

# The Last Fortress

by Ray Greenly

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*The sermon emphasizes the necessity of breaking through personal barriers through active faith and repentance to experience true freedom in Christ.*

**Duration:** 40:18

**Scripture:** Romans 5:1, Romans 5:3-5, Philippians 3:1-4

**Topics:** "Protection"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of repentance and humility in finding true freedom. He shares a story of a man who protested his innocence and remained locked in a prison cell until he finally admitted his guilt. The speaker relates this story to the Apostle Paul's teachings in the book of Philippians, where he encourages believers to rejoice in the Lord and let their gentleness be evident to all. The sermon concludes with the message that true righteousness comes from belief in God's Word and a humble posture before Him.

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## Transcript

The Last Fortress. Almighty God, in your great mercy, in your kindness, in your compassion, would you come and deliver us from our last fortress? Would you come and bring a change, a freedom, a joy, a rejoicing as the last bastion is broken through? And we walk in your glory and in your power. Thank you, Jesus.

Today you see the hearts that need healed, the minds that need to be calmed. Come, Holy Spirit, with healing in your wings. I pray in the name of Jesus, amen.

Romans, the fifth chapter, beginning with verse one. Therefore, having been made righteous through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, character, hope.

And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us. This wonderful description is where we're going. It's not where we're at.

And we have to really recognize the journey that God has called us on out of darkness into light. That's the call of God on our hearts. Have you found sustenance in your excuses? Have you found encouragement in your positions? Have you found peace in your explanations as you have justified maintaining the last bastion against the Holy Spirit, maintaining control of your life, have you found in that place joy? My dad used to have a saying, he would rebuke me or he would treat me in a manner I thought unfair.

I'd shove my lip out. Man, he'd say, Raymond, you're cutting off your nose to spite your face. I had not a clue what that meant.

Those were nonsense words to me. Made me madder. My lip would go out further.

He'd finally say, Raymond, I don't like to look at you when you look like that. Why don't you go to your room until you can change your face around? After some time in my bedroom, slowly my face of natural cause would return to a more pleasant expression. But my heart was still very upset.

I know now what he meant when he said, cutting off your nose to spite your face. He simply meant, if you continue to behave the way you're behaving, it'll only cause you increased pain and agony. So, what's the point? I mean, do your arguments, do your posturings, do your explanations, do your positions.

Gain for you the joy and freedom that you desire with your heart. And if they don't, why maintain them? Why not release them? In Hebrews, the 11th chapter and verse 1, we find this incredible statement, now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Now, I've struggled with that statement so many times that finally I had to put it in my own words so that I could understand what was being said.

Let me try to give you my understanding of the definition of faith. First of all, I understand faith to be a verb. Now, when I was in school, they may have changed it these many years.

But when I was in school, they told me that verbs meant action. Is that still true, young people? Here's the definition that I would like to give you. I'd suggest you jot it down on a piece of paper.

You may want to review it and you may find a way to adjust it and make it more true. And if you do, please share it with me. Faith is an act based on belief sustained by confidence in God's word.

Let me give it to you one more time. Faith is an act based on belief sustained by confidence in God's word. Now, could we use that definition and come and say, therefore, in chapter 5 of Romans, verse 1, therefore, since we have been made righteous through an act, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And that act is based on belief. It is sustained by confidence in God's word. But it does require of us a specific verb.

It requires an action. Now, almost all of my life, I have believed that faith was passive, that it was something that was done to me. You know, I have this agony in my heart and I'm just going to have to wait until something happens to change that.

I have agony in my heart. I feel distressed. God, here I am.

You're going to have to do something to me. If God doesn't do anything to me, there's nothing I can do. That's not what the scripture teaches.

The scripture teaches we have been justified through faith. We have been justified by taking a specific action. It is something that we decide about.

The reason we do not like what I'm describing is because I can remain in my fortress so long as it is someone else's responsibility to move me out of it. And I have to tell you, when I was younger, I had a friend give me a cartoon. It was the picture of an ocean.

And at the bottom of the ocean, there was a cave. And in the cave, there was a huge wall. And behind that wall was a little man scrunched down in his cave.

Then up on the top of the ocean, a man was going over the cave, many feet below him, in a rowboat. And my friend had drawn on this cartoon, Ray, where are you? Ray, I'm looking for you. I can't find you.

And he gave me it. And I was very, very offended. I said, why have you given me this cartoon with my name on it? I am not in a hole in the bottom of the ocean.

He said, you're not? Tell me about it. You never say anything to me. You just ask me questions.

So, where is your hide-a-cave? Oh, I got the point. Do you? That last bastion, that place where we have the right to preserve our own system of belief and our own practice and our own prejudices, where we can remain hunkered down, where we can stay hidden, and we can be right. And we're saying, it's up to you, God.

If you don't want me here, you've got to dig me out. And God's rowing across the ocean, calling your name. Where are you? Where are you? Have you created for yourself by your practices, by your beliefs, by your needs, by your culture, projections, arguments, logic, emotion, have you created for yourself a place to hide with your experiences, where you know reality because this is what's been done to you? And you maintain that hide-a-cave at the bottom of the ocean with a big wall, so that you can continue to be you.

The Apostle Paul is saying to us, we have been made righteous through an act that is based on belief and sustained by confidence in God's word. Have you ever, when you were a kid, found a box turtle out in the woods, and you pick it up and it, and you knock on his door, and he goes in tighter. And you say, hello, anybody in there? And you've got it right in your face.

Hello, anybody in there? He doesn't come out to play. Mr. Turtle, will you come out and play? No, I'm hidden away. Not a sound is made.

You gently turn that turtle over on his back and leave him on the forest floor and step off just a bit. And pretty soon, he pokes his head out. Who turned me over? Oh, Mr. Turtle, I turned you over.

Here, let me get you. He's closed in again. So, you walk away and you leave him there.

Pretty soon, his legs are out going like this. He's trying to get a handle on the soil behind him so he can flip himself over. Aren't you tired of trying to flip yourself over? Aren't you tired of that? Aren't you tired of being mad? Tired of being alone? Tired of being depressed? Tired of being discouraged? Tired of working so hard? This last fortress has to be broken through.

And it's broken through by faith and action. An action that you have to take. Nobody can take it for you.

Mama can't do it for you. Daddy can't do it for you. Wife can't do it for you.

Husband can't do it for you. You have to do it for yourself. A friend can't do it for you.

It's something that every person has to come before God and deal with head on, honest. And there is no excuse that God will accept to bring you into his kingdom until this cave is breached and broken through. Now, you can wear all the nice clothes.

You can go to the job. You can smile at everybody. You can pat them on the back.

You can be Mr. Social Do-Gooder. You can do whatever you want to do. And that's just a fancy turtle shell.

You finally have to come to the point of answering the question, what am I going to do with Jesus? What am I going to do with Jesus? It's not, do I agree with this theology? Do I? No. Am I willing to take the one act that I've been called upon to take that trumps all other actions? Any of you rook players? You know in the suite there is one bird, a raven. And the way we play it, that one card trumps or takes anything else.

When you lay that card down, everything else comes your way. Nobody can take the trump card. What I'm talking about today is the trump card.

It's the action necessary to breach this final fortress where we've been hiding and holding on to our own. What is that? One action that we are required to take that will break, that will break everything free. Matthew, the fourth chapter, verse 17.

From that time on, Jesus began to preach, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. Repentance is the one act that we can take that releases us. From every bondage, are we willing to give up our cave and say, Jesus, I give to you my life.

I give you my mess. I give you my anger. I give you my bitterness.

I give you my stubborn refusal. I give you everything. Now some of you are having a very hard time with this because you've said, I'm going to eat what I want to eat.

I'm going to go where I want to go. I'm going to say what I want to say. My arguments are true.

My positions are secure. My ways are right. I have a right to act this way.

Yes, you do. And you can act that way. And you can refuse to repent.

And you can tell the Lord, I've already repented. I'm righteous. Have it your way.

But you'll still be confined to your shell. You'll still be confined to your hidey cave. And there will be no release.

I'm reminded of that parable. This man was thrown into prison. And all the way to prison, he protested his innocence.

He said, I didn't do it. I'm innocent. Why are you treating me this way? How dare you treat me this way? Do you know who I am? You don't have a right to treat me this way.

You have to respect me and my position. They paid no attention. They took him on to jail and put him in a cell and slammed the door shut.

Every morning and every evening, the turnkey would come. A slot would be opened in the door and a tray of food would be shoved through. And he would protest to the turnkey.

I'm innocent. Would you please contact the governor? Would you tell them what they've done to me? I'm innocent. This is unjust.

It's not fair. And the turnkey would say, right. They all say that.

And he would walk down the hall and be gone, and he'd be in isolation the rest of the day. He lived there for some time. One morning, he awakened.

He had a tiny window up at the very top of his cell. There was just a bit of sun streaming into that window. And as he lay on his bed, he looked up.

He could see just a spot of blue sky. And he said to himself, look what I'm missing. Look what I'm missing.

The sky is blue. There are clouds drifting past, and I'm in here rotting. And then he said the most astounding thing.

He said, I'm guilty. Just then his breakfast came. He shouted to the turnkey.

I'm guilty. I'm guilty. The turnkey turned and walked away.

A few minutes later, he looked at the door, and it didn't look quite right. He got up and went over to the door, and he touched it, and it moved. He opened the door.

It wasn't locked. It swung open. He walked down the hallway.

Every door opened before him until he was standing out in the full brilliance of the sun, a free man. Freedom came by his simply saying, I'm guilty. And the doors all opened.

Repentance opens the door to the fortress and sets us free. As long as we posture and lie and maintain our position. As long as we try to remain hidden.

As long as we give our positions and our arguments. As long as we protest. The doors remain locked.

We're confined and we live in our misery. The Apostle Paul says some very interesting things in the book of Philippians. Chapter 4, verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord always, and I will say it again, rejoice.

Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything.

By prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

And whatever you've learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice, and the God of peace will be with you. Go with me to the third chapter of Philippians, verse 1. Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. It's no trouble for me to write the same thing to you again.

It's a safeguard for you. Verse 8, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ.

I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. What is everything? It's my cave. It's my place of hiding.

It's my lifestyle. It's my posturing. It's my excuses.

It's my arguments. It's my behavior. It's everything about me.

It's my soul. My soul is my personality. And Paul is saying, I count all of that as rubbish.

In other words, I'm not going to invest any longer in being right. I'm not going to invest in my feelings. I'm not going to invest in my intellect.

I'm going to invest in only one place, knowing Jesus Christ. Repentance is when I turn away from my security places and I begin to move now toward Jesus Christ. When I begin to walk toward Jesus, that in Scripture is called repentance.

The Lord says, if you will draw close to me, I will draw close to you. It does not say that He will draw close to us and that will cause us to draw close to Him. It does not say that.

It says that if we draw close to Him, He will draw close to us. I draw close to God by turning from my ways and moving toward God. That's called repentance in Scripture.

When I begin to walk away from my cave, because I now count it as rubbish compared to knowing Jesus Christ, I have to then make a value judgment. Do I love that lust? Do I love that bitterness? Do I love being right? Do I love having it my way? Do I love being able to operate the way I think I should operate? Do I love all of that more than I love Jesus Christ? I hear people say to me, Pastor, I understand what you're asking me for. I sat with a man and wept with a man this last week.

He said, Pastor, I understand exactly what you're asking me for. You're asking me to give up who I am. You're asking me to turn away from my life and accept the life of Jesus Christ.

I said, you got it. Will you do that? He said, Pastor, come on. Be reasonable.

How can I walk away from everything I love and turn to Jesus Christ? Is Jesus Christ going to pay my bills? Is Jesus Christ going to take care of my family? Is Jesus Christ going to do everything that I need to have done in my life so I can live? I said, no. His intention is that you die. He said, oh, now you've really done it.

You're telling me I have to die to be a Christian? Yes. You have to die. And the way you die is you turn away from those things about you that you love and you turn to Jesus Christ and you say with your heart and with your mouth, Jesus, I love you more than I love that mess back there.

Jesus, I love you more than I love my intellectual arguments. I love you more, Jesus, than I love my emotions. You see, all of this finally comes down to it's not religion we're talking about.

It's a man we're talking about. His name is Jesus. And he poured out his love on the cross when he died for us.

And he didn't do that for good theology. He did that for people, for persons, for you and for me. Because he loved us.

And he's saying, I left everything for you. Will you leave everything for me? And we say back, well, Jesus, I was taught, I understand, this is how it's supposed to work. This is what I've accomplished.

And frankly, when I die, I'd like to be able to look back and say, you know, I finally made a contribution. I finally did something worthwhile. I'm somebody.

Now God accept me on that basis. And the Lord says no. Jesus did not come down and die on the cross so he could be somebody.

He was already somebody. He didn't come down and allow them to nail his hands so he could prove how tough he was. He'd already proven how tough he was.

The question is, who do you love? Who do you love? Do you love Jesus? And will you turn in your heart and repent and give up your position, give up being right, give up your offense and say, Jesus, I'm coming for you because I love you and I worship you and I honor your name. As soon as you say that, the prison door opens. You can't use a sledgehammer to open it.

You can't use a pickaxe. It simply takes those two very simple, honest words. I'm guilty.

I'm guilty. And then you begin to make your steps toward Jesus Christ. Paul, talking about this, says, verse 10, I want to know Christ, the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Is that all you want? If there's anything else that you want in your heart, that's what requires repentance, for that is your fortress. That's your cave. That's your turtle shell.

You can paint it up any way you want to paint it up. You can polish it. You can make it look very pretty.

But the fact is, it's a prison. He says, not that I've already obtained all of this, or have already been made perfect. That word in the Greek is to be made complete.

He's not saying he was still walking in sin. Paul is saying that he hasn't been brought into the heavenly realm yet to be able to remain there. Remember, Paul had been to the heavenly realm in vision.

He'd seen it all. He knew what was over there. And he's saying, I haven't completed this journey on earth yet, so I'm not over there yet.

But I press on. And the word press in the Greek means a continual, heavy, pushing, and pressure with no let up. It's not dynamite.

It's not dunamis. It's not explosive power. It's like oxen who lean into the yoke, and they're pulling, and they're pulling, and they're pulling with steady, consistent power.

They're moving that heavy load. That's what Paul is saying. I take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do, forgetting what is behind, straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward, Jesus Christ. My goal is Jesus Christ.

Is your goal Jesus Christ? Is that where you're going? If we're going to rejoice in the Lord, if we're going to let our gentleness be evident to all, if we're not going to be anxious about anything, if in everything we're going to pray and petition God with thanksgiving, if we're going to have our hearts filled with the peace of God that transcends all understanding or all intellectualism, then our minds are going to have to be in Christ Jesus. And that means we're going to have to take that one simple act, faith. It means we're going to have to turn our back on everything we've loved all of our lives and everything we've learned all of our lives.

And we're going to have to move toward Jesus Christ because he's the lover of our souls. Almighty God, would you gain the victory? Would you gain the victory today that each of us would be willing to take that action step of walking away from what we have so proudly hung on to? Lord, some today love to wander. Lord, some love to be right.

Lord, some love to be full. Lord, some love a fight. Lord, some love to be in charge.

And Lord, some love to not be in charge. Lord, whatever it is we love today, would you cause us to see it as trash that our hearts could be turned to you, Jesus. That we would come under the control and under the power of your mighty Holy Spirit and that he would come amongst us.

That he would rule over us. That his wings would overshadow us. Lord, the God that we have worshipped in America is crashing to the floor.

Everything that we've loved as Americans is being torn away from us by your mighty hand. Lord, cause us now to find our rest in you, Jesus. I pray in your holy name.

Amen.

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