

Itching Ears

by Michael L. Brown

Michael L. Brown's sermon 'Itching Ears' emphasizes the need for confronting uncomfortable truths in the pursuit of genuine spiritual growth.

Duration: 45:24

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 3:18, Isaiah 30:8-9, Isaiah 30:11, Jeremiah 23:29, Acts 24:25

Topics: "Sound Doctrine", "Gospel Message"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of love and warning others. He quotes Robert Lennick Shane, who suggests that if we truly loved others, we would warn them about the dangers they face. The preacher also highlights the need for sound doctrine and warns against the temptation to follow teachings that cater to our own desires. He mentions the concept of holding revivals, particularly in the American context, and suggests that there may be more to the gospel message that people need to hear. The sermon concludes by discussing the importance of the gospel message to both lost sinners and the church, emphasizing the need for individuals to recognize their own lostness and turn to faith in Christ Jesus.

Transcript

Your hands to God with me. Open your heart to him. Father, we stand here before you, open to you, open to your word, open to your truth.

Father, none of us are here just to be entertained. None of us are here, Father, just to hear another message. None of us are here, Father, just to have our ears tickled.

We want to know truth. Father, we genuinely are asking you to open the eyes of our understanding and to change our whole orientation. If we have blind spots, if there are areas where we become numb or dull, if we're missing anything, God Almighty, we ask you to speak to us, to show us, to make it plain, to change us.

Help us, Lord, to put into practice what you give us. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.

You can be seated. I want to read two passages to you, first from Isaiah 30 and then from 2 Timothy chapter 4. And I want to speak to you about the theme, Itching Ears, Isaiah chapter 30. As you're turning there, let me give you a perspective.

We become accustomed to the environment we find ourselves in. And what is normal for an American might be extravagant for a Scotsman or luxurious for an Indian. We get used to things a certain way.

We do things a certain way in church in America, and it seems normal to us. And if you did the same thing in parts of Europe, it would seem like hype to them. Or if the way things were done in Europe were done in churches in America, it would seem low-key, just different styles sometimes.

I'm not talking about right and wrong, sinful and not sinful. I'm just talking about different styles that are neutral in themselves. We get used to certain things.

Maybe you've been saved for five years and you've watched a lot of Christian television and you think that's normal. That's what you've been raised with. Maybe your particular church preaches a certain emphasis and never really brings a message of repentance or holiness, and you think that's normal.

And when someone comes and brings a different kind of message, it shocks you. Maybe you were raised in a church that didn't believe that the gifts and powers of the Spirit were for today. And you go to a church and they pray for the sick and people are healed, and you're shocked because you didn't know what was going on.

To one extent or another, all of us are products of our environment, and all of us have at least some blind spots, and that's why we need the rest of the body. Amen? Many of us have become so accustomed to the American gospel, to the American style, that we have not realized how far it has departed from the biblical norm. You know, we have a concept, especially in Southern America, in the Bible Belt, like where we are here in Pensacola.

We have this expression of holding a revival. They find it comical, that expression, in Britain, don't they, brother? All of the Americans are holding another revival. We're holding a three-day revival next month, praise the Lord.

Oh, our church is holding, we scheduled a revival for May 4th through the 15th. We scheduled a long revival. What we mean in America is, you know, a series of special meetings with special speakers, special music, all hyped up, all these special offerings, and then you leave the same way you came in, but you're excited for that moment anyway, you're charged.

And I've told people here, week in, week out, you can no more hold a revival than you can hold a hurricane. You can no more schedule a revival than you can schedule an earthquake, but that's American Bible Belt terminology. If you take it to other parts of the world, it sounds utterly foolish, because revival to them is a visitation, is God coming down.

We schedule God to visit our church next month, from exactly 11 to 12 on Sunday, but we have some other activities right after. So we've scheduled a one-hour visitation. We have, we are holding a flood.

It's foolishness, but that's the way we talk, it's our terminology. The same way, I've had missionary friends who've been overseas working in the harvest fields for years, being in nations where maybe 1% or less of the population is truly born again. Even so-called Christian nations, nations that have had the gospel for up to 2,000 years, since the days of the apostles.

And to this day, maybe 1% of the people are saying, maybe there's never been a national revival. And there are people, missionary friends out there, pouring their lives out, pouring their hearts out, day in, day

out, laboring, preaching, teaching, serving, giving. And then they come to the States, and they are shocked sometimes by what they see.

I remember a pastor from Canada, who got saved and kind of came to the Lord in a closed environment, was not that exposed to a lot of the other trends out in the church, had a pure time in the Word and prayer and seeking God. Came to America with some friends to visit Leonard Ravenhill, before he went to be with the Lord. And they flipped on television, and there was a preacher.

Guy got off TV for a while after that. But there was a preacher, and they were shocked. They thought it was a comedian mocking the gospel.

They thought that this guy, asking for money and doing things the way he was doing, was actually a comedian mocking the gospel. And they said, my God, God is going to be displeased with this man. Think of the judgment that's going to be on this guy.

And then they found out it was actually a popular American preacher. And he was well respected by many. They were shocked.

I've had missionary friends come back, or native workers from other parts of the world, and they find the latest trend, the latest fad, the latest new craze in the church, and they're thinking, what is going on? Your country's going to hell all around you. You're consuming so much of the world's resources on yourself. People are dying out there without Jesus.

What in the world are you doing? You know, now we've got the latest spiritual trend fad, you know? The latest Christian diaphragm, the latest Christian aerobic video. We don't realize sometimes how much we have departed from a strong, clear, biblical word. How much we have been softened by our environment.

When I wrote the book, It's Time to Rock the Boat, I wrote a chapter in there called Connoisseur Christians and a Gourmet Gospel, where I had some of our pampered pew sitters of today counseling John the Baptist, and Jeremiah, and Joel the prophet, and some of these others. Giving them counsel because their message was too hard, it was too negative, they were going to scare the people off, they'd never amount to much. I mean, if John the Baptist had listened to the counsel I gave, he could have lived a good long life.

I even tried to help Jesus out with some counsel. If we used the same standards that we put on people today, on the biblical authors, we would have tuned them all off. I want you to see something.

This may be an eye-opener for some. This may just confirm the burden of your heart. But let's start in Isaiah, the 30th chapter, verse 8. Go now, write it on a tablet for them, and describe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness.

Speaking to the rebellious people of Israel and Judah. These are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction. They say to the seers, see no more visions.

And to the prophets, give us no more visions of what is right. Tell us pleasant things. Prophecy illusions.

Lead this way, get off this path, and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel. We've heard enough of this holiness message, Isaiah. We've heard enough of this judgment is coming, judgment is coming message.

We've heard enough of this repent, get this sin out message. In fact, Isaiah's favorite title for God, he called him Kedosh Yisrael, the Holy One of Israel. That was his favorite title of God.

They didn't want to hear it. Quit talking to us about the Holy One of Israel. It makes us uncomfortable.

It makes us feel like something's wrong with us. Makes us feel like God is angry with us. Quit it, man, he's our father.

He's a loving God. He made us the way we are. He understands our needs.

He understands our desires. Tell us good things. Pleasant things.

Prophecy illusions. That's a self-deceived person speaking. This is what the Lord speaks.

Verse 12, therefore this is what the Holy One of Israel says. It's never wise to tell a prophet to shut up. Stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel.

Therefore, this is what the Holy One of Israel says. And here is a message of judgment. Because you have rejected this message, relied on oppression, and depended on deceit, this sin will become for you like a high wall cracked and bulging.

It collapses suddenly in an instant. It will break in pieces like pottery, shattered so mercilessly that among its pieces, that a fragment will be found for taking coals from a hearth or scooping water out of a cistern. But the people said, stop it.

2 Timothy chapter 4. 2 Timothy chapter 4. 2 Timothy 4 follows on the heels of 2 Timothy 3. Paul has written to Timothy how he's known the Scriptures since he was a child, the Scriptures that are able to make him wise for salvation through faith in Messiah Jesus. In 3.16, all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for, notice this, what is the word useful for, what is Scripture good for? Teaching. We love teaching.

Keep reading. Rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Speaking of discipline there.

So that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Notice he didn't say the word is useful for teaching and encouragement and building faith and making you feel good. Although some of those things it is useful for.

He said no, it's useful for teaching and rebuking and correcting and training in righteousness. Three out of the four things he lists are pretty confrontational and pretty strong. In other words, the diet is not candy bars, soda, and ice cream.

The diet is vegetables and fruit and juices. Steve sometimes talks about brussel sprouts versus Twinkies. He talks about choking on brussel sprouts.

I tried eating brussel sprouts one time. I know some people love them, and I prayed that God would give me a love for broccoli and brussel sprouts. Either I have to act on my faith more, or just discipline myself, or just accept that there are other healthy things to eat aside from broccoli and brussel sprouts.

I only tried brussel sprouts once. I don't know if it was my mental attitude or the taste or the texture, but I almost choked on it. It's the way some of us are with truth.

On the other hand, I'd rather choke on a brussel sprout than on truth. Amen? We have a lot of, what, vegetarian fanatics here or something? It wasn't a healthy amen. Some of you think I should rather choke on truth than a brussel sprout.

Now he goes on. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead this is an awesome charge. And in view of his appearing in his kingdom, I give you this charge.

Preach the word. Be prepared in season and out of season. Correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction.

Here he's giving pastoral instruction to Timothy, or Timothy who would have oversight over several of the churches. Even as a young man, he's giving him pastoral wisdom. And he's telling Timothy how to minister the word.

And he's saying, don't ever forget this. I want you to remember this. This is a charge of the presence of Almighty God and of Jesus who's going to judge the living and the dead, who's going to return.

Timothy, you preach and you correct and you rebuke and you encourage. Part of the preaching of the word. Part of the ministering of the word.

Confronting what's wrong. Setting it right. The word of God says in the book of Proverbs, the 28th chapter, that he who rebukes a man will have more favor in the end than someone who speaks with a flattering tongue.

It says in Proverbs, the 27th chapter, open rebuke is better than secret love. The kisses of an enemy are profuse, but faithful are the wounds of a friend. Somebody may tell you all the good things you want to hear, make you feel good, flatter you, never say anything that's cutting or painful.

Not even in love, they won't ever say that to you. They'll just tell you, oh man, you're going to be okay. Oh, your preaching is terrific.

Oh, the way you're raising your kids is great. Oh, don't worry about that. Over and over and over and over and over.

They never tell you, you're hell bound. Or they never tell you, you're on the path to destruction. Or they never tell you, you're only preaching half the message.

They just pat you on the back. Oh, that book is awesome. It doesn't need any correcting.

Don't listen to that editor. Don't listen to that publisher. And in the end, that person has hurt you.

And the one who told you something you didn't want to hear, sir, if you don't go on a diet and get in shape, you're going to die. Ma'am, if you don't change your whole attitude, you're going to alienate your kids. The one who told you those words that you didn't want to hear, that was the true friend.

And the one that just had a smooth, nice word, never confronted, never warned, that person is really an enemy. I told somebody just the other day, 14-year-old, came up for prayer, and said, listen, I'm not living right. I don't have any godly friends around me.

And I know I'm making wrong choices, and I've got to get right with God. It was very clear she wasn't living right. It just happened recently.

And I said to her, listen, there's no room for playing games. I said, I feel it's so strong in me. I've warned other young people sometimes, felt it so clearly, and seen what they didn't hear.

It happened. I said, listen, if you don't get right now, you'll be pregnant when you're 15. Or you'll hang out one time with the wrong person, get some sexually transmitted disease.

There's no room to play games, young lady. Maybe somebody else would have just said, hey, honey, you're going to be okay. And then maybe they'll be speaking at her funeral three years later.

Robert Murray McShane said it like this, if we had more love, we would warn people. If we had more love, if we weren't so selfish, if we weren't so concerned about what people thought of us, we would warn. So Timothy receives these words from Paul, for the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.

Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. Now there's only one problem here.

Nobody thinks they are doing that. If you're in the church, you believe that you have sound doctrine, don't you? I mean, do any of you pastors get up and say, now I'm going to preach something very unsound today? I want you to know that what I'm preaching is not true, it's not according to the Word. No, we all think that what we have is sound doctrine.

And I want to help you distinguish some things today. I want to help you understand what some of God's message must contain for the world and for the church, compared to the itching ears kind of message. I'm just laying some foundations now.

One message tells the people what they want to hear, the other message tells the people what they need to hear. John Wesley made the comment, we're all approved, few profit. It doesn't matter if you're going to be accepted because of the message, it doesn't matter if you're going to lose crowds initially because of the message, the question is, do you have the favor of God? Are you delivering His message His way? Yes, in love, yes, in the power of the Spirit, but is it true? The Word of God is not only a lamp to our feet, the light to our path, Psalm 119, 105, it's not only a tree of life to all who take hold of it.

Proverbs 3, 18, it's not just that, but it's also like fire. Jeremiah 23, 29, and like a hammer that shatters the rock in pieces. It's also sharp as any two-edged sword and pierces to the very depths of our being, according to Hebrews 4, 12 and 13.

Where is that piercing word of truth that sets the cold on fire, that smashes the hardness of heart and brings repentance? Problem is, though, that nobody thinks they themselves have unsound doctrine. Let me illustrate my point. If you are a Baptist, one of the Baptist mottos is, we preach the whole counsel of God.

Apparently, if you're not a Baptist, you only preach part of the counsel of God. If you are Presbyterian or Reformed in your doctrine and theology, you have the orthodox doctrine. Everybody else is just poor unorthodox guys.

You have the orthodox. If you are Pentecostal, you are full gospel. We're a full gospel church.

Where do you go to? I go to a partial gospel church. If you believe, if you hold to a schismatic doctrine like Jesus only, what do you believe? We have the apostolic doctrine of the Lord Jesus. What about your church? No, we just made it up in our church.

My favorite, of course, is the word of faith. I go to a word church. You go to a word church? I go to a word church.

What kind of church do you go to? We don't use the word in our church. We use the phone book on Sunday morning. We're not a word church.

See, that's the mentality. Our church is a word church. Our church is a full gospel church.

Our church preaches the whole counsel of God. If you're into the restoration movement, you go to a New Testament church. Whether you go to a New Testament church, I have two answers.

Yes and no. If someone says, do you go to a New Testament church, I just say yes. And that discussion's simple.

But the more truthful answer would be no and neither do you. And if there was a New Testament church on our block, we'd probably excommunicate it for being too radical. We'd say, those guys are off.

They're extremists. We don't believe in that stuff. I go to a New Testament church.

What about you? No, our church is called the traditions of men church. See, everybody thinks they've got... I remember hearing a guy on the radio when I was a new believer, and his teaching was certainly not in depth, to be polite. And it was lacking in some other areas.

I mean, I just, even as a new believer, I knew that we're just getting little bits and pieces. But I remember him laughing on the radio, and the only preacher on the station was Sound Doctrine. How many have heard shows on the radio called the Sound Doctrine Hour? Why doesn't everyone else just give that guy their own air time? Because he's got the Sound Doctrine.

Nobody is willingly deceived. Okay? Nobody comes up to you and says, Listen, I'm a con man. I want to con you out of all of your life savings.

And you say, Okay, great. What's the scam? I'll sign it on the dotted line. I am a cult leader, and I'm going to lead you straight to hell and destruction, and everything I tell you is a lie.

Follow me. Nobody does that. People get deceived and don't realize they're deceived.

Let me illustrate that again. Does anyone here go to the First Assembly of the Misled? The Congregation of the Deceived? You know, I start, Let No One Deceive You, out with that question, you know. Who is willingly deceived? Everyone says, Don't be deceived, don't be deceived.

Maybe the ones warning us about being deceived are deceived themselves. People are so worried about receiving a false spirit, in the meantime they reject the true spirit, which is a worse deception. How can we distinguish them? What's God really saying? What's the message we really need to hear? We all want sound doctrine, don't we? Everyone here wants the truth at any cost.

Even if it hurts. Even if it stings. Even if it brings up evil.

We want the truth. I remember Leonard Ravenhill telling me repeatedly, here he was in his 80s, he went to be with the Lord in 87, passionate for God, meditated dearly on the judgment seat, dearly. I don't know for how many decades he did, but was awestruck at the thought, and preparing his life to meet with God.

In fact, it was such a serious topic to him, even though he knew the joy of the Lord, and intimacy with Jesus, he had a broken heart for the state of the church, and the state of the world. And the subject of the judgment seat was overwhelming to him. Not that he was afraid God would damn him to hell, no, he was a believer, and he knew the Lord, and he knew the Lord's love for him, but he knew he was going to have to give a count to God one day.

Think of that. He was going to have to give a count. And when he was 87, he had a stroke, never came out of it for about two months, could respond sometimes to family just by squeezing a hand a little bit.

When hymns would come on, he would kind of, he had one hand that wasn't paralyzed, he would kind of conduct the hymns. I wasn't there with him, but his wife Martha would be telling me. Then after two months he went to be with the Lord, but in the midst of this, when I was talking to his dear wife Martha about it, she said to me, it's good that he had this extra time just to prepare to meet God.

Nothing else except focus on the day that he was going to stand before him and give a count of his life. That's how seriously he took the subject. We have to know the truth now rather than find it out then.

I'd rather God rebukes me now and humbles me before the whole world and gives me an opportunity to change than I stand before him and it's too late. I'd rather be embarrassed now than embarrassed then. I'd rather someone told me you're going the wrong way after I've been traveling for 50 hours than after I've been traveling for 10 years have to turn around.

We need to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves. We need to be ruthlessly honest with those that we witness to. When we are doing one-on-one witnessing, there's a certain way we do it.

When there's public preaching, there's another thing. When you're speaking through book or television, each of these is different, and always we need wisdom, and always we need sensitivity because we're dealing with human beings that are precious in the sight of God. Our goal is not to look big and strong and powerful and anointed.

Our goal is to communicate the truth to sinners and to saints alike. But there are several essential ingredients of the gospel that we must preach. There are several truths that we must preach and that itching ears don't want to hear.

One Puritan said it like this. He said, Ministers are physicians, not cooks, and therefore should not study to please the palate, but to cure the patient. Your goal when you bring the Word is not to serve up some tasty dish that everybody loves.

Mmm boy, this tastes so good. He's a good cook while the patient's out there dying of disease. Your goal is to expose the sickness and bring people to the great physician.

Now let me read you something that Charles Finney said about the gospel. This may surprise you, but these were Finney's words. Listen to what he says.

Here is the sinner in rebellion. God comes with pardon in one hand and a sword in the other. Notice he describes the sinner in rebellion.

Someone who is not saved is in rebellion. They're not just lost. They're not just hell bound.

They are in rebellion. Here is the sinner in rebellion. God comes with pardon in one hand and a sword in the other and tells the sinner to repent and receive pardon or refuse and perish.

That's the gospel. Double-edged sword. If you repent, there's life, there's pardon, there's forgiveness, there's mercy.

If you turn and say, Oh God, have mercy on me. Save me from my sins. I put my faith in your son to save me and deliver me and cleanse me.

By his power I turn from the life I'm living and I turn to you. Pardon. If you refuse, you perish.

Which is it? Now listen to what he said. It is of great importance that the sinner should be made to feel his guilt and not left to the impression that he is unfortunate. Isn't that symptomatic of our preaching today? Everything is a disease, a disorder.

Instead of gluttony, it's an eating disorder. I'm not talking about some of the legitimate thyroid problem or something like that, which is the tiny, tiny minority. Not gluttony.

It's an eating disorder. It's not the sin of alcoholism. It's a disease of alcohol.

That person that's committing all those sexual sins where they were abused when they were little. You know how God looks at it? The person who abused them is guilty of sin and they who are now committing sexual sins themselves are guilty. Both are guilty.

We make it like no one's guilty because the guy that abused the girl when she was little, well, he was abused when he was little, so nobody's guilty. God's perspective, no, everybody outside of Jesus is guilty. Instead of nobody, it's everybody.

I think this is a very prevalent fault, and he said, particularly in books on the subject, that are calculated to make the sinner think more of his sorrows than of his sin and feel that his state is rather unfortunate than criminal. Oh, you poor sinner. You've had such a rough, tough life.

Now, maybe they have. Maybe there are poor sinners also, but they also need to be confronted as people in rebellion against God whose sins nailed the Son of God to the cross. We preach a message to the lost that gives the impression that Jesus is in need of them, that Jesus is standing waiting at the door for them.

It's Jesus again. Won't you open up? I'm knocking at the door of your heart. I've been waiting so patiently.

Now that you've finished that affair, now that you've finished that drug addiction, I'm still here knocking. It's cold and rainy. Won't you let me in? Yeah, I decided to give Jesus a try.

You know, I figured he's been waiting for me all that time. No, that's not the way it is. He knocks and says, open or perish.

We are in need of him. He is not in need of us. But how often do people after our altar calls realize that? How often do people that we're witnessing to realize that? We tend to offer them a better life.

We tend to point to all the benefits and all the good things, and there are awesome, wonderful, good things that come out of knowing Jesus. But that's not the heart and soul of the gospel message. You say, but didn't he promise a hundredfold return if people would follow him? No.

He told those who had left everything, they had already left everything, he told them, follow me and I'll make you fishers of men. They had left everything and they said to him, by the way, we've left everything. What do we get? We left families.

We left houses. He said, well, you'll get a hundred times more families, houses, everything left. You'll get a hundred times more in this world with persecution and in the world to come, eternal life.

But he didn't cut some deals. He said, all right, now, if you will follow me, we have a special today, three hundredfold return if you give up your house, one hundredfold return if you give up your family, and if you'll follow me now, we offer forgiveness of sins and straight tickets to heaven. Now, how many will come? No.

He warned them because he had the goods. He was Jesus. He didn't have to cut deals.

He walked in, crowds came everywhere. He walked in, they came running with the sick. He walked in, just to hear him, he'd have to go out in the boat because the crowds were so large they'd be swarming him.

He had to go out to sea just a little bit so he could speak to all of them safely. Sometimes the crowds were such he couldn't even eat. There he is in the midst of ministry, can't even do anything.

They open the roof, drop somebody down for healing. That's the environment. Everybody's swarming.

He said, now, wait one second. Wait one second. If you really want me, if you really want to be my disciple, you've got to leave everything.

That's what he said. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. That's entry level.

Anyone who does not forsake everything he has cannot be my disciple. Those were the words of Jesus. And read through Disciple in the New Testament.

That's not to supersede. That's just what followers of Jesus were called. I tell you, if God was moving in our midst in greater power, if God was moving in our churches throughout America in greater power, and in different nations in greater power, and God was healing and setting people free, and touching lives radically, people would be swarming from everywhere.

Crowds would not be the problem. Dealing with the crowds would be the problem. But crowds would be coming.

The question would be sorting them out and finding the true disciples from the not true. We've been having that in our school now with such a flood of people wanting to come. We're making our application process more stringent.

Making our recommendation process more stringent. Because this school, man, God's moving. We've got awesome faculty.

Classes are anointed. The Spirit moves in chapel. God may just come down during classes and take over class time.

It's an incredible environment. And you're in the revival too. We want to make sure are you really willing to take up your cross? Do you really realize the demands we're going to put on you? Do you really realize the holiness standards you're going to be held to? Do you really realize the purpose in coming? Jesus didn't say, won't anybody please follow me? He didn't stand there on the mountain and say, please, I'm lonely.

Ask me into your heart. He warned people. He said, one day the door's going to be shut in your face.

One day you're going to say, but we ate with you. We dragged you in our streets, you're in our homes. And he's going to say, I never knew you.

You were churchgoers. You were religious people. You had the form, but you didn't have the content.

I never knew you. This is one of these Friday morning feel-good messages. Listen to Finney.

Make the sinner see that all pleas and excuse for not submitting to God are acts of rebellion against him. Tear away the last lie which he grasped in his hand and make him feel that he is absolutely condemned before God. That's how Finney preached the gospel of grace.

Listen to Charles Wesley. I preached from George Whitefield's pulpit, the wall. They preached outdoors because churches wouldn't have them.

I preached from George Whitefield's pulpit, the wall. Many, I am persuaded, found themselves stripped, wounded, and half dead and are therefore ready for the oil and wine. They realized their need.

They realized their sickness. The gospel message to lost sinners. I'm going to talk the rest of the time about the gospel message to the church.

But the gospel message to lost sinners must make them see that they are lost. Go through the preaching in the book of Acts and follow that pattern. What does Paul do with Felix in Acts the 24th chapter? Felix is a leading man in the Roman government.

He comes in to talk to Paul, the prisoner. And he comes in with his wife, Christela. And Paul talks to him about faith in Christ Jesus.

So if I said fill in the blanks, what did Paul talk to him about? Faith in Christ Jesus. What do you think he would have preached on? You know, we can think, well, he'd probably talk about the love of God, talk about the cross, talk about the blood of Jesus, talk about salvation from sin through the blood of Jesus. He may have told them all of that, but that's not what Luke records.

Luke says, as he discoursed about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, I've had enough for now. Slight paraphrasing. I've had it for now.

I'll tell you when it's convenient. We'll talk again. And he gets out of there.

First thing is this. Felix's wife, Christela, was not his own wife originally. According to the historian, she was a beautiful young woman married to someone else.

And Felix spoke every law of God and of man to take her as his own wife. He was living in adultery, just like Herod, whom John the Baptist rebuked. And what has Paul taught? He comes in with his wife.

Sure, they strut in. The big man with his beautiful wife. He was just a prisoner.

And Paul talks to him about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. And Felix panics and wants out. Let me ask you something.

Lost people that you know, lost friends, lost relatives, you may not be able to come right to this in your very first conversation, but those that you've shared the gospel with for a period of time, those that you've had opportunity to witness to for a period of time, have you clearly warned them of the consequences of rejecting the message? Have you told them that although God loves them so much to send his son to die for them, that God is angry with the wicked every day? Do they understand that they are sinners in rebellion against God? Or have they just heard a soft Jesus has done so much for me, he can do so much for you kind of message? There's more to it than that. What happens, listen, let's say somebody was messed up. Their marriage was messed up because of their sins.

They were drinking. The wife gets saved. The husband gets saved.

They're in love. Things are doing wonderfully well. Their marriage is solid.

They're going to church. Everything's doing great. And now this is a country where there's some persecution for the faith.

And now the husband is confronted with the gospel on his job. And he stands up and says, I cannot deny Jesus. I am a Christian.

And he's arrested and put in prison for ten years. And he's tortured. If he's following Jesus because things go better for you when you follow Jesus, now what do you tell him? If he's following Jesus just so his marriage can get back together, now he and his wife are separated.

There's got to be a deeper motivation. Listen, in the parable of the sower, Jesus warned us about those whose soil was shallow. And when testing came because of the word, that plant that had grown so quickly withers just as quickly because there were no deep roots.

When shaking comes, when persecution comes, when tests come, when hard times come, don't think that just because you prayed a prayer or you're feeling better about life that you're going to make it. You've got to have some roots that are planted deep. And if we don't get people soundly converted, the roots are going to be shallow.

Do you know what most major evangelistic campaigns, major evangelists, fine evangelists, some of the best names in the world, they will readily admit that of all those that come forward to receive Jesus, five or six percent are actually added to the church. In other words, over 90% of those who come forward and say, I want to receive Jesus, do not end up in the churches. Something's wrong there.

Something's wrong. It's not just the follow-up process. Well, if they were followed up better, it would help.

The big problem is they haven't been presented with a truthful message. Or, they haven't been presented with a clear enough warning. Some of our evangelists are bringing a fine, truthful message, but perhaps there's more to the story.

Perhaps there's more that people need to hear. Here, let me give you a famous example. Mickey Cone was a gangster who heard the gospel at an evangelistic meeting in the 1950s, and he thought about it and chewed on it and was he going to follow or not and back and forth and he wasn't sure and one of his friends really encouraged him to ask Jesus in.

Someone urged him using Revelation 3.20, I stand at the door and knock, to invite Jesus Christ into his life. This he professed to do. And his life subsequently gave no evidence of repentance, that mighty change of mind, heart, and life.

He rebuked his friend telling him, you didn't tell me that I would have to give up my work, meaning his rackets. You didn't tell me that I would have to give up my friends, meaning his gangster associates. Now listen to this.

He had heard that so-and-so was a Christian football player, so-and-so a Christian cowboy, so-and-so a Christian actress, so-and-so a Christian senator, and he really thought that he could be a Christian gangster. Let me stop for a minute. I was doing a radio interview in New York one time.

I was in Jersey doing an interview by phone into New York, New Jersey area. And someone called in and they wanted to attack Pat Robertson. And I said, I'm certainly not going to sit here and throw stones at Pat Robertson.

Thank God for the good he's done, and if you differ with certain things, then you differ with certain things. I'm not here to defend it, because I've been appointed an adjunct professor of Old Testament and Jewish Studies at Regent University School of Divinity, the school that Pat Robertson founded. So I said, I'm certainly not going to just sit here and, you know, you're asking me to attack him, I'm not going to attack him.

And he said, well, it didn't mean I agreed with everything he had said or done either. And he said, well, on a recent show, now this is just what the guy's telling you, he said, on a recent show, he had on Hulk Hogan, the wrestler, and some female bodybuilder, and they were giving their testimonies, Christian testimonies. Professional wrestler, one of the most stupid, violence-exalting sports.

Shouldn't call it a sport on the one hand, because there's no athletic competition, but these guys are monsters. They're athletes in a different sense. But to think of someone in the midst of that being a believer, maybe what it means is that he's a good guy, you know, in the wrestling scene, that he's not one of the bad guys.

Well, I understand he's become a bad guy now. Or maybe it means that he's not sleeping around or on drugs, but he's a Christian professional wrestler. Somehow, that strikes me as odd.

I have to tell you, it strikes Christians as odd in other parts of the world that we have Christian boxers. Here's a guy laying in the corner, bloody, got a concussion, you know, his nose broken, his eyes cut up. He's laying there in the corner, knocked out.

The other guy's raising his hand. I have to give all praise, honor, and glory to the Lord Jesus. I couldn't have done this without Jesus.

We're used to that in America, and I believe some of these men are genuine Christians, but the standard of Christianity in America is so low that they can do what they're doing and be part of the church. If the

standard was raised to where God wanted it to be, we wouldn't have any of that. We wouldn't have it.

And then, you know, the guy's in this Christian lady bodybuilder. She was wearing such a skimpy bikini that they couldn't even show the full, you know, they, you know, blocked out some of the picture that was on the screen just to show her muscles. This is Christian.

Give her the testimony. The Lord's really helped me to be disciplined. The Lord's really helped me to work hard to build my muscles.

I was, and I don't know what she said, but I'm making this, you know, I was told when I was little I couldn't do anything but Jesus come into my life, and now he told me I can be the best, and now I'm the best, you know, female bodybuilder there is. Something's wrong there. I'm not saying it's absolutely sinful if a woman has muscles.

Read Proverbs 31 and that woman there's a whole lot of stuff. She's probably got some muscles too. But I'm talking about the outfits, I'm talking about the poses, I'm talking about the whole scene.

But see that's...

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