

Dallas Area Conference 1993-08

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of surrendering our lives to God and trusting in His goodness and love, even when it's difficult and uncomfortable.

Duration: 35:47

Scripture: Exodus 3:11, Exodus 4:10, Psalm 69:7-9, Jeremiah 1:6, Luke 9:62, Luke 19:14, Acts 9:5

Topics: "Conference"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the awe-inspiring nature of Jesus as portrayed in the Gospels. Despite the quiet and understated manner in which the story of the Savior is told, the glory of Jesus is enough to amaze us. The speaker emphasizes the importance of obeying the voice of the Lord, even though it may not always be the most logical or comfortable choice. The sermon also highlights the reluctance and hesitation that often accompanies God's call, using examples from the lives of Moses and Jeremiah.

Transcript

We were talking about what an awesome Lord we have. The marvelous restraint in which the whole story of the Savior is told in the Gospels. No superlatives, no great adjectives actually, just told very, very quietly and in unpoetic form.

You might say prosaically. And yet, if we remember at every juncture in the Gospel who it is speaking about, the glory to this person is really enough to sweep us away in amazement, isn't it? Wonderful, wonderful Jesus who can compare with you. So you'd think that if that Lord ever spoke to us, ever invited us, ever called us, He'd respond right away, wouldn't He? This is the most logical thing in the world.

To hear the voice of the Lord, to be in a hurry to obey. You know, it isn't that way, is it? If I could give a title to my little talk this afternoon, it would be this, The Squirming Sacrifice, because that's what we are. We're squirming sacrifices.

And I'd like to read a few verses of Scripture to you. It shows you what the human heart is like. God calls a man named Moses.

I want you to go, I want you to be my mouthpiece, I want you to go before Pharaoh. Say, let my people go. Exodus chapter 3, verse 11.

And incidentally, when the Lord gave him that instruction, that included all of the needed strength and grace, didn't it? He didn't need anything. All he needed to do was obey. Exodus 3, 11, Moses said to God, who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt? It seems that with every call of God, there's a measure of human reluctance, insane as it is.

Exodus 4, verse 10. Then Moses said to the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since you have spoken to your servants, but I am slow of speech and slow of tone. Here it is again.

Foot-dragging the squirming sacrifice. Jeremiah chapter 1, verse 6. God called Jeremiah. Mind you, it wasn't a very joyful commission in his case, the weeping prophet.

But Jeremiah said, Then said I, Ah, Lord God, behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth. And then we move over to the Gospels, and we have the Lord describing his reception. And it says in Luke 19, 14, But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.

Remember who we were speaking about this morning. Remember the glories of the person we were speaking about. I imagine people think, We will not have this man to reign over us.

And then you think of Saul of Tarsus. The great fisher was playing his fish, and he said to Saul, It's hard for you to kick against the goads. Saul didn't realize the hook was already in his jaw, did he? And then, of course, the Lord encapsulated it all.

He said, No one, having put his hand to the plow, is fit for the kingdom of God. Looking back, looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. C.F. Lewis said that the Lord brought him in, kicking and screaming, the most reluctant convert in all of England.

That's amazing, isn't it? He brought him in, kicking and screaming, the most reluctant convert in all of England. And you know, many of us can identify with what Lewis said. I can.

I can. For years, we had gone our own way. We wanted nothing more than to have our own way.

And stamping our foot, we said, We will not have this man to reign over us. Amazing, really, when you stop to think. We were determined that nobody was going to direct our lives.

We had our own plans and ambitions, and we didn't want anything or anyone to interfere with them. We didn't desire the Lord, or want a knowledge of his ways. We were only happy when we could forget him, and only sad when we remembered him.

We wanted pleasure, and we were convinced that God didn't want us to have it. We looked upon him as the cosmic spoilsport, sitting up there determined to ruin our lives. We wanted the approval of our companions.

To us, what our fellow men and women thought about us was far more important than what God thought about us. We cared nothing for the divine approval. We wanted self to be on the throne of our lives, and we looked upon the Lord as a meddling usurper.

It's strong language, but it's true just the same. And gradually, our peace was shattered. It must be that someone was praying for us.

And everywhere we turned, there were those Christians who wouldn't mind their own business. They insisted on talking to us about God and Christ, about heaven and hell, about salvation. And every time we turned around, we ran into it.

It could have been on a shopping mall. Or we drive along in the car and see Jesus Saves printed on a rock. Or we turn on the radio, and what did we hear? Saved things.

The things of God were just bumping into us everywhere in life. And it seemed that it was just as ubiquitous as a telephone booth or a Coca-Cola sign. Or I might even say a McDonald's hamburger.

And then open warfare erupted. Up until that time, our hostility was like a sleeping dog. Now we could say, against the God who built the sky, I fought with hands up, lifted high.

Despite the mention of His grace, too proud to seek a hiding place. There were times that we asked God to leave us alone. It scares us to think of it today, but we did.

Like Saul of Tarsus, we were kicking against the goads, and it was hard. It was hard to kick against them. In one sense, we were at war with God, and in another sense, we were running away from Him.

It was a war, and it was a chafe. In our insanity, we were trying to flee from the person who's everywhere. His omnipresence.

F. W. H. Myers captured it very beautifully in his poem, The Hound of Heaven. I'll read you a portion of it, and then I'll interpret it or translate it. He said, I fled Him down the nights and down the days.

I fled Him down the arches of the years. I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind. And in the midst of tears, I fled from Him.

And under running laughter, up-visted hopes, I sped and shot, precipitated, down titanic glooms of chasmed fears from those strong feet that followed, followed after, but with unhurried pace and unperturbed chase, deliberate speed, majestic instancy, they beat, and a voice beat more instant than defeat, saying, All things betray thee who betrayest me. What a picture of running away from God. We were short of breath, running away with all the strength.

We were going up over the hills and down into the valley, and the Lord was just following with unhurried speed, just following, following, following, saying, Betray me, you betray yourself. What a picture of a sinner running away from the Savior. It was all so irrational.

We were fighting against our own best interests. We thought the Savior wanted to rob us of pleasure. He didn't want to rob us of pleasure.

He just wanted us to find it in the right place. Thy presence is fullness of joy. At thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.

We thought that God's will was bad and undesirable and horrible, and actually it was good and acceptable and perfect, but we weren't looking through the eyes of faith at that time. All the time he wanted to save us from the sins that were dragging us down to hell. He wanted to give us eternal life as a free gift.

He didn't come to steal, kill, and destroy. He came to give us life more abundantly and patiently. Knock at the door.

I often think of my dear friend Ernie Tatum. Years ago in Canada he had a broadcast called Young Canada Bible Hour, and every week they used to beam the gospel out to the youth of Canada. It was supported just by the freewill offerings of the Lord's people.

They just looked to the Lord to provide the money. One night at 10 o'clock the phone rang. Is this Mr. Tatum? Yes, this is Mr. Tatum.

I'm just passing through Toronto. I'm down at the train station, and I'd just like to come out and say hello. Ernie said, well, it really is quite late.

She said, I wouldn't stay long. She said, I don't have too long between the trains, but it would be a thrill to me. She said, I pray for the program.

She said, I'm vitally interested. It would just be great if I could meet you. He said, I think the buses have stopped running by now.

She said, no problem at all. She said, I'd be glad to take a taxi. No matter what he said, she had something to counteract.

Finally he was defeated, and he said, well, you just come. So they waited for her to come. She didn't really stay very long.

She just wanted to come and meet them. And as she was leaving, she handed him an envelope with a very sizable gift of money in it for the young Canada Bible Hour. You know what he said? I'm so glad I let her in.

And it always reminds me of Hoffman's picture of Christ standing at the door there at St. Paul's Cathedral. What a picture. Here's the door.

It's overgrown with ivy. No handle, no handle on the outside. No latch on the outside.

There he is standing outside, knocking at the door. Imagine. He stood at my heart's door in sunshine and rain and patiently waited an entrance to gain.

What shame that so long he entreated in vain, for he is so precious to me. You know, there were moments when we actually weakened. We knew we should trust the Lord.

After all, we had everything to gain and nothing to lose. But what would our friends think? Whenever that thought would hit us, what would our friends think? It chills down our spine, you know. We broke out into goose pimples.

What was the trouble? We were ashamed. Ashamed of Jesus. Remember who we were talking about this morning? We were ashamed of him.

The Lord of life and glory. Ashamed of Jesus. Can it be a mortal man ashamed of thee? Ashamed of thee whom angels praise, whose glories shine through endless days.

Ashamed of Jesus, that dear friend on whom my hopes of heaven depend. Know when I blush be this my name, by my shame that I no more revere his name. But we would think of our friends and we'd think of their sneering laughs and their snide remarks when we told them we had trusted the Lord.

And yet by this time conviction was deepening in our hearts. And day and night God's hand was heavy upon us, like day that our moisture was turned into the drought of summer, as he tells us in his penitential psalm. And we tried to plead our basic goodness with the Lord.

We tried to tell the Lord what pretty good persons we were after all. And then the Holy Spirit would come and spoil it all. He would give us a terrible revelation of what we were inside.

And then we realized that what we were inside was a lot worse than anything we had ever done, which is absolutely true. And we knew that nobody with a thought life like ours could ever enter heaven unless those sins were confessed and forgiven and covered by the blood of Christ. When we should be sleeping, we were wide awake.

And hell was no longer just a swear word to us. It was an awful reality. We thought of the terrible punishment that awaited us if we died without Christ.

And with hypocritical skill we tried to hide it from our friends, our parents, anybody else. Don't let them know, don't let them know what's going on inside of you. We were such good actors, but inside we were just a tangled mass of confusion, fightings within and fears without.

Frankly, our life was falling apart. Like Lewis, we felt the steady, unrelenting approach of him whom we so earnestly desired not to meet. Hmm? The steady, unrelenting approach of him whom we so earnestly desired not to meet.

And then at last there came that moment of surrender. That's what it was. It was surrender.

We faced the glorious Victor Prince divine, and we heard him say, Your sword, sir. And we realized it had to be unconditional surrender. And we said, Nay, but I yield, I yield.

I can hold out no more. I sink by dying, love-compelled, and own thee, conqueror. Actually, it happened during a meeting, and the congregation was singing, Just as I am without one flea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bidst me come to thee, O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt, Fightings within and fears without, O Lamb of God, I come. Charlotte Elliott really captured it in this lovely hymn. And just as I am poor, wretched, blind, sight-healing of the mind, Yes, all, all I need is thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, thou wilt receive, wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve, Because thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come. Just as I am, thy love unknown has broken every barrier down, Now to be thine, thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come. It was wonderful, wasn't it? What a wonderful thing.

If I could just quote Lewis once again, he said, Who can duly adore that love which will open the high gates to a prodigal Who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, And darting his eyes in every direction for a chance to escape? Amazing grace, isn't it? Amazing grace that God will work with men on terms like that. That we're reluctant, and we're holding back. Who can duly adore a love like that, to bring in the prodigal, In that state of mind, looking for a chance to escape? The war was over.

But another battle had just begun. It's true that we had turned our lives over to the Lord for the salvation of our souls, But what about turning our lives over to the Lord for service? Ah, that was something different, wasn't it? Now, there are a lot of Christians who have come to Christ and trusted him for salvation, And

have never got down on their knees and said, Lord Jesus, my life is yours, you can do anything with it you want. Now, actually, those both happened at the same time for solid process, didn't they? I mean, he turned his life over to the Lord for salvation and for service on the same day, But unfortunately, it doesn't happen like that.

We had to face this question. Can I trust the Lord? Can I surrender my life to him? That he should do with it whatever he wants to do with it? A complete surrender, a total surrender. Do we dare say to him, Lord Jesus, anytime, anywhere, anything you want me to do? Which means, of course, abandoning our own plans and ambitions for our lives.

Surrendering them to him. Yes, we could trust him for the eternal salvation of our souls, But could I trust him to manage my life down here? Ah, that's different, isn't it? It's really different. And this is a war that goes on in the hearts of Christians.

And once again, our stubborn will shifted into high gear. And we knew what we should do. We weren't prepared to do it.

We knew that divine logic pointed in only one direction. Jesus Christ is God and died for me. And no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him.

We knew that. O Christ, thy bleeding hands and feet, thy sacrifice for me, each wound, each tear demands my life of sacrifice for thee. But that might interfere with our plans.

We had our own plans. We had plans for an idyllic marriage, good-looking children, home in suburbia, hot and cold folding doors, two cars, the whole schmeer. Good reputation in the community, and a good income, oh yes, some time to serve the Lord.

That's the scenario, isn't it? Oh yes, some time to serve the Lord. All the things that dreams are made of. You know, to all outward appearance, the world was our oyster, and our friends really clucked when they saw the way we were getting on in the world, but they didn't know that the sea was churning inside us.

We felt that we were just spinning our wheels, we were just becoming specialists in underwater basket weaving, you know? And all these thoughts were going through our minds and making us more and more miserable. There was a deep disquiet in our hearts, and there we were chasing butterflies, chasing shadows, and under the surface we were struggling with certain very unsettling facts. We knew this.

We knew that the offering of our bodies to the Lord Jesus was the only reasonable response we could make to him, because we heard him say, this is my body, given for you. What else could we say but, Lord Jesus, this is my body, given for you. No wonder Paul calls it a reasonable service in Romans 12.

We struggled with this fact. If Jesus Christ is Lord, he has a right to all. And he is Lord, isn't he? He is Lord.

That means master, that means in complete control. We struggled with this fact. He purchased us at Calvary at enormous cost of his own precious blood.

And if he purchased me, then I don't belong to myself anymore. I belong to the Lord Jesus. And if I take my life and spend it the way I want to spend it, I'm taking something that doesn't belong to me.

It doesn't seem quite right, does it? We struggled with this fact. If I can trust the Lord Jesus for my eternal salvation, I ought to be able to trust him to run my life down here. Seems so reasonable.

Seems so sensible. But we were afraid. Afraid of what his will might be for us.

Certainly it couldn't be as glamorous as the career we had carved out for ourselves, could it? But we didn't realize that the Lord had options that we knew nothing about. That would make us deliriously happy. That we chose to go on in our stubborn way.

If I give my life to the Lord, I might have to walk by faith and not by sight. Might even be on welfare. How gross.

No visible means of support. And then, of course, we were always afraid it might mean the mission field. We had prayed many times that the Lord would send workers to the mission field, but never thought that it might be ourselves.

We weren't yielded for that. We thought of the mission field of all we could think of would be snakes, spiders, scorpions. The worst possible scenario that could possibly happen.

Giving up the comforts of home and maybe even dying on a foreign field. And then we were afraid of the unknown. Our imaginations just ran wild.

I was thinking this morning of Abraham and how God called him out from Ur of the Chaldees. Told him nothing. Just told him nothing.

Just follow me. Abraham went. It was marvelous, wasn't it? It'd be nice to interview him this afternoon, wouldn't it? You sorry, Abraham? He'd laugh.

He'd really enjoy that. And so we dueled with God, and we listened to our hesitations far, far too long. And finally, we realized the folly of it all, and the Holy Spirit seemed to remove the blinders from our eyes.

And we saw Him. There He is, the Christ of glory. I belong to Him, and He deserves all that I am and have.

And we realized that the God of infinite love wants nothing but the very best for His people. That's true, too. Wonderful to know that everything comes into our lives, filtered by His love and wisdom and power.

And we tumbled to the fact that His will is good and acceptable and perfect. And so for the first time in our lives, mind you, we were saved years before. For the first time in our lives, we went down on our knees.

We said, Lord Jesus, I give my life to You. I want You to use me anywhere You can use me. And when we did that, we gave Him what we couldn't keep anyway, and what we had ceased to love.

The poet said that poor is our sacrifice whose eyes are lighted from above. We offer what we cannot keep, what we have ceased to love. Jim Elliott said that he's no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

And I say, for the first time in our lives, we got down on our knees, and we just turned over our lives to Him. The second war was over. But then, as time went on, we learned a painful lesson.

We learned that our living sacrifice had a tendency to crawl off the altar. A squirming sacrifice. That's true, we had already turned our lives over to the Lord for service, but we realized that the crisis of commitment

was not enough.

It had to be repeated on a daily basis. Each morning, we had to come to the Lord and say, Lord Jesus, I rededicate myself to You again for the next 24-hour period. Each morning, we had to kneel by our beds and pray what Bishop Taylor Smith used to pray.

Lord Jesus, every morning, Lord Jesus, my bed, Your altar, myself, Your living sacrifice. Lord Jesus, my bed, Your altar, myself, Your living sacrifice. Each morning, we had to come to Him for an exchange of wills.

For the rest of our lives, this was to go on. As Ann Granis says it so beautifully in her poem, which really has had a very strong influence in my life, I want my life so cleared of self that my dear Lord may come and set up His own furnishings and make my heart His home. And since I know what this requires, each morning while it's still, I slip into that secret place and leave with Him my will.

He always takes it graciously, presenting me with His. I'm ready then to start the day in any task there is. This is how my Lord controls my interests, my ills.

Because we meet at break of day for an exchange of wills. It's interesting to know how many people in this meeting tonight know that, know that every morning you get down on your knees and you just have that exchange of wills. What peace and poise it gives to your life.

You turn your will over to the Lord at the beginning of the day. You accept His will. No matter what happens in the rest of the day, it doesn't make any difference, does it? Whatever happens, you take it as the leading of the Lord for that day.

And then as the Lord's will unfolded in our life, we found a real reason for our existence. There was a new peace in our lives, and we were humbly conscious that God was working in us and through us, and yet we weren't proud about it. A wonderful thing.

And we realized that when our lives touched other lives, something happened for God. And having turned our lives over to the Lord for the next 24-hour period, we believed that He was guiding, controlling, and using us. And looking back over the whole scenario, we realize how well Theodore Minow captured it all in his lovely poem.

He says, Oh, the bitter shame and sorrow that a time could ever be when I let the Savior's pity plead in vain and proudly answered, All of self and none of thee. Yet he found me, I beheld him bleeding on the accursed tree, heard him pray, Forgive them, Father. And my wistful heart said faintly, Some of self, some of thee.

Day by day his tender mercy healing, helping, full and free, sweet and strong and ah, so patient, brought me lower while I whispered, Less of self and more of thee. Higher than the highest heavens, deeper than the deepest sea, Lord, thy love at last has conquered. Grant me now my soul's petition, None of self, all of thee.

And you know, everybody in the meeting this afternoon is somewhere in that scenario. Where are you? Maybe you're here unsaved. You've never taken that step.

You squirm when you think of trusting Christ. Maybe God is speaking to you this afternoon. And you're saying, tell me in the simplest possible way how I can be saved.

First of all, you have to recognize you're a guilty, lost, depraved, hell-deserving sinner. Has to come. Secondly, you have to abandon any thought of contributing to your own salvation in whole or in part.

Thirdly, you must realize the Lord Jesus died there on the cross of Calvary for you. Died as a substitute for you. Then by a definite act of faith, you must receive him as your only hope for heaven.

When you do that, God saves you, writes your name down, the Lamb's Book of Life. Maybe there's someone here today, and you know your state, and yet you've never had that experience. Never have had that experience where you turn your life over to the Lord.

Say, I'm too old. You're never too old to be obedient. Say, well, I'm too young.

I haven't got through college. I haven't got married yet. Unconditional surrender.

I wonder if God is speaking to some young person here this afternoon. Is that the issue right now? Dare I trust the Lord Jesus to map out my life for me? Maybe there are some here who have really turned over control of their lives to the Lord, and yet the wretched thing has crawled off the altar. A squirming sacrifice.

And the time has come to rededicate your life to the Lord Jesus. I want to tell you, He's worthy. He's really worthy of it all.

The best life is the life that's under His control. So Lord, help us to find ourselves in that scenario this afternoon and take appropriate action.

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