

The Gospel Call

by Paul Washer

Paul Washer emphasizes the transformative power of the Gospel and the necessity of genuine conversion for salvation.

Duration: 1:03:21

Scripture: Matthew 25:32, Matthew 25:34, Romans 1:16, Romans 10:6, Romans 10:9-11

Topics: "Persevering Faith", "Gospel Proclamation"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of perseverance and continuation in the faith. He uses the example of believers in the Roman Empire who were being persecuted and killed for confessing Jesus as Lord. The speaker urges believers not to demand the same level of maturity and purity from new believers as they would from someone who has been a Christian for a long time. He also highlights the need for believers to faithfully proclaim the message of Jesus, even in the face of opposition and persecution. The sermon concludes with a reminder of Jesus' invitation to believers to open the door of their hearts and let Him in.

Transcript

Let's open up our Bibles to Romans, chapter 1. Romans, chapter 1, verse 16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, also to the Greek. It seems that many times in our search for great things that we pass over the greatest thing.

It seems that in our search for many clues and many resolutions to supposed enigmas in the Christian faith, we pass over the answers that are clearly set before us. I would suggest to you today that a great portion of the problems, of the maladies that are faced by even true Christianity today would all be solved with simply a correct understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Of the sinner's saving response to that gospel.

Of the idea and the doctrine of biblical assurance. All these things are looked over today. If you go into a modern day typical, although there are exceptions, a modern day typical Christian bookstore, you will find countless books on all the problems that plague modern day Christianity.

You will find countless books on discipleship, and ten ways to do this, and ten ways to do that. Problems with the lack of sanctification among God's people. But if you were to scan the entire store, you would find few books on simply what is the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ.

You would find almost nothing written on genuine conversion. You see, we've jumped over the answer. Back in the 70s and early 80s, there was a tremendous influence with regard to discipleship.

We need to do discipleship. We need to do personal discipleship. Statements were made like this.

The reason why there are just as many people leaving the back door of the church as coming in the front door of the church, is because we're not discipling the people who get saved. Now, we need to do discipleship, and personal discipleship is a wonderful thing, but that is simply not true. The reason why there's just as many people leaving the back door as there are coming in the front door, is because they're not genuinely being converted.

But they're not genuinely being converted, because in many cases, the gospel is not being preached. We are simply trying to disciple goats so that they will act like sheep. Now, this morning, I do not have time to go through, of course, all the elements of the gospel or even the gospel call, but I want to just pick out a few things.

Before I go to my text, let me say this. One of the greatest things missing, I believe, in the gospel proclamation of what God has done for us in Christ, is simply understanding His death on the cross. If you've heard me preach once, you probably never need to hear me preach again, because it seems to be always about the same thing.

There is such an idea today that somehow the physical suffering heaped upon Jesus Christ by the hands of men are the very thing that paid for our sins. Now, I don't want to take away from the physical sufferings of Christ, the nails in His hands, the crown of thorn on His head, and the lance in His side, but so often I will hear men put forth the gospel of Jesus Christ without ever mentioning that Jesus Christ was crushed under the wrath of His Father, that divine justice must be satisfied. We'll hear statements from evangelists that will say things like, God could have been just with you, but instead of being just with you, He was loving.

That is simply saying that God's love is unjust. The fact is, God was just and loving. Here some say that, and I've heard this in popular literature, that God must satisfy justice as though there were a principle hanging over the head of God that God Himself had to obey.

And that's not correct either. The justice God had to satisfy was not some principle in the universe. It was His own.

He is holy. He must be holy in love. He is just.

He must be just in His love. And the great issue of the cross is the fact that on that tree, it pleased God the Father to crush His only begotten Son, the One who at that moment was bearing sin, the sin of His people, the guilt of that sin upon Himself and being treated in their place and crushed under the justice of God. That's not the theme of my sermon today, but I always got to get that in because of all the things I've ever learned in Scripture.

That one thing is the most precious to me. And in that thing do I see the greatest revelation of all the attributes of God. But then there's the gospel call.

As I often say, we've taken this gospel and the gospel call, and we've reduced it down to five things God wants you to know, or a set of spiritual laws, or a few evangelical hoops that if we will jump through them,

at the end of the line, someone will be able to tell us that we are saved. We look at this passage, first of all, Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel. I don't think you can understand this text until you understand that Paul's flesh had every right to be ashamed of the gospel.

The gospel was absolutely ludicrous to the natural mind of fallen man. It is a plan devised, defined, created, designed by God, and it would have never entered into the mind of fallen man to have the Son of God die upon a cross bearing the sins of His people and crushed under the weight of justice. Now, I want you to think something for a moment about the supernatural nature of the gospel.

One of the greatest evidences to me that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true is the fact that it continues. If it had depended upon the eloquence or the brilliance of the apostles, it would have died in its tracks. Not because they weren't brilliant.

Not because they weren't eloquent. But to the mind of their hearers, the gospel of Jesus Christ had to be an absolute absurdity. So Paul walks in among all these philosophers, the most brilliant minds of the day, the epitome of human wisdom.

I mean, it had all come to this point after generation and generation of philosophy handed down. It had come to this point of the most brilliant men gathered together, and here walks in Paul. First of all, despised because he's a Jew.

So he walks to all these men and he says, You're all wrong. Now, whether you understand it or not, that's the very thing that has always caused Christians to die. If Paul had come into the Roman Empire and said, Jesus is God in the flesh, who died upon a tree and rose again from the dead, it would not have caused him that much problem.

But when he said, And He is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him. When he said, All your gods are false gods, he was labeled an atheist and was then worthy of death. You see, Christianity never gets itself in trouble when it says that Jesus is a way.

Or Jesus is a great lifestyle. Christianity gets itself stoned when it says, Christ and Christ alone and everything outside of Him is not even reality. You see, in the Roman Empire, everyone was having a good time.

There were hundreds and hundreds of gods, maybe even thousands of gods, and everyone was happy with it. They could trade gods like baseball cards because everyone was right. And then all of a sudden, here shows up the Gospel and ruins everyone's party.

And now think about this. He comes to these men and he says, You're all wrong. Well, then what's your opinion, Paul? The one true God has become flesh.

To the Greek Roman mind, that was absolutely the most absurd, blasphemous thing you could ever say. I mean, it would be like telling someone that you saw a group of aliens in Antarctica and they all looked like penguins. I mean, this is something for the national inquirer of the Roman Empire.

This is absolutely ludicrous. No one's going to believe this, I can tell you. No one is going to believe this message.

It's impossible. And that's one of our problems. We don't realize how ludicrous the Gospel message is and ought to continue to be to the natural mind.

And we do not understand that it is impossible for someone to believe this message apart from a supernatural revelation of God. If we would understand that, then we would cast ourselves upon God and His power and quit with the circus of trying to manipulate men. Whether it's through the seeker friendly or the so-called scholarly apologetic that makes itself believe you can convince men of the resurrection because you can give historical legal reasons for it.

We have to be a people who sit there and go, I believe, therefore I have spoken. I have had an encounter with God. I know I stand here like a lamb led to the slaughter, like a sheep before a shears, but I stand here in the power of the Gospel and I'm going to proclaim it because God has promised.

I proclaim this message. Someone is going to be converted. So Paul comes.

God became flesh. Oh really? Through what noble family in the empire? Well, actually, he was a Jew. The most despised people group in the empire.

Well, all right. What king among your people? Well, actually, his mother was married to a carpenter, Nazareth. Well, his father? Well, his father is God.

Okay, and how did he become the Savior of the world? Well, he died a blasphemer in the minds of his own people and a traitor to the Roman empire upon a cross. I can see them now. Hey guys, this is good.

You've got to listen to this. And then what happened? I guess we're to follow his life, you know, the power of his martyrdom Well, no, he rose again on the third day. And he presented himself, I suppose, to the entire nation, right? Well, actually, no.

He showed himself to his followers. Yeah, okay. Now, I'm not trying to make a mockery of the message.

I'm just trying to show you something. How do you think you're going to make anybody believe this? It's ludicrous to the natural man. And the point I'm trying to get across is when you realize the absolute impossibility that someone's ever going to believe this message coming out of your mouth and you cast yourself upon the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit, the recreative power of the Holy Spirit, the promises of God that He has said He will bring forth a people unto His name for Himself, when you shed yourself of every human help and you stand there and simply proclaim the Gospel over and over and over again, then there's going to be power unto salvation revealed in the lives and hearts of men.

I was listening to Dr. Moore a while back from Southern Seminary and he said something that just filled my heart with such joy, but also established some things. He said, you know, so many people will talk to him and say, you know, I've been witnessing to my dad over and over and over and over and trying to share the Gospel with my father. And my father just keeps rejecting it and rejecting it.

And, you know, I just want to talk to you, Dr. Moore, about is there something, you know, I could say, could you give me some... And Dr. Moore goes, now look, the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. He goes, it's not that this person is going to be saved because you give him just a little bit more information about something. He said, let me give you an example.

You've witnessed to someone a hundred times and they've rejected the message every time. And then one day you're witnessing to them and you get to the resurrection and for the first time you mention, and he was resurrected on the third day and he was seen by more than five hundred witnesses at once. And the person goes, stop.

Stop right there. He was seen by over five hundred witnesses at once? At one time? Yes. Well, you never told me that.

Okay, I'll accept it. It doesn't work that way. You're always looking.

If I could just get him a little bit more information or if I could learn to say this in a slicker way. But what you've got to realize is that you are in the same predicament as Noah. How many decades did that man preach? I can so identify with him.

His message never changed. After about 15 years of preaching, people would gather around. What's the message for today, Noah? It's going to rain.

Daily devotions. Hey, Dad, you know, I've been doing this for 15 years. What's the daily devotion on today? It's going to rain.

He was called to faithfully proclaim a message. And it was a message of judgment. But we are called to proclaim a message.

Yea, He has died. Yea, He has risen from the dead. He was not ashamed of the Gospel.

Not because he was able to study His culture, be sensitive to His culture, and then somehow preach the Gospel in a way, package the Gospel in a way, so that it would no longer be offensive to His culture and everyone would jump on the Gospel bandwagon. What you need to understand about cultural sensitivity is this. The Gospel, by nature, must be offensive in order to work.

And every time you clean this thing up to make it presentable, you've taken away her beauty. It's like taking an absolutely beautiful farm girl who's done nothing all her life but wear cotton dresses, never a stitch of makeup, just beauty in beauty's right. And then you take her to New York City, to one of the gaudiest, most sensual places, and you deck her out.

Wild hair and makeup and shiny clothing. But to anyone with a keen eye, you've ruined what was made. You do that to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And in doing so, you strip the power from her. Preachers have to realize, and I say this in the biblical sense of the term, we are prophets or we are useless. When we preach the Gospel, we are always, always Ezekiel.

Standing in a valley of dry bones with the question being thrown at us, can these bones live? And always our response must be, You know, Lord. We do not say no because we do not doubt His power. We do not say yes because we do not presume upon it.

Do you know, Lord, that the only thing, the only way that anything is going to happen is through a supernatural miracle of God on par with the very creation of the universe. And when you're cast upon that, your Gospel remains clear, clarion, and powerful. I am not ashamed of the Gospel.

Not because He was able to fix it, but He wasn't ashamed of it because He saw through the Gospel being preached, the power of God manifested in an undeniable fashion. The changing of the lives of men. The mere continuation of apostolic Christianity is evidence of its truth because it is absolutely an impossible thing.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation. One of the great problems today is we take this word salvation, and I know you know this, but you need to hear it. We take the salvation thing and we reduce it to only one time zone or one aspect of salvation.

We make it into something like a vaccination or a flu shot to protect you from God or a ticket to heaven as it is often blasphemously reported. It is the power of God for salvation. For deliverance in all tenses.

This message is the only message that has the power to save us from the condemnation of our sin. To save us from the justice of God. It is the only message that has the power to bring about the justification of wicked men by faith in Jesus Christ.

But it doesn't stop there. This message, if truly brought home to the heart of the hearer, not only leads to a salvation past tense or to a salvation future tense, but a salvation present tense. This message has the power to conform us to the image of Christ.

It is the power to sanctify us because sanctification is just the continuation of the salvation that began with justification. It has that power. Now, in what way? I believe that there is a morality set out in Scripture.

I believe that. There is a morality and there are rules and we need to obey the commands. But you must get out of thinking about Christianity as something primarily moral.

It is not primarily moral. It is primarily relational. How is the gospel, the power of God under salvation, under sanctification, how does the gospel have the power to change my life? Well, first of all, it lays down the basis of that change and that is a new creature.

And when it does that, it solves the great majority of the problem. Justification always goes arm in arm with regeneration. If anyone be in Christ, there is a new creature and new creatures follow.

Just live new ways. Even an apple tree left in the wild to itself will continue bearing apples. They might not be as beautiful as the one cared for by the hands of men, the ones doted over and given food and fertilizer and all the things that such trees need, but they will continue bearing fruit because it is their nature to bear fruit.

And so the gospel begins this by simply changing a man into a creature made in the image of God. But then secondly, and this is where again, I was speaking on last night and I think we've got to grab this. In Romans 12, He tells us, He encourages us, He admonishes us, He begs us to do what? To offer ourselves as living, holy sacrifices to God.

Now, you can offer a lot of things to God, but to offer self is the biggest. I mean, you can give away cars and houses and everything, but to give away the totality of your life, who you are, your very self, that's quite another thing. And so to do something like that, He also recommends the motive.

The reason why it should be done. The thing that can cause a man to give himself over to God. And He says, the mercies of God.

And those mercies of God are the first 11 chapters of the book of Romans. But all the mercies of God find their focal point and their greatest fountain and demonstration in this, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The humiliation of the Son of God becoming a man, taking on flesh, bearing our sin, dying on a tree.

It is that that motivates our sanctification. If you're pursuing sanctification for sanctification's sake, that's idolatry. If you are moral for morality's sake, that is idolatry.

Everything in your life must be pushed, motivated, and constrained by the fact that the Son of God shed His own blood for my soul. And the end of all of that, and all creatures, rational creatures, must have a logical end. It is for His glory.

It is the power of God for salvation to everyone. That eliminates this idea of some men being converted, radically changed, and continuing on in a process of change. And other men being saved and never experiencing a change at all.

He doesn't allow for two groups here. Now the Scriptures do allow for men growing in maturity at different stages. The Scriptures do tell us that God seems to have given to the church gifted men.

I'll never have the mind of Jonathan Edwards. I'll never have the passion of a David Brainerd. I'll never have the faith of a George Mueller possibly.

I'll never exceed or excel in areas of piety where others have gone before it. We do know that there are differences among us. But everyone who has truly embraced the Gospel and been embraced by it will experience its saving power.

Its saving power for salvation to everyone who believes. To the Jew first and also to the Greek. There's the entire world there.

The entire world. Now I want us to look for just a moment at something I often set forth and it's this. We take the Gospel of Jesus Christ and we present it this way.

Do you know you're a sinner? If they say yes, then we go on to the next question. Do you want to go to heaven? If they say yes, we go on to the next question. Would you like to pray and ask Jesus to come into your heart? If they say yes and do that, at the end we pronounce them saved.

Now let's just look at that. Do you know you're a sinner? My dear friend, if you say yes or if any man says yes, I know I'm a sinner, it means absolutely nothing. The devil knows he's a sinner.

The question, the evangelical question, the Gospel question to the hearer is not do you simply know you are a sinner? But the question is upon hearing the Gospel preached, has God so worked in your heart that your view towards sin has changed? You could say it in this radical way that the sin you once loved and boasted of you now hate and are ashamed of. Is there any change in your relationship to sin? Not just do you know you're a sinner, do you have a heart change wrought by the power of God with regard to that sin? And then the question, do you want to go to heaven? Obviously, when we ask that question, we betray ourselves and show that we've never studied political theory. Because that's what politics is all about.

Everybody wants to go to heaven. Build a utopia on earth. A wonderful place where we can all be happy.

You see, everyone wants to go to heaven. But as I often say, the problem is most people don't want God to be there when they get there. The question is not do you want to go to heaven? That's why so much preaching is so wrong.

So much singing is so wrong. The question is not do you want to go to heaven? The question is has God done such a work in your heart that you now esteem Him, desire Him? Do you want Him? Do you see the value of Christ? And then do you want to ask Jesus to come into your heart? That language. Where it came from exactly.

Is it what came from Romans 10? No, it didn't. Well, Revelation 3.20 says, no, it's not. It is simply a way to get God to move into some place, but it's all wrong.

What is the gospel call? The gospel call is repent and believe. Repent and believe. Repent and believe.

Now, let's talk about this for a moment because there's something that's been bothering me in the last year or so with the uprise of so much good theology and people taking true conversion seriously. I think there's also a problem. I have so many people who come to me and they doubt the assurance of their salvation because in their scrutiny of their own repentance, they're expecting, they're almost demanding that the saving repentance be the repentance of a mature believer of 30 years.

They scrutinize every aspect of their life and if they don't look like a Puritan, they say I can't be converted. What you need to understand is repentance in its initial seed is simply a changing of the mind. God is all.

I need Him. You say, that's it? Can be. I can't save myself.

I'm lost. I need a Savior. But the Bible describes repentance in so many ways.

Yes, it does. But are you expecting a full-blown repentance the very second God begins to work in your heart? As I study repentance in Scripture, I look back at the moment I was converted and my repentance was a very singular thing. I need to be saved.

But now after 25 years as I grow in Scripture, the repentance matures and deepens. But you err, young person, when you scrutinize your life to wonder whether or not you're saved and you're looking for repentance that can only be found in someone who's walked with God for decades. I hope I'm making myself clear.

I believe in repentance. But repentance can merely mean I'm falling and I can't save myself. It's turning from self-worth.

It is turning from ability and giving up, as Brother Charles once told me. It's just giving up. I can't.

I collapse. I'm gone. I have a thing that I've worked through several years ago on the doctrine of repentance.

If you take everything the Bible teaches about repentance, you will have a very big book. Amazing things are said. And they all should be learned.

And we should grow into them. But to take the entire full-orb biblical course of repentance and demand it before someone can have assurance of salvation is absolutely preposterous. We have a lot of young people and a lot of other people who are not assured of their salvation because they're expecting to see in

their wee years as a babe in Christ a full-blown sanctification of a man 40 years in the faith.

We need to be careful. Save me! I'm lost! And even a great deal of that clamoring for salvation, don't expect it or demand it to be absolutely pure. Some of it will just simply be self-preservation.

Remember, God saves men who repent, not men who repent perfectly. God saves brokenhearted people even the ones who are brokenhearted over the fact that they're not brokenhearted enough. And even those who think they're brokenhearted enough, when God knows, they're not hardly brokenhearted at all.

This will add fuel to the fire to my enemies. But in my conversion experience, to be honest with you, sin was not the foremost thing in my mind the day I was converted. The foremost thing in my mind was He loves me.

He's everywhere. He's everything. Now you say, okay, what are you saying? But, even though I was a heinous sinner, I was a horrible man, at that moment, the only thing that was really real to me for several weeks was the love of God.

But then as I began to study the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit began to work, He began to work repentance that He continues on till this day. So, see, let's be careful here. You can define people out of the Kingdom of God.

You can demand so much of a man of salvation more than even what God demands at first. Simply, I can't. I can't.

And then faith. Faith. We are saved by faith of a mustard seed.

Believe. Well, how do I believe? Alright, you've already just said you can't. Now, go one step further.

He can. And will. And desires to.

Can you believe that? You say, is that it? No, it's the beginning. But it is real. Well, how will I know it's real? Because it will keep going.

And growing. In the same way your repentance will grow and grow and grow. Your faith and the reality of it will grow and grow.

But I am not going to expect from my ten-month-old daughter what I expect from my six-and-a-half-year-old son. Also, I want to talk about the pride. You know, I love the Puritans.

You know that I love all that kind of stuff. I want to talk to you about a root of pride I see springing up among people who embrace this kind of lovely truth. It's almost like a badge of spirituality when they will so-called struggle of whether or not they're saved.

And what they're just trying to prove to people is my version of conversions not as superficial as everyone else's. I'm going to wrestle and I'm going to fight and I'm going to do all this stuff. And I don't even know if I'm saved after that.

And you think you're bringing glory to God. There is a sense when some men are awakened to their sin and they must break through and they must struggle and so on and so forth. I agree with all of that.

But be very careful that we're not just reacting against the superficial gospel of others. God is glorified when a heart is open and they say, I'm falling, but He can! And they stand on that. Oh, it's so glorious! You are saved by faith.

But it is not the quality of this faith, the greatness of this faith. It's the quality, the greatness and the character of One in Whom you believe. And this is so important.

Look unto Jesus. Look, just look unto Jesus. What terrifies me so much, you talk to people on the streets, are you going to heaven? Yes, I'm going to heaven.

Why? I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my heart. Now, look what they're doing. They are trusting in a transaction they made.

They are trusting in the sincerity of a prayer. But then again, we must be careful. Doctor, heal thyself.

Because some are trusting in the magnitude of their repentance. And others are trusting in the magnitude of their faith. When what I love to hear is, I'm looking unto Him.

I'm looking unto Him. And I would be terrified to take my eyes off of Him. I'm looking unto Jesus.

Now, I want us to go and look at Romans 10 for a moment. Verse 6, But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows, Do not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven, that is to bring Christ down, or who will descend into the abyss, that is to bring Christ up from the dead. That salvation is not wrought in the heart of a man by some exhausting effort on his part.

Some impossibility laid at his feet. Some divine challenge that he must overcome in order to obtain. He says this, But what does it say? The Word is near you.

What's that Word? The Gospel of everything that God has done for you in Christ. It's in your mouth and in your heart. That is the Word of faith which we are preaching.

The whole point of the Gospel is that all your efforts are vain. All your attempts in the flesh to conquer have turned to rot. There is nothing for you except to throw yourself upon Him.

One day when I was going through a great struggle, just a terrible thing, and it just came into my mind, God is the rock. Christ is the rock. And for the believer, when He falls, the believer falls upon the rock, not off of Him.

Such is His expanse. Such is His greatness. It is simply throwing yourself upon Christ.

Better that. Better than that, because throwing requires effort. It's falling upon Christ.

Repentance in its seed form is stopping. It's ceasing. It's giving up.

I can't. I've reached that conclusion. Faith is falling and being caught.

Imagine, sometimes my little boy will get on the monkey bars. How long can he hang? And he'll hang and hang and hang and he will strive and strive. And you can just see his little fingers are turning white and his arms are burning and his little chest is pounding.

And he's just more afraid and more afraid and more afraid. He doesn't want to let go. All his effort.

All his strength. And then he comes to the realization, I can't any longer. But Dad will catch me.

And you say, but how do we know when something like that is really true? Well, that's easy. It will continue. You mean you will become greater in faith and greater in repentance? You will mature in faith and mature in repentance.

But you've got it all wrong. The maturity makes you weaker in self and more Godward. Not that you become stronger so you need less of the grace of God, which seems to be what some of you are seeking to achieve.

But it is learning to rely more upon the grace of God and less upon self. And then he says, what does it say? The Word is near you. It's in your mouth, in your heart.

It is the Word of faith, which we are preaching. Now, two of the most beautiful passages in the entire Scripture, two of the most beautiful verses in the Bible are before us now. And I dare say, two of the most twisted texts in the Bible.

Twisted by men who receive their teaching on hand-me-downs. I read it. That's how other people evangelize.

That was in this tract. But let's look at it for a moment. That if you will confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

For with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed. Now, we have taken this text and look what we've done with it.

We've reduced it down to this. If after an evangelistic campaign, feeling moved, you walk forward and you pray the sinner's prayer, and then afterwards when the preacher presents you to the congregation as saved, you willingly stand there. You know those invitations.

Jesus said, you don't confess Me before men. I won't confess you before My Father. And we equate that with them coming forward.

Now, what is really going on here? Well, all the ancient exegetes seem to be in agreement that we are saved by faith. We are saved by believing. But the saving quality, the saving characteristic of that belief in the heart is manifested by the confession of the mouth, which according to the teachings of our Lord, the confession of the mouth is validated by the fruit we bear.

But back up again and do not demand the fruit from a new believer or someone recently converted that you demand of an 80-year-old puritan. The idea here is perseverance and continuation. Now, I want to try to draw up a scenario for you to help you understand this text.

Now, recall what we've turned it into. Let's look at it a different way. First of all, this is the Roman Empire.

Like lambs led to the slaughter, like sheep before the shears, believers are being killed in Judea and throughout the Roman Empire. They are having to stand and confess that Jesus is Lord. Let's imagine that all of us, we're all carpenters and we work together and we're building a building there in Rome.

And it's lunchtime. It's a beautiful spring day. We just had lunch and we're all just laying out in the grass and we're just happy.

And most of us are believers. We belong to the same secret, hidden congregation. We're just having a good time.

You know, drawing up a picture. Drawing little fishes in the sand and stuff like that. And then all of a sudden, we hear the marching of soldiers' feet.

And we look up and here comes a group of soldiers. And they're carrying a little altar that has a fire on it and a bowl of incense. And we know what the law says.

Caesar is Lord. Emperor worship coming our way. And so we all stand to our feet and the first carpenter goes up.

Not a believer. Not a part of the fellowship. Goes up.

Grabs a little incense. Throws it in the fire. Caesar is Lord.

Walks away. The other guy comes up. Grabs a little incense.

Throws it in the fire. Caesar is Lord. Then one of the leaders among us, trembling, looking back with fear.

Tell my wife. Walks up to the altar and stands there. They say, confess.

Jesus is Lord. And they kill him. And then the next believer comes up.

Jesus is Lord. And they kill him. And then another believer comes up.

Jesus is Lord. And they kill him. And we have taken that beautiful text and reduced it down to a pathetic creedal statement made in front of a lot of other unconverted people who want more their creedal statement and their ticket to heaven than the reality of the power of Jesus Christ and the confession of a true believer.

Look what we do to Scripture. Let's go over for a moment to the book of Revelation. Chapter 3, verse 20.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him and he with me. Now, we must acknowledge that in the immediate context, he is talking to a church.

Please. I know I told one evangelist that one time and he said, I know that, but it works doing it the other way. We prove, we betray ourselves that we followed Benjamin Franklin instead of Jonathan Edwards a long time ago.

We decided for pragmatism over theology. But at the same time, some of the ancients would use this text in a way of illustration. But let's just show how the modern day interpretation of this text breaks down even if we use it inviting sinners into fellowship with Christ.

Because look what he says. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. Now, first of all, many of your problems are solved if you will just identify the one standing at the door.

He's not just a Savior. He's a Lord. And so, I would look to someone and I would say this if I were forced to use this text in this way.

I would say, Jesus stands at the door and knocks. This is hard for me to say, but open the door and let him in. He will give you eternal life.

And someone says, wow, that's a great deal. And they go over there and right before their hand grabs the doorknob, I go, I clear my throat. Excuse me, there's one thing I left off.

If you open the door, he owns everything. He's coming in as Lord. Now, at first, it may be cataclysmic.

I don't know. But it may be like just a soft breeze. But I can tell you it's going to become a bumpy ride.

He is going to demand of you in the end of your days everything. Oh, really? Let's just look at this for a moment. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

Now, I want you to think about this just for a moment. Here is an American. Now, I'm an American, so I can say this.

Here's an American who loves himself and happens to have a wonderful plan for his life. I love me and I have an absolutely marvelous plan for my life. And so you come along as the evangelist and you say, God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

He goes, what? Never heard that before. I love me. God loves me.

I have a wonderful plan for my life. And God is willing to jump on this bandwagon with omnipotence and make all my plans come true. Yeah, I'll take him.

Something was missed in the translation. Does anyone have a problem with what's going on here? You've got to be kidding. We are reinforcing everything we wrongly believe about reality to men who are lost and continue to be lost.

And you can go on using this verse if you like, but please identify the guy on the other side of the door. Then he says, if anyone hears my voice... You have to be careful because the same one who says this says it in John 10. They don't just open some ontological door of a hidden heart.

It says, they hear my voice and they follow me. But here's the big one. I will come into him and I will dine with him and he with me.

The evidence that the door has been opened is a continuing fellowship with Jesus Christ. Not a flu shot. Not a flu shot.

So someone says, they did all this. I say, fine, talk to me about your continuing fellowship with him as he dines with you and you with him. Let's go to one last passage just to show you the power of taking the word wrongly and sapping it of its strength.

Go to Matthew 25. It is the great judgment of the nations. It says in verse 32 of chapter 25, all the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate them from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

And he will put the sheep on his right and the goats on the left. Then the king will say to those on his right, come you who are blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.

I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me.

I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you something to drink? And when did we see you a stranger and invite you in or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and come to you? And the king will answer and say to them, truly I say to you to the extent that you did it to one of these my brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to me. Then he will also say to those on his left, depart from me because they did not do the same.

We take this incredibly important text and use it to validate the fact that we ought to have prison ministries. That is not what this text means. Now should we have prison ministries? Yes.

Should we feed the poor? Absolutely. But that's not what Jesus is talking about. He's not saying I was a thief in prison and you visited me.

What is he saying? Well, let's just go back to an illustration. You and I and several of us have been meeting on Sunday nights out in a kind of a grave area in a kind of a part right outside of Rome where most people are too superstitious to go. We've been going in there and holding worship services to Jesus.

And we all know that we need to scatter out before we all return back. So we don't want to return in groups. And as we make it to our homes, about two hours later, someone wakes us up and says, have you heard the news? Have you heard the news? Well, what? Julius, the deacon.

What about him? As he was going home tonight, they caught him. They caught him with a letter. He's been thrown in prison.

All right, let's call a meeting immediately. Have everybody go back. They go back.

Now, in the prisons in the third world, still today at times, if you're thrown in prison and no one brings you clothing, you go naked. You're usually beaten before you're thrown in prison. So if no one comes to help you with medical attention, you die of infection.

And the prison does not provide food. Someone from the outside must come and bring you food. And so we have our meeting together and everyone says, our dear Julius, he's been thrown in prison.

We must go to him. We've heard that he's been beaten badly. He hasn't had water for several hours.

We've got to go. And someone zealously, a young Christian stands up. I'll go.

Older Christian stands up and says, just settle down. And we need to understand what's going on here. We must go.

And someone else says, but sir, if we take water to him and clothing to him, they've got him in there because he's a Christian. Won't they know that we're Christians too? Yes. Won't they throw us in the same prison? That'll kill us.

And then the young man says, I'll still go. This teaching is not about a prison ministry. This teaching is saying, what? We are saved only by faith alone.

But faith is the result, like so many other things, of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. And one of the greatest manifestations of genuine conversion is a love for the brethren to the point that we are willing to die for them. And yet again, we take still another text and we strip it of its power.

The Gospel. Well, this country is not gospel hardened. It's gospel ignorant.

So for you who do not believe, believe. How will I know? There'll be a work of grace. There'll be a confirmation that will continue, that will continue.

Not one or the other, not either or, both and. For those of you who are struggling, not knowing whether you believe or not. I appreciate the battle and it may be sincere, but be very careful that you do not expect from your repentance and from your faith something that should only be expected from those who have walked with Him for many, many years.

If you realize you have no longer any strength within you and you must let go, and yet you believe that you can let go and fall upon Him, then do so. Look unto Christ and be saved. All the ends of the earth believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved and not disappointed.

Father, thank You for Your Word and for Your help. I pray, Lord, that You would do a saving work in the hearts of men and women and children. An affirming work in the hearts of those who need it.

A disturbing work in the hearts of others. Whatever is needed, Father, to most bring about Your purposes in the hearts of men. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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