned to equate that to the relationship to Christ. We've learned to equate a person's relationship to the rights and the wrongs, to the lists of things we don't, to the relationship to Christ.

So as long as I submit myself to the machine, so long as I am part of the program, that is accepted as my relationship to Christ. There's nothing to lose. Nothing may be farther from the truth.

In integrating a person into the operation, I may have introduced only a relationship between them and the program. There's no relationship to Christ. In house-training the certain procedures and behavior patterns, I may have introduced only a relationship between them and me and the constituency I represent and the standards that we propound without any relationship to Christ.

We equate consent to certain evangelical doctrines with a relationship to Christ. But that isn't valid. I can mark all the doctrines of the Bible and have no relationship to Jesus Christ, but you can intellectually convince of their validity.

And in the very proclamation of those doctrines, living words of Jesus Christ might just well be dead for all the party players in the process of being a Christian. I had a letter some little time ago from a medical doctor who had been attending some meetings that it had been my privilege to speak at in Phoenix,

Arizona. He had moved out to California.

And he just wrote a very courteous letter and just expressed appreciation. He said, In twenty years as a Christian, for the first time I learned that Jesus Christ actually had a role to play in the Christian life. Now that used to shock me, doesn't it now? Because it referred to such constant regularity.

He had never in twenty years doubted, of course, the fact that his salvation depended upon the death of Christ, that he would only gain access into the presence of the Holy God on the basis of the blood that was shed for him, vicariously by the Lord Jesus, when he had accepted him in his person in the consequence of his guilt, that he might be accrued it. That he accepted. Jesus Christ, historical, two thousand years ago, accomplished what would get me out of hell into heaven, of course, never once challenged the validity of his resurrection from the dead, or that he was ascended to be with the Father, or shared again now the glory that had always been his in the eternal age of the past, and will continue to be his in the eternal age of the future.

The only thing he failed to grasp was that Jesus Christ was not only alive there, but was alive here. And that his presence as God, created within the creature, was imperative to a man's humanity. That Jesus Christ actually had a role to play in the Christian life.

You see, it's often the Lord Jesus Christ is presented not as the one who plays the role, but the object of our activities. The one for whom we do things. Who's way out there.

The man upstairs. All this is calculated to brainwash people into completely false concepts of the Christian life. Jesus Christ isn't a man upstairs.

He isn't a way out there. If I'm a Christian at all, it's only because he, having died for me, rose again from the dead to come and give himself to me, so that 24 hours and every day, my flesh and blood might call his divine activity exclusively. That Jesus Christ is the only one capable of living the Christian life.

And without him there is no Christian life. Only a cheap, shabby imitation of the real thing. No matter how sincere it may be.

No matter how noble my aspirations may be, if I haven't yet learned that Jesus Christ actually has a role to play in the Christian life, other than being the object of my endeavors. The ruler whom I worship. The one for whom I dedicate myself.

And to whom I give my time. That leaves him passive and inactive. He might just as well be a Buddha.

In his pagoda. But we reduce Jesus Christ precisely to that role. As with the Church in Ephesus.

He says, you've got everything. Programmed, pointed. Talk about a program.

You can see your charts and your missionary graphs. And your pledge, programmed. Everything you've got in the world.

Everything except me. I have someone against me. Because I have left thy first love.

Notice what he says. It's an ultimatum. Verse 5. Remember therefore from whence thou fallest.

From whence thou fallest. He's talking to a fallen church. Repent, he says.

Get back to where you belong. First principle. Do the first will.
Or else, ultimatum. I will come unto thee quickly. Suddenly.
Calamitously. And remove thy candlestick out of its place. You've become intoxicated.
With your own endeavors. Bewitched. By your own smartness.
Overwhelmed by your own success. And now remove your candlestick. Write your office.
Total loss. Deadwood. Repent or else.
Well, uh. The question might reasonably come to mind. How can you became.
On the face of it. The casual passerby. Going into this situation.
Would be. Well overwhelmed. Their breath would take away.
My. What a change. How can we detect.
What's wrong. But rather fascinating. This particular situation.
Because we can compare. A simple evaluation. That was made of another church.
And we find. Something quite helpful. And keeping the faith there in Revelation 2. If you care to turn.
To Paul's epistles. The first of his epistles. To the Thessalonians.
And keep the two places open. Because we'll need to compare. What he has to say.
Then. Of this particular church. With what the Lord Jesus had to say.
In the. Church of Epps. It's quite obvious.
That this church. Uh. Which Paul had.
In the first of his epistles. To the Thessalonians. Was one that brought him.
Unmuted joy. In some fashion. In his ministry.
He says. In the end of verse. Uh.
Of chapter 2. In verse 19. 1 Thessalonians 2. 19. What is our hope.
Or joy. Or crown of rejoicing. Are not even ye.
In the presence. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. At his coming.
You are our glory. He says. You are our joy.
His. His heart warmed. Quite obviously.
When he thought of these people. They weren't perfect. It wasn't.

For one moment. It suggested that. But there was.

There was a character. About this particular company. Of.

Of redeemed sinners. That. That warmed the heart.

Of the apostle Paul. As others. Caused him.

Considerable sadness. In heaven. For instance.

The church in Corinth. Or the foolish Galatians. That this church.

Would be a source of great encouragement. He says. Our gospel.

Verse 5 of chapter 1. Came not unto you in word only. But also in power. This is God, in all his utter holiness, telling a man to be as holy as God.

From God's point of view, utterly logical. From man's point of view, hopelessly unreasonable. How can I, as a man, be holy like God? Well, the answer, if you remember my proposition, was this.

Because there is in the divine logic a hidden factor that is absent in human reason, that makes divinely possible what is otherwise humanly unreasonable. And that hidden factor is? To worship you, but to will and to do what is impossible. Faithful is he that calleth you willful? So there is absolutely nothing to which God calls you that he himself is not prepared to do.

So that makes divinely logical and possible everything which otherwise is humanly unreasonable. But take the hidden factor out! What have you got left? A proposition that is humanly unreasonable. That's why you've got to settle for something less.

That is humanly explicable. And that's what the Church of Ephesus has settled for. Work that needed no faith to explain.

Faith that isn't believing facts or giving academic consent or a mental nod to certain theological propositions. Faith, as you will remember, simply lets God be God in action. Faith invokes the activity of a second party.

Faith brings somebody or something into action on your behalf. And if your faith doesn't do that, if your faith, which you call faith, doesn't bring God into action, it isn't faith. Faith must bring somebody or something into action on your behalf.

Otherwise it's just a belief. My belief tells me that a plane will fly at a certain time. My faith sits in it.

And lets the plane that I believe will fly at a certain time take me to my destination. That's the difference between the two. And by and large, within the evangelical context, we have something to do with belief for faith.

And we equate now people believing things and giving mental consent to certain evangelical doctrines with the faith that lets God translate them into the flesh and blood of our humanity, for which there is no possible explanation but God Himself. Work without faith to explain. Labor that needed no love to compel it.

And a patience that needed no hope to sustain it. That was characteristic of the Church in Earth. Work that needed no faith to explain it.

Labor that needed no love to compel it. And a patience that needed no hope to sustain it. For this good reason, that there was absolutely no margin of difference between the program and what was reasonably possible on the basis of human engineering.

And there was absolutely no margin between the service rendered and the adequacy of the reward given. I'm not just thinking in terms of dollars and cents. I'm not just thinking in terms of that kind of reward.

There are many other rewards to which people will render service. And without which they won't. Quite apart from dollars, glamour, recognition, applause, limelight, success, position, office, power, promotion, excitement, the ultimate trip, going high on Jesus.

Those are the rewards that people are looking for by and large today. For labor that in God's estimate can only be compelled by love. There was no margin of difference between what was patiently expected and what had already been carefully provided.

So nobody planned, did or expected anything which wasn't reasonably possible, adequately rewarded or already full up. That was a church in Ephesus. It was a perfect museum.

That worked magnificently without Jesus Christ. The program was professional, absolutely top. The motive was materialistic, even though they had become so acclimatized to it they weren't even able to recognize the symptoms.

And their stamina had become stagnant. It was terror. Destitute of any real reproductive life.

And Jesus said, I'm not destined. I'm not destined. I'm not just a fit.

It isn't just a hunch I've got. Repent or else. And of course in this we easily recognize the true nature of repentance.

An attitude that makes God imperative to the exercise. Repent. What happened when man fell into sin? Is that he believed the devil's lie that a man could be actually a functional man without God.

That Jesus Christ doesn't actually have a role to play in the Christian life. Even if you want to be a Christian. This is the carnal mind that is perpetuating within the regenerative.

Because what's the difference between Christians, a Christian who believes that he can successfully live the Christian life without Christ, and Adam who believes the devil's lie that he could be a successful man without God. What's the difference? What's the difference between a Christian trying to live a Christian life without total step-by-step, moment-by-moment, breath-by-breath, dependence upon Christ as the sole and exclusive origin of the act, and a man believing the devil's lie that a man can be a man without God. Absolutely none whatever.

And there's nothing that tickles the devil more than Christians in the very propagation of their faith who are perpetuating the Adam creed of self-sufficiency. And trying to live a Christian life without Christ as Adam tried to be a man without God. Nothing is more subtle than that.

But it is the pitfall into which you and I unwittingly, and without insincerity, can so easily fall. The moment we're supposed to substitute anything or anybody for Jesus Christ himself. When Adam fell into sin, he traded dependence for independence.

So repentance takes place only when we trade independence for dependence. So the measure of your repentance and mine is simply the measure in which we are dependent. Any area in your life or mine in which we continue to be independent is an area in which we have not repented.

No matter where that area may be. Whether it's in the pulpit. If I can get into the pulpit and by virtue of custom, practice, repetition, can get by, that's an area in which I've never repented.

Even though what I say is biblical. And that is the great wonder truth of Hudson Taylor. When you realize that for all these years in China, he's been rushing around to Digibron trying to bear fruit for the run.

Suddenly he saw it. You see, for all too long he thought, when Jesus said, I am the vine, you are the branch, he just distinguishes between vine and branch. Because there's a branch for one thing and a vine for the other.

And suddenly he saw it. If he is the vine, vine includes the branch. You don't have a vine without branches.

A vine incorporates the branch, embraces the branch. And when he said, I am the vine, that includes the branch. And suddenly the moment of truth dawned upon his poor, battered soul.

When Jesus said, I am the branch, he included me as part of him called branch. All I've got to do is abide. Then he who is the vine, including the branch, through me the branch, abiding in him, will bear fruit.

All I've got to do is stick my fingers up. And a thousand Muslims went to China. A.B. Simpson, Dwight Moody, Andrew Murray, F.B. Meyer, Jonathan Edwards.

These are amazing men and women in whose frail humanity God rocked the world. Not because of what they did, but what they discovered Jesus Christ to be. When he's got any old drain pipe open both ends and nothing in the middle, that will let the water flow.

I'm so thankful personally for the moment in my own life as a Christian. And at the age of 19, seven years after my conversion, in which I had sincerely accepted Christ as my Redeemer, and had been no less sincerely programmed by those who knew no better. As for the procedures of a Christian life, which were to be equated with my relationship to Christ, left me at the end of seven years, defeated, frustrated, exhausted, and debilitated.

Already in my second year, training as a doctor to become a medical missionary in Africa. Leader of the intervals to Christian fellowship. Spending all my vacations, Bible chanting, preaching in the open air, witnessing what lessons sent on every committee I could lay my hands on.

Thinking that certain activity could be it, and with no incentive, and with a degree, but in utter sheer despair, in total exhaustion, and finally, with tears in my eyes, I got down on my knees and said, not because I don't love you, I do, but because quite obviously, I'm a total hopeless, utter failure. And you might just as well write me off now, as for me to go on playing. I know if I go to Africa as a missionary, I'll be as useless there as I have been in England.

And I'm so tired. I'll be there. I'll sit.

I'll watch. From now on I'm a spectator. And I almost heard him sigh with relief.

This was the moment of truth. It was almost as though he was standing in the room and said, thank you, at last. This is what I've been waiting for for seven years.

For seven years you've been trying to live for me, with no insincerity, with the utmost devotion, with all your abilities, you've been trying to live for me, a life that only I can live through. At last you've discovered why I died for you. That I might risen from the dead, come and give myself to you, share my life with you, and let that life loose through you.

And do you know, the whole Bible from that moment became a new book. That was nearly 40 years ago. 39.

It precipitated immediately into that ministry in which it's still my joy to participate. Within five weeks I'd left the university. I suddenly saw it.

For seven miserable years I'd been asking Jesus Christ to give me what I already had. I didn't receive one thing new. Not one thing.

For Jesus Christ at the age of 12 had already come to inhabit my humanity, but I'd locked him up downstairs in a cell. Like foolish Galatians, having begun my new life through the Holy Spirit, the presence of a risen Lord within my heart, I tried to be made perfect in the flesh. Tried to be made perfect in the flesh.

My, what a relief. What a relief to discover that he had never ever expected of me anything more than the failure that I did. That's a relief.

Because you can stop apologizing to yourself. How often our prayer life is one long apology. We go to confession very well.

Oh God, fancy me doing that. You know what God says? Fancy you doing anything else. Captain Wallace used to say some people go around with a skunk rat on their neck always complaining of the smell.

It's the one you see there at the head, where God put him. On the cross, there was executed in the person of Jesus Christ all that you are. Apart from all that Jesus Christ is.

Why not leave it there? And step out into the abundant, magnificent, fabulous provision that God has provided for you in the glorious fact that Jesus is alive, not only in heaven but in you. To share the inimitable resources of Jesus and all you've got to do is let him live. When I got up next morning, I said, Jesus Christ, I've got nothing but the history of faith.

I looked back on it for seven years. But for the first time in my life, I'm going to dare to believe that because you not only died for me, but rose again to live within me, you're going to do something worthy. No longer what I can do for you, but what you can do for me.

Thanks for the story you're going to tell. Thanks for the blessing you're going to bring. Thanks for the life you're going to be transformed.

And I can't explain it to you, but the moment I began to say, thank you, Lord Jesus, instead of please, Lord Jesus, people got saved. Almost every day for five and a half weeks until at last, he tapped me on the shoulder again and said, I've just given you a little taste, a little foretaste of good things to come. And I just want to remind you of the fact you can't have your program and my life.

And you're not going to be a doctor. You're not going to Africa. You're going to leave the university, go up and down the British Isles and tell people I'm alive and not dead.

Okay? Be a doctor if you like. Go to the mission if you like, but without me. Then you'll come back every three or four years with a little box of slime.

And tell your weary story. I said, no thanks. I've got a box of slime.

But it isn't a weary story. And boy, it's just been the most marvelous adventure since then. Recognizing I can't, but he can.

Always made aware, oppressed again and again by the Holy Spirit of our inherent weakness and bankruptcy, but just to discover how full is the life that is ours in Jesus Christ. And at the age of 19, he precipitated me upon this particular ministry to which God has so graciously called me though the least of all his saints and the chief of sinners. Just to tell folks that Jesus is alive and his strength is made perfect in our weakness.

If only we'll let him loose. And all you've got to do in every situation to which everyone you've set face, is to bow yourself out and bow him in and say, I can't, but you can. I'm available.

At the receiving end of your instruction, waiting for you to vindicate yourself. And every new experience of his power released in terms of our availability undergirds our faith for the next adventure. And the more difficult it is and the more challenging and the more frightening and the more hilarious it becomes.

God, it was pretty tough yesterday, but boy, this is a corker. It's going to be exciting to see how you handle it. Thank you so much that you're God and I'm not.

And so where does the responsibility rest? Fairly and squarely upon his broad shoulders and their bitterness. And that's great. Well, we'll have to stop.

We're thankful, Lord Jesus, because of who you are. So much more wonderful even than what you did. So we're deeply thankful for that.

Because it's only what you did that makes it possible for us now to enjoy what you are. Forgiver, we pray you, for the folly of enjoying what you did without daily enjoying what you are. We want you to find in our redeemed humanity an outlet for your deity.

Those through whom you can demonstrate the fact that you're alive. We want the quality of life, dear Lord, that can be explained only in terms of Jesus Christ. We thank you for this glorious process.

Thanks for those who are now bowed in your presence and the desire that you've already awakened long since in our hearts to be extended. Thank you for those who are going to come alive as your life through them is released to us to the ultimate end of the earth. It's so wonderfully, indescribably exciting.

We don't deserve it. And we don't ask for anything that might be described as sensational or spectacular. But we cannot and will not, Lord Jesus, settle for anything less than the miracle through which only God himself can be the explanation.

And for your dear name's sake. Amen. Thank you so much.

Is that good? Okay, would you? I'm sorry. And boy has answered and said to her, it has truly been said. The principle I began to practice overnight.

And nothing has ever changed that principle. Quite frankly, in the simplest possible terms, I stopped saying please and started saying thank you. I entered into what you may call the assumption of faith, which I've already entered into as far as my rejection of the terms seven years before.

I've never, in those seven years, asked Christ to redeem me again. I've entered into the assumption of faith. All I learned that night was to assume that he was alive in me and once I've learned to assume that he died for me.

And say thank you. Now, when I say that, I don't mean that overnight I entered into the fullness of what was mine. Every day since then and still today is a new discovery of the illimitable result.

And I don't mean that there aren't occasions, many of them, all too many, in which I could kick myself complaining that they thank you and going out on a limb on their own and falling flat on their face. But the marvelous thing is when you do that, you know the principle you violate. You see? And when you fall flat on your face, you get up and say, Lord, I know exactly what I did.

I was stupid enough to assume responsibility for that as though I could when I couldn't. But you promise instant cleansing. The moment I admit it, thanks for the cleansing.

I'm back where I belong. I don't even know how to clean up the mess that I've made, but you do. Thanks very much.

You then look at me straight in the eye and say, I appreciate the help you've just given me. Thank you for the service demonstration that I can't, but only thanks that I can give you a real service. I needed that reminder.

Bye-bye. Consider yourself to be infallible. You're not back to where you belong when you need the reminder that you're not.

That's all. And that's a process that has enriched my life over the years and it's still in me. You see? So the principle never changes, that I enjoy my body constantly multiplies.

And every new experience of his attitude becomes a memory. And that memory undergirds, you see, the new situation. So finally, you begin to speak out of the abundance of your heart and accumulation of memories of those experiences of his adequacy, of what we call growth and grace.

So you see, simply to repeat a doctrine, you begin to speak out of your experience. Not your experience of yourself, but your experience of him. And you share Christ.

Okay? Thank you. Bye. The following is where Ian Thomas is at Los Altos Baptist Church speaking in Ruth, the second chapter.

And he said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kins. As you sought grace in the infinite mercy of God, you have encountered the one who has the right to redeem. The near kin, who can purchase us out of bankruptcy and give back life to the lifeless.

Isn't that a great story? Of course, we're only just begun. We're just paddling in the shadow or the shallow. A whole lot more to happen yet.

We haven't got anything near to the message of the book. But at least we're doing a little homework and laying the foundation of those further discoveries that we're going to make as we continue tomorrow night and discover the lavish provision that God made for those who seek His grace. Time, the great abode, the mighty man of wealth, in whose presence for time and eternity you can cry, Redeemed! For God has not appointed us to walk but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us.

But whether we wake or sleep still physically alive on earth or already dead up from the body in heaven, whether now or then, in time or eternity, here or there, we should live together with Him. Redeemed. One of the loveliest young fellows who came from Germany, fifteen, sixteen year old, arrived in my home, I suppose about fifteen years ago now, Huldah Blue.

One of the finest youngsters I've ever met. Upright, frank, noble, open-hearted, brilliant in his work at school without being a bookworm, he was a fine sportsman, a personality that you couldn't help but be enamored with. His parents told me that when he set out on that journey to visit us for that summer vacation, just before he left the home, he turned to his mother and he said, Mother, I just like a son, all that you've done for me, the way you've cared for me, clothed me, when I was a little baby, meticulous care.

When I was sick, you nursed me. Thank you. Then he turned to his father.

He said, Father, I want to thank you too. You worked so hard. You put me through a good school.

You've given me a lovely home. And now you've made it possible for me to go on this journey. I want to thank you.

Wasn't that a lovely way to say goodbye? And then they watched him as he strode down the street on a beautiful sunny July morning. His first journey outside of his own country. He arrived on a Wednesday.

And in a couple of days, he knocked on my study door. And in a very sweet, willful way, he said, Could you help me? And told me how he felt his need of Christ as his Savior. And I had to join him.

And it was so easy because he was so willing, just to introduce him to Christ. That night we had what we call on Fridays a faithful meeting. When anybody can stand up, he was the first to a seat to tell the folks how that day he'd received Christ into his life.

He did it in English, perfect. We'd made friends with a fine young man who was an acting pastor of a Baptist church, which was so small they couldn't afford to sustain a pastor. So he worked part-time and pastored the church three and for nothing.

Very fine young man. And he had promised his grandparents that he would visit them while staying with us some 40 miles away in a place called Blackpool. And on the Tuesday morning he was driving out of the courtyard on his motorcycle when he saw Holger and he said, would you like to come and hold him? And Holger said yes, jumped on the back and off they went.

And an hour later both of them were dead. He had a tractor that was catapulted into the air and killed outright. And I had one of the most tragic duties to perform that I can remember.

To tell his parents that their only child and their only son was dead. His father was a very honorable, kind, God-fearing, upright man. He flew into Manchester.

I met him at the airport. We had a service of remembrance for them both. And when I went out to fetch the father from his room to bring him down to that step I saw him standing trembling with a piece of paper in his hand.

When I came to him he said, I found it in his wallet. It was the testimony that he had given on the Friday evening first written in German and then translated into English. Written on that piece of paper were these words, God gives to every person at least once in life the opportunity to find him.

Today I took that chance. I felt so unclean inside that I went to a friend and asked him if he could help me. And he led me to Christ.

And now, now I know, and this is how he put it, I am a member of his congregation. And underneath one word in big black capital redeemed, redeemed. Yes, that's it.

He sought grace and met the one who has the right to redeem our greater Father. Mighty, mighty man of words. In time or eternity, in the body or out of it, on earth or in heaven, to live together with him.

Redeemed. Could you write across your life tonight in his dear name who made it possible for time or eternity, on earth or in heaven, I share life with him who is my Lord. Redeemed.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. It's all so marvelously simple and so good of God. As her heart draws, seeking grace, she found him.

If you're a Christian, just say thank you again tonight for God's goodness that he ever passed your way. With renewed desire, place yourself at his disposal that he through you might reach others. That you to them might be his voice, his touch, his shadow.

If I'm talking to a boy or a girl or a man or a woman tonight, deep down within your soul there is this God-shaped blank, this homesickness for heaven that has never been satisfied. Remember, all you have to do, in the light of all that he has done,

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