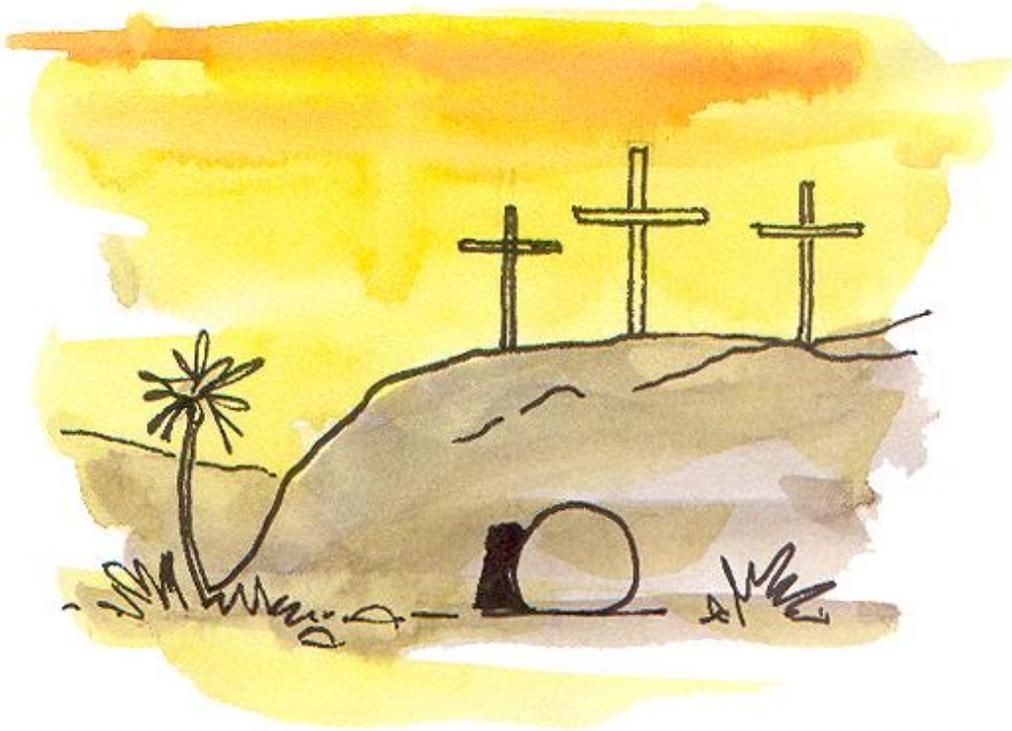


GOSPEL SERMONS

Volume 1



by
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preachthetword.com



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"A Bridge Too Far"

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I just want to read one verse with you this evening, that we'll be thinking about a little later, from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs chapter 29 and verse 1, Proverbs chapter 29 and verse 1: "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy". I'll read it again: 'He', or she, 'that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy'.

Not very many words in this little proverb - like most proverbs - but there is profound truth within it. 'He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy'. Another translation puts it like this: 'He, who is often reprov'd yet stiffens his neck, will suddenly be broken without healing'. Another translation, again, says: 'The man who is often reprov'd, but refuses to accept criticism, will suddenly be broken and never have another chance'.

The subject I wish to preach on this evening, from this verse, is: 'A Bridge Too Far'. Perhaps you've seen the film, you've seen how those troops in the second world war - they got so far, only to go a bridge too far, where they met their end. We can think of many illustrations, many instances, within our own lives where we could say that we have gone a bridge too far. Perhaps in education we've achieved something and we thought we'd go on a little further - and we got a little further, until we got greedy about it, and we went a little more further to only fail and realise we'd went a bridge too far. Perhaps in business we've found it, and we've got that scent - that scent of the bait, if you like - and we go a little bit further in business, and we try to gather a bit more money, and we go too far - only to fall and lose a bit of money. It's a bit like gambling as well, isn't it? You get a scent, and you get a feel, you get an emotion for the gambling and you go a little bit further - and the more you win, the more you want to go on, until you fall because you go a bridge too far.

'He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy'. The picture that the man who is writing this proverb has in his own mind, I believe, is perhaps the picture of the oxen. A picture of a bullock - and the farmer is walking along, and he's about to start his work early in the morning, and he's about to plough the field. And he goes into the field and he takes the yoke - that big long panel of wood for the shoulders of the oxen, [with] which they will plough that field and work hard for his labours. And he goes over to those beasts, and he goes to put the yoke upon their shoulders but they turn their heads - they turn away, they refuse his yoke, they're rebellious, they don't want anything to do with it - and he can't seem to put the yoke upon their shoulders, for the purposes and the labours which he has in mind.

It's the picture of little dog, isn't it? You go over to the cloakroom, and you open the door and he sees you getting the coat - and then he goes frantic, and he's jumping and shouting, jumping on your knees - and then you go to put the lead on him, and then there's a growl. He just won't let you put that lead on him, and he moves, and he turns his neck away - and he'll bite you, but he won't have the lead round his neck. The [writer] put it: the man - the women, the teenager, the boy or girl - who hardens his neck, who stiffens the muscles and the sinews and the flesh of his neck against God, who refuses the yoke of God, who refuses God's will, God's way upon his life, who refuses the lead of God whereby He may walk him in His paths of righteousness - he says that that man who hardens his neck, who has a brass neck, suddenly that man will be broken. And he will be broken in a way that is irrevocable - it will not be able to be brought back, it will not be able to be mended or, as the translation I read said, it won't be able to be healed. There will never, ever again be another chance to be the way that man was.

I don't want to go any further, but I really want to apply this now. People who come Sunday evening after Sunday evening, Sunday morning, perhaps go to Youth Fellowship, or the organisations within our fellowship - and week after week they hear the message of the Gospel, and week after week they harden their heart and their neck against God! Is that you tonight? Be honest with yourself here. You know who you are, you know if God is speaking or singling you out this evening in our gathering. I don't know who you are, but God does - and listen, He has a message for you tonight: that you who would harden your heart, and who week after week go out the back doors, and perhaps you have a sense of the presence of God when you're in here, but when the cold day air hits your face - all those spiritual realities seem to fade away. And you begin to think about what you're going to do tomorrow, the week of work that lies ahead - and those deep spiritual thoughts that have been brought before you here in the pew, they're gone, suddenly, in a flash, and again you harden your neck against God and you reject Him once more!

How many walk away...how many see the Saviour, almost visibly in their own minds eye, bleeding, dying, crying out for their soul - can you remember those times, friend? When you thought you could nearly see Him calling your name, when you heard the preacher, as it was, pointing out and singling out aspects - specific events in your life - that he was convicting you over. And you thought to yourself, 'How does that man know about my life? How could God know about that?'. Yet those times, you walked away from God. The Bible says that God is not willing that any should perish - and we praise God for that truth, that God does not want to see people going to hell. It says God is long-suffering, He's patient towards us and He doesn't want us to go to hell - He wants us to be saved, He wants us to live for Him, to give everything for Him. But! Although God is patient, and although God is long-suffering, even God's patience can run out!

We, in our country, are very fixed in our minds, aren't we? In our own little town, the people of our town picturing the whole of our nation, are fixed in their mind in certain ways: political ways. But listen, this evening, you could be a symptom of that in your religious or your spiritual ways. You could be fixed in your mind. Perhaps you've decided years ago, 30 years ago, perhaps a couple of years ago, that you would have nothing to do with this Gospel. Perhaps you decided that you were going to live for yourself, for your business, for your wealth, for your health! And you didn't want anything to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and you've made your mind concrete - or as another man says: 'thoroughly fixed and mixed, and permanently set'. Have you a concrete mind tonight? Is your mind set? That you're not going to accept this Gospel - and no matter if God, in Christ, could come before you tonight bodily, visibly and show you the nail prints in His hands, the scar in His side: you still, like Thomas, will not believe! He saw it, and he believed - but if you saw it tonight you wouldn't believe, because you've made your mind up! You're set in your ways, and you're thoroughly fixed.

Now, I know nothing about farming, but I'm sure some boys here you could tell you a little bit about it. But I've been told that if you push a cow one way, it'll go the other way - and sometimes we can be like that. We can be like the oxen, we can harden our necks, we can harden every sinew and muscle in our body against God, spiritually speaking. We can refuse His grace, refuse His goodness, close our ears to His word, our hearts to His light, and we reject Him in every conceivable way - and we would not thank Him for anything that He gives us! Could that be you tonight? Could you be one who is hardening his neck against God? Well, I want to talk to you, just for a few moments tonight, about God's patience.

God's patience: even God's patience - and I say this reverently, and He's more patient than anyone upon the face of the earth - but even His patience runs out! Usually His patience runs out with those who have heard. That's right, those who He has spoken to before, those who He has come to, who He has pleaded with, who He has revealed certain truths to - it's usually with those whom His patience runs out. The children of believers, those who have parents who are born-again, who've grown up under the sound of the Gospel and have been sent to Sunday School, and the children's meeting, and the Campaigners* and so on - and they

heard the Gospel since they were knee-high, yet they grow up and whatever happens - perhaps they've been offended or annoyed, or something they have seen makes them rebel against God and God's people - and they turn away and refuse the gospel of Jesus Christ. People in families, husbands, wives - wives who have been married to godly husbands, and vice versa - and they have seen a witness, and they've seen Christ through the loving kindness of their husband or wife, yet they go on rejecting Him! And no matter how much God tries through that witness, through the fleshly witness of His Spirit within those people, they refuse Christ as their Saviour. Through churches, perhaps it's this church, perhaps it's another church - I don't care what church it is - but a church who presents the Gospel from the Bible, and you've heard it over and over again - but no matter how many times you hear it, you reject it!

*uniformed Christian youth organisation

I want to tell you what God thinks, this evening, what God's patience is this evening with regard to your rebellion and your rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We find it in Proverbs 1 and verse 24, and God says in Proverbs 1 and 24: 'Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded...' - I've called to you and you refused My voice, and no man has seen it, but I have put My hand out against you - '...But you have set at nothing all my counsel, and would none of my reproof...'. God is saying, 'You wouldn't listen to one thing I said to you!'. '...I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh...' - when you want Me, when you need Me, when there's a time in your life when you cry out to Me, I will look upon you and think 'It's too late!'. 'When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord'.

Aren't those sobering words, tonight? We all know the verses: 'Them that seek the Lord will find Him, if they search with all their heart', we know that, and we love quoting it - and some people are sitting, sitting in some kind of security, remembering those verses. And they say, 'Some day I'll trust Him. Some day when I'm older, when I'm on my deathbed, when I really need Him - I don't really need Him now - but then I'll trust Him!'. But oh, that we would believe our whole Bible and oh, that we would hear God saying to you, perhaps tonight, and sit in fear of these words this evening: 'Then shall they call upon me...'. That day that you're thinking of, when you're on your deathbed, you could call upon Him - but He will not answer! And no matter how early you seek Him, you will not find Him! We find it again in Zechariah chapter 7, verse 11, where God says to the people of Israel - and He could be saying to you tonight: 'You refused to hearken', you didn't want to listen, 'you pulled away the shoulder'. You know when you put your [hand on the] shoulder of someone whom you love, and they have a grudge against you and they turn away - have you done that with God? Is that what you're doing to God this evening? You refuse, you turn away the shoulder and stop the ears, that you should not hear what He is saying? 'Yea, you have made your hearts as adamant stone, lest you should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets', you've hardened your heart against God!

Listen, friend tonight: has God been speaking to you? Have you heard God on a Sunday evening or a Sunday morning? Have you heard the still small voice of God through your circumstances in your life? Have you heard God's voice through an illness that has been recent? Have you heard God's voice through problems that have come across your daily path? Have you heard God's voice through the death of a loved one, or a friend in your family, or a husband, or a wife? And you've heard God speaking, but you don't want to hear Him because you blame Him for those things that have come into your life! Has God been speaking to you through an accident? Perhaps a car accident? And you got out of it, and you don't know how you got out of it, and the police and the ambulance don't know how you got out of it - but you got out of it! And God is speaking to you, He is wanting you to know that He has a purpose for your life, He wants to save you, He wants to use you, but you turn your neck away from Him, you turn away the shoulder.

There was once a revival in a Presbyterian church, in Pennsylvania in America. There were thousands of people being saved, it was glorious - it was like heaven came down to earth - in every Gospel meeting there were people being saved, it was glorious! But there was one girl and she felt God speaking to her soul - and she came along to the meetings, but she would come to them on alternate evenings: Monday, Wednesday, Friday and the other evenings, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday she would go to the dances. Her week, her routine over the two weeks of the mission was: the meeting, the dance, the meeting, the dance, the meeting, the dance. And the documents of the church have it as such, that the second week, I believe, of that mission, her calendar was: the meeting, the dance, the meeting, the dance, the meeting, the dance, the coffin! And what a sobering reality it was for the elders of that church to look upon that, and to hear, perhaps, the word of God, by the Spirit of God speaking to them: 'She that hardeneth her neck against God shall be swiftly reproved, and that without remedy'. Do you hear God speaking to you tonight?

You know, God spoke to so many people in His word. He spoke to Sodom and Gomorrah over and over again, He warned them of their sin - that came up to Him as a stench to His holy nostrils. For what they had done, He warned over and over again and again - but His patience ran out! And He destroyed them. He spoke to Pharaoh, He said over and over again, 'Let my people go'. He sent ten plagues, and every time Pharaoh said, 'I'll let them go now', but then he hardened his heart against God - and eventually God ran out of patience and slew his firstborn child! Eli's sons, bringing offerings to God in the temple - and what did they do? They came in and they offered strange fire, a wrong sacrifice - we believe, perhaps, they were even drunk as they came to God to worship Him - and God said, 'I've warned you enough, sons - that's it! My patience has run out!' - and He struck them down! What greater example is there than Judas Iscariot? Three years with the Lord Jesus Christ, seeing the honey words dropping from His lips, from the mouth of incarnate God. Hearing the teaching, first-hand, from the Lord Jesus Christ, witnessing His miracles, Judas beside Him every day of His life - yet he betrayed Him!

Perhaps you could be like the surgeon tonight: the surgeon, who when he operates on his first patient, and the patient dies - perhaps that night is a sleepless night, perhaps the rest of the week he thinks, 'I wonder is there something I could have done? If I had done this procedure, rather than the other one that I did do, or if I'd listened to another doctor, or one of the nurses beside me. If I wasn't quick enough...', and all these thoughts course across his mind - and he thinks of these things. But in 30 years time when he is over a patient and that patient passes away, he will feel sorry, he will feel, 'Maybe she would have lived - or he would have lived - if we did something else', but he will quickly forget and he will go on to the next patient, because there's work to be done. And he, over time, has become de-sensitised to death.

Perhaps you, tonight, are de-sensitised to the gospel of Jesus Christ. You remember, when you were a child and you heard about the person in your family, the first person closest to you who died - and it was tragic, and you cried, and every time you thought, or saw a photograph of them, it brought those pains to you. But as you grow older, and more people die, you become a little more accustomed to it - and eventually you can become hardened to it. Listen to the word of God tonight, to your soul: 'He that hardeneth himself against God!' You're like the frost - you know the frost - one layer comes down, another layer comes down, and the more layers that come down the harder the ground gets, the more dangerous it gets. And you're just like that, the more you harden your heart - listen! - the more dangerous it becomes for you! And God says in 1 Thessalonians, that like a pregnant woman who's walking down the street one day, and the pains, and the pangs of childbirth come upon her - listen! - if you refuse God, if you harden your heart and your neck against Him, judgement will come upon your life because you refused His instruction!

Why does God's patience run out? Well, God's patience ran out with the children in Genesis, just before the flood had happened - what happened? It says that, listen: 'The imaginations of every man's heart was only evil continually' - now, I know things are bad today, but I wonder are they as bad as that? The only thoughts that men had were 'only evil continually' - and God said: 'That is enough! My patience has run out!'. And He

said to them, 'I'll give you 70 years to live - but listen, My Spirit shall not always strive with man', and His Spirit ceased to strive with those men when He sent the flood and destroyed them. That's why God's patience runs out - for as He says in Hosea, and I want these words to burn into your heart, not because I want to frighten you, not because I want to be morbid or solemn tonight, but because this is the truth of God and you need to know it! God said, in Hosea 4 and verse 17, about one of the tribes of Israel, Ephraim - He said these sobering words, listen: 'Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone'. Did you hear those words? Ephraim - this tribe of Israel - they're joined to idols, they're following after their own gods, they're following after materialism, their car, their business, their wife, their lover, they're following after their education, they have made idols to themselves - listen to the voice of God, how horrifying it must have been to them: 'Let him alone!'. Can you imagine this evening, if you, sitting in your pew tonight, heard the voice of God, or lying in your bed with a cold sweat upon your brow, you heard the words of God: 'Let him alone! Leave him! He's refused Me enough'.

In Pilgrim's Progress there is a story about a man that was found in a cage - and Pilgrim's Progress is a story, a picture, an allegory of the Christian walk and the Christian life, and the chief character is the man who is called Christian. He flees from the City of Wrath, which is about to be destroyed, and he's walking, and journeying, and [is on a] pilgrimage to a city, a Celestial City which is heaven. But along his path, he meets this man and I want to read it out to you tonight, I want you to listen, picture it:

And [the writer] says, "So he took him by the hand again and led him into a very dark room, where there sat a man in an iron cage. Now the man to look on seemed very sad and he sat with his eyes looking down to the ground, his hands folded together, and he sighed as if he would break his heart.

Then said Christian, 'What means this?', at which the Interpreter - or the Holy Spirit - bid him talk with the man. Then said Christian to the man, 'What are you?'

The man answered, 'I am what I was not once'.

'What were you?'

The man said, 'I was once fair, a flourishing person who said they were a Christian, both in my own eyes and also in the eyes of others. I once was - as I thought - fair for heaven, the Celestial City, and even then I had joy at the thoughts that I should get there'.

Christian said, 'Well, but what are you now?'

'I am now a man of despair. I am shut up in it, as in this iron cage. I cannot get out! Oh! Now I cannot get out!'

Christian said to him, 'But how came you to this condition?'

He said, 'I left off to watch and to be sober, I laid the reins upon the necks of my own lusts. I sinned against the light of the world and the goodness of God, I have grieved the Spirit and He is gone. I tempted the devil and he has come to me. I have provoked God to anger and He has left me! I have so hardened my heart that I cannot repent!'

Then said Christian, 'But is there no hopes for such a man as this?'

'Ask him', said the Interpreter.

Then said Christian, 'Is there no hope, but you must be kept in the iron cage of despair?'

The man replied, 'No, none at all'.

'Why? The Son of the Blessed is very pitiful and merciful and long-suffering'.

Listen to the man's words: 'I have crucified Him to myself afresh. I have despised His person, I have despised His righteousness. I have counted His blood as an unholy thing. I have done despite to the spirit of grace. Therefore I have shut myself out of all the promises, and now there remains nothing for me but threatenings, dreadful threatenings, fearful threatenings of certain judgement and fiery indignation which shall devour me as an adversary'.

Christian asked him, 'For what did you bring yourself into this condition?'

He replied, 'For the lusts, the pleasures, the profits of this world, in the enjoyment of which I did then promise myself much delight. But now every one of those things also bite me and gnaw me like a burning worm'.

Christian says, 'But canst thou not now repent and turn?'.

Listen: 'No! God hath denied me repentance! His word gives me no encouragement to believe. Yea Himself has shut me up in this iron cage - nor can all the men in the world let me out! Oh! Eternity, eternity, how shall I grapple with the misery that I must meet with in eternity?'.

Then said Interpreter to the Christian, 'Let this man's misery be remembered by thee, and be an everlasting caution to thee'.

Listen, friend, our time has gone this evening, but listen! Could that be you tonight? 'Oh! Eternity! Eternity!' - perhaps you're so close, a foot off rejecting Christ for the last time, and He will say: 'It is enough!'. You could be a backslider tonight, and if you're truly a backslider you will never lift up your eyes in hell if you were saved in the first place - but listen, believer who is outside the path, and the will, and the walking of God's precepts - listen! 1 John chapter 4 says that there is a sin unto death, and if you walk in disobedience to Christ and go too far on this earth, He will take you from this scene of time to protect His testimony - He'll take you to glory! But for this cause, many are sickly among you and do sleep.

I want you to see, as we close, not just God patience, but God's provision. Now listen, if God is speaking to you tonight - and I believe He could be speaking to someone here this evening for the very last time: Christ for sin atonement makes. Christ can cover your sin. Christ, by His blood that He shed at the cross, He can provide a covering, a veil for your guilt - to plunge it away, to separate your sins as far as the east is from the west, to dig them deep into the depths of the ocean. He can take them away, tonight! Will you listen to His voice? Or will you harden your heart and be swiftly destroyed?

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - September 2000

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"Ye Must Be Born Again"

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Well good evening everyone, let me thank you for the warm words of welcome from your Pastor on behalf of the whole church here in Kilkeel. It's a great privilege to be here with you this evening, and to be labouring with you in this mission in the Gospel. I trust, and hope, that as we go night by night preaching the word of God, that the Lord will be pleased to save people by the grace of God.

I want you to turn with me to a very well known passage of Scripture, it's a passage that I have preached on many times - and I haven't preached that many times, really - but John chapter 3 is probably known to most of you in this gathering this evening. It is a story of another individual who the singers were singing about, who the Lord met. It's a great thing to meet the Lord - I wonder have you ever met the Lord? This man met the Lord, and I believe that the Lord is going to meet with someone this evening. Now, it's up to you what you're going to do with the Lord - whether you're going to trust Him, whether you're going to accept Him or reject Him. This man accepted the Lord.

In verse 1 we read this: "There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

Let's take a moment of prayer: Our Father in heaven, we come to Thee in the name of the Lord Jesus, and we need Thee. No-one else will do - David Legge means nothing, Kilkeel Baptist means nothing, we need God, we need God the Holy Spirit. I need Him to fill me, the sinner in the pew here this evening needs Him to save them. So God, we pray that Thou wilt come and do a work of salvation in this place. In Jesus' name, Amen.

In John chapter 3 the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to this man named Nicodemus. Now, I want you to notice this: three times the Lord Jesus Christ says something to this man. Now you might say that if the Lord Jesus Christ came to you one evening in the middle of the night, and you were awakened out of your sleep all of a sudden - and at the bottom of the bed there stood Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and He said something to you once, I think you would be sure to listen to Him, wouldn't you? But Jesus Christ came to Nicodemus, and in his middle of the night He said something to him three times! Now if Jesus says something to you once, my friend, listen. If Jesus says something to you twice, you'd better listen! And if He says three times - and He's going to say it to you this evening - you've got to listen to what He is saying!

Here is what He says, listen: 'Truly, truly, I say unto thee, Ye must be born again'. Have you ever heard those words? I remember the last time I preached on these words, there was a man waiting at the door for me. He shook hands with me and pulled me over to him, and I knew he was going to say something that I wasn't going to like. He said to me: 'Do you think you used your time well there this evening?'. I said: 'What do you mean?'. He says: 'Well, you repeated over and over and over again 'Ye must be born again, Ye must be born again'', he said, 'There's a whole lot of other things that you could have said in that half an hour' - maybe it was a wee bit over half an hour! I said to that man, and I say to you: 'Do you know why I did that? Because ye must be born again'.

Do you know that? That's the essence of the Gospel. I'm not asking you do you understand what it means, I'm asking you have you ever heard it? Have you ever shut your ears and your eyes and your heart to this fact: that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, over and over again and again said to this man, 'Listen, listen to me in whatever I say, Ye must be born again'. Well, are you? Are you? You say: 'Well, I don't understand what it means to be born-again'. Well, I'm going to explain to you, with the help of God, what it means.

'In the beginning', we read this, the word of God says, 'God created the heavens and the earth'. I know half the world doesn't believe that any more. They'll tell you that you can go and shake hands with your grandfather, or your great-grandfather, or your ancestor way down the line - some chimpanzee, or some wee cell in the middle of this pool of mud. They tell us that we come from the monkeys, and we come from all sorts of things, but we definitely don't come from God! My friend, the word of God says: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. So what is man? If God created us, what is he? The Bible says that man is created in the image and the likeness of his Creator God. That simply means this: the first man could know God, could know the things of God, he had a will that delighted to do the things that God wanted him to do, he had a heart that loved the things that God loved. But we read in Genesis chapter 3 that the devil came in!

Has that ever happened to you? The devil has come in, hasn't he? He came in here in the garden, and God told them: 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, don't eat of that one: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die'. What did Satan say? 'Go on, you'll not die at all'. They took, and they ate, and they disobeyed God - and it says that from that moment that sin meant that death came upon all of creation. From that moment on men were no longer in the exact image of their Creator God, but the word of God says: '...and Adam begat a son in his own image'.

That's what big theologians call 'the fall'. Men and women have fallen from the glory where God had created them. He had created them to be like Him, to walk like Him, and talk like Him, and do all things like their Creator God - but they fell and were marred, and God's beautiful design and picture was defaced. That's what the Bible means - have you ever heard these words: 'We are born in sin and shapen in iniquity'? That's what the Bible means when Paul says: 'There is no difference, for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God'. That's what the Bible means when Isaiah, seeing himself and the children of God in Israel, said: 'From the tip of the head to the tip of the toe they were covered in putrifying, oozing sores of sin'.

I wonder do you see yourself that way? Do you know what the gospel of Jesus Christ is? It's how the image is, that stamp of God upon His creature, can be restored. The Bible teaches that the only way that can happen is that the Holy Spirit of God comes back into man and back into woman, and restores the life of God into those that are spiritually dead. The Bible calls it the 'new birth' - new life! To be regenerated, to have the life revived within your soul, to have the Spirit of God come into your heart and breathe new life into everything that is dead. The Lord Jesus Christ says to you, my friend, as He said to Nicodemus: 'Except a man be born-again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'.

If I was to ask you all to put your hand up - whoever wants to see the kingdom of God - I'm sure that everybody's hand would be up, wouldn't they? Who wants to go to heaven? Everybody puts their hand up, don't they? Oh, they all argue about the way they get there of course - I'm not talking about that - but there is a desire within their soul, within their heart, that when they die they will go to be with God, whoever their god may be. Jesus Christ - do you think He's a liar, do you? Stand up if you think He's a liar. Do you think He was a lunatic? Well, be a man about it, or a woman about it, and stand up and say to everybody here that He was mad, He was off His head! Well, if He was neither, He says to you: 'If you're to see heaven one day, my friend, if you're to get to Glory, and if you're to get with all loved ones that have gone before you that were saved - ye must be born-again!'

What is it to be born-again? Well you'll know, better than I do coming from the city, that every creature that is born into this world has a nature after its own kind. In other words, you can't train a bird to crawl, and for the same reason you can't train a snake to fly, because they are true to their nature. A caterpillar crawls, and a bird flies. But one day when we watch, perhaps for weeks and months, a caterpillar crawling along the ground - and suddenly one-day it sprouts wings and it flies, what do we say? 'Boy, that's a clever caterpillar. Look what that caterpillar has accomplished, that caterpillar must have read a book on flying! Look what has happened!' - you don't say that, why? Because it's its new nature: caterpillars change from caterpillars to butterflies. You could say it's been born-again, couldn't you? It's been born again! It's a new life!

Let me say this: do you see if you're a sinner - and you're all sinners, the Bible says - but if you're not born-again, if you're not saved, you might as well try and breathe life into an old dead Mummy in a tomb or a pyramid in Egypt, you might as well try and talk with your foot, and hear with your nose, as try and be born-again of yourself! Have you got that? It's impossible! Water never rises above its own level, sure it doesn't? Jesus says: 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh', and there are hundreds of people across our land and they think because they were born a Protestant, or because they were born a Roman Catholic, people all over the world who believe because they were born Muslim or whatever that that is their ticket to heaven. Listen to Jesus: 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh' - no good - you need to be born of the Spirit.

You can cultivate it, you can look after it, you can dress it up, you can refine yourself - your soul - whatever it may be. You can send it to church, you can make it religious, but the word of God says that you can never breathe life into your soul. You might as well try and lift yourself up by your shoelaces, as to generate new life, to bring salvation into your soul, and to one day go and be in the kingdom of God - you can't do it. I know there's people rushing around everywhere, and people will do anything, give anything, just to try something to become spiritual, to become accepted by God. I know people in the south of Ireland, and they cut themselves, and they walk up rocks on bare knees, bleeding. They pray and they fast, and they do all sorts of things to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus said - oh, that men and women here would listen to Jesus! - 'Except a man be born-again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'.

Do you know what you need? You need to be born-again. Some of you farmers will know what a pig is - that's just about as far as it goes for me, I could tell you one whether it's on the plate or on the farm, but I know a pig. You can take a pig, can't you, and you can put it in the bath and give it a good scrub. You can take it and put deodorant on it, and perfume, and talcum powder, and you can give it a lovely name. You can perfume it and then dress it up in a beautiful tuxedo and fancy bow tie, and you can bring it to the dinner table and set it down. You can talk to it and say all manner of things about it, but when it starts to eat - what is it? It's a pig. That's the nature of the thing. No matter what you do to it, it doesn't make any difference. It's still a pig!

My friend, maybe you go to church, maybe you say your prayers, maybe you read the Bible, maybe you're faithful and give to the poor, maybe you're good to your neighbour and you do all manner of things - and you're hoping that one day, when you get to Glory, and God will be there or Peter at the pearly gates, and he

weighs up your good and your bad, that you'll just slip in! Not a bit of it! For 'Except a man be born-again, he'll never be in the kingdom of God'.

Peter says that we must be partakers of the divine nature. Do you understand that? What that means? You need to be born of God! God needs, in a meeting like this, or at home when you open the word of God, and when you look to God and pray to God, and when you seek God - God has to come and breathe new life into your soul! God needs to come, and God needs to save your soul. God needs to change you to be a new person, because you know as well as I do - and your wife or your husband knows - that, no matter how much you try, you can never change yourself!

Have you ever seen an apple tree that yields two types of fruit? Have you? One side is apples and the other side is pears? You can get that - what it simply is is a branch has been cut off the apple tree, and a few shoots have been cut off a pear tree, and what the gardener does is: he cuts a slit in the little stump of where the branch on the apple tree was cut off, and he shoves those little pear shoots down that stump. He puts beeswax on it and a bit of cloth, and in a year or two's time one half of the tree is covered in apples, and the other half is covered in pears. Do you know what he has done? He has put in a new nature. My friend, you need Jesus Christ! Do you hear me? You don't need a church, you don't need a preacher, you don't need any denomination, you need Jesus Christ! You need Him to come to you, you need Him to save you, because Jesus Christ was the one who was born into this world so that you might be born-again.

Did you know that? You know the Nativity story at Christmas of how He was born into that manger. You sing about it and you read about it, but do you realise why He was born there? He was born that you might be born-again! He was born so that He might grow, so that He might mature, and one day so that He might be taken by wicked and cruel hands of His own creatures and stripped naked. They spat upon Him, they mocked Him, they bruised Him, they pulled the hairs from His beard, and they whipped His back - the word of God says - until it was like a ploughed field. They beat His face so that He was marred more than the face of any man - He was almost unrecognisable as a human being!

Why did God do that? Why did God send a wee baby into the manger for something like that to happen? Did He make a mistake? Did He turn away His eyes for a couple of moments, and then man and the devil came in and did something that He didn't know about, behind His back? Not a bit of it! Oh yes, man tried all that he could to kill the Lord Jesus. The devil did all that he could throw at Him there at the cross to make sure that this Messiah, the Son of God, would die and never live again or trouble the devil. But, my friend, listen to what the prophet Isaiah says - listen now: 'It pleased the Lord to bruise him...for he hath put him to scorn...he hath laid on him the iniquity of us all'.

Did you hear that? All our sins were laid on Him - your sin my friend! Your drunken nights, your abuse to the wife, your running around, your fiddling the books, all those things that God calls sin, and that God one day will condemn in hell - all of that was taken off you and put on Christ there at the cross! He suffered my hell, He suffered my punishment, He stood in my place, He took the rap for me, He became my substitute! The amazing thing is this: He did it for you, do you know that? Has anybody ever told you that? You see, Jesus said to the same man that He said: 'You must be born-again', He said, 'Moses, the same way as he lifted an old serpent up in the wilderness, and everybody looked' - what happened there was the story that a plague had gone through the whole nation of Israel, and they were bitten all over. They were dying, and they were wriggling around in the dust with the poison going through their bloodstream - and they didn't know where to look, or who would help them. They were dying! Moses was told by God to go and get this brazen serpent, stick it on a pole, stick it in the middle of the desert. He said: 'Look, if you look to that pole, you'll live!'.

There's people here - and I know it - and they're squirming around in their sin in the dust and the dirt. Oh, they love their sin - but it's a love-hate relationship, they wish they could get rid of it, but they can't live with it and they can't live without it. They're lying there squirming in agony, and Jesus Christ is on the cross, and He's crying out to them: 'Look and live! Look and live!'. There with His puffed, bleeding eyes that men had beaten, He looks down upon you this evening. All that He is looking for is that you, as you squirm there in your own sin and degradation, in your own dead nature, is that you turn your head where you are and look at Him! Look at Him dying for you! Look at Him, in love, shedding His blood for you, taking God's wrath and exhausting it for you!

He wants you to turn from your sin, my friend. He wants you to come by faith and look and live! Oh, you can't do it any other way. If I was to go home this evening and walk through the back door, and there's the kitchen clock and it has stopped. If I was to take it and say to my wife, Barbara: 'Do you think if we put in the living-room it would start?', and I go and put it above the mantelpiece, but it's still not working. You take it down and then you go into the hall and try it there, and you swap at all around the place - that's what people are doing with their souls! They take it to this church, the other church, they take it to this belief, or the other thing - and they don't realise that it doesn't make a rap of difference for: 'We must be born-again!'

My friend tonight, what are you going to do? What are you going to do? Are you going to trust Him? I believe this message is for someone! Are you going to say: 'Yes Lord Jesus, I realise that I need to be born-again of the Spirit of God. I can't change myself, I can't take myself on some kind of supernatural ladder to heaven through doing good works. Lord Jesus, You're going to have to make me born-again, You're going to have to save me!'. Have you realised that? Have you realised that you need to look to Calvary, where Jesus died for you because He loved you? If you've realised it, do you know what you need to do? You need to turn away from your sin, you need to repent - that means turn away, and turn to God and be done with your sin. You need to come by faith and say: 'Lord, I'm trusting in the cross alone, and what you did at the cross alone - nothing to do with me - I'm going to trust the blood that saves me!'. You need to ask Him to take your life and make it His own.

Let's bow our heads. God has been speaking, because His word never returns unto Him void. There are those that are not saved, and maybe it's dawning on them that they've no hope of heaven. My friend, let me tell you this solemnly: if you've no hope of heaven, the only place is hell. What are you going to do? Are you going to walk out of this place again, like you've done in a Gospel meeting before, and say: 'Ach, a lot of nonsense'. Or you know in the depths of your soul that there's a bit of truth in it, but you love your sin too much, you love the booze too much. What are you going to do? My friend, if you want to have peace, if you want to have rest, you need to have the forgiveness of your sins, you need to get right with God. All you need to do is look to Him now in faith, ask Him, and say: 'Lord, Lord, I'm sorry. Lord, I turn from my sin. Lord, will You save me?'. Why not pray it now?

I'll be shaking hands at the door on the way out, if you want to speak to me about your soul, I know God is speaking to you - so speak to me. If you want to sit where you are, you don't want to draw attention to yourself, sit here a while and let everybody go out. I'll come in and I'll have a word with you. But no matter how young you are, how old you are, who you're here with - listen: don't leave this building tonight without being born-again.

Let us pray: Our Father, we thank Thee for the Gospel that is so simple. From the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, three times He says: 'Ye must be born-again. For except a man be born-again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'. Lord, there are people dead in their sin, and they know it. Lord, they need to be born not of the flesh - they've been born of the flesh and it's done them no good - but they need to be born of the Spirit. Lord, only Thou canst do that this evening. We pray that Thou wilt come, dear God the Holy Spirit, and save men and women in this place this evening. So we ask Thy blessing now as we go our separate ways, and pray that none will leave this building without knowing Christ as their Saviour - for it's in His name we pray. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2001

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"Conviction Of Sin"

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If you have a copy of the word of God with you this evening, we're turning in our Bibles to the book of Job. The book of Job in the Old Testament - don't worry if you don't have a Bible with you, or you can't find the book of Job, you can listen as we read the word of God together. Job chapter 23, Job chapter 23, and we'll take time to read the whole chapter to get the context.

"Then Job answered and said, Even to day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Oh that I knew where I might find him! That I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me. There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold. My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food. But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? And what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him. Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him". This is the verse that I want us to concentrate on this evening: "For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me: Because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither hath he covered the darkness from my face".

Let's come before the Lord in a word of prayer, and ask His help as we come to His precious word. Our Father in heaven, we thank Thee for the word of God. We thank Thee that there is power in the word of God. Lord, we don't handle it lightly this evening but, Lord, we need help - we're weak. Lord, we really do ask that Thy Holy Spirit may presence Himself with us, that He may come and do the job that He does so well of saving souls for eternity. Fill me with Thy Spirit I pray, and may there be a divine consciousness that God is in this place, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's look at verse 16, again, of the chapter: 'For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me'. If you know the story of Job you'll know that the devil came to God, and the devil said: 'There is this man Job, and he serves You, but he only serves You because he's well-off for following You'. So God says: 'I will test my servant Job to prove to you, Satan, that he follows Me because he loves Me. And when he is tried', as our passage says, 'he will come forth as gold'. God permitted Satan to do such with him. He lost his family, he lost his cattle, he lost his business, he lost his home, he lost absolutely everything. He's sitting on a pile of ashes with boils all over his body, and he is asking God: 'God, what are You doing?'

Now Job was a saved man, as we say today. He was a Christian, he followed God. But even Job, because of the way God was dealing with him, he could turn to God and say: 'God, You're melting my heart, You're softening my heart - and, Lord, You're troubling me to the depths of my soul!'. I wonder have you been at these meetings in the week gone by, and God has started a process in your life of softening your heart and troubling your soul. The Bible calls that by this name: 'Conviction of Sin'.

What is it? It's simply this - and God describes it a little bit in the work of a saint, but it's also in the work of the unsaved sinner - it says: 'He is in one mind, and who can turn him? And what his', God's, 'soul desireth,

even that he doeth'. You've heard the Gospel, perhaps, or someone gave you a tract - maybe not from this church - or you heard the Gospel somewhere else, in the open air, or through a book, or through a video, or through a friend - and for some reason you, after hearing the word of God, have been troubled about it. Your heart has been softened, something has been pricked into your soul, something is different now. You begin to think about these things and the thought of God, and your sin, and eternal things, and salvation, is really troubling your soul! That's the conviction of sin.

Let me say this: it is God that is doing it. You might say: 'How can God do such a nasty thing? I'm troubled to the very depths of my soul, I feel it in my bones! There's something wrong, I can hardly sleep at times, I can hardly rest because this thing is going on my head'. Friend, listen! It is God! God has one mind concerning you, God has His eye on you, God has His finger, His hand, upon you - and He is determined not to let you be lost. God is not willing that any should perish, and He doesn't want you to perish, my friend. If I can say it reverently: God is hunting you down! God wants to make you uncomfortable, He wants to make you tremble, He wants to make you frightened and uneasy because of the Gospel - because He knows that if you're too comfortable you'll never ever want to come to Him!

It's the word of God that does this. It's not new-fangled ideas, it's the old-fashioned word of God. You see God Himself describes the word of God as a hammer. Your heart may have been hard, and maybe it's hard this evening, and you're like the frost outside - each time you hear the Gospel it's like another layer on top of the previous layer, and it gets harder and harder and harder and harder, until you can sit in a meeting or a mission like this and it doesn't affect you at all! My friend, God's word is like a hammer, and it can smash and break the hardest of all hardened hearts. God's word is called the sword of the Spirit. It is double-edged - it's so sharp, the word of God says, it can divide the very bone from the marrow, the soul from the spirit. Perhaps you've been sitting under the word of God, and you've almost felt a dagger go into your heart and into your life because God is speaking to you!

The Psalmist says: 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path'. Maybe in these nights, or in some other experience that you've had in your life, you have found the word of God shining into your heart like a laser beam, uncovering things that no-one else knows about, the secret things of your heart and in your life. God, like a light, has shone in! You know what it was like this morning, a beautiful morning. Maybe you were in the kitchen or the bathroom, and the sun was shining through the window - and what happens? You could have dusted, ladies, the house the night before - but it doesn't matter, when the sun shines in through the window you see the dust float everywhere.

Has God's word made your heart soft? Oh, there are many things that can make our heart soft. The birth of a child can soften a hardened drinker or gambler, so much so that they want to leave their old ways for the sake of their child. Maybe they'll send their child to Sunday School, bring it up as a so-called Christian, because their heart has been softened by nature's cries. There are so many things - a bereavement - that can soften the heart, but can I say that that is not conviction of sin! Conviction of sin is when God comes in with His word, and He begins to do something supernatural. He makes your heart soft - you almost think it could break, you've no rest, you've no peace - and like Job says: 'the Almighty troubleth me'.

Do you know what God has been doing? He's been sitting at His divine drawing board, working out how He's going to trouble you. He wants you to be moved, He wants you to be shaken out of your lethargy and your apathy and your carelessness, because of your soul. He'll do anything, by anyway, by any means, to bring you out of that quicksand of indecision - he wants to trouble your soul, my friend!

There was a great revivalist preacher in America by the name of Charles Finney, you can buy his biography on the table at the back. He was a man so full of the Holy Spirit, a man so anointed of God to preach the Gospel, that hundreds of thousands of unbelievers came into the kingdom of God because of him. Do you

know what the records say? The state in America where he was having his revival meetings was at the coast, a bit like Kilkeel. Boats that passed the shoreline a hundred miles out - wait till you hear this - they were playing cards and poker, gambling, smoking their fags, drinking their booze, doing all those sorts of things - but as soon as they came within the radius of where Finney was, and where God was moving, a silence came upon them. It all stopped, and they stood still, they feared that if they took another drag, or another sip, or another bet, that God would come down upon them!

Do you feel any of a measure of that my friend? There could be reasons why God has softened your heart, there could be reasons why God is troubling you, and I think the first reason could be this: God has been uncovering your sin. That's what troubles us the most. You don't like being caught, do you? It's like the criminal that murders someone, and what does he do with the dead body? He either digs up his garden and buries it and then builds a patio over it, or he takes the body and he ties something heavy to it and puts it in a bin bag and throws it into the river. What's he trying to do? He's trying to bury the evidence of his crime, he's wanting to get rid of it. Maybe, my friend, in your life God has been bringing the skeletons out of the cupboard - He's been reminding you of the things that you thought that you'd forgotten long ago, you'd wiped off your memory and time had erased, but all of a sudden God is softening your heart to these things. God is troubling you, and you wish you could forget them all again!

Is it the sins of youth? Job talked about the sins of youth. He said that his bones 'were full of sin of his youth, which shall lie down with him in the dust'. He was saying that he would take his sins of his youth with him, they troubled him so much - he couldn't forget about them. David cried to God: 'Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions, according to Thy mercy. Remember Thou me in Thy goodness, O Lord'. Is it forgotten sins? You may have forgotten, my friend, but God has not. Jesus Christ, one day, will stand upon the earth and He will look eyeball to eyeball into your face, and He says: 'Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement'. Secret sins, He says: 'There is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad', in that day when God shall judge the secrets of men's hearts by Jesus Christ according to the Gospel.

Is your sin troubling you, my friend, is it? Because it ought to! If God is working with your heart, and if God is striving in your life, you can be sure that if there's unrest, if there's uneasiness, it is God who is the originator of it because God wants to save you! The apostle John says that: 'If we say that we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves, and make God a liar' - and anybody in this place that doesn't feel God upon them because of their sin, they're deceiving themselves. Maybe God is softening your heart, or troubling you, because He is uncovering your sin.

Secondly, perhaps it's because you're starting to feel the guilt and the danger of your sin. It's like legal conviction. When you're caught in a crime - or, as the saying goes, you're caught red-handed - do you know what that feels like? The embarrassing feeling of knowing that you've been caught doing wrong, red-faced embarrassment and guilt. Some of you, perhaps, know what it's like. It's the feeling of standing in the courtroom, and there is the judge and the jury, and you've gone through the trial and dug up all the dirty washing. You're waiting for the pronouncement, the judgement upon you - and then, when you hear it and it's the worst that you can hear, there is that sinking, burning feeling rising up in your soul. The feeling of guilt and terror at what has happened!

I wonder has God's customs officer stepped onto the boat of your life and found something? Has He? It's so tragic that it is softening and squeezing your heart, and troubling you to the depths of your being. In these last nights or, my friend, in your life, has the Holy Spirit put His chains and handcuffs upon you? Has the divine jailer imprisoned you, and aroused your conscience to what is going on in your life? Let me say this: if that is what is happening in your life, the likelihood is this - that you're trying to close your ears to God! You're trying to shut Him up! You're trying to harden your heart and numb yourself! What often a lost man

or woman, or a backslider, does is: they go and they run head-long and saturate themselves in their sin to numb themselves to the conviction of God!

They'll go and get full to try and numb the dagger blows of the word of God into their heart, and the slashes of the two-edged sword of God's word. You've heard about men and women drowning their sorrows, well some of you have been drowning your conviction - or at least trying to. But just as you wake up with a sore head the next morning, you wake up with a sore heart - because He is softening your heart, He is troubling your spirit, and God is moving among you. God is speaking to you through your family, through a church, through a tract, through something - and it seems that, no matter how far you run away from the sound of the Gospel, everywhere you turn, everything you go to do is troubling you because the Gospel darts of God are flying full at you!

I heard about a man a few weeks ago, and he was declaring how he used to walk with God, and he used to - as he said - be a believer, but he could 'never go to church any more'. He could 'never even send his children to church, because they are so out of touch with reality, and Christianity isn't as it ought to be'. Then, in the next breath, he says this: 'I don't know why I'm going on about this, for I'm not interested at all'. As William Shakespeare says: 'He protests too much'. Are you one of these people that bad-mouth Christians, Christian churches, Christian ministers, any form of Christian doctrine or anything? You know why you do it, your friends don't - they think you're big and tall - but your friends don't know that, inside your heart, what you doing is: you're trying to drown out God's conviction! You're trying to convince yourself that you want nothing to do with all this! You just wish God would stop speaking!

You're like Cain, remember he killed his brother? God punished him, and Cain turned round and said to the Lord: 'My punishment is greater than I can bear'. Is that the way you feel? God is weighing you down. Like the nation of Israel, He said that they'll find no ease for their foot, 'neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the Lord shall give them a trembling heart, failing eyes, sorrow of mind: And their life shall hang in doubt before their eyes; they shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of their life'. Do you fear for your life day by day? In morning, do you say: 'Would to God that it was the evening', and in the evening you say: 'Would to God it was the morning'? Are you like David? David says in the Psalms that his life was spent in grief, he sighed year after year, his strength failed him, God's arrows stuck into him fast, God's hand pressed sore upon his brow, there was no rest in his bones because of the heavy burden of his sin crushing him down! He said that his wounds stank, even that his family and his friends wouldn't come near to him! Is that the way you feel?

If you feel like that, God is after you! Are you trying to hide from God? Are you trying to bury your head in the sand? Are you trying to turn your back, plug your ears to God? What are you trying to do, my friend? Because the Holy Spirit of God is coming after you, and perhaps it's not just because He's uncovered your sin, or He's making you feel the guilt and the danger of your sin - but perhaps, as you've heard about the cross, and as you've heard about Christ bleeding and dying and in agony, of Christ bearing the world's hell so that they wouldn't have to, as you've heard about Jesus being stripped naked, being shamed, being spat upon, being buffeted, being mocked - you have heard God say: 'Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for your iniquities: the chastisement of your peace was upon him'. He was punished so that you might have peace! As you hear that God poured out His soul as an offering for your sin, perhaps you've sat and you've thought: 'That was because of me! And I know it! I've been told it since I was a child, and there's many a time it has bothered me, and I just wish it would stop!'

My friend, there's two ways it will stop. Listen, the first is: if you turn round to God one time too many and say: 'Leave me alone' in the time that He listens, the next time you hear His voice will be in hell. The second way to get rid of it is to do what the Jews did. Do you know what a scapegoat is? You talk about a scapegoat,

and it's someone blaming another person to get themselves off the hook. What they did in Judaism was: they got a lamb, a goat, and the high priest - who represented the people before God - put his hands on the head of the goat and confessed his sins, and then they took the goat and loosed it out into the wilderness. It was symbolising that all their sins were going away.

Christ is your scapegoat. God has put on Him, God has blamed His Son, to get you off the hook. God's Spirit is striving with you to make you realise that it was your guilt, your sin, that was put upon Christ and killed Christ! He died that we might be forgiven. You've heard about heart transplants and kidney transplants, where another person's organ has been taken and donated to one in need. Well, this was the sin transplant - where God took your sin and my sin and put it upon His own Son! Do you know something? Listen: if you're to be free of this troubling of your soul, and this softening of your heart, my friend, listen: 'Burdens are lifted at Calvary'. You need to get your eyes to Calvary, you need to see that bleeding Lamb taking your place, dying in your room. You need to see that it was because of your sin, it was because of your wrong and your rottenness - you need to see that! You need to fall at the feet of God and say: 'Lord, I'm sorry. Lord, I take what You did for me there. I ask You to save me, and forgive me, and take me to Glory with You' - and when you do that, just like Christian in Pilgrim's Progress, the burden on your back will roll away!

Maybe God is troubling you because of the cost to leave your sin. You know the fear of the sinner coming off his sin is like the drug addict going through cold turkey. It's like the alcoholic with the shakes - they need it! They want it! They can't live without it! It's like your sin, my friend, have you ever seen a doctor who is pleading with a person with lung cancer to give up the cigarettes because it's killing them - and the doctor can't cure them because they won't help themselves! The alcoholic lying in an intensive care bed with a liver like a sardine shrivelled up, lying there with a body poisoned with alcohol, and he's pleading with him: 'Will you not stop drinking? It's going to kill you!' - but he can't! He won't! He needs it!

My friend, you will never be free from your sin, you'll never be free from the pain and the guilt and the judgement of your sin - listen to me! - until you come to Christ. He'll take the burden, and He'll heal the heart. He'll give you a new heart, He'll give you a new nature, He'll give you a new life, He'll give you peace with Himself, He'll give you a hope of home in heaven. He'll give you everything that He has promised within His word - my friend, what could stop you?

What are you going to do? Is your heart soft? Is God troubling you? Listen: God wants you so much that He was prepared to buy you with the blood of His own Son. Would you not give Him your life, this evening, and finish this whole thing with God? The peace of God that passes all understanding will rule in your heart and your mind through Christ Jesus.

Now, if God has been speaking to your heart this evening it is of utmost importance, and there will never be a bigger, more important, or greater decision that you will have to make in your life than to listen to Him. Why not trust Him now? Hear His voice with a softened heart and a troubled soul, turn to Him, away from your sin. Trust the death of the Lord Jesus, and His blood that was shed, and ask Him to save your soul. You can do it now, where you are, by lifting up your heart to God in prayer, and saying: 'Lord, I'm sorry. I have sinned, I turn from my sin, I trust the Saviour's death. Lord, save me'. He will do it.

I have some booklets, and there are some sitting on the table on your way out. They're free, you can take one of them. You can talk with me this evening, for as long as is necessary - but listen: please don't go without trusting Christ.

Our Father, we thank Thee for this time. We find it hard to even say this, but we think Thee for troubling us about our eternal destiny. We thank Thee for softening our heart to Thy word, and to what the Lord Jesus did for us - because He loved us - at Calvary. For Lord, if You hadn't troubled us, we would never have been

saved. Lord, I believe that this message was for some soul here, because You are troubling them, and You want them for Your own this evening. Lord, I pray that You will take them, take them from the devil, take them from the world and their own sin, and put Your peace into their heart and save their soul. We thank Thee for this time, and we pray now that Thy blessing will go with us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2001

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"Death"

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Revelation chapter 6 and we'll take time to read from verse 1 - we're concentrating this evening on verse 8 of this chapter. This is the message, and I want to stress this before we begin, this is the message that I believe God wants me to give this evening - OK? That's important, that means that I believe God has this message for someone - maybe one, maybe two or maybe more people - in our gathering this evening. So it's important that as we look at the word of God, that you realise that this message could be for you.

Verse 1, and John - seeing a vision from God of things that are to come - he said: "I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer. And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword. And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine. And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth".

We know that God will bless the reading of His own truth. Let's come before Him, and if you're a believer let's pray and ask God to bless His word. Let us pray together: Our Father in heaven, we bow before Thee and we thank Thee for the word of God. We thank Thee for the power of the written page, but we know that this book is much more, for this book is inspired by Thy Holy Spirit. Therefore we pray that the One who has said He will reveal all truth unto us may come into this place and reveal the truth of the word of God by power to the heart of the unbeliever. Come and fill me, I pray, oh Holy Ghost. Come and descend upon us in convicting and in converting power, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Let us read this verse again, verse 8 of chapter 6, John says: 'I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth'.

You may be here this evening, and you don't believe in God. I may be speaking to someone who doesn't believe that God is Almighty, that God is the Creator of the universe, you don't believe He even exists! You don't believe in a six-day creation, that God created all that we have in the world around us - you don't believe it! You refuse to believe in heaven, you don't believe in hell, you don't believe in any afterlife - once you're dead you're done for, you die as a dog, you're life's blown out like the light of a candle. You don't believe in Jesus Christ - maybe you're like some and you don't even believe that He lived, and if you believe that He lived you don't believe He's the Son of God, or God the Son. You don't believe that there was anything particularly special about this man, you certainly don't believe that He was born to be the Saviour of the world! You don't believe that He died at the cross to save you from your sin, or anybody from their sin.

Maybe you're like that. You certainly don't believe that after He died, whether He died for sin or not, that He raised from the dead. You don't believe that He's ascended to heaven, you don't believe He's alive now. You don't believe in the power of His blood to cleanse you from all sin. You don't believe in the preaching of the Gospel. You don't believe in any gift of eternal life. Maybe you believe it's all a Christian self-delusion. Maybe if I were to sever your arteries this evening, pouring from them would be blood - blood of an unbeliever, blood of an atheist, blood of an agnostic, running through your veins. You do not believe!

Can I say to you this evening: the subject I wish to preach on, there will not be one unbeliever in this building. Every one of you will be a convert to the message that I have to preach this evening. Now listen: I'm going to preach it from the Bible, and you mightn't believe in the Bible, you mightn't believe it's the word of God. I'm not going to preach it from the newspaper, or from politics, or from a periodical - I guarantee you that what I preach to you this evening, you're going to believe!

What is it? It's 'Death'. Do you believe in it, my friend? Do you? Do you believe that people die? Sure it's a thing that you, perhaps, live with day by day - but you live as if it didn't exist. It's a thing that we all prepare for with wills, insurance policies, all sorts of things - but we hate to talk about it. No matter how much we prepare for it, we never want to mention it - and we certainly don't want to hear about it from a gospel preacher, some Bible-basher.

For some of us it's a two-week wonder, isn't it? When someone in our family dies, or a friend is bereaved, all of a sudden it comes home to us that life at best is very brief, and you can't be sure of tomorrow - that we can be gone in an instant, we cannot boast about what we're going to do tomorrow - but usually it only lasts for a couple of weeks. Then the reality, the mundane drone of the materialistic life that we all live drowns out the loud scream of death.

This, imagine, it's one of the most real things in the whole of the world and in life, but rarely do we ever take it seriously enough to just, for one moment, think about the implications of it. Psychologists tell us that most of us laugh about it, it's one of the most popular subjects of humour - talking about undertakers, and funerals, and coffins - but behind that laugh, that great 'Ha, ha' that we all have around the subject of death, the psychologist tells us that it's because of our own insecurity with it. Because we can't talk about it seriously, or soberly, we have to joke about it to get it out of our conscience.

I suspect there are some of you sitting here and saying: 'I didn't come to listen to all this. I'm not here to listen about death'. Or maybe you're thinking about all the reasons that you're going to tell the person you're with that you'll not be coming back to this mission, or this church, to hear this - that man's just a scaremonger, they're all the same, all 'hell and damnation'. Listen: do you know what I hear from the public at large today and from the world? Do you know what they try and tell me? 'For goodness sake, why don't you preach about something that's real? Real issues, real things that matter and affect people's lives - social, racial, politics, current affairs and the like' - well, here it is! Here is the greatest current affair in the world today: death.

It's all around us. It's in every nation. It's in every town, and there are people this evening mourning those that they have lost in this very town. The book of the Revelation that we read from this evening, what it does is: it basically outlines the things that are still to come in our world, and the climax of world history that is still to come is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth. But everything after that will all be heading towards the destruction of a sinful world that has rejected God and His Christ and His Gospel. The next thing that the Bible, and the book of the Revelation, prophesies about is what we were talking about with the young people last night. It's called the 'Rapture of the church'. It simply is Jesus coming to the sky and taking home to be with Him all those who love the Lord Jesus, all who are washed in His blood, all who are trusting in His death at Calvary to save them from their sin.

Have you ever asked yourself why He takes all the Christians away? Do you know why? It's to curse the earth, and He is going to curse the earth with a torrent of judgements. The Bible says that it is a time that the world has never seen before, the world will never see it repeated again, it is called the 'Great Tribulation' period. Jesus tells us through the revelation of Himself in this book, that there will be many disasters upon the earth, there will be bloody wars, holocausts, famine, global hunger, worldwide pestilence, earthquakes, an exhausting of all earthly wealth, destruction of earthly life, and a breaking up of earthly power and peace.

Look at Revelation 6, you can see it described in more detail in verses 12 to 17. Look at them, verse 12: 'And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?'

There is a day coming, my friend, and we have read about it from this passage of Scripture - and, specifically, verse 8 tells us about the fourth horseman of the apocalypse. Look at it, he is described in verse 8 as being a 'pale horse'. The Greek word in the New Testament that we get this description 'pale' from is the Greek word that we get the English word 'chlorophyll' from. Chlorophyll is the substance that runs through the veins of a plant to make it green, that pale green colour. Do you see what the Bible is saying? This horse is pale, it is a greeny pale, ashen pallor characteristic of white.

You know what it's like. You go to a wake, and you're taken up the stairs, and you look into a coffin and you see that colour. Pale, ashen, sickly, the colour of death itself. This fourth horse is that colour, and it says in the verse that God grants this horseman the authority to bring death to 25% of the world's population - that's a quarter of all the world! Under the three previous horsemen the Bible says that there was false peace brought, and then there was war, then there was famine, then there was disease - and, like the cavalry, number four horse gallops along and he comes to shovel the corpses that have died and to bury them in the hordes of hell!

On that pale horse, it says, was Death followed by Hell. You know, hell is a good partner for death because hell, my friend - your minister mightn't tell you, your church, or a Sunday School teacher, or an R.E. teacher mightn't tell you, but I'll tell you because your blood would be on my hands - hell is where you'll be if you don't trust Christ! All the dead are there because they're lost. My friend, as you've looked and you've listened, I know you probably haven't understood it all - but as you're thinking right now about what God has prophesied will happen, because God's going to bring it to happen, does it not put the fear of God into you? Does it not make you fear for your life? Does it not make you fear for the future, about what is to come?

Maybe you don't believe any of this: 'It's all a lot of nonsense. Fortune telling such stuff, and trying to make us fear about all the end of the world, how the world's going to go up in smoke one day' - well, let me ask you this: do you believe in death? Because God says that, whether it will be a day for you when this fourth horseman comes, whether it be then or it will be now - at some point in your life you will die! Have no doubts about it, that livid greenish pallor of death, whether it comes in the Great Tribulation or not, you can be sure that that great grey stallion will roam across the highway of your life one day. Death will come, and it will be just as devastating and just as paralysing for you as it will be for a quarter of the earth on that day when they will cry for the rocks and the mountains - whether they be kings or paupers - to fall on them, to shield them from the wrath and the anger of Jesus the crucified Christ of God. Prince or pauper, young or

old, intelligent or foolish and ignorant, religious or blasphemous, nationalist or unionist, and even saved and lost - all of us, if Jesus Christ does not return, must die!

It may not come by murder, it may not come by disease, or war, or famine, or earthquakes - but, my friend, it will come! The Bible teaches that because of what Adam did in the garden of Eden, disobeying God, we are all in Adam - we're all related to him - and because we're all related to him, sin has been passed down to us all and we have received death by our sin. The future is bleak, the Bible says: 'There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death'. There is not one of you, not one of you my friend, that can hold onto your next breath - it's in the hands of God. Your soul is there, and when God wants to take it back to Himself, He will do it - not one of us have the power over our spirits or over the day of our death.

The Bible says that death, for many of us, will put an end to all our earthly projects - so much so that the prophet said: 'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest'. It strips you of your earthly possessions, for we brought nothing into this world, the word of God says, and it is certain that we will take nothing out with us! It levels all ranks, God said that the small and the great are there in death. Will you be there? My friend, you can be sure - and I believe you believe you'll be there.

The Bible describes our life as a messenger on a horse that runs through the desert, you've seen them going through the town maybe on a motorbike taking the post. They're whizzing by, and that's what our life is like - Job says that it's like the span of a man's hand, it's like the weaver's shuttle as it goes round and round. The apostle James says it's like boiling the kettle, you watch the steam and it appears for a little time and then it vanishes away.

What will you do when God requires your soul? What are you going to do? Surely you believe in death? What are you going to do when God takes your soul away from you? When the divine rent man of the soul comes to collect your life again, when He comes to retrieve your debt of a life, what do you have to show Him for it? Jesus says: 'What shall a man give in exchange for his soul? He could gain the whole world, but lose his own soul'.

My friend, when you go where there is no return, when you go into the dust, when you descend into the silence, when you are cut down and your life flees as a shadow, what then? Will you be like a man in the Old Testament called Korah? He suffered the death of a false religion. Do you know what he tried to do? It says in the Bible that he offered strange fire to God, that means he tried to get to God his own way - that's maybe you! You're going to your church, and you're giving in, and you take Communion, and you're baptised, and you've done everything right as far as you can see - but you're trying to get to God not by the way of the cross and the blood of the cross. It says of this man Korah, who tried to get to God his own way and create another religion, the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all his goods. Why? Because he didn't go God's way.

Will it be the death of a rebellious son, like Absalom the son of David? He wanted to be king, he wanted to dethrone his father - and maybe you're here, and you're walking over the heart of your father, you're ignoring his prayers and his pleas for you to be saved. You go out and you have a wild night, and you come in and you don't care what happens, or what he feels, or what he thinks. It says of Absalom that he was taken up between the heaven and the earth, and the mule that was under him went away - his hair was caught in a tree and he was hung!

There are many who will die the death of a false religionist, who will die the death of a rebellious son, or who will die the death of a loose woman - like Jezebel. She was an immoral woman, worshipped false gods

with her body. It says in the word of God that in her end, that they threw her down and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses, and they trod her underfoot - because she rejected God!

Will your death, my friend, be the death of a drunkard - like King Belshazzar? As he was there, mocking God, blaspheming the name of God, getting drunk in the face of God, and God wrote on the wall the writing: 'Thou art weighed and found wanting'. It says that his countenance changed, his knees knocked - and the word of God says that night Belshazzar was slain

Will it be the death of two Christian pretenders? We read about them in the book of Acts, Ananias and Sapphira - I don't know whether they were saved, or whether they weren't saved, but I know this: that they were imitating. They had sold a field, and they pretended that they were giving all the money into the church, but they kept a wee bit back for themselves. Maybe you wouldn't be as deceptive as that about your giving, but you would give the impression that you're a Christian - but you're not. God struck them down one after another, because they pretended to be something that they weren't!

Listen to me my friend: your pint of lager, and your packet of king size cigarettes, won't help you then! Your career, your family won't be able to pull you out of that black hole. Your denominational preference won't make hair's breadth of difference! To hear some people talk, you know, you'd think that God was going to look at their birth certificate - whether they were a Protestant or a Roman Catholic. That God, when they get to the pearly gates, is going to look at the Communion card, or the baptismal certificate, before He takes your soul! My friend, in God's name, will you waken up! For unless you have Christ, unless you're trusting in the death of Christ and the blood of Christ - His substitution for you - you'll die and you'll go to hell.

At the end it says Hell followed after Death - it didn't end there. The world views death in many ways, and they talk about what follows after death. Some say you'll come back as a tomcat, or a goldfish! Some say that you'll go to a place called purgatory, and you'll suffer for your sins. Some say that there's this limbo between heaven and earth, and it's neither one nor the other. My friend, listen: philosophy says he hopes to live again, science says he may live again, ethics says he ought to live again, atheism says he will never live again - Jesus Christ the Son of God says he will live again! As sure as night follows day, as sure as winter follows summer, death has in its wake: hell.

Can you see the scene? It's your house, it's the number on your door, it's your beloved car that's in the driveway, it's your son or daughter in the front living room, it's your husband or your wife making the tea - and they're all there, they're all gathered together with their hankies, and it's your wake! My friend, if you are not marked by the blood of Christ you will be in hell! That will be your wake! It's nothing to laugh about, for some of you are mighty near it. You're nearer to it this evening, and I believe if some of you knew how near you were to it, you'd be saved where you sit, where you are. Some of you have had close shaves in the past, and you're gambling with hell and with God - and anybody who gambles with God loses!

What are you going to do? Are you going to take a chance? Can I tell you: there is only one way out of hell. Listen, for if you miss this you miss everything: the remedy for death and the remedy for hell is found in 2 Timothy 1 and verse 10: 'Our Saviour Jesus Christ hath abolished death and hell, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel'. Do you see my blessed Lord Jesus? Out of love for your soul - your soul - out of love for you, my friend, out of a desire to keep you out of hell and to take you to heaven, out of a desire to free you from your sin and your booze, and all the habits and all the thoughts and all the filthy words that come out of your mouth, and all the self-religiosity and self-righteousness that you have within your heart of pride - He wanted to save you from it all! He loved you so much that He went to that cross, and He bled and He died and He suffered.

Oh, how He suffered physically - but oh how He suffered spiritually! The word of God says that God poured out His soul as an offering for sin. Like an atomic bomb going off in a matchbox, Jesus Christ was punished for your sin. Have you ever known love like that? I know your wife loves you, or your husband, or your children love you - but do they love you like that? My friend, you will never know a love like that, for there is no love like that - it's an eternal love, it's an everlasting love, it's a love that the world or the universe will never see, because it's a love that was willing to go through, almost literally, the fires of hell so that you wouldn't have to!

Now, if you want, on your way out you can name to me somebody who would go and suffer an eternity of hell for you in three hours - but I'll not believe you. There is only one who would be willing to do that, and that's Jesus Christ. As His glorious spirit left His body on the cross, it was as if He jumped down off the cross and grabbed hold of the very devil himself and put handcuffs on him. It was as if He went down to the very fires of hell and He extinguished them for you, if you trust Him, and for me because I believe, by His own blood. Martin Luther said: 'If one drop of blood was to fall into the caverns of the damned it would extinguish hell for all eternity'.

Praise God, there is power in the blood of Christ! There is power in the death of Christ to set you free from death and hell, and from your sin and all that the world, the flesh, and the devil would pour over you! We can say, who know Christ, who have trusted in his death: 'Oh death, where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory?'. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

What about you? Now listen: there was once I preached on a message similar in the gospel to this, and there was a woman that went out the door - it was a mission - and she walked home, and she walked down the side of the river, and she fell! She broke her leg, she was lying there and she thought she was going to die - but by the grace and the mercy of God she didn't die, and she was found. She was brought to the hospital, and one of the elders of the meeting went up to visit her and to talk to her about her soul - but she had no interest!

I believe that there's someone here, and you could have stared death in the face, and you still haven't believed. I have heard of men who have taken three heart attacks in a row, sitting in front of their son who's a saved boy, yet it wasn't enough to bring them to Christ. Do you know what you need my friend? You need saved, you need born-again, you need to trust the Saviour's death at Calvary. You need to turn from your sin, repent of it, forsake it and leave it for good. Turn to Him, you need to ask Him and plead with Him to save you and to show mercy to you, so that you'll never go to hell!

Let us bow our heads. I said at the beginning of this meeting that this was a message, and I believe it's for someone, or some people, in this building. I don't know why God gave you this message, but it doesn't take Einstein to think about it - for we're all going to die, but how will you die my friend? Will you die without Christ and without hope? Or will you die safe in the arms of Jesus, and safe in His gentle care? Why not ask Him to save you now? Say: 'Lord', from your heart, pray, 'Lord, I repent of my sin, I turn from it, I forsake it. I turn to You, and I trust what the Lord Jesus Christ did for me at the cross of Calvary. I ask You to cleanse me with His blood. Lord, save me, take my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen'.

If you've done that this evening, from your heart by faith, please tell us at the door because we want to pray for you. We'll not embarrass you or anything like that. If you want to talk to me I'll be at the door, and we can go somewhere private and discuss this matter a bit more if you want some help to get right with God. There are some booklets at the door on the table on your right on the way out, if you're down this aisle, and on your left down this one. My friend, listen: you don't know what the next hour, even, will bring. The one thing we can all know is this: that if we have Christ, we need not fear.

Our Father in heaven, we ask that there would be none in this place this evening who, as they fear and face the valley of the shadow of death, will not know the reality of the abiding presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Come and abide with some soul this evening, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2001

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"Except Ye Repent, Ye Shall All Likewise Perish"

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We're turning to Luke's gospel, the gospel of Luke and chapter 13. Chapter 13 of the third gospel, and I want to read just five verses with you. We were thinking last evening of three things that the Lord Jesus Christ repeated: 'Ye must be born again, ye must be born again, ye must be born again. Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God'. Three times the Lord Jesus Christ said those words, but the words that we're going to look at this evening He said twice within this same passage of Scripture.

Verse 1: "There were present at that season some that told him", the Lord Jesus, "of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish".

Let's ask the Lord's help in a word of prayer as we come to His word. Our Father in heaven, we have read Thy truth and we know that Thy word is truth, that it is the sword of the Spirit, that it cuts the very bone and marrow in two, that it has the power to convict of sin. But, our Father, we know that the word without the Spirit is dead. We pray, dear God, that the Holy Spirit, Thy Holy Spirit - that power of Pentecost, as it came upon them in that upper room, that this evening it would come upon this gathering, but Lord that it would come in salvation. That He who convinces the world of sin, righteousness, and of judgement to come - that He may come this evening and save souls. Lord, fill me I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

The text I want to bring to you this evening is found in verse 3 and verse 5 of chapter 13. Jesus said, twice He said it: 'I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish'. We learnt that when Jesus says something it's very important to listen, didn't we? We learnt that when He says something two times - twice, He repeats Himself - remember that this is God in flesh, the Son of God, and He is bringing Himself to us this evening by His Spirit, and He is repeating something to you. He wants you to prick your ears up, He wants your consciousness to become attentive to what He is saying. He is saying: 'This is of utmost importance to you, that you listen - My child - to what I am saying: except you repent, all of you will perish'!

I know it's not a very popular subject - but don't I know! For every preacher of the gospel in this land knows that people don't like hearing about repentance, but it's one of the most important subjects in the gospel. You could take a poll, look at the statistics, within our land of all the pulpits where a message is preached from, and ask the question: Do you hear about repentance? The answer is 'No'. Why? Because, sad to say, men are afraid to preach it because people don't like it! Sure, you know and I know that if we're half human beings, and we're half nice, you don't like to bring bad news to a person, do you? But you see the gospel, although it is good news, the beginning of it for the sinner is awful news! You see, preachers want to bring a message of happiness, they want to bring a message of a new life, they want to bring a message of salvation, but the word of God teaches that until you realise that you're born in sin, until you realise that you're bound for hell, that you've no hope, that God's wrath abides upon your head and upon your soul - and except you repent, you'll all perish!

Oh, it's hard to be told you're wrong, isn't it? Oh, sure, you can criticise - and it happens in life, doesn't it? You hear your neighbours and they're talking about this one, and that one, and the other one - and sadly it happens in churches that they're backstabbing one another everywhere! But what happens when someone comes to you and points the finger at you, you don't like it sure you don't? We're all the same, it's human nature. You don't like being told you're wrong about anything. Oh, it's easy to load the gun at other people, isn't it, and shoot at them?

I remember hearing about a young preacher, and he came into a meeting just like this. He was walking up the aisle through the back doors - it wasn't this church, now - he was walking up the aisle and one man stopped him and said: 'Now son, when you're preaching whatever you do when you get into that pulpit don't mention discos'. He says: 'Why ever not?'. He says: 'Well, it's a bit sensitive because there's a deacon in this church and his son is running to the discos all the time, and he doesn't like anybody to condemn him or mention it'. He thought: 'Well, I suppose I could steer clear of that'. He walked a little bit more up the aisle and then another deacon stopped him, and said: 'Now, you see when you're preaching? Whatever you do don't mention drink, not drink! Because there are some people in this fellowship and they have shares in the breweries. You know, if you mentioned it or condemned them, or frightened them off, maybe we wouldn't get the revenue in the collection plate week by week. Don't mention wine, because there's some of the congregation - and they're not alcoholics or anything, but they like a wee glass of wine many once a week with their family meal. Just a wee social one. Don't mention Sunday observance, because the Grand Prix is on on a Sunday afternoon. Don't mention that, because they like to watch the match. It's harmless, it means nothing, whatever you do don't mention those things'. The young man, by the time he got to the pulpit, he turned round and he said: 'In heaven's name, what do you want me to preach?'. There was a wee voice came up from the back, and he said: 'Give it to the Jews, for there's none of them'.

Isn't that what we're like? Oh, give it to them, as long as it doesn't come near me! Hit out against that one and the other one, preach against that sin or this sin, but whatever you do don't preach against my sin! You're like David, remember the king, and he committed adultery with Bathsheba - a married woman. Then what happened? He knew of his sin, he realised he was going to have to do something about it, and he made sure that woman's husband was murdered - put him on the front line of the battle, made sure he was wiped out. Then, like you, the one sin grew into another sin and it multiplied, and over and over again and again he found himself in this morass of iniquity and transgression in the face of God. Then one day his door knocked, and the prophet Nathan came to him. He says: 'I've a story to tell you King, and you're not going to like it. It's about a wee man and he has no kids, not married. He has a wee lamb, a wee pet lamb, and he nurses it. It sleeps in the same bed as him, it eats from the same cup as him, it's like his own child. But there's another man, he lives a wee bit up the road, and he's got plenty of flocks and plenty of sheep. He has a great farm and barns, he's wealthy, he's got everything going for him. One day there was a visitor coming to this rich man, and do you know what he did King? He went down to the wee poor man, and he took the wee poor man's lamb and he roasted it! He prepared and he served it for the traveller for his meal'. David says: 'Tell me who he is, and I'll sort him out. I'm not going to have that in my kingdom'. You know the story, Nathan - I can see him now - turned round to the King, and he could have lost his head for it, and he pointed the finger and he said: 'You are that man'.

Oh, it's different when it comes near home, isn't it? It's different. Oh, make me a preacher, Lord, like John the Baptist. Make us all Christians like John the Baptist - not a fear of man in any of the bones of his body. He lost his head, you remember. Do you remember why he lost his head? Because he stood in front of the king, King Herod, and he loaded his gospel gun with the seventh commandment: 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' - this old king had gone off with his brother's wife. He pointed it at the dirty old rascal and he fired it, and he lost his life for it. My friend, there's a cost in preaching repentance - and can I say this from the depth of my soul, and I mean this before God: if it costs your praise upon this preacher, well, that's a big price to pay but I'm going to pay it. For unless you realise that you need to repent of your sin, Jesus Christ said: 'Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish'.

You know, Paul preached the gospel of repentance - not just Jesus, but Paul preached it. There's a story told about a minister, and he used to go to what's called a minister's fraternal - and there's nothing wrong with that. All the ministers of the district met round and talked over a cup of tea. They used to exchange notes and ideas about their pet doctrines, and they were all sitting round one day and the meeting was over. He went home, and he went to his bed. As he was lying there in his sleep he had a dream, and he saw into the next week of when they were in the ministers fraternal. They were all dressed in their long robes and garbs, and with their fancy books - they were all sitting round, and all of a sudden Paul, Paul the apostle, burst in the door! His hair was dishevelled, his face was scarred and he was limping. He had a bruised arm and a black eye. He looked around the circle and he said: 'Where, men, in God's name have you been preaching?'

You see, when you preach repentance you suffer for it. That's maybe why you'll hear a message here this evening that you haven't heard before. Maybe you haven't heard it in 50 years, well you're going to hear it tonight - because it's the message that Jesus Christ the Son of God preached! As soon as His mouth was opened in His ministry on earth He said: 'Except ye repent, all of you will likewise perish'.

Why do people not repent today? Why is it not preached? Why is there a fear of man? Do you know why? Because repentance is admitting that you're wrong. If you look at this passage you'll see in verses 1 to 5 that the Jews came to the Lord Jesus Christ and they cited two things that were happening around the environment of where Jesus was living at this time. They were all talking about it, it was in the newspapers, they were gossiping about it: 'Did you hear what happened the Galileans? They were sacrificing in the temple, and Pilate sent his troops in and he slew those people worshipping God, and they mingled the blood with the sacrifice! What an abomination unto God! Blasphemous! Did you hear what they did?'. Do you know what was behind the Jews thinking? Their theology, whether written down or only in their mind, was this: that if something terrible happens to you, oh, you must be sinful.

So they deduced - they put two and two together and made five - they deduced: 'These people must be awful sinners for something to happen like that'. Then they said: 'What about those of whom the tower of Siloam fell? They must have been doing something in secret that only God knew about'. It's all told in the story about the blind man - do you remember that blind person? The Jews came up to the Lord Jesus Christ and said: 'What did his parents do that he's been born blind?'. There are so many in the world like that, aren't there? 'If you're in trouble it's because of sin'.

But do you see the thing that the Lord was trying to get across to them? Listen: 'You're running around our district and you're talking about this awful thing that has happened with the Galileans and the tower of Siloam. You're looking at the awful calamity and you're saying: 'They must be awful sinners', but I say unto you except ye all repent, you'll all likewise perish. Don't you think for one moment that they're worse off than you are, that because this accident has happened to them that they're a bigger sinner than you are'. Jesus Christ was drawing, like a curtain, all of humanity together and saying there's no difference - whether it be a King, whether it be a pauper - no matter who is born into this world: except they repent, they'll all perish!

Did you know that? You must repent. I want to tell you that repentance isn't knowing you're wrong - sure there are plenty of people that know they're wrong. This is something that must happen by the Holy Spirit of God, He must come into your life, He must show you that you need Christ, that you need to turn from your sin. There are plenty of people that know they're wrong, and they're carrying on in their wrongness and their sinfulness - but they won't ever stop it or repent. There are some people, you know, and they can't lay their head on the pillow at night because they know they're wrong. They've wronged their wife or their children, they've known the many things that they've done in their past and it destroys them, it tortures them - but they've no intention of repenting. One day they will walk into the mouth of hell knowing that they were wrong, but never repenting!

It's more than being sorry. Oh, you can know you're wrong, but it's more than being sorry that you've done wrong as well. Paul says: 'Godly sorrow worketh repentance'. You can be sorry about something, but it might never turn into godly sorrow that makes you repent, that makes you turn away from your sin for good - leave it, trust Christ and His cross and be saved. Sure a prisoner, you go down to a prison and you talk to one, sure they're all sorry, aren't they? But what are they sorry for? They're sorry that they got caught! They're very remorseful, but because the long arm of the law has caught them red-handed, that's what they're sorry about.

You go into intensive care to a man who has been rushed in all of a sudden in an emergency, and his liver is shrivelled up because of his drinking - alcoholism. You look at him lying there in pain, poisoned, and he's crying out, he says: 'I wish I hadn't done this'. But what is he sorry about? He's sorry about the consequences - but if he got better tomorrow, where would you find him? In the public house. What about the young person that's sleeping around? They get a venereal disease - are they sorry for the illicit sex? Are they? Or are they sorry for the illness it has brought? What about the wee fellow that gets his girlfriend pregnant? You've heard all about it, it's all over the television and papers - and he's sorry, what's he sorry for? Is he sorry that he's defiled this young girl's innocence? Not a bit of it! He's sorry that his plans are destroyed, and something is going to have to come out of his pocket, and he hasn't got a job - and that's why the whole world, and even their own family, tells them: 'Get an abortion! Get rid of it quick! It'll destroy your life!'.

My friend, knowing you're wrong is not repentance, being sorry about it is not repentance - and let me say this: even confessing your sin is not repentance! You've heard of deathbed conversions, and sometimes the world - people that aren't saved - are sceptical about it. You know, to tell you the truth, I'm sceptical about it - some of them. Because I think many a man or woman lying on their deathbed, who have probably lived a life under the sound of the Gospel and through a church, and has said: 'Well, I'll wait till I'm on my deathbed and then I'll cry to God for mercy'. Do you know what they're sorry for? Not their sin, now - they're sorry that they're dying. It's a fear of death! Don't you, whatever you do, wait till you die - because you might be lying on your deathbed, and you might have a pain in your chest, or cancer oozing across your whole body, and you think that you're crying unto God - but you can't differentiate from what is repentance and what is the fear of death! Don't make that confusion for yourself whatever you do.

It's amazing how men can be as pious as a pope when they're on the way out, isn't it? You might even confess your sin this evening, and some are too proud even to confess it - do you know how hard it is for a psychiatrist to get an alcoholic to admit that they are an alcoholic? Sure, that's what AA are always trying to do. They say that you've taken the first step when you say: 'I am David Legge and I'm an alcoholic'. Why? Why is it so hard to do? Because deep in the heart of men and women, and boys and girls, there's a thing called pride: 'Everybody in the world can be wrong, but I'm not wrong - not me!'.

Are you repentant of your sin, my friend? Have you repented? That means this: that you have left off from your sin - and you know what I'm talking about, the person beside you doesn't know what it is, sure they don't? But you know, and God knows - have you turned around from it? That's what repentance means: to turn away, to forsake it and say: 'I've left that, Lord, and I'm turning to You. I'm giving my life to You Lord, take me' - have you done that? For my friend, if you have not done that, you will perish - I don't care what your name is, I don't care what church you go to, I don't care if you take communion, you've been baptised - I don't care, because Jesus didn't care! He said: 'Except you repent, you'll all perish!'.

What does it mean? What do you have to do? Well, here's the beauty of it - these blessed folk were singing about it this evening - listen, do you know what you have to do? Nothing, nothing! That's the second thing that hurts the pride of men and women - not just that they're a sinner, but that they can do nothing to get themselves out of it. You say: 'David, but you've just been telling us all to repent or we'll all perish!'. My friend, you can only repent this evening if you turn from your sin - who are you turning to? You could turn to

yourself, you could turn to a church, you could go into a convent or into a monastery and turn to religion - but, you see, the only person that can help you, the only person that can save you is if you turn from your sin and turn to Christ! He's done it all you see. It's finished, that's what they were singing.

Jesus, you remember, was hanging on the cross - and men put Him there, and the word of God says your sin put Him there. As He hung there they were many beautiful things that dropped from His lips, and one of the things was this: He lifted His head high, He opened His mouth, and those lungs that had borne the weight of the sin of the world cried out, 'Tetelestai! It is finished!'. That means that everything that you need to be saved has been done, that Jesus Christ died for you at the cross, that He took your place, that He bore your sin, that He went through your punishment - all that you need to be saved has been done - but, my friend, you've got to realise that you need it, and you need the Holy Spirit to reveal that to you - and I believe that He's doing it for some of you now. The Holy Spirit is doing it because you're dead in your sin. Please, God, that the Holy Spirit would come to you and turn your eyes to Calvary to see there the bleeding Lamb of God, that you may behold the Lamb of God that taketh away your sin! My friend this evening, if you don't you'll perish.

Do you see that wee word 'perish'? Do you know what it means? Eternal death. Not just death - you know these boys that tell you that once you're dead you're done for: 'Your life is like a candle and it's great when it's burning away but don't worry about after that - it'll go out and that's the end of it. You die like a dog, and you'll be buried and rot in the grave - no afterlife, you don't go anywhere - a lot of nonsense!'. My friend, even some so-called Christian churches are preaching that - but the Greek word for 'perish', do you know what it means? 'Eternal death'. You'll go home tonight, maybe you're taping something on the television, are you? You'll go home, maybe it's a football match, and you'll switch it on, you'll put the tape in and you'll press play. You'll see a goal when it's scored, and maybe you missed a wee bit of it, or you didn't see the lead up - so you rewind it and you play it again. You think: 'That's terrific!', and you rewind it and you play it again, over and over again and again and again. That's what 'perish' means: you'll die over again and again and again, but you'll not be able to die finally. It will be an eternal hell over again and again and again - and you'll not be able to stop it. Half the world, if not all the world, are fearing dying - but they shouldn't be fearing dying, they should be fearing eternal death, perishing! They should be fearing not what will take the body, but what will take the body and the soul and throw it into hell - God!

Do you fear God? It's a hard thing to come by these days, fearing God. Do you fear meeting your Maker after you die? Are you prepared to meet your God? Are you prepared to look Him straight in the eye and say: 'Well, I did alright you know. I tried my best and I went to my church, and I gave into the collection and it's all written down with the amount beside it. I was baptised and catechised, and I was this, that and the other'? Can you do that? I couldn't! My friend, unless you repent of your sin, unless you turn to Christ an answer from the sky is sent: 'Ye who from God depart while it is called today: repent and harden not your heart'. Jesus said in Luke 23 that there is a day coming when men and women will call out for the mountains and the rocks to fall upon them. They'll cry out for mercy to God because they'll realise that Jesus has come again and it's too late now to repent, they can't do it - but there'll be so many people coming up aisles then, won't there? There'll be hundreds of people and they'll all fall on their knees and they'll cry to God: 'Lord, you said in your word whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Lord, save me, save me now' - but it's too late!

Maybe you'll be one of them. Oh, there are millions of penitents in hell tonight. If you could look into hell, and if God could open it up for us for five minutes - or for one split second - and look in: you would see men and women reciting prayers that they learnt at the foot of a Sunday School teacher! They'll be reciting the catechism of what it is to repent of sin! They'll be crying for mercy upon God, that He may pour the blood of Christ over them to wash them and loose them of their sin - but it's too late!

What are you going to do? Are you going to wait? Jesus says that on that day Nineveh - have you heard of Nineveh? You know Jonah and the whale, and Jonah was sent to preach to these people in Nineveh - and you know they'd never heard the Gospel in their life before, but the first time they heard the Gospel through the prophet of God they repented of their sin! There was a mighty move of God, and there were thousands getting saved the first time they heard! Oh, there's people in this building this evening and they've heard it all their life - and what a hell you'll go through, my friend, for rejecting Christ. Jesus says that those poor souls in Nineveh will rise up one day and say: 'You're a fool! You heard it about 20 times, 20 years perhaps, and you rejected Christ and look where you are now!'. Will you not repent and be saved?

There were two women on a boat, a bit like the Titanic. You remember, you've watched the film haven't you? What happened? The boat began to sink - what did they all start singing? 'Nearer my God to Thee' - I doubt it was repentance, it was probably the fear of death. The boat sinks - not the Titanic, now - and there's a lifeboat put out. These two women are floating in the sea, one is a poor woman and one is a rich woman. The rich woman is clothed in garments that are beautiful, heavy chains and rings, everything that you could want in this world and what the world strives after. The other woman has ordinary clothes on. The man on the lifeboat says: 'Now dear, that is weighing you down, and if you don't take it off you'll not be able to get into this boat. You'll not be able to get out of the water, and we won't get you out of the water'. But she wouldn't part with it - wouldn't part with it! Do you know what happened? The lady and the garments drowned, both of them - she was ashamed to be naked, she was ashamed to leave those things that she lived for. She was like some of you here this evening: you can't leave your sin, and you would hold out a hand, perhaps if you could, to Christ - one hand, and you'd hold onto your sin with the other hand. The other wee lady stripped off those garments that were weighing her down, and she was saved. Saved!

Let's bow our heads. Will you strip off those things that are weighing you down, my friend? Will you repent of your sin? For except you repent, you'll perish. You need to ask the Lord to save you, you need to admit your sin - not just be sorry for it, but you need to turn away from it and be willing to leave it for good. You need to see Jesus Christ shedding His blood there at Calvary, and you need to say: 'Lord, I trust You, that Your death finished it all for me there'. You need to ask Him to take your life, and to save you and make you His own. You can do it now where you sit, just lift your heart to Him.

If you have done that, the word of God says that we are to confess with our mouth - why not tell me on the way out the back door this evening? If you want to talk to me about your soul, there's something stopping you but you want to get saved, talk to me - I'll be here for as long as you want. If you're a backslider and you want to come back to the Lord, do something! Speak to us, but whatever you do: repent. I have books at the door as well, you can take one of them. If you even just want to sit where you are in your seat, draw no attention to yourself, do that and I or the Pastor will be in to speak to you. My friend, listen once more: except you repent, you'll perish.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2001

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"Excuses, Excuses"

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Now our reading is taken from the word of God, from Luke's gospel, the gospel of Luke and chapter 14. The third gospel, Luke, chapter 14 and beginning to read at verse 15. We're thinking tonight about the parable of the great banquet. This is a story that the Lord Jesus Christ told, and behind each story that He told, each parable that He told, there was one specific point that He was trying to get across. I've entitled my message this evening: 'Excuses, Excuses'.

"And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper".

Let us come before the Lord and ask His help as we come now to His word. Let us pray: Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down. Jesus, Thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love Thou art. Visit us with Thy salvation, enter every trembling heart. Lord Jesus, we ask that You would presence Yourself here with us, that we would know a very real sense that Jesus is here. Father, even as the disciples of old sensed His risen presence as they smelt the very ointment on His body, we would pray that the sweet fragrance of the risen Lord Jesus Christ would be here. For we ask these things in His name. Amen.

I want you to open your Bible, if you have a Bible with you, at the passage and the parable that we read together - the parable of the great banquet. A doctor reported that one evening he was driving too fast, and he made the mistake of driving past a police car. Once the police car sensed this it speeded up right behind him, and thinking fast the doctor reached into his medical bag and lifted his stethoscope. He waved it out the window at the police car, and the man in the police car nodded and slowed down and stopped at the side of the road. He got away with it. A few days later the same doctor was driving down the same road, and again he passed the same police car. But this time the police car came up beside him, the policeman wound the window down, stuck his hand out the window, and was dangling a set of handcuffs.

This time in New Zealand, a woman was driving for 25 years without a driving licence. She explained to the judge who fined her: 'I only drive on roads that have very little traffic, and none of those roads lead to an office where I could apply for a drivers licence'. That's women drivers for you! Another story I heard was of a Canadian man who was charged in the United States of America, in Michigan, for driving at 74 mph. He explained that he thought that since the Canadian gallon is higher than the US gallon, that a mile might be longer north of the border. The magistrate clarified the error and fined him in Canadian dollars, which are smaller than US dollars.

It's amazing the excuses that you can find. That's what I want to speak to you this evening about: excuses. The parable that we read about this evening was about men who made excuses. Statistics tell us that 99% of all failures are people who have a habit of making excuses. If you really want to know a person, if you really want to know how someone ticks, listen to their excuses. We have some really silly excuses in this passage. We find the first one in verse 18, it says: 'But they all alike began to make excuses. And the first said, I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it: please excuse me'. This man was offered to go to a great banquet, it was probably the greatest banquet that there was in that town or city at the time. He was invited, it was a free banquet, he didn't have to pay for the banquet, he had been given a personal invitation to the banquet - but this man had something that he thought was more important. 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it'.

Verse 19, another person was given an invitation to the same special banquet, and he said: 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out: please excuse me'. Again, another excuse. What I want you to notice about those first two excuses is that they are both things that could have waited. This banquet was something that was happening once, it was something that perhaps was probably never ever going to happen again. It was something special, perhaps like a wedding or an anniversary, that was something in time that couldn't be postponed, it was something that couldn't be put off to another stage in that person's life. Yet these things, these excuses that were being made, they could have been put off. The man could have gone to check his field on another day. The other man could have checked his yoke of oxen [another day], but they didn't.

The third excuse was: 'I have just got married'. Now, I can't make that excuse yet, but I'm sure I'll use it some stage! That was his excuse. I want to ask you right away, bluntly, tonight: are you making excuses? Excuses are not reasons. A reason is something that holds weight, a reason is justified, a reason is a plausible thing - why you have not done something - but an excuse is not plausible. Excuses are not excusable. These were excuses, and perhaps you have come to gospel services, gospel missions, evangelistic outreach - you've read books about it, you've seen videos, listened to tapes about it, people in your family, your friends in your work have witnessed to you about the gospel - yet you continually make excuses why you're not saved. I don't know how many excuses there can be, I don't know how many excuses I have heard in my short lifespan, why people will not trust the Lord Jesus Christ. They can think of every excuse under the sun.

'I'm too young, I've got the rest of my life ahead of me'. 'I'm too old, it's too late at my stage'. 'I've done too many wrong things, God couldn't take me, God wouldn't have me'. 'I have a career to think about'. 'I'm only starting out in life, I've my education, I want to get on the right footing of life - and then, perhaps, when I have everything around me like a good house, a good wife, a good salary, then I'll think about it'. Perhaps it's family: 'I want to devote my time to my family. Between my job and my family, well, if I started going to church and if I became a Christian and had to dedicate myself to something else I wouldn't have the time for my family, or I wouldn't have the time for my career'.

Is it your reputation? I was hearing today from one esteemed brother in Christ on a video about the Lord Jesus Christ - so often preachers and authors worry about their reputation, we all do it and we're all human. When we're in the workplace we worry about our reputation - but it's great, isn't it, to have no reputation. The Lord Jesus Christ, what was said of Him was this: that He had no reputation. Therefore, to a certain extent, He did not need to worry what people said about Him, He didn't worry what they thought about Him, because He wasn't worried about His reputation. Perhaps you're worried about what people would think of you: 'If I came to Christ the hassle I would get, the jokes that I would receive, the friends that I would lose' - listen: are you making excuses? Are you? Listen: they are not reasons, they are only excuses.

He who excuses himself accuses himself. An excuse cannot stand up. The excuse that you are making for not trusting Christ - don't think that it fools the person who's witnessing to you, don't think that we cannot see

right through to the reasons behind why you're saying these things. When you make excuses you're accusing yourself of this fact: that excuses are guarded lies. More importantly, you don't fool the Christians in your family, you don't fool the Christians in your church, but listen: you don't fool God, because God can see right into the deep recesses of your heart. God can weigh your motives, God can weigh your excuses, and God knows more than anyone the excuses that you are making, and He knows that they cannot stand. We only make excuses when we ought to making opportunities. You see, you only make excuses in a negative sense, there is never a positive way to make an excuse - you only make an excuse when you know you should be doing something else. Excuses are ways of hiding making opportunities.

This is what happened to these three guests who were invited to this banquet. They knew where they should have been, and I'm sure that they knew deep down that this excuse that they were making wouldn't wipe anyway with the person who was inviting them. They knew deep down in their heart that these things could have waited, that this banquet was more important, more prestigious, and the person who was inviting them was more important than anything that they could do. Yet they - knowing that they themselves could see through their excuses, knowing that the person inviting them could see through their excuses - made the excuses nevertheless.

Now, what opportunities were they missing? These silly excuses were making them miss a super banquet, a super party. In verse 16 we read that a certain man was preparing a great banquet, this was something special, this was almost something that never ever happened before - perhaps a chance that they would never get again to go to something like this. This man was inviting people to this banquet. Do you know what Jesus was talking about? Jesus was talking about the Christian life, that's the banquet that Jesus was alluding to in this parable. It was a banquet of happiness, it was a banquet of delight, it was a banquet of fulfilment and satisfaction.

Some people think that Christianity is a funeral. Perhaps Christians, some of us, are guilty of portraying that image. But listen: don't judge Christianity by Christians, in fact don't judge Christianity by any man because men - we all, the Bible says, you and me, no matter who we are - we are all sinners. If you look to us, you'll be sure to be let down. But judge Christianity by the person who is the head of Christianity, and that is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, who never sinned. Jesus Christ, who never knew what it was to think of sin. Jesus Christ, when He was tempted with sin, refused it. Jesus Christ, who could heal the sick. Jesus Christ, who could read a man's mind and could look right into his heart to see his motives, to see the masks that he was putting up. Jesus Christ, who loved all men. Jesus Christ, who was no respecter of persons. Jesus Christ, who hated hypocrisy. That is Christianity: the Jesus Christ who died for sinful men, who shed His blood. The Jesus Christ who suffered, taking the sins of the world upon His shoulders. The Jesus Christ who literally endured hell so that sinners, His creatures, would not have to go through it. Jesus Christ, who said: 'If I lay down my life, I take it up again'. Jesus Christ, who had the power to rise from the dead - that's Christianity! That Jesus Christ says that one day He is coming again, and that Jesus Christ will judge the world, and no man - no matter how many excuses he makes, no matter how detailed, no matter how convincing they are - that same Jesus Christ, with His eyes of flaming fire, will burn through every man's soul. All the masks of history, the masks of the rich and the famous, the masks of the politicians and the ordinary man on the street, they will fall. All the covered things will become uncovered.

Listen: if you want to know what real Christianity is about, don't look at the church, don't look at the Christians! Listen: read the word of God, read the Gospels, read about the greatest person that ever lived, Jesus Christ the Son of God. He is the Word of God the Bible says, that means He is the expression, He is the reflection, He is the stamp of God Himself. If you look at Him, you will say, like the Centurion: 'Surely this man was the Son of God'. If you read and listen to His words, you will surely say: 'No man ever spoke

like this man'. If you see His actions, if you see His miracles, you will say: 'What manner of man is this that even the winds and the waves obey Him?'. Do you know what real Christianity is? I'm not talking about religion, I'm not talking about denominationalism, I'm not talking about anything like that. I'm talking about a relationship with the man Jesus.

This was a super party, it was a banquet that was going to bring happiness. Do you know what happiness is? Do you long to know happiness? Where are you searching for happiness? Some men thought that happiness was found in unbelief and atheism, but Voltaire - a great atheist - was the greatest infidel of the most pronounced type. He wrote these words: 'I wish I had never been born' - that's where atheism leads you. Happiness is not found in pleasure, and don't think that Christians are kill-joys and they never have any pleasure, but all we are saying is that you will not find real satisfaction in pleasure alone. Lord Byron died, he had lived a life of pleasure if anyone did. He wrote these words: 'The worm, the canker and grief are mine alone'.

Happiness is not found in money. Money is not wrong, the Bible does not say that money is wrong - but it does say that the love of money is wrong. Why? Because God, Jesus Christ, God the Father, God the Holy Spirit is to be the only one we love truly and bow down to. He is to be first in our life. Jay Gould, a famous American millionaire, when dying said this: 'I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth'. You can't find happiness in position or fame either. Lord Beaconsfield enjoyed his fair share of both of these, yet he wrote: 'Youth is a mistake, manhood is a struggle, old-age is a regret'. Imagine that! These men had what we think is perfect, in the eyes of young people today. They had unbelief - that means that they knew they weren't going to suffer for anything they did. Hedonism, they went and did whatever they wanted because they thought there were no consequences.

They thought they could find it in pleasure, in money, in position and fame. Alexander the Great thought he could find it in military glory, and when he had conquered all the known world in his day - having done so he wept in his tent, because he said: 'There are no more worlds to conquer'. Listen friend: if you are striving for what we have down here, if it's for career or money or fame, if it is for satisfaction with earthly fleshly things - listen: you will get to the top of the ladder and realise that there is nothing there!

Where is happiness found? Happiness is found in Jesus Christ, for He said - and He alone said - 'I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life'. Life! You see, the life that you are now living with all this sickness, with all this pain, all this emotional turmoil - when we look around the world and see what's going on, even in our little province - that is not the life that God intended for us. Because we messed it up, and because way back then Adam and Eve disobeyed God when they had a perfect, vital relationship with Him they turned their back on Him and went after their own selfish will and lust - because of that the plan that God had for life, true, vibrant, abundant, satisfying life, it all went down the tube.

Because of God's love, because He loved us so much, He had to bring that life back to us. So He sent eternal life, personified in Jesus Christ, into the world. He was the life, He was coming to infuse, to energize, to regenerate those dead lifeless bodies with God's life. He said this: 'I come to give you not religion, I come to give you life - freedom from the bonds of religion, freedom from the bonds of sin. A relationship with God Almighty, face-to-face, I'm coming to give you that life and give you it in abundance'. He says: 'I'm coming to give you life to the full, life the way it ought to be'.

Maybe you think you're living it up. Maybe you're thinking you have a great time with the drink, maybe it's the drugs, maybe it's going to the discos and the nightclubs - I don't know what it is. But whatever way you're in the world, you are enjoying yourself - but listen: you're not living! You see, you cannot know what living is - and you cannot judge Christianity until you know, until, as the word of God says, you taste and see that the Lord is good. Listen: I am not spinning a whole load of lies to you tonight - Christianity is the only

life to live! Christ is the only person that satisfies! Jesus is the only friend that sticks by you! Jesus is the only one who can give you the assurance that your life is in His hands, that it is in His control, and no matter what happens to you down here He will work it all together for your betterment.

If you do not know that, if you are enjoying yourself - in a measure - in this life on earth, and then when you die and you're not sure where you're going - that is not life. That is life living in the midst of death. Don't tell me, if you're not a Christian, that you're not afraid of death. I want to tell you tonight: Jesus gives life, and He gives eternal life. It's not a package that when you pass from this time to the next, when you die on earth and go to heaven, that He hands it to you all wrapped up when you get there. Listen: this eternal life that He gives, He gives it to us now. You have it now! You can begin to live it now, you can begin to be prepared for heaven now.

Do you know, do you really know what life is? Christians walk around with sour faces, puritanical, they're criticising this, that and the other. The world points at them and says: 'Look at those miserable people, what kind of a life is that?'. On the other hand, if Christians go about with a jump in their step, and with a smile on their face, and with a whistle and a song - they look at them and say: 'They're oblivious to everything that's going on in this world - look at them!'. That's what they said about Jesus, remember John the Baptist? The greatest man, the greatest prophet that ever lived, yet Jesus said to the people of Israel: 'Look, John the Baptist came to you and you said that he was the devil because he didn't eat and drink the way you did. He wasn't like you. Then I came, the Son of God, I came eating and drinking the same way that you did, I look the same, I'm the same - a normal man as far as you can see with the eye. Yet you say I'm a winebibber, I'm a friend of publicans and a friend of sinners'.

Listen: you need Christ to please you tonight. That will only happen when you look at Him, when you stop looking to the world, when you stop looking to yourself, your family, your career to satisfy you - because in a flash, like Job, all those things could be taken away from you. Are you going to tell me that that's the end of living? Some people don't even start off with those things. Christianity in the home is kindness, Christianity in the business is honesty, Christianity in society is courtesy, Christianity in work is fairness. Towards the unfortunate Christianity ought to be pity, towards the weak it ought to be help, towards the wicked it ought to be resistance, toward the strong it ought to be trust and an arm to cry on. Towards the fortunate it ought to be congratulations, towards the penitent it ought to be forgiveness - and towards God it ought to be reverence and it ought to be love. Maybe you have some form of Christianity, but it doesn't give you life. Listen: you need Jesus Christ, for He alone can give you that life.

These men made silly excuses, these men missed a super party, but we see that the people who came to this feast - they were strange guests. In fact, Jesus says that this man who was inviting these people had invited the respectable, the rich, the famous, the religious leaders - but these men, it seemed, were too busy. These men had too many concerns, so this man instructed his servant to go out and to go into the highways and byways and collect the poor, collect the down and out, collect the sinner, collect the social outcast and the sexual pervert, to collect them all and invite them into the kingdom of God. Very rarely is a rich man saved, that's what Jesus said. It's not anything to do with the fact that he has money, but because his material needs are met, because in a way he's spoilt with worldly goods, he cannot see within him - or a certain part of his soul is masked to seeing - his dire need, his lack in the sight of God. He mistakes his lack of physical need for a lack of spiritual need.

Is that you tonight? Perhaps you're not rich, but perhaps you've no real need physically. I urge you to ask God to show you your need, to show you what you are in the sight of God - because it might be that you could be one of these people that were invited to this banquet. Perhaps you've been invited so many times, yet you're not willing to come - you're hardening your neck against God. Listen: these men, these men didn't go - and Jesus said: 'I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet'. If you

don't get time right now, and make time at this very moment, to deal with God, to get right with God, to face God and to debate the matter over with Him - and let Him and you reason together - you will never in this life, or the life to come, taste that life that is eternal.

It was the convicted terrorist, the homosexual, the prostitute, the cripple, the murderer, the blind, the lame, the leprous, the drug addict, the no-hopers who were in that feast. These were the people who Jesus ate with. In this society, listen, to eat with someone was not just to sit down like we would to a meal - that wasn't what it meant. To eat with someone communicated something more, in fact it spoke volumes about the relationship between those who ate together. To eat together - that's what the Lord's Supper means - it's a sign of communion, a relationship, a special fellowship. In Palestine, to eat with a friend was to show a deep communion and fellowship and love between one another.

The Pharisees, the religious hypocrites, looked at Jesus Christ - and they saw Him showing a deep concern and compassion and love, a wish for a relationship with sinners! They looked at him and said: 'Look! He eats, He even eats, with publicans and sinners!'. They looked at Him as, in public, an immoral woman kissed His feet. Remember, He was of no reputation, He didn't care. She cried on His feet, anointed ointment on His feet, and with her hair - which was almost a sensual thing in Palestine - she wiped His feet. The Pharisees are saying to themselves: 'Does He not know what type of a woman this is?'. That was the type of woman Jesus came to save: it was the zealots, the terrorists - Jesus slept in their homes, Jesus ate at their tables, Jesus listened to their concerns. Jesus, with an ear that could hear every pang of the breast, listened to their cries for help deep down in their soul - and Jesus heard them! Jesus came from heaven to save them.

Who are you? Are you the rich man that makes excuses? Are you the person who's crying out for help? Listen: whoever you are, all people here were invited to this feast! They were all invited! Jesus even said that the man who invited these people to this feast, when they came he said: 'There is room for more!'. The song says:

'There's room at the cross for you.
Though millions may come,
There is still room for one,
There's room at the cross for you'.

A man once wanted to paint a portrait of the prodigal son. He looked all over the place for a suitable model, and he couldn't find one. He went to the market places, he went to the sewers where those type of people would hang about - but he couldn't find anyone. Until one day he was walking through a marketplace, and in the corner of that market there was a bundle of bones and dirt and drink lying there. He walked over and he said: 'Sir, could I ask you a question? Would you please pose for me, for I want to draw a portrait?'. He said: 'Me?'. 'Yes, you! I want to draw a portrait, and I want you to be at my studio tomorrow morning at eleven o'clock'. The next day, sure enough, at eleven o'clock there was a knock upon that artist's door. He opened the door and there stood a man. He asked: 'What do you want?'. The man said: 'I'm here'. He said: 'Well, who are you?'. The man said: 'Well, you told me to be here at eleven o'clock'. The artist replied: 'I did not tell you to be here at eleven o'clock'. He said: 'Yes, you did. I was in the market, I was lying in the corner'. He said: 'But you didn't look like that'. The man said: 'Oh, well I thought if you were going to paint my portrait, and I was going to be on canvas, I would clean myself up a little, I would put a few new clothes on, I would look my best'. Before slamming the door in his face, the artist said: 'I'm sorry Sir, but I wanted you the way you were'.

Listen: God is not in the business of cleaning you up with soap and water. You can't do that for yourself, God has to make you a new person. God is willing to do that tonight. On every invitation you receive, at the bottom there are four letters: R.S.V.P. You know what they mean. Tonight, to the banquet, there is an

invitation with your name on it. The responsibility is yours to reply as soon as possible. That banquet will not hold off for you, will you hold off for it and miss it? Jesus says to you tonight: 'Come now, for everything is ready'.

Let us pray. If you're here tonight and you're not a Christian, and you've never come to Christ for Him to save you, and you want Him to do that now - you want to respond to Him, to that invitation to come to His feast, to have true life, not the farce that you're living now - why not, in the stillness of this moment, while everyone is quiet, ask Him to save you. Just say: 'Lord, I come to You. Save me'. Say it now.

Father, we pray tonight for those in our gathering that do not know You. Lord, we can do nothing, all we can do is give what You say to them. Father, I pray that Your Spirit, who alone can save a man, would enter into their hearts now, that He would do a work of grace, that He would warm their heart, set it alight, and give their heart of stone a heart of flesh. Lord, change them, give them real life that's worth living for. Give them a Friend, a Saviour, Master, and a Lord in Jesus Christ. Give them peace in their heart, give them life everlasting. Father, we thank You for today, we thank You for the gift and the blessing of Your presence. We pray that that presence would go with us in the week that lies ahead, that others would see Christ in us and glorify our Father that is in heaven. Part us now, we pray, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2001

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"God Is Calling You!"

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Thank you. Now if you have a copy of the New Testament with you tonight, I want you to turn with me for a moment to 1 Peter and chapter 1. First Peter chapter 1 and verse 18.

Peter writes to these Christians, and he says these words: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God".

In the United States of America, there was held in Chicago a great parliament of religions. Every known religion and cult and faith was represented at that parliament over a period of a week or so. During one of the conference sessions a man called Dr. Joseph Cook stood to his feet. As he rose to his feet he turned to each person in the gathering, and he addressed them saying these words: 'I have with me this evening', he said, 'a woman with a great sorrow'. He said: 'This woman that I have with me has blood stains upon her hands. In her desperation and in her distress she has tried absolutely everything to get the guilt of this blood stain off her hands, but nothing she has done has taken them away'. He proceeded to ask them a question, he said: 'Is there anything, anything in your faiths, anything in your religions or your beliefs, that can give this woman peace, that can take away her heartache, can take away her guilt and give her real life?'. Each representative looked at one another, they didn't know what to say, they were dumbfounded - no answer came. So Dr. Joseph Cook, as it were, looked to heaven - and when he looked to the sky he said: 'I'm going to ask another question'. He said: 'John, John the apostle, can you tell this woman how to get rid of the awful stains from off her hands?'. As if to hear an answer coming straight from heaven, he said: 'Listen, listen, hear John the apostle speak! The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin!'.

That's the message that we have for you tonight. It's not a new message, it's not a modern message, it's the old old story of Jesus Christ who shed His blood - but it's as new tonight as it has ever been! This passage that we read together [Isaiah chapter 1 verse 18], you'll know that it was addressed to the Jew - but, as we look at this passage, we see that it's not specific to the Jews. In other words, it can be applied to any person that has ever lived down all the eras of time. In the passage we see three things that are applicable to every person, even in our gathering tonight.

First of all we see in the passage the sinfulness of every single person in this world. He says: 'Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Take them away, be cleansed from all the wrong that you've done'. Secondly we see from the passage the fact that God has provided a remedy that we might be cleansed from all those wrong things that we have done. Thirdly it presents us with the result, or the consequence of whether we say 'Yes' to God and His cleansing, or whether we simply reject Him and say, 'I'm OK the way that I am'.

Let's look at verse 18 [of Isaiah chapter 1], God says these words: 'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord'. It's an invitation, God is calling, God is saying to someone here: 'Come to me! Come, I'm calling, I'm inviting, I'm asking you to come to me'. Now, as a Christian, when I look at that verse it speaks to me of a day in my life when I heard - not verbally, but I felt God calling me. Not calling me to service, not to the ministry, nothing like that - but God actually calling me first to Himself, to know what it is to have my sins forgiven, to know what it is to have a real relationship from day-to-day with Almighty God.

Now, if that speaks to me of my call, it speaks to you of your call too - why? Because this passage, as we've already said, is applicable to every single person that has ever lived. So if it speaks to me of my call, that must mean that God is calling to you tonight as well. God is saying, specifically to you - not to the person beside you, or someone at home, but God is saying to you tonight: 'Come to me! Listen, I'm calling you, I'm shouting for you to come to me. I'm inviting you to come'. I think this is, by far, one of the greatest truths and facts about the gospel of Jesus Christ: that the Creator, the almighty sovereign God, the God who by His hands flung the stars into space, the God who set the orbits in their motion, the God who made the universe exceeding the knowledge of men - that God, the Creator of the sun the moon and the stars and everything that is in the world, that God is personally interested in you!

I wonder can you think how big the universe is? Scientists tell us that we can't measure the length of the universe, the height or the depth, it just goes on for ever and ever. It seems, they say, that it's eternal. Yet Paul the apostle, in the book of Acts, said something different than that. He said that in God we live, we move, and we have our being. In other words, what he meant by that was: every single thing that is dwells within God. God is bigger than anything that we've ever thought of, or anything that even exists in our existence - He far exceeds it all. God, bigger than the universe.

You think how big even our own solar system is, how big our Milky Way is. If you had a telescope, and you came from the outside of the universe and you were focusing in and you were looking for planet Earth - can you think of how far you would have to go in even to find it? How large our solar system is, and you would come right into our specific solar system, and you would see some of the planets like Pluto, Venus, Saturn and Mars. As you would go in further and further you would see a little green and blue planet - planet Earth. Think just for a moment how small, how minute the earth's sphere would be in comparison to the solar system, or even in comparison to the whole universe. It's minute!

You go in further and further, right into the planet, and you would look at the continents of Africa, Asia, and the Americas and Europe. If you went in on Europe you would see right at the edge of Europe two little islands. You focus in, you come in further and further, and you see on the left side a little tiny speck of an island. You go in further and further, and you go to the north of that island. You see a loch, and just around that loch you see a little town. You go in further and further and you see Portadown. Go in a little more, and you see a little microscopic speck in Portadown - a building. In that building there is one insignificant, it seems, minute inconceivable microcosm of nothingness - and that's you.

Can you think of how small, how seemingly insignificant and seemingly unimportant, you are in comparison to the universe, and in comparison to God in whom the universe dwells? But you see, the great message of the gospel is this: that you are not insignificant to God, but in fact this God who is bigger than the universe, bigger than anything that is, this God is specifically and personally interested in you tonight! So much so that this God comes to you tonight, and invites you to come to Him.

What does He say? What happens when you come to Him? He says: 'Come unto me, and let us reason together, saith the Lord'. It's that word 'reason' that I want you to notice just for a moment. He says: 'Come and let us reason together'. That word, to me, has a bit of a ring of the law courts to it. It's as if God wants you and me to come to Him tonight and have face-to-face confrontation with Him. It seems that He is asking us to come to Him to reason and to debate, as it were, to argue a matter over with Him. You might say to me: 'David, hold on a minute, I have nothing to argue with God! I've nothing I want to reason and debate with God for!'

Let's see what the word of God says about that. Look at verse 6 of chapter 1 of Isaiah, you read these words - and it's as if this is a picture of us that God has taken, if you'll excuse the illustration, with a camera, a

Polaroid camera. This is the way God sees you as He looks at you tonight, He says: 'From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment'. Now, no matter how pretty you are tonight, no matter how pretty you might think you are, as God looks at you in His holiness, in His righteousness, in His perfection - He sees in you nothing but a person who is covered from tip to toe in putrifying, oozing, pussing sores of sin.

Don't think I'm singling you out tonight, because Paul in the book of Romans says that there's no difference between anybody, because all of us have sinned and all of us have fallen short of the mark of God, the standard of God. Unless you're God tonight - and if you are put your hand up - unless you are God tonight, you fall short of His standard. If you could reach His standard you would be God, but if you can't reach His standard the Bible says that you are sinful. That's why God asks you to come and reason with Him, because if God is to solve this problem that you have - if God is to fix your problem and take away your sin - you must have a face-to-face confrontation with Him.

But there is a problem: even when you do have face-to-face confrontation with Him, you cannot delete the indelible, and you cannot change the unchangeable. There's nothing you can do! Think of this: the God of all eternity, as it were, stoops to reason and debate, to talk the matter over with us - yet in all our insignificance, in all our sinfulness, God must help us. We can reason all we like, we can argue all we like, but at the end of the day - no matter what soap we use, no matter what scrubber we use - we cannot remove the sin stains that have been on us since the very moment we came out of our mother's womb.

That's why Isaiah says you have been called tonight - but when you are called, and when you come, you must be cleansed. That's that he says: 'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow'. Do you know what that means? Now listen up tonight: no matter what your sin is - it might be murder, it might be adultery, it might be alcoholism, it might be pornography, it might be anything under the sun, theft, cheating in business, cheating on your wife, lying, envying, it could be anything! It could be the biggest sin that you can think of, no matter what that might be, but God says - listen: 'There is no dye, there is no scarlet, there is no shade of red that is too deep for me to cleanse'.

Have you got that? You might be here tonight - and maybe there is one here tonight - and you think that you're beyond redemption. You think you're too bad for God to save, you think you've done too much. Perhaps you're a backslider, and you think you've gone too far in the other direction and God wouldn't want anything to do with you. Listen to me tonight: God says that no matter how deep-dyed a sinner you are He can cleanse your guilt. You might say: 'Now hold on a wee minute, David. You've just told me a minute ago that God can't look upon our sinfulness. We are sinners, we have fallen short of His glory, how can God then just come along and say: 'Right, I'm here, I'll take your sin and I'll wipe the slate clean, and now your scarlet sin has been made as white as snow, it's like pristine white wool'. How can God just do something like that? It doesn't make sense'.

Turn with me for a moment to Isaiah 53, because Isaiah gives all the answers in this little book. Isaiah 53 and verse 5, and this is a prophecy that was spoken about the Lord Jesus Christ hundreds - now listen - hundreds of years before He ever lived. It says in verse 5, speaking of the Lord Jesus Himself: 'But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed'. Have you got that? What did Dr. Joseph Cook cry? What was his question? It was about a woman who had stains of blood on her hands, she had murdered! She thought that no matter what she could do she couldn't get rid of these stains, she couldn't get the guilt away from her mind, she couldn't get rid of her sin. What did Joseph Cook say? He said the words of John, that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, can cleanse any sin.

That's the message we have tonight: that there is a substance that was shed in this universe, in this timescale, that no matter what your sin is tonight - if it's homosexuality, no matter what you've dabbled in, no matter what you've looked at, no matter what you've taken, no matter what you've swallowed, no matter where you've been - the blood of Christ can wipe it all away. Because of that God says to you tonight: 'Come and let us reason about this, and I'll make your scarlet sin, your deep-dyed sin, as white as snow'. You might say: 'Well, hold on, I'm not a murderer'. You might say: 'Hold on a minute, I'm alright, I don't go into those deep-dyed sins'. Let me ask you just for one moment tonight, where you're sitting, to think of the sins that you have committed in the last hour. Can you do that? Think. What about today? What about this week? What about the wrong things that you've done this month? This year? You try and conjure up in your mind all the wrong things that you have done in this life! No matter whether you haven't murdered, or broken the big commandments in the ten commandments, God looks at you tonight and you're still covered in sores of sin. He says: 'There's no hope for you, child, tonight if you don't come to Me, and you don't get cleansed in the blood of Christ'.

A young sceptic came up to a preacher one night after a meeting like this, and he said: 'Hold on a minute. You were preaching on the blood of Christ, how can the blood of Christ cleanse sin?'. The preacher was nonplussed for moment and he thought about it, he didn't know what to do, he was cornered. After thinking about it for a minute he turned to that young man, and he said: 'Listen, tell me this: how does water quench thirst?'. The young man thought for a moment and said: 'Well, I can't explain to you, I don't know it inside out, but I know one thing: I know that it does'. The preacher said to that young man: 'Listen, I don't know all the intricate details of how blood cleanses sin, all I know is that God requires blood for sin to be cleansed. Because the life, your blood running coursing through your veins, your life is in that blood - and God required perfect, sinless, sacrifice of blood in order to forgive sin and to cleanse it all away'. Praise God tonight, He supplied it in the person of His Son!

I can't explain to you an A-Z of how blood cleanses sin, but listen: I know that it does. Why? Because it cleansed my sin, because tonight I am free from my sin. God has wiped my sin off the face of the earth! How did He do it? Because, as Isaiah 53 says, He laid on His Son, He punished His Son for my iniquities! Jesus Christ was taken, that's how it happened, the sinless spotless Lamb of God, the Son of God, the one who was before even the earth was, the second person of the Trinity was put in flesh, and was brought to a place called 'The Place of the Skull'. He was taken, and listen to this - no matter what pictures you see of Christ with a loincloth on - the Son of God was stripped naked. The creature, the creatures He had made, watched the Creator naked before them. They watched as He was spat upon, as they took their filthy hands and pulled His beard from His face, as they hit Him and took it in turns - a guard of centurions, 100 of them - to punch Him and to beat Him until His eyes were swollen, and His cheeks were puffed, until the Bible says that His face was marred, it was disfigured more than any man that has ever lived. They whipped His back, the Bible says, and if you had watched as they whipped that back - it was like a ploughed field, and the strips of flesh would have come off, and the blood and the sinews would have dropped off the Son of God. They pushed Him down a road with a cross on His back to the Place of the Skull. They took Him, and they lifted Him after putting in another piece of wood, and they dropped His body and the cross into its socket until bones came out of joint in His body. They smote Him with a reed, and they put a crown of thorns on His head, they did everything to humiliate Him that they could do to Him. They did everything physical that they could think of to Him.

But listen brethren, that was only the physical sufferings of Christ. I want you to get this this evening: those were the least of His sufferings! It says in Isaiah 53 and verse 6 that the Father, God, laid on Him the iniquity of us all - that's more than physical punishment, do you know what that is? God said this: 'I'm going to count my Son as your sin'. Do you remember the sin you were thinking of tonight? God the Father, the holy God said: 'I want these people to be cleansed, I want these people to be saved, I want my Son to be glorified, so

what I'm going to do is I'm going to reckon Him, I'm going to account on Him the sins of the world' - and that's exactly what He did. He put in His body, as it were, all your sin, all my sin - and He opened up His holy wrath, His judgement, and He just poured it upon the Son of God. He exhausted on Jesus Christ all the anger and all the wrath of a righteous God, He poured it out upon Him - like an atomic bomb going off in a matchbox, the power of God fell on Him. The suffering of the whole world that ever was, the eternal hell of every man, was poured into Christ in three solid hours at Calvary. So much so that the Bible says a darkness - a darkness - came upon all the land. Not a darkness like we see tonight, but a special darkness - why? Because what was happening to Christ on that dreadful day was something that, when men would look upon it, it was something that never ever happened or never ever would happen again in the history of all time. It was gruesome, why? Because it was sin being punished!

Why did He do it? Do you know why He did it tonight? If you hear nothing else of what I say, listen to this: He did it because He loved you. Do you know that tonight? There mightn't be another soul in the world that loves you, but Christ loves you! Don't ever say that He doesn't love you, because He went all the way to Calvary - and He didn't just die for you, but He took your sin! He was cursed as your sin, and that's how much the Christ of the cross loved you. He loved you so much He stretched His arm out to die for you at Calvary!

In the Old Testament scriptures an agreement between a man and another man is spoken of as a covenant, but in the Old Testament there are also agreements between God and men. Those are also spoken of as covenants. If you like, God is calling you tonight and saying: 'Come unto me, let us reason together, let us make a covenant together about this matter of your sin'. The Hebrew word for 'covenant' is the word 'to cut a covenant'. Do you remember when Moses was on Mount Sinai, and God gave him the ten commandments? God, with His finger, cut the ten commandments in stone - He carved it, He cut a covenant. In Isaiah 49 verse 16 you read these words: 'I, God says, 'I have graven you, I have cut you, upon the palms of my hands'. Do you see what He's saying? Listen: 'I have made a covenant with you on the palms of the hands of my Son'!

That's how much He loved you. Look at our passage tonight quickly: not only are we called, not only can we be cleansed, but there is a command that is given in verse 19. He says: 'If', there's a condition, 'If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it'. What's he saying? He saying this, listen: 'All you have to do is obey'. All you have to do is come, and it doesn't matter that you go to your church - it's good that you go to your church. It doesn't matter that you give to the poor, that's good but it'll do nothing for your salvation. It doesn't matter that you're a great neighbour, or that you give to your church, or that you do your best, or that you're great member of the community, or you say your prayers, or you read the Bible, or you talk about Jesus, or you sing about Jesus. He's saying: 'Listen, that doesn't matter! You must obey the command of God, and the command of God is that you obey His gospel'. His gospel says to you tonight: 'Come unto me! Come now and I'll make your scarlet sin as white as snow'.

Sure, didn't our reading tonight say that at the start of the meeting? It said you weren't bought with corruptible things like silver or gold - he's saying it doesn't matter how much you have in the bank. You weren't saved by the vain tradition of your fathers, your vain way of life - he's saying it doesn't matter whether you're a Protestant, it doesn't matter whether you're a Roman Catholic, whether you're a Buddhist, or whether you're a Muslim. It doesn't matter what lodge you're in, or what organisation you run - he says this is the only thing that can save your soul: the precious blood of Christ, as a Lamb without blemish and without spot.

In the Old Testament when they sacrificed a lamb, do you know what they did? They took it, they killed it, they poured the blood out of it, and during the Passover - you remember when God was cursing Egypt with

the plagues - the people of Israel were told to take a lamb and do just that. Kill it, pour out the blood and put it in a basin. They were told to take a hyssop plant, and dip it into the basin and paint on the lintel and the doorposts the blood of the lamb. If they did that, when the angel of death came past to slay the firstborn of every family it would pass over - He said: 'I will see the blood and I will pass over you'. I wonder what would have happened if the lamb was slain, the blood was poured into the basin, and the basin sat in the corner of the room. What would have happened? The angel would have come past the door, he wouldn't have seen the blood, and he would have come in and slain the firstborn! The point was that people were to exercise faith, they were to have faith in the slain lamb. They were to take the hyssop and put the blood on the doorpost and the lintel, and that would save their souls.

Tonight God is saying to you: 'Listen, Christ has died, but you must have faith. It's not enough that you know your Bible, it's not enough that you know Christ died, but you must by faith have that blood applied to your life - and if ye be willing, and if ye be obedient, you shall eat of the good of the land'. Listen: don't believe that lie of the devil. The devil says that you'll find life out in the world, the devil tells you that Christians are modern-day puritans who don't know how to laugh, don't know how to have a good time, don't know how to live. Listen: its a lie! 'If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat of the good of the land' - if you come to Christ tonight you'll have life as you never knew it! You'll have life as it's meant to be lived! You'll have life, as the Lord Jesus Christ said, and have life in its fullness!

It would be wrong of me tonight to finish without talking about verse 20, for there's the other side of the coin where God says: 'But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword'. Do you know something? One translation of that account of the Passover says that they were also meant to paint the blood on the doorstep. What would have happened if a young man, or a young woman in that home, had went and walked out of the doorstep - what would have happened? They would have been slain. God is saying this to you tonight: if you walk out of this meeting and if you trample the blood of Christ under your feet as an unclean thing, and say to yourself: 'I want nothing of this. You can keep your gospel, you can keep the blood of Christ, I don't want it!'. Listen: God - and I'm warning you - God, in the end, will send you to hell. Let me say this, and I don't take pleasure in saying this, but I say it because I know it's true in myself: if He does send you to hell, He has every right because He sent His Son through your hell - so that you wouldn't have to go through it.

Let me finish with these words, they're not my words, they're the word of God: 'Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it'.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2001

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"God's Day Of Reckoning"

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"**H**e that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him".

One verse, just one reading from the book of the Revelation, the last book in the New Testament, chapter 1 - Revelation chapter 1, of course if you're familiar in any way with the Scriptures you will know that the Revelation primarily speaks of things that are yet to be in the prophetic scheme of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Chapter 1, just one verse, verse 7: "Behold, he", speaking of the Lord Jesus, "cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen".

I think many people think, certainly folk that I talk to, whether they be Christians or not, that in the day in which we live there seems to be much suffering on the side of that which is good. Everything that is evil and not good, or against the things of God or even just plain morals, is triumphing. Good is suffering, or God is suffering, and evil is triumphing - and it seems that the things of God and Christianity in the church is on the backfoot, and atheism or immorality, or whatever you want to call it: other religions, or non-religion, or just plain worldliness, seems to be on the advance. If you feel like that, even if you're not a Christian or born-again, you're not alone and you won't be the first person that's ever thought that. David, who wrote the Psalm that we're reading from tonight, also experienced that in his own day and age, and was able to give vent to it in this Psalm and many other Psalms.

In fact, one Psalm in particular is renowned for this theme right throughout it - Psalm 37, where he says: 'Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity'. Now, why would you be worried about evildoers or envious of those who are workers of iniquity? The reason why David vented that was simply because it seemed in his day that those who were doing evil were prospering, and those who were doing good were suffering for it. That is the norm, let me say that again so that you can catch it: that is the norm for this age in which we live. That is to be expected, this is the way things are to be according to the word of God - it says that the age in which we live, the day in which we live is man's day, it's man's day: the day, age, and epoch where man will have his way. That's why evil triumphs and good suffers, but the Bible also tells us of a day that is yet to come when the tables will be turned, and God will have His day, and His day will be a day of reckoning.

I would say that there's not a person here in our gathering this evening who has not been wronged at some time and place in their life's experience. Something has been done to you by an institution, or by a loved one, or by a friend - someone you counted a friend - or an enemy, and you have been wronged. You were in the right, they were in the wrong, and you've often wondered within your heart, that thing that's pierced your soul down deep and hurt you for so long: will that wrong ever be ironed out? Will there ever be a day of reckoning when wrong things that have been done will be straightened and put right?

Maybe it's when you look at the great atrocities that we see in our land, and have seen done over the years, and maybe right across the world, the disasters that we've seen and the terrorist attacks, and even the Holocaust of the second world war. We wonder will there ever be comeuppance? Will these people - Adolf Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin - will all these horrible monsters of humanity get away with these tragedies? Hitler, perhaps, shot himself - does that mean he's scot free, that he's got off with this greatest crime against all humanity? I think, wouldn't you say that there's something in all of us - even the most warped and depraved and sinful, immoral individual - that cries from the very depths of our being for justice, for righteousness, for vengeance, for fairness in the end. But because we live in man's day, it is not happening as we speak, and as we see and hear things around us, evil more often gains the upper hand than not. But my friend, what I want you to realise is that although we live in man's day, God's day of reckoning is coming, and there is a day - and I believe it's coming very soon - when the tables will be turned, and when justice will be done.

Let's first of all think of this day that we live in that is man's day, and I want you to see that this is very clear not only from the word of God, but from the things that you see going on around you. As you look at Psalm 2, he asks the question: 'Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing?'. If man's day is marked by anything, it's marked by heathen indignation towards God. If I could simplify it like this: men are angry with God. Man is venting, on a continual basis right across our globe, a rage against God and everything to do with God, and everything that comes from God. The word 'rage' literally means 'to assemble tumultuously', like a great riotous throng the whole of humanity seems to rally to the cry of raging and protesting against God. I'm led to believe the original word here means what it is for a horse to neigh, you know when you see a horse neigh when it's pulling at the bit, it's about to go into the race and it just can't wait - and it neighs and you see the steam coming out of its nostrils on a cold day like today. Or it's a horse all metalled up in armour and ready to go into the very depths of battle, bloodthirsty, and it neighs! That's the picture here: humanity is like a beast that neighs in the face of God in rebellion and arrogant pride, angry against God.

This voice of heathen indignation has always been heard down through the ages, and I believe that it's heard in a greater extent today than it has ever been heard. If there is a sign that we are in the end times and in the last days, and it's not long for the Lord Jesus to return again, it is this heathen indignation: man's anger directed toward God. Do you ever think about this? Do you ever wonder within the depths of your soul of the lack, as maybe you see it, of religiousness? Immorality, a lack of reverential fear for anything to do with God or eternity - and you look perhaps as a God-fearing, moralistic, upstanding individual at the terrible abominations that are going on in our society and being legalised by our government, and do you not say to yourself: 'This can't go on like this, surely it must come to an end one day?'. I'll tell you dear friend, that if you're saying that, you're right! Whatever that is in the depths of your soul, maybe it's planted by God as He's written His law in your heart in conscience - I don't know what it is, maybe the Spirit of God is speaking to you, maybe you've been brought up under the word of God and you've been told about this day of judgement of God's wrath and the return of the Lord Jesus - I don't know what it is, but let me tell you this: when it rises in your bosom, 'Surely there must be an end to all this?', you're right! You're right!

What does this world want that it rages in heathen indignation towards God? I'll tell you what it wants: it wants freedom from God. That's what it wants! Freedom from God! The kings of the earth all set themselves toward God, take counsel together against the Lord and Christ, and they want to break - verse 3 - God's bands from them. They want to loose God's cords and influences and restraints from their lives! Here, friends, is the fatal mistake that humanity has made right from the very beginning of time, and it is this: freedom is not achieved by breaking the bands of God off you - you mark this - freedom is only achieved when you submit to God and His Christ's salvation.

But sadly humanity, for all time, has made this mistake and they have thrown off God's rule. They have just invited bondage and destruction, the very thing that they're trying to get away from. If I can prove this to you

by illustrating what it was like in the 1960s - I obviously don't remember it, but I know enough about it from living in the overflow of it in my childhood and teenage years. It was the epoch of revolution and freedom: free love, free drugs, free drink, free morals, everything was free! The cry was to throw off the restraints of society and the institutions that were the ground and foundation of society, but what has it led to today? What is the offshoot and the fallout of it? It is a society wrecked with drug abuse, alcoholism, promiscuity, lack of morals, venereal diseases, and the demise of the marriage unity and the family bond. That's what we get from man's attempt at freedom and breaking loose from the restraints of God!

I wonder am I speaking to someone, and your whole life's experience has been a cry for freedom, getting away from the restraints of your parents, the restraints of your school, your upbringing, your society, your church. I don't know what specifically it is, but your heart genuinely yearns for freedom - and because of that you've been pushed to resist anything that smacks or smells of God! Anything to do with God! You resist your family's prayers - they've been praying for you, since you've been a child, to receive Christ as your Saviour. Your Sunday School teacher pleaded with you when you were at his knee. Your husband, your wife is saved, and they long and shed many a tear through a waking night for your soul's salvation - and you're throwing of all those restraints because you see that as hindering your freedom. My friend, you're putting yourself in bondage!

The mark of this day and age in which we live is man's anger toward God. The second thing here is vain imaginations. The kings, it says in the second part of verse 1, 'the people', the nations, 'imagine a vain thing'. In their selfish ambition they plot and plan ways of avoiding God's rule. You see this is the next step: you're angry against God, and then you decide: 'Well, I'm going to do something about this! I'm not going to be restricted by the standards of my parents, or by my church, or even by my society. I'm going to plan a way' - whether it's in the home - 'I'm not going to take part in family worship or family prayers. As long as I can I'm going to try to get out of going to church on a Sunday morning or a Sunday evening, or I don't want to go to that gospel meeting because it makes me feel uncomfortable - and I'll think of every excuse in the book not to go'. Or maybe it's the standards in the house that you live in: you've been brought up with godly parents, and you're trying to rebel and throw off these cords and these bands that you see they are putting upon you. When your parents aren't about, and people you know from the young people's in the church, you avoid the things of God, and in fact you go further: you plan ways that you can get rid of them.

That's the next stage: is that you? Do you know what the next step after that is? United opposition. Heathen indignation, vain imagination - planning ways that you can avoid God and the things of God - then there comes united opposition. It says here in verse 2 that: 'The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD', and all peoples of the nations united themselves against God's rule. Here's the downward spiral and pattern - what is it? One: you get angry with God and the things of God. Two: you plan and you plot to avoid the things of God and get the restraints away from you. And three: then eventually you unite with people who are opposed to Christ and the things of God, and you eventually find yourself agreeing with them.

Here you are, is it not you? I don't know why you're angry against God, I don't know how you're plotting to avoid the things of God, but I'll tell you this: I wonder are you on the next step of actually opposing, opposition united with the world? Are you united? Are you united in a wrong relationship that's pulling you down spiritually? Are you united studying something that is not profitable for your soul? Are you united with some type of entertainment or occupation, or leisure habit - I don't know what it is, but it has driven you into a position where you have found yourself starting to agree with those who are against Christ! That's what happens! Do you know what the step is after that? In fact, I would say that you've qualified if you have heathen indignation, and you have this vain imagination, and this united opposition - do you know it means? You're a gospel rebel! Gospel rebellion! You have become a rebel to the gospel.

These kings of the earth and nations were rebellious against all divine influence, and do you know what that is? It is the spirit of the age in which we live, man's age, it has always been from the beginning when the men of Babel built a great tower that they said would reach unto heaven, and they would worship God in their own way, and they would unite together on their own terms - and God said 'No!', and He scattered them into different languages right across the earth into confusion - that's why you've got languages today. It happened in Babylon, we read there of Nebuchadnezzar. He exalted himself against the face of God, and said: 'Look at my great kingdom that I have brought to myself, and that I have built', and God had to teach him a lesson: that the only reason that he was on Babylon's throne and that he was successful as an emperor, was because God had let him. Do you know what God did? He made him like a beast of the field, to crawl on all fours, and he had fur on him like feathers of ravens, and he ate of the grass, and the dew of the morning came upon his flesh, and he was out in the field like a wild beast until he admitted, and lifted his beastly head heavenward, that there was a God in heaven who alone ruleth in the kingdoms of men!

He had the spirit of the age in him, and I'll tell you: when you get to the cross of Calvary and you see all these old worldly sinners judging the Lord Jesus - imagine them standing in judgement! Men like Pilate, men like Herod, men like Caiaphas the high priest - and it's amazing that they're fighting the bit out, the Roman Emperor against the Jews, all the nations of the world against one another ready to slay one another and takeover one another - yet when it comes to opposing God and His Christ they all unite together to crucify the Son of God! It's the spirit of the age! Then, when the church of Jesus Christ was formed, it was no different - and we have in Acts chapter 4 the apostle preaching, and do you know what he preaches on? Psalm 2, and he talks about how the wicked age of man took the holy child Jesus, God's Son, and crucified Him! And Herod, and Pilate, Rome and Judaism, united together to oppose God and His Christ, and nailed Him to a cross!

Oh, this is nothing new, and I'll tell you this: it's happening, you can see it with your own eyes, and the Bible says it will happen in the end times - and I believe very firmly that we are living in the last days. In the last days the Scriptures teach that there will be a full fulfilment of Psalm 2, when the kings of the earth will gather together and unite to fight against God. There will rise up a vast federation of rulers and nations that will unite in one passion: a determination to prevent Christ from taking the reins of government in this earth. Now, my simple personal question to you this night is: which crowd do you belong to? Are you one of the men that could be said there is the characteristics of man's day, and you're angry against God, and you've plotted and planned to avoid the things of God, the salvation of God, and even find yourself uniting with people who are opposed to everything that God is and gives? You find you're rebelling against the Gospel and the word of God: my friend, you're among those who crucified the Lord Jesus Christ Himself! I warn you that you have your innings at the moment, and although you have opposed Him all through your life and gotten away with it, there is a day coming when the tables will be turned and the day will turn to God's day! That will be a day of reckoning, and that's why it's futile for you to run away from God. That's why the Psalmist says: 'Why do the heathen rage?' - why are they doing it? If the Psalmist was here tonight in this pulpit he'd be saying: 'Why do they not get saved? Why do they think they can rebel against God forever, because very soon the tables are turning!'

Let me share a couple of things with you about God's day and how it's marked. Do you know how it's marked? It's marked the exact opposite of man's day. There's not man's anger against God, this time Psalm 2 tells us there's God's anger against man. It says that God will laugh at these kings in the world and the nations that oppose Him and rage against Him - He will have them in derision! God doesn't worry about the opposition of the nations and this world's establishments. Their noise and threats don't bother Him! Their clenched fists up into His holy face, and their arrogant slogans and boasts are nothing to Him - they're like the squeaks of a mouse to a lion! They mean nothing! He can't even arouse Himself to fight with them, He just laughs at them!

I'll tell you, this is the picture of God as He is: God on His throne. And although today He's a God of grace and offers you salvation where you sit in this meeting, there's a day coming when He will have the last laugh. My friend, I heard a sermon preached recently on tape of a man of God from years ago, and do you know what the subject of the preaching was? The title was this: 'The God Sinners Never Want to Meet', the God sinners never want to meet - who is He? He is this God that laughs at our calamity, who says: 'I've called unto you and you did not answer, and now I will laugh at your calamity'. I'll tell you, if God laughs at you friend, you've had it, it's over, you're finished!

Let me give you an illustration of it: John the Baptist was said to be a voice crying in the wilderness, and that simply meant that he was a prophet. He was the voice of God, and one day he stood before King Herod - the same one as the Lord stood before later, before His crucifixion. Because King Herod was living with another man's wife, John the Baptist told him his sin, that he was an adulterer, and Herod threw him into prison. One night it was Herod's birthday, and they were having a great party. The daughter of this woman that he was committing adultery with came before Herod to dance before him, and he was so pleased that he said to her: 'What would you like? What can I give you?'. And it says within the word of God that her mother, before, instructed her: 'Say, 'Give me the head of John the Baptist on a charger'', and she asked for John's head! The voice of God that cried in the wilderness through the prophet was cut off! Herod lived for a little while after that, and then came the day when Jesus, the Son of God, stood before him. And I'll tell you this, listen carefully: there's not a word in this book, not one word, that Jesus Christ spoke to Herod the king - why? Because he'd silenced the voice of God!

My friend, there's a day coming when God will laugh, and if by some diabolical move you have silenced God's voice, you will meet a silent God and He will laugh and mock at your calamity. I don't have time to go into all the judgements that will take place upon this earth when Jesus comes, but I'll tell you it is an awful day of wrath that this world has not seen hitherto neither will ever see. Revelation calls it 'the wrath of the Lamb', but I'll tell you this much: the book of Revelation says that on that day those kings of the earth that raged and protested, and arrogantly vented their anger against God, on that day they will be terrified and run! The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, will hide themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and say to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!

There'll be no heathen indignation and vain imaginations and united oppositions and Gospel rebellions on that day! My friend, don't you tell me that you will be any different, for if you're not washed in the blood of the Lamb - just think about it for one moment this evening: what if, as you're listening to the sound of my voice in this building this evening, you heard the trumpet sound, and that beautiful resplendent light that will transcend and be like an aura around the Judge of God, Jesus Christ, coming into the world, came through that window this moment? Would there be one here without Christ that wouldn't tremble and go to pieces and buckle underneath the guilt of your sin? Don't tell me you wouldn't!

Can you doubt that there would be many in this congregation who would be distracted with guilty fear and remorse? Do you not think that all the sinners who had ever rejected Christ would behave in such a way? Of course they would! There will be holy wrath on that day - and what did Revelation chapter 1 and verse 7 say? That verse terrifies me... people will wail! I can't wait to see the Lord, can you? Some people will wail on that day because they don't want to see Him, because they're not ready for Him. Holy wrath, no longer heathen indignation. There will be accomplished plans, no more vain imaginations - God will have His plans and see them through, His sovereign will will be done. It doesn't matter how many plots and plans will be made by kings and great men, and the ordinary Joe Bloggs, they will come to naught, for He will put His righteous Ruler on the throne. There will be no more united opposition against the Lord and His Christ, but Christ will reign, the Anointed King upon His holy hill! Of His government there will be no end, and He will

reign in perfect righteousness. I tell you: at His crucifixion, when He was dying for your sins and mine, Christ was given to the heathen - but Psalm 2 tells us that on that day the heathen will be given to Christ. What about that!

The Lord Jesus Christ, who now sits at the Father's right-hand, there's a day coming when He will enter into the world and He will judge the nations and separate the sheep from the goats - the saved from the unsaved. Revelation says that out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations, and He shall rule them with a rod of iron, and He will tread the winepress of the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God, and He will rule with a rod of iron and He will dash the potters vessel in pieces! Then the books will be opened, the works will be declared, and the judgement will be executed. Then rebels will be broken and bowed, there'll be no Gospel rebellion, but Philippians says every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess the Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

My friend, in this Psalm that you have looked at, the Spirit of God in the closing verses gives you an invitation appeal to come to your senses and come to Christ now, the wise. He appears to the three parts of your personality: your mind, your heart, and your will. To your mind He says: 'Will you wise up, be instructed, the way that you've been going is not the way to happiness and holiness and heaven'. The wisdom of this world is foolish as with God. In verse 11 He appeals to your heart, and He says: 'Serve the Lord with fear, submit yourself and you will rejoice in God even with trembling'. Then He applies and addresses your will, and He says: 'Kiss the Son, lest He be angry with you. This great Judge, who's coming to judge the world, the One who was crucified for your sins and died for your iniquities and bore all your judgement on the cross at Calvary - He's coming back again, and you should take His hand now as He is the Sovereign of the universe, and bow at His foot, and kiss the nailprint!'

Submit to Him, David is saying, pay homage and show loving surrender to Him. Yet maybe you're in our gathering tonight, and you've said it all your life and you're saying it this very moment: 'We will not have this Man to reign over us!'. If you're saying that, soon, very soon, as the disciples stood on Bethany's hill and watched the Lord Jesus ascend after His resurrection, and they watched as that resplendent glory and brightness began to disappear as a speck on the horizon in the sky - very soon on that same geographical spot, some men will be gathered, and they will see that speck return again, and the reverse happen as that resplendent brightness begins to appear, and gradually comes out of the sky, and Christ gather as they watch and debate as to what this is - all it is is the fulfilment of the word of Christ: 'As ye have seen Me go, so I will come again in like manner'. To their horror they will wail as they see the shadow of their being change, because the light of Christ eclipses the very light of the sun as He comes to judge the world - and it's too late!

Oh, my friend, today whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved - today, but not on that day.

'Ye sinners seek His face,
Whose wrath ye cannot bear.
Fly to the shelter of the cross,
And find salvation there'.

Let us pray: I don't know how many times you've heard the Gospel before. I don't know what situation you find yourself in, but I'll tell you this: you don't need to be some theologian, or even a preacher in a pulpit, to realise that things are getting swiftly worse in our land, and it's got to end somewhere. I'm telling you that one day shall end, and Jesus shall reign from shore to shore. But my friend, it is only those who bow the knee in time, bow the knee in the day of grace, bow the knee when the Gospel call is heralded, who will enjoy that day and reign with Christ, and dwell for all eternity in glory. Will you bow the knee? Will you do it voluntarily now? One day you will do it, and be forced to do it - why be forced to do it for someone who

loves you so much? Someone who went to Calvary and shed His blood on your behalf, someone who bore your sin, took your sorrow, went through your hell - is it too much to ask to bow the knee before the King of kings, and kiss His nail pierced hand? Will you not take Him as your Saviour tonight? Confess your sins, trust His cross work, take His gift of eternal life. I'll be here after the meeting to speak to anyone who wants some guidance or help, I've got some literature free of charge for anyone who would like it. You can be saved right where you are if you just call on the name of the Lord. If you are saved, do tell us, and let us know so that we can rejoice and help you.

Don't be counting on tomorrow or even tonight, no man knoweth the day or the hour - and the reason for that is that we might be sure today, and be prepared today, 'er Christ should come before this night is even over. Father, we pray that there may not be one in this place gathered who is not in time. Lord, we pray that there would be none that would endure the wrath of God that will be poured out upon this planet. We pray that there'll be none that will lift up their eyes in the lake of fire, being in torment - for Lord, Thou hast given them every opportunity to trust the bleeding Lamb, and we pray that they will hide for refuge tonight from the wrath to come in His riven side, and be saved for time and for eternity to the glory of His name who is worthy, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - March 2003

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"Heaven And How To Get There"

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We're turning in our Bibles this evening to John's gospel - we have a few readings of the word of God - John's gospel and chapter 14. It is a passage of scripture where the Lord Jesus Christ is speaking - and we have learnt, I hope, after three nights of our mission thus far that we have to listen when the Lord Jesus speaks.

John chapter 14, and this is a passage where Jesus speaks on the subject that you've been hearing about just now, in the word in song, about His coming again and about the place that He wants to bring you and me to. Verse 1 of chapter 14: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me".

Then Revelation chapter 21, the last book of the Bible that speaks about the Lord's return, and indeed about the place called 'heaven'. Revelation 21 and reading at verse 1: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death".

Verse 22: "And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life".

Just three verses from chapter 22, verse 14: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie", verse 17, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely".

Let's bow our heads in a moment's prayer as we ask God's help. If you're a believer in this place this evening, you pray too that God may bless our effort in the gospel. Our Father, we thank Thee for the revelation, Thy

revelation to us, the word of God. Lord, we can know nothing about the hereafter, we can know nothing about Thee, or about salvation, or about the way to be saved, if it were not for Thy word. So Lord, we thank Thee for it. We know that it's sharper than a two-edged sword, it's like a hammer that breaks the broken heart. We pray this evening that Thy Spirit may come upon these pages, but more importantly that He may come upon the lives of them in this place that are without Christ - therefore without hope in this world, or in the world to come. We pray that time would break way to eternity this evening, and that the atmosphere of God may be able to be cut with a knife. Fill me, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

You can take an atlas down from the shelf at home and open it up, and you can even look down the index at the back, and you will see many beautiful places described - countries, places that you may feel are near to paradise, they are idyllic. It may be the tropical sands of the seashore, it may be the forests of the Amazon, it may be the mountains of the Alps, it may be the mountains of the Mournes. Many places on earth - luxurious, exotic resorts - and many of them, if we had a choice to live in a place, we would say: 'Well, I want to live there. I've been there on holiday', or 'I've seen photographs of it', or 'I saw a programme on the television about it, and if I could live anywhere I'd love to live there'.

But I'm sure that none of us would say that we wanted to live there forever. Is that not true? There's no place on earth that I would want to live forever. Because, you see, the problem with no matter what part of the world you go to, no matter how beautiful it is, the problem is that we can never change what's in our hearts and we can never, fundamentally, change the environment that surrounds us. No matter what place we go to on God's earth we find what the Bible calls 'sin', we find lawlessness, crime, abuse, addictions, selfishness. We find these awful things that mar the beautiful creation no matter where we go.

But the Bible says that there is a place, that there is a country, where there is no crime, where there is no violence, where there is no sickness, no sadness, no more tears. A country where there are no more heartaches, no more pain or death or burdens, free from war, free from bloodshed. There's no rich, there's no poor, there's no bond, there's no prison. People never grow tired, never grow old. No-one ever says: 'Goodbye' there. There are no disappointments there, no failures, no wrong, no accidents. You can travel for miles along its roads and you'll never encounter a funeral procession, you'll never find a cemetery, you'll never find a hospital or a doctor or a nurse. There's no chemists, there's no medicine, because there's no-one sick! There's no drunkards, no rapists, no terrorists or child-abusers. There's no broken homes, there's no death. No dumb people, no blind, disabled, homeless. What a place!

My friend, you better believe it this evening: this place is as real, if not more real than, Kilkeel. This is what the word of God calls 'heaven'. You might say: 'Well, that's all rubbish, isn't it? It's all in your head, preacher. It's all out of that little book that you read too much of - and it's beginning to confuse you, and you're believing in pie in the sky when you die. That's not what I want. I want reality - this thing that you talk about, 'heaven', that's just to salve the problems that you have in your life. It's just to give you some kind of hope that all down here that you're living in, that it's all going to be worth all the pain, all the stress and the sickness and the problems - that there's something, some light of the end of the tunnel. You're just deluding yourself!'

Can you prove to me that there's no heaven? Can you? The Bible says that eye has not seen, nor ear ever heard in the human race, neither has it entered into the heart of man - we cannot conceive, the word of God says, what He has prepared for them that love Him. Heaven! A place of perfection, a place of satisfaction, a place - praise God - where there will be no more sin at all!

'How do you know there's a heaven?', you say. I'll give you a couple of reasons. First of all: the human soul has always longed for such a place. If you look into the history books, and you can go 3000 years BC and look at the Egyptian race - and they were wrong in their perception of heaven, but they believed in an

afterlife even way back then. Right from the beginning of time men have always looked to a better land called 'heaven'. Secondly: the human soul has always felt that there is such a place. Now, you can deny it, and you can tell me - I'll not believe you - but you can tell me that you have no desire of a place called heaven, neither do you feel it in your own soul - but I'm telling you, you do. Every day of your life you yearn for something better - that's heaven.

It's like the wee lad who was flying the kite out on a cloudy day, and he lost the kite behind the clouds and he couldn't see where it was - but he could feel that it was there, because it was tugging, the wind was pulling it. You know what I'm talking about - you maybe wouldn't admit about believing it, but you know there's a tug on your heart that there must be something more to this life, there must be something at the end of it all worth living for and toiling for. We must have a purpose down here - you're right!

Thirdly: the human soul needs such a place. You're right in asking the question: 'Is it worth it all?', for some of you have it far tougher than I'll ever have, some of you have gone through things that I could never enter into - problems in your home, and family, and business, and all sorts of things that you probably couldn't even share with people here. Oh, it has to be worth it all somehow - the human soul needs a place at the end of it all, that it will be worth it all!

Fourthly: justice demands a place called 'heaven', because there's been people like me and the Pastor who have preached the Gospel and have lost their heads for it. There are people in Eastern Europe at this moment, and in China, who believe what I believe in the word of God - and they're being tortured for it! Some of them are being crucified upside-down, and why would they do it if there wasn't a place called heaven, if they didn't know that they would go to a place where everything would be fine and God would be there?

Fifthly, and this is the most important, listen to this one: God says there's a heaven, and Jesus Christ said it too. Now, I've asked this question night after night and I still haven't got an answer, but yet nobody's got saved - it surprises me, that one. None of you will say that Christ was a liar, none of you! None of you are saying that He's a lunatic. When He said: 'I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go I will come again and receive you unto myself' - you must believe what He said, because none of you have denied it, none of you have questioned me at the door, yet none of you have got saved!

Jesus says there's a heaven, my friend, and I want to speak to you this evening on this subject of heaven: 'Heaven And How to Get There'. You ask me: 'What's heaven like?'. In John chapter 14, that we read, the Lord Jesus described heaven, first of all, as a home. Now what conjures up into your mind when you think of a home? Maybe it's good memories, memories of Daddy and Mummy and your brothers and sisters together as a family, before they were all broken up. Memories of the good old days, memories of family times, happy round the fire on a Sunday night or something like that. Good memories, around the meal table, of home.

Maybe home hasn't such a good memory for you - home meant a father chucking over the step, drunk. Home meant a mother being beaten, maybe it was you beaten or abused. Home, oh to think of home, an awful picture! You dreamt as a wee child what you would love a home to have been. Well, Jesus says this: that this place heaven is such a home, a home that you could ever want - a home of good memories, a home of good things, a home that is permanent. So many homes in these days are not permanent, they're broken, and children don't know who their real father or mother is they swap around that many times! But this is a place, Jesus says, beyond and above all our imagination.

He said it's a home, He says it's a happy place. I don't know what storms you're going through this evening in your life, in your home, in your own mind and heart there's storms that are raging - and you know all about storms here. In the book of Revelation and chapter 21 we read this: that heaven is a place where there is no

more sea. You can't have a storm without the sea - there's no sea in heaven, there's no more storms, no more heartaches, no more problems, no more perplexities, no more distress, no more arguments, no more fights, no more break-ups, no more walk-outs, no more disasters! A place that is happy.

My friend, sea also speaks of separation. You can't get from here to Scotland because the sea separates us, we have to take a boat. Let me say this: heaven will be a happy place for me, because there's loved ones that have gone on before me and they're there. It'll be happy because I'll be reunited with them, I'll see them again - loved ones I loved long ago will be there! People ask the question: 'Well, will you know them when you get to heaven?' - of course you'll know them! Do you think you'll be dafter up in heaven than you are down here? We'll see them, and we'll be reunited with them!

Is there a vacant chair in your home? Is there a quiet voice? Is there someone that you have loved, and you have lost, and they've gone on to heaven? A mother, a father, a son, a daughter - and they've been saved? Or a little child that has gone to glory - God has taken it up in His arms at birth and brought it there? They are there waiting for you! But you will never be there. My friend, is there that separation? Will you miss them? Will they miss you? Are you like the missionary who, in India, lost her twins, and when she was laying them down to the ground - they died of diphtheria - she laid them down there and whispered to God: 'Only separated for a short time'. How long will you be separated? My friend, the word of God teaches this: that if we die in our sin, that if we die without Christ, if we do not know salvation, if we're not washed in His blood, if we've never repented of our sin - it says that we will have part in the lake of fire!

Oh, if you took a poll in Kilkeel today, most of them will believe in heaven - but few of them will believe in hell. We all like nice things, don't we? Of course we do, it's natural - but hell is real, my friend, hell is in the word of God. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself preached on hell, talked about hell, mentioned hell more than He did about heaven - because He wanted to warn people of the doom and the danger if they were damned!

Will you be separated in hell? The tragedy is this: that the word of God teaches about two men - one was a rich man and one was a pauper, Lazarus. They both died and it says that the rich man lifted up his eyes in hell, and Lazarus was taken into heaven. But it says that the rich man, when he was in hell, was able to see Lazarus in heaven! He was able to see Father Abraham, he could talk with him! And the hell for you, my friend, after this life - if you don't trust Christ - will be ten times the hell for you because you'll see that loved one in heaven! You'll not be able to talk with them, they'll not hear you, they'll not see you in your torture, they'll not hear your weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth! They'll not hear it, but you'll be able to see them in their glory, in their happiness, in their satisfaction - and you'll wish you could be there, but you can't!

Jesus says that it's not just a home, a happy place, but it's holy. He said in the book of Revelation: 'Nothing that defiles shall enter in' - that means sin. If you're a sinner - and you are a sinner because we're all sinners, who do you think you are? Do you think God made you on your own, and you're special, and you're some kind of perfect person, everybody's worse than you are? Come on! Waken up! We're all sinners, we've all done wrong, we've all made mistakes, we've all regrets - but Jesus says that nobody will get in there with a sin. The whoremonger sleeping around, the drunkard, the boozier, the gambler - all those sins, and the self-religious and self-righteous that think they're pious as a pope, they'll not get in either!

So how do you get in? Have you ever seen a dog chained to a pole? You know what I'm talking about, you go into the bank or into the Post Office when you're out for walk with the dog, and you tie it up. All of a sudden it sees you through the window, and it jumps at you but [the chain] catches it. You've seen that - but it's stupid, it jumps again, it keeps on jumping, thinks it can get at you because it can see you. We're all like that, aren't we? We're all jumping at heaven - and let's face it, who doesn't want to go to heaven? Everybody wants to go to heaven, and we'll all jump after it, we'll all strive after it - some will even live after it: deny themselves things, go to special places, join a special religion, become a nun or a priest or a minister just to

get to heaven! But no matter how much we pull after it, like the wee dog, there's something that keeps us back, and it's our sin.

My friend, a wee child on one occasion said this: 'Heaven is where you get everything you want, but if you want everything you'll not get there'. There was a rich man, a young rich man, came to Jesus and said: 'Look, how can I inherit eternal life?' - do you know what he was saying? What you're maybe saying: 'How can I get to heaven?'. Jesus said: 'Well, have you kept the commandments?'. 'Oh, yes, I'm a good religious fellow you know. I kept the commandments'. But Jesus knowing his heart - and Jesus Christ knows your heart this evening, He knows what sin will keep you out of heaven - Jesus said: 'Well, what I want you to do now is to sell all your goods, everything that you have, give them to the poor, and come and follow Me'. The Bible says that that man looked very very sad because he was very very rich.

You see salvation is free, my friend, in one sense: that Jesus Christ at the cross has done all that is needed to be done for you to go to heaven and to be saved - but it costs you your life. You've got to give everything, you've got to forsake your sin, and you've got to throw yourself into the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ - and the big problem that stops us getting to heaven is our sin. Just as the devil needs all of you to take you to hell, Jesus needs all of you to take you to heaven.

Our world today says that, 'Just like all roads lead to Rome' - remember they used to say that? - 'all roads lead to God. All roads lead to heaven, and as long as you're sincere, as long as you have some kind of god, and that you're moral and you live to love your neighbour and to do your best - how could God close you out of heaven when you die and get to the pearly gates?'. That's what the world says, but do you know what God says? Do you know what Jesus said? 'I am the way, the truth, and the life - no man, or woman, comes to the Father, gets to heaven, but by me'. There is one road to heaven, and it's the way of the cross. The wee hymn says:

'The way of the cross leads home,
The way of the cross leads home'.

Another hymn says:

'On the golden streets of heaven,
All men hope to walk some day' - of course they do!
'But so many are not willing
To accept the living way.
And while others stand on good works
and opinions as they may:
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
I'm depending on the blood'.

You see when Jesus was hanging on that tree at Calvary, and when His blood was dripping down to the ground. When men were crying to Him: 'Ach, look at You! You saved others, Yourself You cannot save! Why don't You get down and save Yourself if You are who You say You are?'. Do you know why He didn't come down, my friend? Listen: because He wanted you in heaven. He wanted you never to look at a corpse again, He wanted you never to shed a tear again, never to have another doctor's appointment again, never to have another heartache, never to have another sleepless night! He wanted you over there with Himself in the glory of His glorious being and light. So He endured the cross, He endured your shame and your sin, and the punishment that God poured on Him there instead of pouring it upon you in hell - He took it all! Why? The children's chorus puts it well:

'Jesus loves me, this I know
For the Bible tells me so'.

He did it because He loves you. What kind of a man are you that could spurn a love like that? What kind of a mother are you? You would give your child everything, but when the nail-pierced hand of the Saviour is knocking on your door you would shut it in His face - yet He loved you enough to bleed and to die for you! You can be sure, if you reject Him, you'll never be in heaven.

There was a little negro boy lying on his deathbed in the mission field, and he had a longing desire to go to be with the Lord Jesus. He looked into the eyes of his Sunday School teacher, the missionary, and he said: 'I'm going soon to heaven, and then I'll be with Jesus forever'. The missionary wanted to question little boy - I don't know why, but he said: 'What if Jesus were to leave heaven? What would you do?'. He said: 'Oh, I would follow Him'. The missionary said: 'What if Jesus were to go into hell? What would you do?'. That wee negro boy was smarter than that Sunday School teacher, and he said: 'Sir, where Jesus is there is no hell'.

Let us bow our heads. I believe God has been speaking to your heart sir, madam, young man, young woman. Maybe it's because there's someone there that you love, and you'll never see them again. Maybe it's because you know that you've shut Jesus Christ out too many times. Maybe it's because you're going through the toil of life down here on the earth, and you want something better at the end of it all. My friend, you need to trust the Saviour. You can do it now where you sit, you can pray to God silently and say: 'Lord, I am a sinner. I repent, I turn away from my sin and turn to Thee. I know that Jesus died for me, and that His blood can cleanse me from all my sin. Lord, save me and take me to heaven one day. I give You my life, in Jesus' name. Amen'.

Now let me say that, if God has spoken to your heart this evening, I will be at the door - and if you have trusted the Lord you need to tell me, you need to tell someone. The Lord says we need to confess with our mouth. If you want to talk to me I'll be at the door. Now listen: God is talking to some one of you tonight - talk to me! Get this thing settled and put to bed - make sure, my dear friend, that you're going to heaven.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2001

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"Identifying The Sheep Of God"

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Now we're turning to the word of God, to John chapter 10, for our reading - quite a long reading this evening from John chapter 10. I want to speak to you later on identifying God's sheep. What are the marks of a sheep, or a child, of God? There's great confusion in the days in which we live over what, or who, is a child of God, and what are the attributes of one. How do you recognise one? Well, God doesn't miss the mark when He tells us, specifically, how to recognise one of His children - it's very clear in the word of God, but some of us, at times, can miss it.

We'll read the majority of chapter 10 of John. These are the words of the Lord Jesus: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father. There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind? And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him".

And we know that the Lord will bless the reading of His truth. Let's pray to the Lord and seek His face, and let us pray - if you're a believer in this meeting - let's seek God's face together that He may speak to those who, perhaps, think they're God's sheep, but they're not; to those who want to be God's sheep, but don't know how. Let's pray that the Lord may come by His Spirit and speak to us all.

Our Father, we bow before Thee and we thank Thee for the confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ that can say: 'I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my

skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God'. Our Father, we thank Thee that in the Lord Jesus Christ we have life, and we have eternal life. As Thy word tells us, through His death, through His resurrection, through His ascension, and through His intercession at this moment for us, we have salvation. We are saved in Christ. Our Father, we thank You that we can not only be told that we are saved, but we can know for sure, within us, a witness that we are saved. Lord, we thank You that by faith alone in Christ alone we are saved. We thank You, our Father, that we are justified, and being justified by that faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You that, because we are Thy children, the Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. We bless Thee tonight Lord, and praise Thee for that blessed assurance that Jesus is mine. We thank You that we are persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, or powers, or things present, or things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Lord, this is a great salvation, it is a sure salvation - but, Lord, it is our prayer tonight that the unregenerate sinners in our gathering may behold what Jesus the Saviour has done for them. Lord, by Your Spirit, that You would show them how He suffered for them, how He was forsaken, the Son of God died in their place a substitutionary death for wicked sinners. Lord, that they would see how the King of Heaven condescended in love to this earth to be a sacrifice for sins forever. Lord, that You would open their eyes to see how He prayed, hanging on the cross: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'. There He hung under the burden of sin, under the burden of shame, under the guilt of the wrath of God that was laid upon Him, that we might be called the sons of God, and that we might be made heirs to His throne. Lord, we thank You that He won our victory, we thank You that He made an end of all our sin and shame. We just pray tonight, our Father, that You would show that and reveal that by Your Spirit to those who are backslidden, to those who are not saved and outside of Christ. We say: glory be to Jesus for our great salvation, but we pray that it would be seen simply by them - and, Lord, that You would give them the grace to receive Christ. Lord, let us know the nearness of Your presence, and the fullness of Thy power - for Thine, oh Lord, is the greatness and the power, and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is Thine. Thine is the kingdom, oh Lord, and Thou art exalted as head above all. Amen.

Now I want to read two verses, just two, from this passage of Scripture. It's a great passage of Scripture, so many wonderful eternal truths within it, and we won't have time to look at them all. But what I do want to do tonight is study the word of God, be a bit different this evening, for the simple purpose that I really do want to make these things clear in your minds - especially to some of the young people, but not just to some of the young people.

Now, I know we don't believe in chance - but the chances are, through probability, that in this gathering not everyone who thinks they're saved are saved. Now don't ask me how I get to that statistic, but by reading the word of God I read that there are those, and will be those, in the last days who believe that they are right with God, but the tragedy will dawn on them that they are not. What I never want to happen is that someone who was a member, or a child, or a friend, of the Iron Hall should be one of those individuals. You say: 'It can't be me!' - well, the very people that do say that are the ones who have to beware. In recent days I've counselled folk, good Christian folk, who were in tears - worried that they would go to hell. There was no chance of them going to hell, they were as saved as Paul the apostle - I could see that, and everybody else could see that. The thing about it is: the people that don't see it who are the people that need to worry, those that never question their salvation, that just assume that everything is okay.

Now let's look at these two verses tonight, verse 27 and verse 28 - how we are to identify the sheep of God. "My sheep", the Lord Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand". The plan of salvation is a wonderful thing, and it's outlined within this chapter - John chapter 10 - in a way that, perhaps, it's not outlined anywhere in the whole of the word of God. God's plan, after the fall of man in the garden of Eden, was to save a people, a believing people, for Himself out of every nation, and tongue,

and tribe, and people. We find that at the very end of the book, we look at the back of the book and we find that that was the purpose - that the Lord Jesus Christ would have worship from every people, every tribe, and every tongue, washed and bought by the blood of the Lord Jesus.

That was the plan, that was the purpose, and verse 16 tells us that if you look at it. The Lord said, speaking to Jews now: "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring". There are other sheep, other people who will believe out of every other tribe, and nation, and tongue. It's not just for the Jews, but this gospel is for the whole of the world, and they will believe. We call that group of people the 'church' - it's not a building, it's not an establishment or an institution or a denomination, but the Greek word is 'ecclesia' which means 'to call out'. That is the plan, that God should call out from a dying, damned world a people to glorify His name, and a people that He can conform to be like His Son.

Isaiah 53 verse 6 tells us that: 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Christ the iniquity of us all'. In the way in which we have all gone astray, that call of the Gospel goes out to all - but sadly not all come. In verse 3 we find out that it's only His sheep that hear His voice - He calls His own sheep by name and He leads them out. In other words, if I can illustrate it like this: whatever calls people to Buddhism, or to Islam, or to Roman Catholicism, it is not the Lord Jesus Christ. He calls His own sheep, He only calls His own - He doesn't borrow sheep, He doesn't proselytise sheep, He doesn't say: 'Well, I know they're Buddhists, I know they're Islamic, I know they're Roman Catholic, I know they're Mormon or Jehovah's Witness - but I'll just, by My grace, stamp the word 'Jesus' on their head and they can be Christian. I'll take them all in under My wing' - no! He only calls His sheep, people - sheep - who will take the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's clear from this passage because He says anyone who tries to get into the kingdom another way is an impostor. We looked at that great verse, verse 5, in weeks gone by: they don't follow a stranger. Verse 9: they go in through the door that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 10: anybody else who doesn't go in through the Lord Jesus is a thief and a robber. So you see this: He only calls His own sheep, and His own sheep will never follow a stranger for they do not know a stranger's voice. That is the plan: that that great people, His sheep, should be called out of a dying, sinful world.

Now what is the way? The way is verse 9, look at it: "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture". That is the way, one way: 'I am the door, and the only door'. What is the means? He is the way, that was the plan, but what is the means? Verse 11: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep". Verse 18: "No man taketh [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again". The death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is the means to bring those sheep, to cleanse those sheep, to give those sheep eternal life, and eventually - in our resurrection - to take those sheep to glory when the church will go to be with Christ forever. That's the plan, that's the way, and that's the means.

Now, let's narrow it down. What does that mean? It means this, verse 14: "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine". It means you can't fool Him. You can't fool Him! He knows His sheep, He knows them that are His. Not only does it say that, but His sheep know that they are His - there's a double knowledge. He knows that you're His child, and you know that you are His child. There's no bluffing, there's no being saved without knowing it or realising it - it's a total impossibility! There's a great answer to pluralism that we find in our politically correct society, where everybody's saved as long as they're sincere, and we can't say there's only one God, and only one way, and only one plan, and only one means - well, look at verse 16. The Lord Jesus, who never lied: "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" - one flock and one Saviour!

Now, the plan and the way and the means bring an awful accusation against humanity. It's found in verse 25 where the Pharisees came to the Lord Jesus after hearing what we have just heard from the lips of God incarnate: "Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you". What an awful accusation! "Why do you not believe? I've told you all this, this is the truth. You've seen the works that I've done, you know the prophecies of the Old Testament, yet you still haven't believed! Why do you not believe? You're not my sheep".

Now that tells us very clearly the qualifications of being a sheep of the Lord Jesus Christ - what is it? Belief - 'Because ye have not believed, ye are not my sheep'. Now the natural response of many folk that grow up in Christian homes, and frequent Christian establishments, is: 'I understand that message, I believe, I believe it! I know that Jesus came, and I know that He died and rose again, and I believe it all'. When we were at the conference there was one of the speakers who said he came from the Bible Belt in the Southern states of America - he called it the buckle of the Bible Belt, it was so much of the Bible Belt. He says there that everybody is saved - everybody! Of course he wasn't being literal, he was saying everybody thinks they're saved because somehow they have a connection to a preacher, or to a missionary, or to a family member that is saved.

Is that not a problem that we have, perhaps, in our society today? It's a problem of belief, but there is nothing but belief! The problem with belief alone is found in James chapter 2 and verse 19, where James says this, listen: 'Thou believest that there is one God; you do well: because the devils also believe, and they tremble'. That means believing something alone does not save you! That's a shattering verse of scripture, in fact it made Martin Luther himself quake and think, perhaps, that James wasn't right in some way - but he is right! This is the word of God! Faith alone, without any evidence in your life of salvation, is not true faith.

Now, let's look at the relevance of a message such as this, and I'm going to do my best to get through it tonight because I think it's so important. What is the relevance of preaching something like this? Well, as so many people have said - and I've said it from this pulpit and others - most believer's children make professions and decisions at some stage in their lifetime. Don't get me wrong, I work with children every summer and I don't minimise the value and the beauty of a child, in simple faith, trusting Christ - it's a beautiful, beautiful thing. But let me say this: one of the greatest tragedies, perhaps, of Christendom is for parents of children who make decisions to cement that decision in the child's mind when there is no evidence in the child's life. Now, we do that, and it's natural - it's a natural affection. You want your child to be saved, so you hope that that decision they made was a genuine decision - but you look at your child's life and there is absolutely no sign of the life of Christ in them!

What many parents do is they reassure that child: 'But you prayed that prayer, and you came in simple faith to the Lord Jesus' - and perhaps that child has got it into their mind, and many people in East Belfast have, for the rest of their days: 'I said that prayer, I made that decision, and when I get before God everything will be alright'. Now, that's the relevance of this message. I believe, parents - just on a side issue - that what you should be doing is looking for evidence of salvation in your child's life and, if it is not there, telling your child: 'You know, there's very little in your life to tell me or anybody that you're saved - are you sure?'. You should be questioning it for their sake, for their eternity!

Secondly, there is unrepentant faith. To put it bluntly, that means no changed life. I spoke to a lady in the past couple of weeks, and her husband died of cancer six years ago. As he was on his deathbed it was found - he said, at least - that he trusted the Lord. You know, the family was ecstatic, they were over the moon! His wife really wanted to believe it was so, and she still doesn't know whether to believe it or not. But she said this to me in confidence: 'David, you know I left my Bible at the side of our bed in his last days, I left it sitting there, and I even left it open. I know for a fact that it had never been read, and I just wonder was a

work of grace really done in his heart?'. I'm not making an announcement about whether that man was born again or not, no-one knows but God - but what I want to bring to you is that woman's spiritual discernment to realise that there has to be a changed life. There has to be a desire after God, there has to be a repentance to know that a man or a woman has been born again.

First of all there is that decision, perhaps, as a child that has come to nothing. Secondly there is the unrepentant faith. Thirdly there is unbiblical backsliding. I was just thinking as I was sitting here, now maybe you can correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't believe that the word 'backslide' appears in the New Testament. It appears in the Old Testament, but it doesn't appear in the New. Now, I'm not saying there's no such thing, but I'm saying this: that I don't find in the New Testament a believer who can be happy and content in a life of constant sin - it doesn't exist. If it doesn't exist, and you're living it, you need to ask some very serious questions.

It's interesting to note that in Palestine it was very difficult to tell the difference between sheep and goats. They looked the same. Only the trained eye can tell the difference between them, and that's nearly what this passage is about: telling us how to know the difference between a sheep of Christ and a goat. Now, there's three things from these two verses, verse 27 and 28, that I want you to look at - and we'll be looking at other Scriptures as well.

First thing: if you're a sheep of Christ you hear Christ's voice. Verse 27: 'My sheep hear my voice' - you can't get any more categorical than that! Now don't be thinking that you need to hear the Lord Jesus speak in His human voice in your ear, or you need to hear an audible voice in your head or something like that - that is not what the word of God is talking about. It's talking about what we find in Romans chapter 10, where it says: 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved', and then we find, 'How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace'. What is that saying? It's saying this: that the voice of God is heard in the word of God, through the gospel of God. If you're one of Christ's sheep you hear His voice - you've heard it! You've heard it in the Gospel, you've heard it specifically to you, but it's more than just hearing it - the actual word, literally, is 'you listened to it'. Listening to something anticipates a response, you're engaging intellectual and spiritually with the truth that you are understanding.

That is what we find here, and the response that we find in John chapter 10 is in verse 26: you believe! There is a response of belief. John Calvin, the great reformer, said this: 'Christ thinks nothing of those who will not obey the gospel'. That's what the Lord is looking for! Belief! He wants you to hear His voice in the word of God, to hear the Gospel of God, and say: 'I believe' and step out in faith. Doesn't Peter say: 'What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?'. But you know, it's not only that initial step of belief in the gospel, but I believe it's a love for God's word. You see, once you're saved you don't just set your Bible underneath the television and let the dust gather on it. You hear some people say: 'I don't get anything out of the Bible', and they've no desire to read the word of God. I would have to say that they are not hearing His voice, they don't want to hear His voice! If you don't have a desire for the word of God and to be where the word of God is preached, I would have to put a question mark - according to the word of God - over your salvation!

It's the gospel call, it's the love for the word of God, and do you know what else it is? In antithesis it is not listening to strangers, not listening to false teachers. It says in this passage they'll not follow a stranger, His sheep. It says in 1 John chapter 4 verse 5, those who do follow false teachers '...are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them'. There's no freelancers in this sheepfold, there's no people out on their own. They listen to the word of God, they listen to the church of God, they dwell among the people of God, they are God's sheep. The miraculous thing about it is this: He knows who they are! He

knows! 'They hear my voice, and I know them' - but the powerful thing that I want you to know tonight is verse 14 of chapter 10: 'I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine', you can know too! That's where I want to get you this evening: to know that you are one of the sheep of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But that's the first thing: you have to hear Christ's voice. Secondly: 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me'. Early Christianity, we find this in the book of Acts, was called 'The Way' - the way. You remember Jesus, the Lord said: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me'. They got that nickname 'The Way', because they preached the way to God, and the only way, the one door to God's Throne and God's presence - and that way was the way of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. But that way was another way, elaborated on by the Lord Jesus - Mark 8:34: 'Whosoever will come after me', follow after me, 'let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me'. It is the way of the cross.

Now I want you to turn with me to 1 John, and we're going to read quite a wee bit here from it because this is an epistle, and the message of the epistle is the message that I'm preaching tonight. So don't think that this is something I got from America, or something I've learned recently, this is from the word of God. First John chapter 2 and verses 3 to 5, now as you read these verses ask yourself: 'Do these apply to me?'. Wait till I get the right book! First John chapter 2 and verses 3 to 5: "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him". Can you get any clearer than that? You follow Him, and if you're not following Him you're not of Him! It's very simple, it's very clear in the word of God. If you look at verse 15: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" - he doesn't love the world, neither the things that are in the world.

Chapter 3 and verse 4: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him"! If you are living a life of sin you're not saved! A continual, abiding abundance of transgression and you are comfortable within it - the word of God says that you cannot be saved! Chapter 4 and verse 8 and 9, if you've a problem loving other people, you're a bitter person, a hateful person: "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him". Do you know what he's saying? You see if you've been to the cross of Christ and been saved by grace, you'll not be a bitter person, you'll not be a wizened-up, wicked soul! You cannot be! If the grace of God has penetrated your life that is what will happen to you, the love of God - for God is love - will go right through you.

Here's the thing: 'David, you're saying you have to be perfect' - no I'm not. I sin regularly, but I hate my sin, and I hope that I do what I can by the Spirit of God not to fall into sin. There is no such thing as perfection until we get to glory, but what I am saying here is: if you love your sin, if you live in your sin, and if you are content with your sin - you are not a child of God! I'm not preaching 'saved and lost', that you have to keep up the momentum in your spiritual life, that you can't go down a bit, or be depressed, or be spiritually dejected - but I'm saying this: that there is something wrong if that is your constant state, if you fail to show fruit for Christ on a daily basis, if you do not follow Christ's way, or have no desire to follow Him. If you are in conscious sin, or continual disobedience, you can't be saved! The proof of conversion is not a list of statements that you prayed as a child, or doctrines that you've nodded to in agreement at, but the proof of conversion is a life radically changed for Jesus!

It's the message of James. You say: 'Don't we believe in the doctrine of faith alone - sola fide? From the Reformation, that's what we believe - not by works lest any man should boast'. Well, I believe that too, and

that's what the word of God teaches, but do you know what James says? If you turn to it quickly, James chapter 2 and verse 14 - now note this, young people: 'What does it profit, my brothers, though a man say he has faith, and have not works? Can that faith save him?'. What James is saying is that faith is not faith at all, for the faith that saves has works with it. You're not saved by faith but verse 17, look at it: 'Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone'. Faith without works is dead! Faith without works is not faith at all! As one of the reformers said: 'Faith alone saves, but that faith is not alone!'. Faith alone in Jesus Christ the Lord will save you, but if you have that faith it will not be on its own, it will not be without works! The works don't save you, but it's a package that comes together - and if you don't have the works you don't have the faith!

If I can illustrate it to you: saving faith is like accepting the head of a family, the father, into your home to stay there - and a couple of days later the neighbours are walking down the road and they see the children playing in the garden. They know that the father has taken up residence in that home - that's what works is like. When they see the works in the front garden of your life, it doesn't save you, but it's proof that that saving work of faith has taken residence within your heart. The fruit will be seen in your life because the head of the family, faith, is there. The Lord Jesus said, didn't He, that every tree is known by its fruit.

First you hear His voice. Secondly you will follow Christ's way, and thirdly and finally: you will possess Christ's life. 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand'. You possess the life of Christ! Eternal life! Life, life, eternal life! It doesn't say 'I will give it to them', it's the present tense, a present possession: 'I have given now!' That's why in John 10:10 He says: 'I have come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly'. That's why John chapter 1 and verse 12 says: 'As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, to them that believe on his name'. That's what it's about: that when you believe, you receive the eternal life of God, and that eternal life will be shown in the fruit of the Spirit.

In 1 John 1 verse 4 we read this: 'These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full'. How is your joy full? Do you know how your joy is full? In the knowledge of salvation! In the knowledge that you possess as a present possession, God's rich salvation! Do you have it? Do you hear His voice? Are you following in His ways? Are you living a holy life, trying to be pleasing in the Spirit to Him? Have you the joy of the Lord in your soul because of the work of Christ done within you, because of His efficacy at the cross? 'I give to them eternal life, and they shall never perish' - security! Never perish! Not 'safe in your fruit', but 'safe in Christ's hand' - no-one will pluck you out of His hand! You're safe!

If that's not enough, you're not only in Christ's hand but you're in the Father's hand - and imagine, the Father who is omnipotent holds you in His hand if you're saved. You know, that was the purpose of 1 John, the book, that was the purpose of John's gospel - what was the purpose? The purpose of this message tonight: 'These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that you might know that you have eternal life, and that you might believe on the name of the Son of God'. The purpose of John's gospel: 'These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name'. Do you hear His voice? Are you following Him? Do you have, as a present possession, eternal life and security in Him? Have you believed?

Let me finish with this story. In a Highland village there was a shepherd, and the shepherd had a little daughter. He would take his little daughter when going across the moors to tend and fold the sheep, and most of all the young girl loved going with him to hear her father call the sheep, and watch the sheep follow him into their fold. The shepherd would cry, and sounding free and beautiful down the wind and over the moors was that cry that the sheep reacted to. By and by that little girl grew up to be a beautiful young woman, and

she went off to the city of Edinburgh. At first her letters to her father were regular and frequent, every week. Then eventually the intervals came between them, and they grew longer, and finally they ceased altogether. The rumour circulated that little Highland town that the shepherd's daughter was seen in bad company and in questionable places. One day a lad from the village told how he'd gone down to Edinburgh, and he had met the girl and she had totally ignored him. Hearing that, the shepherd was so annoyed that he put on all his shepherd clothes, and he packed a case. He went to Edinburgh, with his staff in his hand, to seek and find the lost daughter. Day after day he sought her in the avenues and in the slums, but all in vain. Then one day he remembered how his daughter loved to hear him give the shepherd's call, and this time he went out as usual in sorrow, but he sounded his cry loud and free among the streets. You can imagine the passers-by turning in astonishment to hear such a sound, and to see such a sight - a shepherd in the middle of the metropolis! At last, at last, in a house in a degraded street of Edinburgh city, his daughter - sitting in a room with her lost, depraved companions - suddenly looked up with astonishment in her face, why? There was no doubt about it, it was her father's voice, it was the shepherd's call. Flinging wide the front door she rushed into the street, and her father took her in his arms and carried her to her Highland home.

What happened? She heard, she followed, and she was safe. Do you hear? Will you follow? Will you be saved and be sure?

Now let us bow our heads, and we're just taking one or two moments to set these things straight. You're here tonight, you've grown up in a Christian home, let me ask you a question: if you could just transport your life into a non-Christian home that you were born in, would there be much difference with the way it is tonight? Would your life change in anyway? Apart from going to church, and going to Sunday School, and having a bit of a knowledge of the word of God. Have you heard His voice? Are you following Him presently? And are you assured of salvation?

Backslider, you're in a very precarious situation, because no-one can tell you that you are saved - you don't know it if you're living in sin! Older believer, cold in the faith, lost your joy and nobody knows about it: are you sure that you're in the household of faith? May we all, tonight, work out our salvation with fear and trembling. I'll be free to speak to anyone tonight after the meeting.

Father, we thank Thee that this salvation is sure, that it doesn't depend upon our works. We thank Thee that it is by faith alone, for the grace of God has been revealed to men through our Lord Jesus and His cross - but yet, Lord, that faith is not alone: it's so great that it brings with it a transformed life, that we are new creatures in Christ Jesus. Lord, we cannot have the faith without the new creation. We pray that those who, Lord, are trying to hoodwink Thee, or dupe themselves, or going on a wing and a prayer hoping that it'll be alright on the last day, and that they'll have done what's needed - Lord show them their awful condition, and impart saving faith to them this evening, in the blessed name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - April 2001

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"Liar, Lunatic Or Lord?"

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I would like you to open your Bibles at the reading that was given first in Matthew chapter 25 - or sorry Matthew 22 even - better preach from the right passage! Matthew chapter 22 and verse 42 and we read these verses again. Now there's a wee note here for me, a wee envelope and it says that there has been a ring found up in the balcony and the ring is in here, so if any of you 'fellas' have any ideas - you can come and get it later and get on [your] knees, but there we are...Matthew 22 and verse 41: "While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither dared any man from that day forth ask him any more questions."

Let's bow our heads, just for a moment, in a word of prayer: Our Father in heaven we come before Thee this evening and we thank Thee for what has gone before: for the beautiful songs of praise, and worship, and adoration. But our Father we thank Thee more for the Person that we have been singing them to - the Lord Jesus Christ. And our Father we pray this evening that as Thy word is preached that He would be seen, and that as He is seen men and women, boys and girls, teenagers may be drawn unto Him. Lord we need Thy help this evening, we pray for Thy Spirit in power, that He would be here to do the work that only He can do, for we ask all these things in Jesus name, Amen.

I want to ask you the question that is posed in this passage before us this evening, and it's found in verse 42. It's a question that the Lord Jesus asked of the people who He was speaking to in this passage. But we would be foolish to think that He only asked it of these people He was speaking to. Because we today have the word of God, we have the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and it's not just applicable to the people who it was originally written to, but we believe - as is true - it's also applicable to us tonight in 1998. This question therefore that the Lord Jesus asked these disciples, He did not simply ask them the question, but He is asking you this question tonight, and He is asking every person across the face of this green and blue earth this one question. It's almost as if no other question mattered, it's almost as if out of every question that the Lord Jesus Christ wanted to pose to planet earth, that this was the question that was foremost, this was the question that meant everything to Him. So in verse 42 He says these words: "What think ye of Christ?". What do you think about Jesus Christ? That's the question I want to ask you, whether you're young, middle aged, or old - no matter what age you are - that question is so relevant to you, what do you think about Jesus Christ? Not just what do you think about Him, but why do you think it?

Some people believe He was a prophet, some people believe He was a good man, Paul Daniels thinks He was a magician, some people see Him as a guru, the Muslims think of Him as a great teacher and preacher and prophet, some people think He was an imposter - the Jews thought He was an imposter, someone who was wanting to take worship and glory [for] Himself and worship and glory away from God. But what do you think? Not what have you been taught, not what do you hear at school, not what you have read in books, but what, after evaluating this whole person Jesus Christ, [after] thinking about Him, what He did, who He said He was, after all of that: who do you think He was?

You know there's a lot of people in the world today and they think a lot of things and they believe a lot of things, but they couldn't tell you a reason why they believe it. Sad to say tonight that Christians are often guilty of this, they believe things because they've been taught them, because their mother or father have

believed them, but they don't really deep-down know a reason why for the hope or the belief that is within them. That's my question to you tonight, what do you personally think about Jesus Christ? I'm going to give you the answer tonight because there are only three possibilities about who that person was - you see, He could only have been one of three possibilities. There is no sitting on the fence tonight, there's no way of getting out of these three categories, He either had to be one of them or He was non-existent. We know that He wasn't non-existent because there's more proof that the Lord Jesus Christ lived than there is that Julius Caesar lived - and we don't dispute his life, do we? We're sure - as sure as we can be about anybody in history - that Jesus Christ was a man, that Jesus Christ lived and that Jesus Christ died - and I am sure tonight, and we're all sure who are saved - that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

But I don't expect you to right off believe that right away. What are those three categories that I'm talking about tonight? Well they're these: first of all, Jesus was either a liar, He was a lunatic or He was Lord. Have you got those three? He was either a liar, in other words everything He taught, everything He was, everything He did, it was all a pack of lies. He was either a liar, or He was a lunatic, He believed everything He was saying, He believed it about Himself but He was mad, He was away in the head. And the only other alternative is this: that He was who He said He was.

Now you might think that this is a very contemporary issue or this is the real issue today about who Christ was - if you go down to NPO* or Easons* you'll see shelves of books about who Christ was. Some say that He had children and His grave can be found in France, some say that He was a prophet and a teacher but He had a family and He lived and died like any other man. There are so many stories about this man Jesus - who do we believe? Well don't think that this is a contemporary issue, don't think that this has just come out today, because the early Church, the first Christians that ever lived - right just after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ - they were faced with the same issue, in fact they came across this argument so much that they coined a phrase in Latin that went like this, it went "Out deios out homos mallos"(sp?). Now I don't know whether any of you do Latin, I did Latin but I can't remember any of it - but that means this: "Jesus was either God, or He was a bad man". Have you got that? Quite simple: Jesus was either God or He was a bad man, and they reasoned in their minds like this, and they said this: 'Jesus was either God - if He didn't lie of course - and if He did lie well, that makes Him what? It makes Him a bad man'. But they looked at Jesus' life, they looked at His words and His teaching and they thought to themselves, well Jesus obviously doesn't get on like a bad man, so that must mean that He is God.

*bookstores

You might say to me tonight, 'Well David, hold on a minute, that's quite simplistic reasoning there, you don't expect me to accept that?' - well you're right, I don't. But I want you to bear with me for just a few moments tonight, and to listen - don't just put a barrier up to what I'm saying, consider what I'm saying, listen and see if these things are so. I'm sure there are few people here tonight who would say that the Lord Jesus Christ was not a good man, I'm sure there is no-one perhaps, maybe there is one, but most of us would believe that Jesus did good things, He said good things, He taught good things, He lived a good life - in fact many say that He lived a perfect life as a man. And that is true, you read in the Gospels, but you read it in other historical records, that the Lord Jesus Christ went about doing good, He healed the sick, He preached freedom to the captives. Some see Him as a revolutionary, some see Him as a person who helped the poor, who healed the sick. But I want to make something very clear this evening, and it's this: that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself did not claim to be a good man. Now take that in this evening, Jesus never ever claimed to be a good man, but in the Scriptures, in the New Testament we find another claim - we find that this man, Jesus, Jesus Himself claimed to be God. Have you got that? He didn't say He was a good man, He didn't say He was just a prophet, He didn't say He was a guru, He never claimed to be a magician or a rabbi - Jesus Christ claimed to be God.

You remember on one occasion they came to Him and they called Him good, and He said to them: 'Listen, there is none good but God'. And when they looked at the Lord Jesus Christ of course they could see that He

was good, so what was He saying? He was saying 'I am God, there's no man alone that is good, but I am the God-man, I am God incarnate'. Sure even the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ, they came to Him on one occasion and they accused Him of blasphemy. What did they say? They said: 'We will stone you!' and they bent over, as it were, to pick up stones and throw them at Him - and their reason for doing it was this, they said: "For thou being a man makest thyself God".

I hope you're not going to tell me tonight that the Bible doesn't try to tell the story of this man Jesus being God - because it clearly does. But I want you to think for just a moment here, because if Jesus claimed to be God - now listen - if He claimed to be God and He was not God, He could never be described as a good man. Do you believe that Jesus was a good man? You can't! If you don't [believe He was] God, you cannot believe that He was a good man, because it only makes Him a liar if He was not who He said He was. It makes that possibility eradicated - He could not be a good man if He was a man who lived a total lie from His birth to His death. You could never describe a liar as a good man.

Of course it's fashionable today to say that Jesus was only a good man. You go to our universities, many of them, you read academic books, sometimes theological books and those books tell us that Jesus was a good man. Do you know why they say that? Well, they don't want to offend Christians. Yet they don't say that Jesus was God, because if they claim that Jesus was God well, that would offend everyone who wasn't a Christian. So what they do is they say neither and they think that that offends no-one. But do you know what the truth is tonight? And we are only interested in truth - the truth is that by doing that and by claiming nothing about Christ, they offend not Christians, or non-Christians but they offend pure common sense and logic! Now I have more faith in you tonight than the academics do, and I want you this evening young person, older person to think about these issues in your own mind. Jesus could not be described as a good man if He said He was something that He was not.

You might say, 'Well I don't think He is a liar now, David. You can't push me that far to say that He was a liar. He maybe wasn't a bad man, perhaps...perhaps He actually believed what He was saying about Himself, perhaps He really - deep-down in His heart, in His mind - He really believed that He was God?' Well you're right in a way, well that wouldn't make Him morally bad. It wouldn't make Him morally bad, because it would mean He didn't really know what He was doing, He didn't know that He was lying. But listen, if it doesn't make Him morally bad, do you know what it does? It makes Him mentally bad, why? Because He would have deceived Himself, He would have conned Himself into thinking that He was God on earth, that He was something that He was not. Not only would He have conned Himself, but He would have conned thousands of people to follow a madman - to follow a lunatic.

Was He a liar? Well you can't trust a liar, sure you can't? I'm sure you can conjure up in your mind a few liars that you know, you couldn't trust them could you? Well let me ask you: could you trust a lunatic anymore than a liar? You couldn't, you can't trust a liar, you can't trust a lunatic. Now listen: you can only have one of these three, there's no outside of it, and you can't sit in between, you can't sit here tonight, it's too big an issue to just sit here tonight and say, 'Well I'm not sure David. Well I don't know, I haven't made my mind up and I've a bit of my life to live and when I get older and I'm wiser and I've looked into these things a little bit more - well then I'll decide about this issue', you can't do that! Because there are serious life and death issues at stake, because if Jesus said He was who He was: you must listen to His claim. And if He was a liar you can throw it all out, if He was a lunatic you can forget about it because He was mad.

Well I want to say to you this evening, on the authority of the Word of God - and upon plain logic and common sense - that Jesus Christ was not a liar, and Jesus Christ was not a lunatic. 'David how can you be so sure? How can you be so sure that He wasn't lying - were you there? How can you be so sure that He wasn't a lunatic and that He was who He said He was?'

Most people, as they read the Scriptures, as they look into the history books and the accounts of the life of Christ, will admit that Jesus Christ had two characteristics. And I want to build everything that I'm saying tonight upon one thing and it's this: the character of Jesus Christ. There are two things that we see in His character - and most people will admit it - first of all: He was wise. He was wise, He was a wise man, He was wiser even than Solomon who was one of the wisest men that ever lived - everyone admits that He was wise. But secondly, we also look and we see His life, we see everything He said and we see that this man was, indeed, good. Well listen, if He was wise and He was good - a lunatic is not wise, and a liar is not good.

You know tonight, in the mental hospitals about our land and in mental hospitals all over our world today, there is a condition - and this is the truth - and this condition is called 'Divinity Complex'. And believe it or not - I know it seems astounding - there are people in our land today, at this very moment, and they actually believe that they're God - and I mean literally. They actually believe that where they are on the earth, in this hospital ward, they believe that they are God. Now there are certain symptoms to this condition, doctors tell us that they show egotism - it's all 'I, my, me', it's all selfishness - they're self-centred people, everything has to revolve and centre around them. The doctors tell us that they show self-love, they show inflexibility, they are people who are dull to look at and dull to be with, they are people who are absolutely predictable - they're like the soaps on the TV, you can tell what's going to come next, everything they do, you know exactly what's going to come - they're inevitable, they are understandable, but they show within themselves a complete lack of ability to understand others and to love others, and they have a lack of creativity.

Now let me ask you, and be honest about this tonight, does that describe Jesus Christ to you? Listen: egotism, self-love, inflexibility, dullness, predictability, an inability to understand and love others, a lack of creativity? Young person answer me, does that describe Jesus Christ to you? No! Of course it doesn't! Surely as you read the word of God, surely as you read the historical records about this man, surely you can see that Jesus Christ was the exact opposite of this. You read about Him and Christ fulfilled perfectly all of these things: He was a man who was filled with love, He was a man who was filled with compassion, He had an immense creativity. What other man is there in the world who could touch blind eyes and make them see? What other man is there in the world who could touch lame legs and make them walk? Who could make food for thousands out of five loaves and two small fish? What other man in this world could be so creative [as] to walk upon water? What other man could do these things? What other teacher, what other wise man, and guru in the world has exceeded the wisdom and the knowledge of the teaching of Jesus Christ, there is no one!

But further than that, this man had not an inability to understand or appreciate other people. But more, far more than this, this man was able to look right through people! He was able to look through the masks that we put up, the personality shields that we have, so that we can cover our pain, so that we can cover our darkest secrets and our anguish. And Jesus could come in contact with a man, and even without coming in contact with them, He knew their thoughts, He knew their problems, He knew their desires - He knew their thoughts! And listen tonight, wherever you sit, here and now, Jesus Christ can see right into your heart of hearts. He can see every problem that you have, He can sympathise in it, He can see your sin and it pains Him - all your pretense, in the sight of Jesus Christ, all of it goes down the drain, He can see everything! This wasn't a man who was predictable, because this was a man who made the impossible possible. This was a man who was totally unpredictable, the scribes and the Pharisees who knew their Bibles inside out couldn't tell what He was going to come out with next. In fact the word of God says that everyone who came into contact with this man, it says, they wondered - they marvelled at Him. But this man, far from being selfish, this man was full of love, do you know why He was full of love? Because, He laid His life down for His followers. I don't mean in death now, I mean in His life. He said the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head! He didn't have a home, He hardly had any clothes, He didn't have money - the Creator of the universe, as He claimed He was, gave up everything for the ones that He loved - He wasn't selfish and He wasn't loveless.

Someone has said - listen, 'Lunatics are not wonderful people, but Jesus was the most wonderful person in history. And if that were lunacy, lunacy would be more desirable to sanity!' Have you got that? It would be better to be a lunatic tonight and follow Christ, if that were so, but listen this evening, Christ is not a liar and Christ is not a lunatic. If He was a liar do you know what that makes Him this evening? It makes Him one of the most cunning, deceptive, cruel, wicked, evil, devilish men that ever walked upon the face of the earth. Because He would have conned all of the men and women through the centuries who gave up their lives for Him, who followed Him - He conned them and led them into a lost eternity, or simply to lose their lives and not enjoy themselves - it would have been all for nothing! Christianity, one of the greatest faiths in the world, would have been the biggest deception of all time. But the truth tonight is this: that the enemies of Christ when they came to take Him - and believe me they wanted to take Him, and they wanted to put Him to death - when they came to that place of getting hold of Him and taking Him to kill Him, do you know what the Bible says? It says that they couldn't find a fault in Him - and they were the ones, if they wanted to, if there was any fault in Him they would have found it, believe you me, and they would have crucified Him for it! But even they, even Pilate said, 'I find no fault in this man'.

But not only that if He was a liar - listen, He would have died for His lie. Do you know a liar tonight? Do you know any? I know a few, and I can tell you one thing, they're cowards, and they wouldn't die for their lie. But Christ went all the way, if it was a lie, He went all the way to die for His lie and to suffer for His lie - it brought Him nothing! He wasn't a liar, because He had the wrong psychological makeup, His teachings don't point towards lies it was all about truth, what the truth was and exposing hypocrisy and exposing error. There's no understandable motive for this man to have been lying all of His life, why? Because it didn't bring Him riches, it didn't bring Him success in the eyes of the world, what did it bring Him? It brought Him nothing but death!

He couldn't have been a lunatic, because a lunatic lacks the very things that Jesus Christ had. I don't know whether you've ever come in contact with a lunatic, you might think you are tonight. But when you come in contact with someone who is mentally retarded, often - and it's our fault - often we feel uncomfortable, and the reason why we feel uncomfortable, psychologists tell us, it's because that we feel superior to them. We feel superior to them. Now if Christ was a lunatic - He could not have been a lunatic, because everybody who came into contact with Him felt the exact opposite. They knew that He was far superior than they were, why? Because He knew their inner feelings and thoughts, He knew everything about them.

What do you think about Jesus? That was my question, I ask you it again now and answer it honestly: what do you think about Jesus Christ? Well listen, I'll tell you tonight what is the truth from the Word of God, and from plain common sense, and it's this: that He was not a liar, He was not a lunatic, listen, He is Lord and He is God! That is the truth this evening, there is nothing else, there's no in between you can only have one of these and tonight the truth is this, He is who He said He was!

Do you know what that means for you this evening? Do you know what it means? It means when Jesus Christ was on the earth and He said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father but by Me' - that's not very popular today - but what He meant was this, the only way you'll get to heaven is through Christ and Christ alone. And it means that when He said that, that was the truth. It means that there is no way to heaven, not through your church, not through a lodge, not through an organisation, not through a system, not through a philosophy, not through good living - there is no other way, but through Christ! It means that He was right, it means that when He said that everyone in the world was a sinner and had a problem within themselves called sin, it means that - whether you like it or not, tonight - you do have that problem within, you have a problem of sin, it means that that is true! It means that when Jesus said that if we did not trust in Him, if we do not trust in His sacrifice and His death, and follow His way, we would end up in a place called hell - a place of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, a place where there is no hope! It means that

when He said that, it was true. It means that there is a place tonight that we cannot see with the naked eye, that we cannot hear with our ears, where there are millions of people screaming and crying in punishment for sin! It means that it's all true - but listen, it means that when He said He went to the cross, and when He said He would shed His blood for our sins, and when the word of God says that He took our sins in His own body on the tree, that we wouldn't have to be punished for it, and that we could go to a place called heaven - do you know what it means? It means that He was right! And when He said that if you trust Him tonight, you give your whole life to Him, you put it all into His hands, and you come to Him by faith and trust in His death - it means that if you do that, you will be guaranteed of life here and now, and life in eternity. It means that when Jesus said that the world doesn't know what living is all about - and remember that young people, they think they know it, but they know nothing - when they say that, the truth is what Jesus said, when He said 'I will give you life to the full, and give you life in more abundance'.

That's what it means to you this evening - this fact about who Christ is, listen friend, it changes your life tonight whether you like it or not, it changes it one way or the other. Philippians 2 that was our second reading this evening, says that there is a day coming, there is a day coming - now that doesn't mean we think there's a day coming, it doesn't mean there's a story that says there's a day coming, it means there is a day coming! - when every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Now you mightn't do that in this life, but this word in the Word of God says that one day, when Christ returns, you will bow the knee - whether you want to or not. In fact the meaning of that verse is this: that everyone willingly bows the knee. Do you know what the tragedy is tonight? Possibly - and I hope to God that I am wrong - but possibly there are some in our building tonight and you will bow the knee on that day - but listen, you will have bowed it too late! And suddenly on that day the awesome and awful realisation: that what Christ said about Himself was true, that He was God, that He was Lord, that He was who He said He was - it'll all come home and the penny will drop, and it'll all be too late! You'll not be able to get out of it! And how tragic that will be, when people at last bow the knee, to be sent to a lost eternity.

C.S. Lewis, that great writer, said these words - and listen: 'In a civilisation like ours', he said, 'I feel that everyone has to come to terms with the claims of Christ upon his life or else' - listen - 'he is guilty of inattention or pervading the question'. Do you know what he means? If you don't come to terms with the claims of Christ upon your life this evening, you're avoiding the question! You're burying your head in the sand, and how often Christians are accused of that - but listen - if you don't come to terms with these things tonight and walk out as if you don't care, you're avoiding the question of life! Don't ignore Christ - you may ignore Him tonight, but God His Father will not allow you to ignore Him forever.

Will you not yield to Him this evening? Will you not come and bow to the claims of Christ upon your life? One day the Lord came and asked another question of one of His disciples, Peter. He said to him, listen, 'Who do men say that I am?' Peter thought for a moment and he said: 'Well, some people say that you're one of the prophets back from the dead, Elijah. Some people think you're John the Baptist, risen from the dead'. Jesus looked at him right in the eye and said to him, 'But Peter that's not what I'm asking you, I'm asking you, who do you think that I am?' And Peter - Peter said these words - he didn't say what other people were saying, and don't tonight think or say what other people are saying, think about this for yourself this evening, he said, 'Thou art the Christ! The Son of the living God!' And you tonight young person, older person, backslider, unsaved person, you must bow the knee this evening and say those same words: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God and take my life into Thy hands'. Will you do it tonight? Think about the reality of God and Christ...

Transcribed by Judith Watkins, Preach The Word - July 2000

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"Pastor David Legge's Testimony"

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I've two readings to read with you this evening. The first reading is 1 Samuel, the book of 1 Samuel and chapter 1 and beginning to read at verse 9. 1 Samuel chapter 1 and verse 9:

"So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh, and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat by a post of the temple of the Lord. And she [Hannah] was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head."

The second reading is Jeremiah chapter 1, Jeremiah chapter 1 and verse 4...Jeremiah chapter 1 and verse 4: "Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child. But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."

Tonight I decided, I believe by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, to share with you a word of testimony. Not just about how I was saved, but about what the Lord has done in my life and what I can give Him the glory for. I want to stress, right from the outset, that I'll be talking about myself - because it's my testimony and I can't talk about anyone else's - so forgive me if I talk about myself quite a wee bit. But I want to give glory to God tonight, I want to give glory to the Lord Jesus Christ - for what He has done in my life and what He is doing in others lives - and especially, this evening, if you're here and you don't know Him, what He can do in your life.

I once heard a story about three men who were giving their testimony at a mission. The first man who stood up and gave his testimony was a paramilitary. He had been converted - he had murdered men of another religion - and he was standing on this platform, if you like in a religious situation, telling that he had seen the light. Many thought his testimony was tremendous, and it was - how the grace of God could reach so low into the depths of the dirt of this man's life, from such sinfulness and pluck him as a brand from the burning - as the psalmist says, from the miry clay, from the dirt, from the gutter and clean him up and make him a child of God. You can imagine the reaction in the congregation to that testimony. And the second man that stood up, he was a drunkard. He had steeped his life, his youth, his middle age in drink. That's all he lived for, that's all his money went for, he even sold furniture to get his drink, to feed his vice. You can imagine how the saints rejoiced and sinners were amazed at that man, his conversion, how he turned from drink, how he turned from himself and how he turned to Christ. The third man that rose to his feet, began by introducing himself and saying that his testimony was greater than the first two that had gone before - because he said that he had been saved as a child, a young boy - and God had saved him from all those things.

Now I want to tell you tonight, that if you're a Christian and you were saved in your youth, or you're a young person here this evening and you were saved as a child: never get it into your head that you've missed

something! For you have missed nothing and all that you have missed would have been for your bad anyway. Praise God that God saved you from it. I can say tonight, that God saved me from all of that. I praise God this evening that I was brought up in a Christian home, that my father and my mother, even my grandparents on both sides, even my great-grandparents were born-again believers - they loved the Lord. And what a privilege that was, from an early age to know what it was, to see men and women living for Christ, loving Christ, serving Christ, wanting to please Christ. There were times I took it for granted, there were times I thought it was ordinary and I was amazed at times, when I was at school, to hear that other people's parents were not Christians. I don't know whether you've ever felt like that, but it just astounded me, for I thought it was normal to have parents that were born-again believers. Praise God tonight, yourselves, if you were in a family where 'knee-high to a grasshopper' you heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I went to a Bible-believing church, I was sent to Sunday School, I was sent to children's meetings - I was sent to children's meetings that weren't even the children's meetings of the church that I went to. I was saturated in the word of God from a very, very early age. My testimony, in a sense, is quite simple: one Sunday afternoon, the 3rd of November 1984, I went up to my bedroom after Sunday School and I realised, that I knew I needed to be saved, I knew I needed to ask the Lord Jesus Christ into my life and into my heart - but as I looked back on my short life, 7 [or] 8 years of age I realised that I had never, ever done it. I knew what to do, knew the words to say, knew what to claim by faith, knew that Christ had died for me, knew I needed to turn from my sin, knew everything! But I also knew at that moment in time that I had never done it. And that afternoon, about half-four in the afternoon, I knelt beside my bedside - and I can remember it well - and I asked the Lord Jesus Christ into my heart and into my life. And I want to say tonight: that it is great to be saved as a child. It is great to realise that, even at 7 or 8 years of age, that I could grasp what it meant to be born again, that I realised that I was a sinner - and that might astound you tonight - and I realised that I needed Christ, and I realised that I was on my way to hell if I didn't ask Him to save me and ask Him to come into my life. And I did it - and praise God, He did it! And He saved my soul.

Now anybody that's here and was saved at an early age will realise that that's only when the whole thing begins and it's very difficult at times after that. You had to go through the rest of primary school, you then had to go through secondary school and there were many things that came across your path - there were many things that knocked me, if you like, momentarily off the path of God. And for some years after I was saved I didn't live like a Christian - I maybe didn't read my Bible everyday, I maybe didn't pray everyday, I maybe said a few words that I shouldn't have said, I maybe did a few things that I shouldn't have done - but I knew deep within my heart that I was saved.

The transition happened between primary school and secondary school. And I realised, as I left primary school to [start] secondary school, that I was going to start on day one and I was going to have to nail my colours to the mast, as to whether I was the Lord's or whether I was not. A 'Jesus Saves' badge that my mother wore at school, I decided -- even though I wasn't living right before the Lord, even though I had wandered a little bit -- I decided that from day one I was going to make my mark and I pinned this little 'Jesus Saves' badge on and I walked into school. And of course, from that day on, all the jokes were flying -- they knew what I was, even at times if I didn't live it. But I knew deep within myself, that although I was in an outward appearance as a Christian, I had the name of Christ written across me, I knew that deep down there were problems, there were things that were not right - I wasn't living to please God.

In Easter of 1990 my best friend (who, for his sins, was a Free Presbyterian) asked me to come with him to the Easter Convention. Now, if you know anything about Free Presbyterianism, they have an Easter Convention where all the churches come together and they worship together at Easter. And on the Friday night, he invited me especially to that Friday night, and on that Friday night the preacher was preaching, and he was asking young people especially to rededicate their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ - to make a fresh commitment, that they would follow Christ, that they would not turn back, that they would put the cross

before them and go on for Christ to serve Christ, to live for Christ, to lay their lives down upon His altar and to live for Him. I can't remember what the preacher said, I can't remember much about that meeting, but all I can remember is this: that God spoke to me. Now you might find this hard to believe, but I knew - for as far back as I could remember that God wanted me to serve Him. I knew it - [there was] something inside me that told me. But this was like the icing on the cake, and God was crying out to me, and God was calling me. And I went forward at that meeting, and it was a mark in my life - a stepping stone - where I was reaching out to God, and I was saying to God: 'I'm going to live for You'.

Now I want to challenge you tonight, young people - I don't know whether this is the last time I will speak to you in this capacity or not, I don't know - but I want to challenge you. What are you doing for Christ? Now I don't mean that in a pompous way, as if I was doing everything - I wasn't doing everything, that's why I was in this situation. I was living for myself, I was taking the name of Christ, but I wasn't living for Him. I had His very name written across my breast, but His name may not have been in the full capacity of my heart. Can I ask you tonight: are you naming the name of Christ, but is your heart with Him? Does He have all of your heart? Does He have all of your life? Does He have every compartment, so that Christ - even tonight - could walk in, and walk right into your heart, and open every area of your life, and know that He has full jurisdiction in it?

From that night on it was difficult. Now I want to say this: I went to an all boys school - I'm speaking to the young people especially - and that, boy-o-boy, that was difficult. To take my stand for Christ and to not buckle. And I can tell you: I had friends (surprise, surprise, I had friends!) and many of them were Christians, but I want to tell you - and you might know this already - but some of them were as bad as the rest. I don't mean that in a judgemental way, because that breaks my heart. And I know some of them today who have, not destroyed their lives, but they have done things that they shouldn't have done - they've come back to the Lord, but oh how painful it had to be before He could bring them back!

One thing that sticks out in my mind was the 'formal'. Now I'm not condemning you for going to your formal - I don't know what your formal is like, but the formal in the school I went to: they were drunk before they even reached the venue. And this was a big thing, to go, to get all dressed up, to get your girlfriend all dolled-up, and to go to the formal and have a great night - but I knew what it was going to be like. But my Christian friends said to me: 'But David, we're going to have a Christian table, and there'll be no drink, there'll be no smutty jokes, and we'll sit around this table - and it will be a witness to the rest of them'. I believed them - I believed them for a while, and then I began to think, and I thought: 'Now, this table of little Christians, and everybody else around them at every other table is drunk - and that's going to be a witness?' I want to tell you tonight, that I was about the only one in the school that never went to the formal. And I want to tell you that that was hard - mightn't seem hard to some grown-ups, but that hurt - because I stood on my own. And I want to ask you this evening, young person especially: do you know what it is to stand alone for Christ? If your friends desert you - even your Christian friends - it was hard, and I nearly gave in - and thank God tonight, I didn't because a verse came to me and I've remembered it ever since, and it's this: 'Them that honour Me, I will honour'.

I went to school in the centre of Belfast, and my middle name (I hope it's not this now) but my middle name used to be 'worry'. And I would have worried about everything - sometimes I still do, but I worried, and worried, and worried, and once I'd finished worrying about something I moved on to something else, forgot about the last thing and then concentrated on worrying about this, and eventually I would gradually move on and on. But during my teenage years I worried about many things - and I want to say that my teenage years were difficult, as most teenage years are - but there was something that I worried about, that maybe some of you are worrying about tonight. I worried whether I was saved or not - I worried whether I was saved. And, boy, I asked the Lord Jesus Christ into my heart every single night, it might have been twice a night - just to make sure. But no matter how many times I asked, I couldn't find within myself that assurance. Do you know

what I did? I went to school in Belfast, and at that time there was the Evangelical Bookshop, there was the Bethel Bookshop, there was the Faith Mission Bookshop, there was the Northern Publishing Bookshop - all Christian bookshops - and almost every day I was in one of them. Do you know what I was looking for? I was looking for a book that could tell me that I was saved. Maybe you're here tonight, maybe you go to your church, maybe you come to this church, maybe you're in the young people's fellowship - I don't know anything about you, maybe you're grasping after something. Maybe you believe that God is, maybe you believe that Christ died - but can I ask you: are you sure tonight that you're saved? Are you sure of your salvation?

It all came to a head one day, when the same friend that invited me to the first meeting [where] I came back to the Lord, he invited me to another meeting - but this time it was a bad one. And as the man spoke - it was a mission - and I felt that that man was speaking to me. Do you know what he said? He was preaching on the fact that the only way to get to heaven was through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ - and that's true. But do you know what he did - and this is a warning to us all: he asked everyone to close their eyes, and he went through a list of what people sometimes do to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. It was like a list that you would tick off, and he said 'Right, anyone who asked the Lord Jesus Christ into their heart put their hand up'. Of course, when I heard that, 'whoosh' I shot my hand up. He went through a whole [list] of other things: 'Who prayed the sinners prayer?' - more hands went up. 'Who signed a decision card?' - more hands went up. 'Who came forward to an altar?' - more hands went up. And as he went down all of this list, as he reached the bottom - and let me tell you that the whole of this church had their hands up - he said: 'You're not saved'.

If you had struck me with lightning from my head to my toes, it wouldn't have been worse. I said, I've got to talk to this guy, if I'm not saved I've got to put it right. And I waited behind, and I waited for that man, and there was a queue, and I came into that counselling room, and do you know something tonight - and here's a warning to us all - he didn't listen, hardly, to one word I said. He asked me to give my testimony, as I gave it tonight, and he said: 'David, you're not saved'. You know, that broke me - have you ever had anyone tell you you're not saved? That broke me: but the laugh of the thing was, do you know what he had me doing two seconds later? He had me on my knees praying the sinner's prayer.

I walked out of that little room and I picked the phone up, and I rang my Dad, and I told him to come and get me, I told him I'd got saved. You can imagine his reaction, he says: 'What are you talking about? You are saved!'. I said: 'Well, I thought I was saved, and now I realise I'm not saved, and now I've got saved'. You see when I got home? I flung my arms round my father and I cried like a baby because I didn't know where I was. I want to tell you this tonight - and this is a glorious message - my father took me up to the Pastor's house. Do you know what he did? He opened the word of God to me, to a verse that has become so dear to me, Romans chapter 10 and verse 13 - listen: 'For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved'. And, boy, the light shone into my heart, and I knew, I knew because I had asked Christ that I was saved.

From that moment on nothing could stop me: I had my sins, I had my temptations, I had the things that tripped me up like everyone. But I want to say that God had done something in my life, God had called me to work for Him - and young people, tonight, if God has called you let no man stand in your way. When I finished school I had opportunities to go across the water, as many of you have already done, but I was a 'home-bird' and decided to stay here (and maybe a girlfriend had something to do with that as well). But the word of God was leading me, and I decided to go to the Queens University of Belfast and to go to the Irish Baptist College - and they told me (now they don't tell lies, now) but they told me that in three years I could do a six year course. That I could do three years as a Bible student, training for the ministry, and I could do three years of a degree at the same time and it would mean you weren't doing six years - one after the other - and I thought this was great, do it in half the time. So I opted for them and I was going to stay and I was going to study with them...until the first day and they told me 'Well, oh, we forgot to tell you that you have

to be over 22 in order to do our ministerial course'. I thought 'That's great', and for two weeks I started a Queens University course, and I was knowing deep down within my heart that God had called me to serve Him - and it didn't matter what men said, although they were godly men - it didn't matter, that I was to go for Him, that I was to follow Him. And I had a talk with the principal, and he said 'If you really feel that it's God's will, you put the ball in our court and let God deal with it'.

I want to say this: I was nearly going to say I was 16 and never kissed - but I was 18 and had never worked. I'd never done a day's work (and the Pastor might say I still haven't done a day's work!), but I had never done a day's work in my life and everything that was coming to me was this: 'You're too young, you have no experience'. I want to tell you this evening: Christian if you're looking for guidance, Christian if you're looking for help, if you're looking for comfort, whatever you're looking for - unbeliever if you're looking for peace - look in the word of God. And I asked God for guidance, and there were many verses that came to me, but there's one in particular that I want to share with you tonight, and it's found in 1 Chronicles 29 and it was this...you remember that David was not allowed to build the temple because he had blood on his hands? He said in 1 Chronicles 29 and verse 1: "Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation," - and I was reading in the Revised Standard Version, and it read like this - "Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen, is yet young and inexperienced, and the work is great: but the palace is not for man, but for the Lord God." And, boy, you could have blew me over with a feather, I fell to my knees and I praised the Lord. Let me say, let me encourage you tonight - young person: let no-one, let nothing stand in your way to serve God, to know what God wants you to do - do it! Do it.

I wonder do you realise, like Jeremiah and we read the passage - Jeremiah chapter 1 at the very beginning of my message tonight, do you realise that God has a plan for you? You might be unsaved here tonight - God has a plan for you! God wants to start that plan now, He wants to start it tonight, He wants you to live for Him - and there is such an adventure open for you, if you would only trust Him. Christian, maybe you think God can't use you, maybe you think that God has nothing for you to do or there's no gifts in your life. Listen! God has given you at least one gift, and God wants you to use it, and He'll help you.

I began my studies, and I served the Lord, and I finished the three years studying at the Baptist College, and I got the gracious call of God to this place* - and I thank God for it. But I want to tell you, quickly, about something that happened to me this time last year. My baby sister, who's here tonight - so you can all look out for her - she got converted, she got converted. And when I came home, late as usual, I came into the house and my mother was still up, just pondering, thinking about what had happened that evening. We began to talk, and to reminisce, and talk about what had happened, and various things that happened - and I want to tell you, she told me something that night that she had never told me before, and I could have killed her! For I could not understand why, for 20-odd years, she had never told me this. It was this, I don't want to go into undue detail, but this is what happened: when she was having me, when she was giving birth to me, she was in great danger and so was I - so much so, that the heart monitor went blank. And she told me that she cried out to God, that God would let me live, and if God would let me live that He would take me, and He would use me for His service.

*Youth Pastor at Portadown Baptist Church

Can you imagine what that meant to me? Just before I was to enter my ministry here in this church? And to know like Hannah of old who was in bitterness of soul - she was looking for a child, my mother was almost losing one - but she prayed almost the same prayer - but the same God answered her prayer! And that same God is your God, and I'm not saying this tonight to glorify me, or to glorify anybody - I actually do believe (and this is not false humility) but I believe that God had to reveal that to me in order to keep me going. That is how weak I believe I am - and I believe that God has done umpteen things like that in everybody's life, but some have the faith not to need to hear it.

Are you praying for someone tonight? Don't give up. Some of you here this evening have been prayed [for] for years - you've been prayed about for years! You've sat every Sunday night that I've been here for the past year and a half - yet you're still not saved! Can I tell you tonight: you don't know what you're missing! You don't know the joy of the Lord, you don't know the peace of God in your heart. Do you know what it's like to have fellowship with the risen Lord Jesus Christ? It's out of this world, there's nothing like it, there's nothing that can compare to it. And I want to say as I close tonight: every time I sign my signature (not that I do it too often - only on cheques), when I sign it I put Galatians 6 and verse 14 after it. And that simply says this: "God forbid that I should glory," - that I should boast - "except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ". See if Christ had never died on the cross - I wouldn't be here, believers wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be living a life of joy in the Lord, I wouldn't have God guiding me. But Christ died for me, and Christ stood in my place, He took my punishment, He bore my sin, He shed His blood - do you know why? Because He loved someone like me. Can I tell you tonight: He loves you, and He wants you to come to Him. Young person, He wants you to leave your sin, He wants you to give it up, throw it in, and follow Him with all your life - and I can tell you, you'll not regret it.

One of my favourite choruses is this: 'I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold. I'd rather be His than have riches untold. I'd rather have Jesus than houses or lands. I'd rather be led by His nail-pierced hands, than to be a king of a vast domain and be held in sins dread sway. I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today.' Do you know what would be the greatest gift, or the greatest present that I could have leaving this place tonight? That glory could be brought to Christ, through you being saved. Will you come to Him tonight? For Christ's sake, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2000

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"The Great White Throne Judgement"

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We are turning in our Bibles tonight to the book of the Revelation, the last book within our Bibles, the book of the Revelation and chapter 20. If you don't know, this book is a vision that John the Apostle had, when he was exiled to the Isle of Patmos for preaching the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when he was on that island and God revealed to him many things, he saw this, and this is what I want to speak to you about tonight. Verse 11, he says: "And I saw a Great White Throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."

Let us pray, as we come before the word of God: Our Father in heaven, we thank Thee this evening for Thy word - and for the power that we find within it to soothe our hearts, but Lord, it also is a piercing instrument that shows us to be what we are. And our Father we pray this evening that as we come to it - we do feel inadequate, we do feel weak - but Father, we say with one of old 'Who is able for these things?', yet Lord, 'In Thee O Lord, we put our trust'. And we ask for the filling of the Holy Spirit to be our portion tonight, and for those who have never seen Christ in a saving way, that they would see Him tonight, for His name's sake. Amen.

Revelation chapter 20 and verses 11 to 15 is a passage of scripture where you find accounted for us 'The Great White Throne'. You may have heard about this Throne, but tonight we're going think about it. Many years ago, on July 8th 1741, Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon - he entitled that sermon, 'Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God'*. His sermon was written, word for word, on a sheet of paper and he held it to his face and read each word as it was written. Yet thousands of people were touched, and people had the fear of God in them so much that they held onto the pews, they held onto the pillars around them, for fear that the ground would open and swallow them up into hell. One man ran up the aisle and cried, 'Mr Edwards, have mercy upon me!'

*You can read this sermon in our Book Store at www.preachtheword.com

That was then and this is now. And what was a popular message then, a gospel message, about a place called hell, is no longer a popular message today. In fact, within the annals and within the corridors of the church of Jesus Christ, and even in its theological halls and in some of its churches, to mention the word 'hell' brings a frown. The great preacher, the great gospel preacher, Dr. Harry Ironside, on one occasion was taking a mission overseas and when he got off the plane in the airport, at the place where he would take that mission, one of the deacons of the church met him, and he asked Dr. Ironside what he would be preaching on in his time with them. Dr. Ironside said to him, 'Well what would you like me to preach on?', and the deacon said to him, 'Well what about preaching on the love of God?'. Dr. Ironside said, 'Well that's alright, but what text, what passage of scripture would you like me to preach on?'. He said 'Well one that's well known, and one that's probably the best known about the love of God, is John chapter 3 and verse 16, For God so loved the world...'. So Dr. Ironside agreed to it, and on the first night of the mission they were all sitting, the final hymn before the message was sung, and Dr. Ironside rose to the pulpit, opened his Bible at John chapter 3 and began to read. Before that the deacon had said to him, 'Don't mention hell. Just preach on the love of

God, but Dr. Ironside don't mention hell'. So Dr. Ironside got to his feet and he began to read John 3 and 16: 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not...', and he turned to the deacon beside him and said, 'What will I tell them now?'

It is well explained in a story that I heard recently of a man who is on a plane, and the plane gets into severe difficulties. The engines begin to fail - and suddenly there is an announcement comes over the intercom, that everyone has to [reach] below their seats and put their lifejacket on, and get into a brace [position], because it is about to crash. The airhostess comes down the aisle with a package with her, and she comes to a very important man, and she gives him this package and tells him to put it on his back. It's a parachute. But she tells this man, 'Well, if you put this on your back it'll make you more comfortable. If you put this on your back, it'll give you a more easy ride, it'll be a nicer trip for you. In fact, this little backpack, although it doesn't seem it, if you put it on your back, you'll find that it's good for your health. You might look better when you put it on your back, you could feel better, you'll have a better quality of life'. And this man, well he's convinced, and he puts it on his back -- but when he puts it on his back, he realises that the people beside him are looking at him. And the people down the aisle are looking that he's different from them, and they don't understand why he has this on his back - and he starts to fidget because it gets itchy, it gets uncomfortable, it gets sweaty. And eventually what he does is: he takes it off. The plane crashes, and that man is lost. If you were that airhost or airhostess, what would you do? I know what I would do: I would come down the aisle, and I would say, 'Put this on, it could save your life'.

There is a word that we use in the Christian church and in the Evangelical church: it's the word 'saved'. And, my friend tonight, it is a Biblical word, it is a Christian word - but listen, it loses all meaning, it loses all point, all power, if you don't know what you've been saved from. I want to speak to you tonight on 'The Great White Throne Judgement'. If you open your Bibles at Revelation 20 and verse 11, the first thing I want you to see this evening is: the place of judgement. The place of judgement, and this is a court scene - a bit like the courts that we would know (I hope you don't know too much about them, but you know what is there) - and the most important thing that is there, is the judge. Only this courtroom, and this court scene, is extremely different - because at this judgement Throne, at this judgement bar, there is no bargaining. At this judgement scene, there is no defence lawyer, there are no jury, there is no plea, there is no method of appeal and there is no leniency. All there is, is judgement.

What is the place of judgement? Well verse 11 says this - and I want to stress this to you this evening, that we have been reading the word of God, and John says 'I saw'. Now that's not to be debated about, and I'm not going to stand here tonight and try to prove to you that what John saw is true - do you know why? Because only the Holy Spirit can show you that tonight. But I'm telling you that John saw it, and it was real - and oh how John must have shuddered in his boots to see the awful scene of what was ahead of people, if they did not trust Christ. What did John see? Well, he saw the place of judgement. He says in verse 11, if you look at it, that it is a Great White Throne. It's great! Why's it great? Well, it's great, not because of the Throne itself, but it's great because of the Person that sits upon the Throne. It's great in its majesty, it's great in its dignity, it's great in its splendour, and in its sovereignty, and in its power. It's a Great Throne - why? Because there is One who sits upon it who is the Judge of all judges, who is the King of kings, who is the Lord of lords, who is the only Potentate, the pre-eminent One in the universe - Jesus Christ. He sits on the Throne.

It's a Great White Throne. Why is it white? Why is it not black? Why is it not gold? Why is it not speckled in the beautiful gems, studded in the beautiful jewels of this world? Do you know why? Because white - pure pristine white, like snow - speaks of the purity of this Throne. Why is it pure? Simply this: because there will not be one sin that will have a positive judgement from this Throne. This is an absolute authority, there's no leniency - there's absolute judgement. You won't be able to answer back to this Judge, you won't be able to plea your cause, you won't be able to sign a piece of paper and hope that a lawyer will be able to bring you to another court case, and will be able to let you get free. There will be none of that! And this Person - this

pure, righteous, holy Person who cannot look upon a mistake, cannot look upon a sin, cannot even conceive a sin in His own mind - He will declare judgement, and it will be final. It's a Great White Throne.

This is remarkable, it tells us something else about the place of the judgement, because it says in verse 11, 'From whose face', the Person who is sitting on this Throne - from His face. And I want to tell you this evening, that from another passage in the word of God it says of His face, that His eyes were as fire. This is not 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild' that we so often hear about. This is Jesus Christ: The Judge of the World. And as He stands with His 'laser beam' eyes, they go through your very soul and spirit - all your motives, all your characteristics, your personality - it shines through everything, and whatever is not of Himself, whatever is not of God and is of sin, will be burnt up like the chaff.

It says, 'From His face the earth and the heaven fled away'. My friends, this is too deep for me, and I want you to grasp this tonight - from His face. From this blessed Person - you remember the face that was punched, the face that was spat upon, the face that men reviled, the face that men laughed at, the face that men took with their hands and plucked the very hairs from His face? From that face, one day, the very heavens and the earth will flee away in fear! Do you know the size of the sun? You know, if we were to take a giant ice cream scoop tonight, and scoop out the insides of the sun and make it hollow - according to science, you could fit within the sun 1,300,000 earths. Isn't that mind boggling? You could fit within the hollow sun 1,300,000 earths. There's a planet in our solar system, and it's mentioned in the book of Job, and you think of how big the sun is, you could fit so many earths in, but in this planet that's mentioned in Job you could fit 25,000 suns! In the Times a few weeks ago, there was an article that read that there are 120,000 stars in a constellation, a constellation is simply a group of stars, a family of stars - and in just one of those there are 120,000 stars. And this is what is so mind boggling: that for as many stars - 120,000 - there are constellations.

But friend, tonight, on this awful, and on this terrible day, there will be a Throne - either in heaven, or space, or somewhere - and as the One that sits on the Throne looks, and His face is seen, the Bible says that all of that vastness, and greatness: it will flee at His face. What a terrible sight! All flies away from His face, except for you. My friend, if you're not saved tonight, the greatest planets in the world, the greatest buildings in the world, the greatest things that men cannot get their puny mind around, will flee from the face of the Son of God - but you will be stuck, like in cement, you'll not be able to move, you'll not be able to run - and even though you've ran from Him all your life, and all the life He's given you, you will stand still, and the Bible says you will gaze upon the face of the One whom your sins have pierced.

That's the place of judgement. But in verse 12 we find the people who were judged. It says that, '...the dead, the dead were there', John says, 'I saw them: small and great, stand before God'. You know, this is remarkable, because there are many people in our world today, and there are many classes, there are many status symbols, and ladders to climb up to - and there are the paupers and there are the rich people. But this is what the Bible says, this is what the word of God says, that tonight - where you are in this place - that God is not looking at your bank balance, God is not looking at how many letters you have after your name, God is not looking at how many rooms you have in your house, He's not looking at the 'cc' of your car, God isn't looking at that tonight. God says, that on that dreadful day, that the small and the great will be there. I wonder who will be there?

Lot's wife will be there. Do you remember Lot's wife? What happened? God gave her a chance, God gave Lot a chance to escape - what happened? They dwelt in a terrible, terrible town - the sin of that town went to God as a stench, it was so evil. And God warned them that He would come, and He would destroy the town with fire and brimstone, and He told Lot and his family to get out! He didn't want to get out...but He told them, 'If you don't get out, you'll die', and He said, 'When you're going out, you make sure that your exit from that town, and that city is complete - what I mean is: you make sure you're happy to get out! You make sure you're glad to get out - and to show that, don't turn around and look back'. And of course, we know what

happened, Lot's wife turned around, and do you know what the Bible says? She turned around - do you know why? - she loved Sodom. My friend, tonight, maybe you're here and that is your problem, that is what has kept you from Christ all your life - you love your world, you love the wee drink, you love the company of the world, you love the prestige of the world, you love climbing the ladder, you love living for things down here, you love your sin - whatever it is - you love the bright lights, and the world around. You love it! And that is what keeps you from Christ tonight - well, listen, if you let that keep you from Jesus this evening, do you know what will happen? You will be with Lot's wife at the Great White Throne.

Who else was there? Herod Antipas was there. If Lot's wife loved Sodom and the world, Herod Antipas loved sex. You remember what happened: we read in the Bible that John the Baptist lost his head over the whole thing - and I mean literally! He was beheaded because he spoke out against Herod Antipas' love of sex, and love of women. Herodias, a lovely girl in the royal family, in this beautiful [family], prestigious to look upon on the outside - it was regal, it had everything you could ever want in majesty, power and status, and this beautiful creature of a woman was in it. She was married to her uncle, which was wrong in the first place, and then Herod Antipas talked her into marrying him! Leaving her uncle and marrying him! And oh, the stench of this to God, and John the Baptist was one of the least people in the land at that time to realise that this stank to God, and that God was angry, and he preached against it - and because of it, he lost his life! I wonder are you here tonight, and you'll be in hell because you love sex? Listen young people, tonight, is that you? It can be on the television, it can be in books, it doesn't have to be the real thing. But that thing could keep you out of heaven, just like Herod! It could be the thing to stumble you.

Or you could be like Judas tonight - what did he do? He betrayed the Lord Jesus Christ for money! He loved money, and because he loved money - today he is in hell, and in a day to come he will stand at the Great White Throne and be judged for his love of money. Or there's Pilate - he will be there. Why? Well, if you look to John chapter 19 and verse 12 - you remember Jesus, as that beautiful person, the Son of God stood before Pilate about to be sentenced. Pilate said to Him. 'Look, I have authority over You!'. Huh! He was saying, as a creature to his Creator, 'I have authority over you'. And Jesus said, 'You have only the authority that God gives you', and that put the fear of God into Pilate, and he wasn't going to crucify Him. And do you know what happened? The Jews turned around to him and said, 'You are not Caesar's friend. If you were Caesar's friend you wouldn't have anybody else who is a King. This Man says He's King of kings - He's putting Himself above Caesar - you're not Caesar's friend'. Of course that was below the belt for Pilate - do you know why? Because Pilate was a lover of men. He loved prestige, he loved to be popular, he loved to be seen to be fashionable and to be going with the crowd, he loved all of that - and he was so taken up with his reputation and his name, that he crucified the Son of God, to be called Caesar's friend. What about you tonight? What about you? He will stand before this great and awesome Throne, and everything and the worlds around will disappear and flee, and he will stand - and you might stand beside him in the same category - for loving men, for loving your mates, and being afraid of what your mates would say, and your family would say, what your wife would say, or your husband - and because of that, you would stand in Pilate's shoes.

Or there's a man in the book of Acts called Gallio, and he will be there. There was a great rumpus in the city in which Gallio was a Governor within -- he had power within this city, and there was a great uproar - why? Because of the Christians, because of the Jews fighting with the Christians and so on, there was so much going on. And do you know what Gallio did? He stepped back, and it says that, 'He cared for none of those things'. Lot's wife loved Sodom, Herod Antipas loved sex, Judas loved money, Pilate loved men and Gallio loved nothing. And you could be here tonight, and you're looking on, and you're saying, 'This is all well and good, and I would agree with you there, David' - but you're not willing to do anything about it! He looked on and he said, 'That's all well and good, you have your meetings, you have your missions, you preach your gospel, you talk about hell if you believe it - but I'll live my life, I'll get on with my own life and not worry about it all'. My friend, you'll stand right beside Gallio.

When the second world war was over, the roll book of all those who were in the Nazi party - which added up to about eight million people - was let loose, and given to the authorities. And within that book there were the small, the great, the prestigious, the rich, the great politicians, people who loved being in the leading, ruling party who had all the power, prestige and wealth - yet now, now it was different because it was in the hands of what was supposed to be a just rule, and that just rule said that they had committed war crimes, and it was different then. My friend, tonight, listen: you could be living like these people - you could be living like Lot's wife and you think everything's OK; like Herod; you could be living like Gallio; you could be living like all these people - you could be living like King Agrippa: Almost! Almost! You're nearly there, you're nearly over the line - but the time could come too late, when the books will be opened, when the roll will be called and your name won't be in it! What will you do then?

I want you to see finally: the penalty of judgement. Do you know what it says? It says '...the books were opened: and the book of life was opened: and the dead were judged by their works'. Do you know what Mark says in Mark 4, and Matthew says in Matthew 12, and Matthew also says in Matthew 10, listen: 'For there is nothing hid which shall not be manifested, neither was anything kept secret but that it should come abroad. Every idle word that man shall speak, they shall give account thereof on the day of judgement, there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed'. Have you ever had an experience - I don't know whether you ever have, but I'm sure you've read about it many times - where a person is in such a difficult situation, maybe they're in a car accident, maybe they're in another accident - a life threatening situation - and they use the phraseology that 'their life flashed before their eyes'. My friend, tonight, there is a day that will come when that will happen to all of us. Dr. Wilbur Penfold is the Director of Montreal Neurological Institute, and he wrote a report on the brain, and I quote it here word for word - and please listen to this - he says: 'Your brain contains a permanent record of your past that is like a single continuous strip of movie film, complete with a soundtrack - and this film library records your whole waking life, from childhood on. You can live again those scenes from your past, one at a time, when a surgeon simply applies a gentle electrical current to the centre point of the temporal cortex of your brain'. The article goes on to say that: '...as you relive the scene from your past', it says, 'you feel exactly the same emotions, the same feelings as you did during the original experience'. My friend, tonight, if that's what men in white coats can do, what can the Son of God on a White Throne do? Can you imagine that? Those experiences! Those sins! Those nights of drunkenness, of revelry! Those nights that you didn't do it, maybe, outwardly but you did it in your mind - the things that you have thought about! Can you imagine this? For a whole eternity, perhaps, reliving them, re-experiencing them, feeling them over and over again and not being able to escape! Those skeletons will not remain in the cupboard, because the word of God says that the books are opened and the dead will be judged, small and great upon their works, upon the things that they have done. Can you imagine standing there, and the Son of God - who knew no sin, did no sin, could not conceive of sin or could not commit a sin - and you're standing, and you're watching your life, and you're watching the sins - and He is watching them too - and the tears are running down your face, and every single one that you feel again you're doing it, you regret you ever did it! What a terrible penalty to pay!

What is the penalty? The penalty is hell. You know, the Bible speak about death, and death claims the body, hell claims the soul and spirit. But there is a strange verse in this passage that says that '...the sea gave up the dead which were in it...'. Do you know what that means? That the sea - those who have died at sea, those who have been buried at sea - it vomited the dead back up again, and every particle that was lost, from one end of the ocean to the other, that made up that person, will come together - miraculously - as one person, and their body will be there again and the soul and spirit will unite with it. And those people who are unsaved will go and stand before God in their body - death took their body, hell, if they're not saved, took their soul and spirit - but listen: the word of God says that on this judgement, if their name is not found written in the book, that they experience the second death.

What is the second death? The second death is when your resurrected body, soul and spirit is cast into the lake of fire. Cast - alive! - into the lake of everlasting fire! And we see something, a little bit, of the picture of it with the rich man and Lazarus - and that rich man who had lived such a fat, sumptuous life on earth, and this poor peasant who had lived a hell on earth was now in heaven, and he [the rich man] was in hell. And he could see him [Lazarus], he could see him in heaven enjoying himself. He could talk to Abraham, he could feel his thirst, he could feel the heat, he could think, he could remember all that he did in his life - the times he rejected God's truth and walked past the beggar lying there. Oh my friend, tonight, this is an awful penalty! Jesus called this place, this lake of fire, where people - body, soul and spirit - are cast into, He called it 'Gehenna'. Gehenna was the place where King Manasseh offered children, sacrificed children to the fire, for the god Molech. But in Jesus' day, Gehenna was the city dump, it was the place - the incinerator - that was a continual fire and flame, the flame never went out. And Jesus Christ now - not me! - Jesus said that that is what hell will be like. And the smoke of their torment ascended up for ever and ever and they had no rest, day and night.

My friend, tonight, I want to finish on this note of good news. Listen to me - if you're not saved tonight you will face this, believe you me! You will face it, and this night that you heard about it will haunt you for all eternity - but listen to this! Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary, almost 2000 years ago, He went through your lake of fire, He went through your hell, He went through your first and second death - do you know why? So that you would not have to.

'David, how can I be saved? How can I be saved from all this? How can I escape this?' - listen - flee! Flee to Christ tonight! Trust Christ! Prepare to meet your God! He is standing with open arms to you - all you have to do is come to Him! Please come to Him tonight! Please don't face this! Many people feel they're living a hell on earth already - listen: they know nothing about hell, nothing. Will you not trust Christ tonight? Will you not run to the bosom of Christ and be put within that bosom so that when He goes through the fire, as He did go through the fire, you are within Him and He is taking your penalty, He is setting you free, and He's taking you over to the glory land - He's taking you to heaven, where there is no pain, where there is no sorrow, where there is no separation, no parting, no dying, no crying - nothing more! Where there is eternal rest and eternal bliss for evermore. My friend, what holds you back? 'For whosoever was not found in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire'.

Let us pray. I believe God has been speaking to some of you tonight. Talk to us, and don't leave this place without getting right with the Lord Jesus Christ. You can get right with Him where you are, but if you want to talk, if you want help, if you want to be pointed in a certain direction, or a certain scripture, we're here for you - but get right with God tonight.

Our Father we thank Thee for Thy word, and Lord we know that we have a duty to preach all Thy word, and we know that the love of God means nothing if we do not see the wrath and the anger of God upon sin. Lord, the cross means nothing if there is not a hell, if there is not a punishment - for what could Christ save us from, what would be worth doing what He did, only hell? And Lord, hell is the most real thing that there is in the gospel, in the sense that we are all destined there if we do not get saved. Lord, save souls tonight, for Thy glory, in Jesus name. Take us now, our Father, to our homes and bless us there. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - July 2000

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"The Harvest Is Past"

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We're turning in our Bibles to the book of Jeremiah the prophet, and his prophecy - chapter 8 of that book, and only one verse that we will read together this evening. Jeremiah chapter 8, verse 20 is our text - and let me say before I read this, I feel it's important to say this: last week, last Sunday evening was our watchnight service, and this is the message that I felt God was giving me for that. It's the exact same message, so if you've come tonight don't think that anybody has tipped me off that I know where you are and I know all about you - this is the message I hoped to preach last week, but God led me to preach something else. So I bring it to you this week, and that - I believe - is for a reason. It must be for a reason, there's no coincidences with God - and I believe that reason is you! No matter who you are, or where you are in this gathering tonight: this is God's message for you tonight, and I am 100% certain of that - you may not be, but I am, so I want you to listen to it this evening.

Verse 20 of chapter 8: "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved"... "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved".

Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer, and perhaps as we bow our heads together we could sing quietly and prayerfully that first verse of the hymn we've just sung:

'Pass me not, O gentle Saviour,
Hear my humble cry,
While on others Thou art calling
Do not pass me by'.

Can you sing that? Let's sing it together:

'Pass me not, O gentle Saviour,
Hear my humble cry,
While on others Thou art calling
Do not pass me by.

Saviour, Saviour, hear my humble cry,
While on others Thou art calling
Do not pass me by'.

Father, we know that we come to a merciful and a gracious God. In the light of that we're looking to Thee tonight not to pass by anybody, but to lift them up in Thine arms of mercy and save their precious soul. But if that is to happen, it's not going to come through me, it's not going to come through the Iron Hall, but it's going to have to be the Spirit of the Living God. So we pray Lord, that You'll shut up everything that is not of Thyself, and that Thy Spirit may have free course in our gathering to convince of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement to come, and that He may lift those wounded, broken spirits heavenward to Calvary. May there be someone - one, two, three, or more - who will look to the slain Lamb tonight and find mercy and grace, and peace with God. Fill me I pray, anoint my head with oil, let my cup run over. Amen.

Let's look at our text again: 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved'. What a terrible text of Scripture! The historical context of it was Israel in their wanderings and captivity because of their sin.

You find that cycle right throughout the whole of the Old Testament - Israel and their God at loggerheads, not from God's perspective, but from their perspective. Living in sin and rebellious towards God and His word, so much so that God had to teach them, God had to bring them - if you like - through the hedge backwards, to teach them who He was, how much He loved them, and the fact that He wanted to save them and bring salvation to their heart.

That is a cycle that is not old hat, it is something that is going on every day in this world in which we live. It's the same cycle of God's grace, that He is longing to bring men and women to Himself, and at times they have to go a roundabout way for one reason and one reason only - that is: their own sinful rebellion. God would have men come easily, God would have men come on the spot - right away - but men do not choose it so. Israel was such, and because of that God let them go into captivity, let them be slaves.

As they are sitting here before us in this verse, they're dejected, they're depressed. The season of hope, which is harvest, is gone. The sunshine and the blessing of summer is over - and suddenly the realisation, the awesome, terrible reality of the fact that here they are in a foreign land, away from God, away from the temple, away from everything that means that they worship God in the right way, their sins and their iniquities have separated them from their God, and they have that terrible realisation: 'We are not saved!'

Listen: 'We are not saved!'. What terrible words. What an awful cry to come from the heart of any sinner: 'We're not saved! I'm not saved! I know I'm not saved!'. Is that you? You're here tonight, and you're not one of these Sunday go to meeting, good living type people that think that you're going to get in by the skin of your teeth. You know fine rightly that you're here tonight, and you're far from grace and God and you're not at home. You know that if you wake up tomorrow, and you don't wake up but you wake up in another world, you know fine rightly that there'll be no hope for you at the pearly gate.

These people were concerned about their souls. I mean, who else would say the like of that? 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved' - they were very concerned about the whole matter. Indeed that's what the Lord Jesus said we ought to be, isn't it? He said: 'What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'. In other words, you'll give anything but look after your soul. You'll forge a career, you'll sow the seeds of success, you'll raise a family, you'll go to work every morning - five days a week, six, maybe seven - earn a living, go into old-age, have retirement, have grandchildren. You'll do everything, you'll give anything and everything in exchange for your soul! The Lord Jesus was being concerned about those who are not concerned about their soul!

That's what He meant when He said: 'What does it profit?' - do you have any profit in your life? What is the profit? Is it money? It's maybe not money - what is it? Is it so-called freedom, is it your sin? Jesus the Son of God said: 'What shall it profit, if you gain the whole world yet lose your own soul?'. What was He saying? He's saying this: 'I'm concerned about your soul'. He's saying: 'You ought to be concerned about your soul!' These Israelites here, in their sin and degradation, are concerned about their soul - are you?

Now come on! I'm not going to preach a floury, puffy-up pastry type sermon here tonight! I'm wanting to do a dealing with your soul! Are you saved? Are you concerned about your soul? Are you concerned about where you will wake up in eternity? And can I ask you, at the end of an old year, and at the first Lord's Day of a new year: have you been saved in the year that has gone by? For if you haven't, that's a sure sign that you're not concerned about your soul. A man or a woman that's concerned about their soul will be saved! It's as simple as that!

We were talking about the mercy of God this morning*. We talked about a judge, and we saw the foolishness of a judge sitting on his high seat in the court, and there in the dock a great sinner and offender. Can you imagine: who's ever heard of a judge pleading with the person in the dock? You've never heard of that in

your life! Sure they couldn't care less about the people in the dock if the truth is told - it's only a job to them. But here we have a judge pleading, a judge more concerned about your soul than you are!

*See the 'Behold Your God' study series on our Bible Studies page

Imagine walking into the doctor's with a pain in your chest. You sit down and the doctor says: 'What's wrong?'. You say: 'Well, I've had a bit of a pain - but I think I'm alright. I'm not going to worry about it'. You go for tests, and you find four of your arteries are blocked up - and you haven't a care in the world! The doctor is pleading with you to have a bypass, but you just go! Can you imagine a doctor more concerned for his patient? Not a bit of it - but that's the foolishness of sinners, because the Saviour of sinners is more concerned about your soul than you are!

Oh my friend, I would say even tonight - and I stand before God and say this - I would say possibly I am more concerned about your soul than you are. Imagine that! I maybe haven't even met you, I perhaps have never even spoken a courteous word to you in my life - and I may never ever do that. But let me tell you this: I could be more concerned about your eternal destiny than you are. Isn't that terrible? To think that men and women are going to a lost eternity, on their way to a sinner's hell, without even one concern! Can I ask you this evening: does it not bother you that you're entering into a new year and you're still not saved?! The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and you're sitting here tonight in the Iron Hall in a Gospel meeting saying: 'And still I'm not saved!' You've wasted another 365 days, another 52 weeks - and if you multiplied that by the number of years that you've known the Gospel, and have had the intelligence to understand and attribute it into your very life...

What a destiny for you, my friend: for your day of opportunity to go, for your spiritual summer to pass and end, and still not be saved! Verse 20 that we read together is a Hebrew proverb, and do you know what it really means? It means this: 'One season of hope after another has passed, but the expected deliverance never came, now all hope is gone'. That's what it means! One season of deliverance after another has passed, but the expected deliverance never ever came, now all hope is gone. Isn't that what harvest is? They're sitting starving, God is letting them starve because of their sin, and they're looking for harvest again. They're hoping that in those months of fruitfulness that suddenly God's wrath will cease, and God will bless them with food. As the month goes by, month after month of harvest season, and there's nothing - they think: 'Maybe God is late. Maybe it will be summer - the sun shining and the fruit ripening, maybe there'll be a chance'. But summer goes by and is ended, and still they're not saved.

The problem for the Israelites was not that they weren't concerned. Maybe that's your problem: you're not concerned. You know what their problem was: they were concerned too late - too late. I have no worry tonight - not one iota of worry - that anybody in this place forever will be unconcerned about their soul, for you will be concerned. But my fear for you, my friend, is that you will be concerned far far too late. When the harvest is past, and when the summer is ended, and still you're not saved - and you know it all too well. When it's too late, like the rich man lifting up his eyes in hell - it was too late!

I want to ask you two questions. The first is this: have you had seasons of hope and opportunity? Have you? Man, you couldn't live in Ulster and not have, could you? In this wee land of ours that has been blessed, the hopes and opportunities for men's salvation are second to none. Let's think about the hopes first of all - hopes for your salvation. Perhaps your family has brought you here tonight, I don't know, but that's usually the way it happens. Family or friends bring you along to a meeting, maybe a loved one has spoken to you time after time - and they're speaking with the motivation of the hope that God will speak to you. Perhaps somebody has handed you a booklet and said: 'Now will you read that?', or somebody has given you a video or a tape and you've put it in, and they've said: 'Now please watch it'. Little did you know they were going away and they were praying that God would speak to you through it. They were hoping that you would be saved! They're praying, and in their prayers there is an agonising hope, in their prayers they have a vision of

dreaming of that great day when you will come weeping to Calvary. Maybe you're here and now at this very meeting, and your loved ones are here, and they're praying where they sit - and they're hoping that you'll be saved. That hope comes time after time after time, but it seems that the season of their hope is coming to an end. Even with all their hopes, you're sitting here saying: 'I'm still not saved', and you're not a bit concerned.

Maybe you are concerned. Well, that's good, you listen tonight if you're concerned. Can I just say this - and I'm not saying this for bravado or anything - but, you know, I've prayed for you. Imagine that. I've maybe never met you, I've maybe never talked to you, but I have spent hours in prayer for your soul! Concerned for you! Concerned that you would not let your harvest season pass! Concerned that your summer, spiritually, wouldn't end and you'd be left unsaved! Oh, there's many have hopes, and I have high hopes for some of you tonight that you're going to be saved! If I didn't, I wouldn't be here, I wouldn't be wasting my time.

You've had hopes, what about opportunities? That's what the prophet is meaning: summer past, ended; harvest ended. The opportunities for blessing, how many opportunities have you had? Let's count them up - maybe you can't in your mind, the gospel meetings you've been to, the missions during the autumn time in all those wee country Orange Halls and school houses, the youth meetings you've been to as children, Sunday School, children's meetings, a quiet word of a friend or a relative. You've been in Gospel meetings where the Spirit of God has come down, and Christ Jesus has been presented, crucified in all His agony, bearing the sins of men. You've seen Him and you've walked out of that opportunity of trusting Him once more.

What about when you go down the city centre to shop? A wee man in a long coat gives you a tract, and you stuff it in your pocket - what about that? Eh? You see, God's writing all these things down. There's a book - you mightn't believe it - but there's a book and all your opportunities are being listed one by one by one. God is counting them, yet with you you're sitting here and there still is that condemnation over your head, with all people's hopes for you, with all the opportunities you've had, still: 'I'm not saved'!

It's always a puzzle to me - well, not really, but it always astounds me when I remember that I've no right to be saved. This is a day of rights, isn't it? Everybody has a right to do everything, even the dogs and the cats have rights - more rights than human beings at times! But, you know, I have no right to be saved - not a bit of it. God would have been justified to cast me, before I was even born, my spirit and soul into an eternal hell. I've no right, my friend, you have no right - God's not obliged to save you, but the miracle of the Gospel is that in grace and love He gave His Son for you! He came into the world in flesh: by grace are ye saved. He was nailed to a cross, and He could have called 10,000 angels, but He didn't because He loved you, because He wanted you for His own - and He shed His blood to save you, yet you're still not saved!

After all the opportunities you've had, after all others hopes for you - still you're not saved! Why should He give you another chance? If that was me I wouldn't give you another chance - you need to thank God tonight it's not me! If I was God I wouldn't have given me a chance - but praise God, we were learning this morning, His mercy endureth forever. This is a merciful God, plenteous in grace, endless in mercy. He's here tonight and He may not give you another chance after tonight, I cannot question or ask God, or bring anything like that to His mind. He can do as He wills - but let me say this: be warned, for God has gone many other extra miles for you, my friend.

I don't know your background, but you know there's wee children growing up in this land under the darkness of Islam, under the darkness of Buddhism, even on this island the darkness of Roman Catholicism, and idolatry and all sorts of evils that your mind couldn't even imagine. There's people running around naked in a jungle eating one another's flesh - and you've been brought up in Ulster under the Gospel! The grace of God has been lavished upon you, yet still: 'I'm not saved'! Is that your cry? Oh, my friend, I believe this very night, at this very moment in which I speak, there are souls being dropped into hell. Do you know what they're crying? 'Why am I not saved?' - they're crying that! They really don't know why they're not saved!

After a life, perhaps, like yours, of hearing the Gospel and squandering opportunities - they still don't know why they're not saved.

There's a day coming when they'll be brought before the Great White Throne of God, and the Lord Jesus will sit upon it. He will open the book of all the opportunities, all the prayers that were prayed for you, all the harvest seasons of hope, and the summer - spiritually speaking - of opportunity that you have had, all of them! He will go down them and say: 'Refused! Refused! Refused! Refused!'. Will there be an entry: 'Date: 7th January 2001. Location: Iron Hall. Destination: Hell'? My friend, listen to me: you will stand on that day with a multitude of opportunities that will torture you for all eternity without any fire and brimstone - you'll not even need the fire and brimstone, it'll be there, but this will be enough to torture you forever! You had a chance! You had a harvest and a summer! Yet you're still not saved.

Like Pilate, you have stood face-to-face with the Lord Jesus Christ. You've known who He was - oh, you've known. Where you sit tonight you know who He was. [Pilate's] wife came to him, and said: 'Don't you have anything to do with this Man, I have had a dream - and I've had terrible trouble since I've had it. This Man, there's something special about Him'. You know there's something special about Him, but like Pilate you're willing to wash your hands of Him because you afraid of friends. Isn't that what he did? The old Jews came to him: 'You can't call yourself Caesar's friend if you're going to let this Man call Himself the King of the Jews'. So he washed his hands of the Saviour. You have your mates to see, don't you? You've maybe a wife, or a husband, or a mother, or a father, or children to speak to. You've maybe to go into work, into the boys that will rake you stupid about trusting Christ, and about all this good living stuff. My friend, what will that mean to you in hell?

Are you like Judas? Imagine, can you imagine the privilege that man had? He heard the voice of Christ! You've maybe heard it. He's heard the teaching and been a partaker of it, he was the treasurer of the disciples, but he was able to betray the Lord with a kiss for thirty pieces of silver - the price of a dirty old slave. The Bible says that he went to his own place - there was a special compartment in hell for him. My friend, oh my friend, can you see the magnitude of this whole thing? Don't let it be you! Don't let the blood of Christ abide on your head, the wrath of God upon your soul because He died for you, and because He pleaded with you, and you walked out after the harvest passed and summer ended, not saved!

A year is finished, there's a lot of things have been concluded, isn't there? Things have ended. What have you ended? The year is over, and perhaps your career is over, maybe you've retired. Maybe your life at home with the parents has gone past, and their influence in their godliness is over now. Maybe your time at Sunday School has passed, maybe you don't go to church any more, and this Gospel influence is past - it's almost ended. Perhaps your very life is nearly concluded, yet you've never concluded the matter of your soul's salvation! What a fool, my friend! Now, I'm not calling you a fool, because I would be as foolish if God hadn't shone into my heart. If God hadn't saved my soul I would be sitting where you are tonight, maybe unmoved, maybe totally ignorant and without a concern about my soul - but, praise God, He came to me! He can come to you right where you are tonight. Oh, He can come again and save you.

These Israelites were as good as asking: 'Well, where has God been? You're talking about a past year, where is He? Where has He been in my life? I haven't seen any of Him, He hasn't been helping me. I've gone through heartache and trouble, and all sorts of stress and problems, and God hasn't been any help to me' - that's what they were saying. 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and God still hasn't come to our aid!'. Do you know what God said to them before that verse? 'You know why I forsook you: because of your idols, your foreign gods, and your sin. If you don't want Me to forsake you, you've got to forsake them'. That's what God wants of you tonight. He wants you to forsake your sin, He's wanting you to forsake those gods that are in your heart that you worship. The reason why God hasn't penetrated your life is because, in your rebellious sinfulness, you won't let Him! That is your captivity.

My friend, listen tonight: you don't have to do anything to end up in hell - don't do a thing, don't lift a finger, you're on your way, headlong, where you sit. In the capacity in which you are in there's no problem - it's concluded, it's written already, that's your final state unless you're saved. But I want to tell you tonight, secondly: God's mercy gives you another opportunity. The harvest may be almost past, the summer may be nearly ended, and you may still not be saved. The people were in hopelessness, they were despairing, the man Jeremiah was wailing and praying for deliverance - and he couldn't believe that it hadn't come as yet. He was weeping, verse 1 of chapter 9: 'Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!'. He was so heartbroken because God hadn't saved them, but let me you tell you tonight: for you there's hope! Hallelujah! There's hope!

I heard a story, I think it was somebody in here told me - I can't remember who it was. A wee man in the shipyard, he used to be doing his work always everyday - and whenever anybody came up to him and said: 'Can you give me the time?', he would look at his watch and he would say: 'Now is the day of salvation, and it's eight minutes to eight'. My friend, God has given you another opportunity - oh, would you thank God for that, would you thank God for that? Don't despise it tonight, don't despise the grace and offer of Calvary's Saviour to you by His own blood. Now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation - it's not too late! His mercy endureth forever, God is still the God of salvation!

But be warned: the day of salvation is swiftly drawing to a close. You know, the Lord's coming - hallelujah! He is coming, and He's going to fold this old earth up like a tablecloth. The whole earth is going to go up in smoke, there's a day coming when believers in your family, the nearest and dearest you know, are going to go to glory - raptured to be with the Lord forever! But down here antichrist will be revealed, that man of perdition, that son of the devil. My friend, there will be seven years tribulation that you'll have to go through, and the vials of God holy wrath will be poured out upon this earth. The Lord Jesus Christ, gentle Jesus meek and mild, will walk through this earth in a white robe of purity treading the winepress of His wrath!

My friend, there may be no hope then, but there's hope now. Oh, in Christ's stead I say to thee: be reconciled to God! While the day is nigh buy up the time, while there's a chance call on the name of the Lord! Now! That's your hope: now is the time if you repent. Do you know what this chapter says in verse 22? They were running around wondering when they were going to be saved, do you know what the word from the prophet was? This, listen: 'There is a balm in Gilead'. That's Double-Dutch, maybe, to some of you - but do you know what that means? There's a medicine for your need. Oh, there's hope - what fool would go out into eternity without that hope? Tonight I proclaim, in the name of the Lord Jesus that:

'There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole,
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul'.

You can't go back in time to your opportunities, you can't take them again, but my friend you have an opportunity now, you have hope - now - of believing. You've wasted many years, but there is a medicine that will cleanse you there at Calvary! If you would ascend the hill of the Lord with us tonight. By faith, if you would come where that great river of medicine of the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, that cleanses us from all sin is flowing for all - for the whosoever will. If you will plunge beneath that flood, you'll be as white as snow.

You think you're living life now? Catch yourself on! You know fine rightly there's more to life than what you're living. It's a misery, your soul is empty - but you know that it's only the old devil holding you back tonight! If you came to Christ, oh, it would be life, life, abundant life, Jesus alone is the giver! Will you do it? Will you take the medicine of Calvary? Will you take the poultice of faith and put it onto your soul and be saved? Will you, my friend? Will you buy the truth and sell it not? Will you redeem the time, right now here, the day of salvation, and be born-again?

Or as you go into a new year, will you waste another opportunity, and perhaps waste another year, and - God help you - even waste your own soul? What will you sell your soul for this year? My friend, I asked last Lord's Day: what will you prostitute your soul for? Will you sell it for money? Will you sell it for the family? Will you sell it for your credibility with your mates and your friends and the ones you drink in the pub with? Is that all life is to you? Is that all your soul is worth, the soul of your wife and your family, and your children and your mother? Will you wake up in hell - God forbid - and cry an awful tear-wrenching, soul-wrenching cry: 'I'm not saved!'?

D.L. Moody had one man in his congregation who regularly was on the verge of conversion. D. L. Moody urged him time after time to be saved, and do you know what he kept saying? He said: 'I couldn't be saved, my business partner would ridicule me. He'd laugh his head off at me'. 'He would never stop taking the mickey out of me' - in our terms that's what he was saying. 'I couldn't be saved', is that you? Maybe it's not a business partner, maybe it's something else. Moody persisted, every time he came into the meeting he said to him: 'Are you saved yet? Are you saved yet?' - and he persisted so much that the man desisted in coming to the meetings!

One day the man's wife came to Moody and knocked on his door and said: 'Mr Moody, my husband is very sick, and the doctor says he's not going to do'. Moody went up to that man and spoke to him of Christ, and it seemed that that man trusted Christ - he professed faith in the Lord - Moody thought he was saved. The man, lo and behold, got better - the Lord touched him and he was raised to his feet, and there's many like that, and when they're raised to their feet they live the life of sin that they always lived. Moody urged him, he said: 'Now you're saved why not go to people, go to your partner and testify? Why don't you stand up in the church here and tell what the Lord means for you?'. He said: 'I couldn't do that, people will ridicule me. My partner will laugh at me again'.

Finally, to get away from Moody, he moved to Michigan and set up business there - and Moody told him: 'You can't run away from your Lord'. The message came to Moody not many weeks after that that man had had a relapse of his illness. Moody got on transport and he went and visited him, and Moody said to him: 'Will you not come to Christ, you didn't come to Him before, sure you didn't?'. He said: 'No', he said: 'Will you not come to Him?'. Do you know what he said? 'Mr Moody, I have thrown away my chance. I have thrown away my chance'. Moody said to him: 'The Lord Jesus said, 'Him that cometh onto me, I will in no wise cast out''. The man said: 'It's no good, it's no good' - Moody pleaded with him, Moody fell to his knees to pray and he couldn't pray! All he could hear was the dying voice of that man as he sank into hell saying this: 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I'm not saved'.

Let us bow our heads. We're not going to have a closing hymn, but we're just going to sing one verse of that hymn: 'Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me'. Can you pray that? 'And that Thou bidst me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come'. Listen: I feel it's time tonight for somebody. In fact, I'll say it stronger: I know it's somebody's time, and if you miss it, you've missed life. Let's sing together:

'Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst come to Thee.
O Lamb of God, I come, I come'.

Now, as the heads are bowed in our meeting tonight, the Lord Jesus is before you and He says: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden'. My friend, can I say this: if you reject such a Saviour you deserve to go to hell, every bit of you! You're worth the fires of the damned if you can refuse such a Lord. It's time you come and say: 'Lord Jesus, I know You died for me at Calvary, and I put my trust and faith in Thee. I

turn from my sin, and I come to Thee. Save me and make me Your own, in the name of the Saviour I ask it. Amen'.

If you have prayed that prayer, or if you want to talk to me, I'm here. I'll be at the door, I'll be shaking hands with folk as they go out - but listen to me now: don't you leave this place without getting right with God. Let us close our meeting in prayer, and let me ask that there be silence as we leave this building tonight. Total silence, you can do what you like when you get out of these doors, but please do respect that God has been in this house, and He may be dealing with folk.

Our Father, we thank Thee for so great salvation that is able to save the chief of sinners, and able to save anybody in this building. Lord, You've been so good, You've given us so many opportunities and there's so many building their hopes upon us being saved, some of us. Yet the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and they're not saved. Lord, You know I can do nothing about that, and You know that their loved ones and their friends and this place can do nothing - but Lord, if You would just reach down, and if You would just touch them, we would be ever so thankful. Bless us now as we part, and may the still small voice of God not leave us, nor be snatched by any. In the name of the Lord we pray, Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - March 2001

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"The Place Called Calvary"

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Thank you very much to the young people for that message in song. Matthew chapter 27 is our passage of Scripture this evening. Matthew's gospel and chapter 27, we're reading from verse 1, and we're jumping about a bit in the passage - so make sure you follow it with me. Verse 1 and verse 2 first of all: "When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor".

Verse 31: "And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him".

Verse 34: "They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched him there; And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God".

Let's come before the Lord and ask His help in a word of prayer. Let us pray: Our Father in heaven, we bow before Thee and, Lord, we can say - as we've just been reading Thy holy Word - that the place whereon we stand is holy ground. We say that we have entered the most holy place, the Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him. We have seen the cross, our Father, but we want to see it again - and most of all we want to see the cross for the unbeliever tonight, that they may be given a vision of the Christ of Calvary, that they may be brought by faith, by the eye of faith, to the Mount of Golgotha, that they may see the crucified One dying for them, and that they may trust in Him this evening. Come and do this by Thy Spirit, we pray. Come and fill me now, I pray, oh God. In Jesus name, Amen.

I want us all this evening, by our spirits and by our minds, to travel with Matthew to the place called Calvary. It is nine o'clock in the morning, and between the hours of 9 and 12 noon some instances happen that we read about in the gospel. Simon helps Christ carry the cross. Some of the women who followed

Christ are found to be wandering after Him, and weeping and crying over Jesus. Then He is taken and He is pushed, taken from the court, He has been whipped, He has been stripped, He has been mocked. Centurions, perhaps 600 of them, have taken their turn with the Lord Jesus Christ - and I say it reverently - as if He were a rag doll! They pull Him to shreds, and they beat His face to a pulp, they pull the hairs from His face, they hit Him over the head with a reed. They make a crown of thorns and they batter it into His brow until He is bleeding - what He suffers there!

They strap a beam to His back, they push Him down the Via Dolorosa to the cross. Because His arms outstretched, when He falls onto the ground as He does, He has no hands to save Himself and He lands flat on that scarred face again. A black man at the side of the road helps Him. They follow Him to that cross and there, between two thieves, they lay Him on the ground. They attach another beam to that beam on His back. With a 'crane' they lift Him up, but before they do that they take a hammer and rusty square long nails and beat them into His hands and into His feet. As they lift the cross up high, they drop it into its socket - and as that happens, perhaps, most of the bones in His body go out of joint.

The soldiers around the cross take His garment and they gamble for it, they cast lots. As the people walk by, the beggars, the poor, the criminals, they mock Him, they shout at Him, they spit at Him, they throw things at Him. The first words that He says are this: 'Father, forgive them, for they know what they do'. As He hangs there, He turns to the man beside Him who was a thief and a robber, perhaps a murderer, and he's been mocking Him - the Bible says that, that he was mocking Him, throwing the same things in Christ's teeth. 'You're the Saviour of the world, save Yourself!'. Jesus turns and says to him: 'Verily I say unto thee, today thou shalt be with Me in paradise'.

He looks down to His mother, and He says to John: 'Woman, behold thy son. Son, behold thy mother'. It is three o'clock in the afternoon and all of a sudden there is a great cry, as the Christ lifts His head and looks to glory and says: 'My God, My God, why have You done this? Why is this happening? Why have You forsaken Me?'. He says: 'I thirst!'. 'It is finished!'. 'Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit!'. Then He bowed His head and gave up the ghost.

The Bible says that after that moment there was darkness over the whole area, and the veil of the temple that separated the Holy Place where God dwelt - where men were not allowed to go because they were so sinful - the word of God says that from the top, God's part, He ripped it right to the bottom. It says there was an earthquake, the tombs opened. The testimony of the Centurion, as he stood there witnessing it all, was: 'This must be, surely this man is the Son of God!'.

The confused crowd wander home wondering what has happened, perhaps wondering what they have done. A soldier, knowing that Christ has died, takes a spear and sticks it in His side to make sure that He's dead. Out of His side flows blood and water. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus come to the cross and lift down that body, take it to a tomb and bury the Lord Jesus Christ. They roll a stone over the door, and to all intents and purposes the Christ of God is dead.

Have you ever been there, my friend? Have you ever been to Calvary? Have you ever known what is to sit in a gospel meeting, and have the Holy Ghost of God do something - I think, perhaps, there is no holier thing in the whole universe than to be brought by your mind and your spirit to Golgotha's Hill? To see there the Son of God, God the Son, expiring in blood and agony, suffering there on the cross, taking the sinner's place - have you ever seen it? I think some of you have.

You know, the Lord was called the Man of Sorrows - because before even the cross came He was rejected by His own home folk. His family said He was mad, the people in His hometown said He was an illegitimate child. They said all manner of things about Him. He was misunderstood, He was persecuted, He was

ridiculed, He was threatened constantly by Herod, by the kings, by the Jews, by the Pharisees, by His neighbours, by all people and even the very devil himself threatened Him! As Jesus went about the earth there was this cloud always above Him, He was betrayed by men - by the nearest and dearest. He was misunderstood. When He was being crucified the Bible says that He was forsaken by all His disciples - they all ran away and fled. He was misquoted, misrepresented. He was lied about, He was mis-tried in the courts of the land, and finally He was tortured and then He was crucified.

He was a Man of Sorrows alright. He went through all this - this is gentle Jesus meek and mild that you know about - but perhaps you don't realise, my friend, unsaved or backslidden, you've forgotten what it was that Christ went through. You've forgotten what it was for Him to say: 'My God, My God, why?'. What it was for the Son of God who did no wrong, for the Father to turn His face away from Him in those moments at the cross and leave Him! He says: 'Waves and billows come over my head. I am sinking into the deep mire where there is no standing. Dogs encompass me, they gape at me with their mouths, they're like ravaging lions ready to tear my flesh. All humanity is around me condemning me, wanting to rip me apart. Father, why are You letting this happen? What is going on?'

You know what was going on, or you should know. The word of God says that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. It says - praise the Lord - that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin. His blood had to be shed, because flowing through the veins of the Almighty Son of God there was a substance - there was never a substance like it in the whole universe - it was precious, it was priceless, it was an eternal thing, it was something so special it had so much power, it is the blood of Jesus Christ! It is the only thing in the universe that can take away a man's sin. It is the only thing in the universe that can save a never-dying soul, an eternal soul, from the fires of an eternal hell. It's the only thing! Prayers can't do it, candles can't do it, religiosity, denominational status can't do it, morals can't do it, politics can't do it, only the blood of Christ.

He suffered physically because His blood had to be shed, but He suffered spiritually there on the cross. You see, the Bible tells us that a darkness fell upon the cross, and indeed all the land around it. There is something that went on there, not just the physical and emotional sufferings of the Lord Jesus, but something that we can never understand, we can never plumb the depths or estimate the vast volume of what happened on the cross spiritually. We read in the book of Isaiah, listen, that God the Father laid on Him the iniquities of us all. Do you know that?

Now, let's get real tonight: your sin, your sin, not the boy beside you, your sin was upon Him 2000 years ago. The Bible even says that He was counted as your sin, God looked at Him and God said: 'Do you see that sin? That Person, My beloved Son, I'm going to look at Him for this time in earth's history, I'm going to look at Him as David Legge's sin. All David Legge's filth, all his filthy thoughts and filthy words, all his jealousy, all his anger, all his adulterous thoughts and murderous actions and motives, all he has ever done, all that he is doing, all that he will do', God says, 'Jesus, I'm going to count You as that'. He cursed Him, and He poured all His wrath upon Him.

Now can I say this: the word of God teaches us that God is all-powerful - that's why you call God the Almighty. That means that God can do anything for any length of time, but the word of God teaches this: that upon the cross at Calvary God exhausted His anger against the world's sin! Your sin my friend, like a sponge full of water, God took all the anger that He had against you - and let me tell you that He had a lot of anger against you - and He wrung it out upon His Son. Like a tap that dripped dry to the last dregs of every drop, He poured it all out, He exhausted it. He showed, and wanted to show, so much mercy to you that He was merciless towards His own Son. He gave Him everything, this is Almighty God we're talking about, He did everything He could do to Him - poured all the wrath and the anger and the righteous justice upon His own Son - and He exhausted it.

Jesus Christ - I want you to see this, if you see nothing else see this - like an electric pylon in the countryside, where all the electric lines converge their current onto, He was there - the pylon for my sin. God directed upon Him every sin of the world, from east and west, and north and south. Every language, every culture, every creed, every country, was directed to Him. He, standing there between heaven and hell, was the way, the bridge, an arrow pointing to God - if man was going to know God, have his sins forgiven, have a relationship restored that was broken way back in the Garden of Eden, he was going to have to come by the way of the cross.

That cross, just like it was made out of a tree, would be the tree of life to every sinner. He hung there, He suffered there. Let me say this: He saw, He suffered, the punishment of every conceivable sin that you could imagine. He saw there on the cross, He saw the murders of the terrorists, He saw the extortionists and He suffered for their sin. He suffered for the rapist, He suffered for the adulterer, He suffered for the self-righteous, He took the place of every person that has ever repented and come to Christ in the history of time. But the almighty thing, and the wondrous thing, and the astounding thing to me is this: when He was on the cross I was on His mind.

Do you know something? You might never have been told this, this may be a divine revelation to you this evening, but you were at the centre of His thoughts too. Oh, there are millions of people in this world and no-one loves them. There are street children in the streets of Brazil and nobody would touch them, and even the very police shoot them dead to get them out of the way. There are children across our land, and maybe you're one of them or were one of them in the past, and you feel no-one loves you - not a family. There are people like that - but no-one can really say that no-one loves them. I challenge you, you could be a father or a mother, you could be a son our daughter, a husband or a wife, and you think that the love that you have within that family relationship is something that can never be exceeded or outweighed or beaten - but I tell you that the love of Christ, the love that He had for you to suffer on the cruel tree, is more than tongue can tell. It's a greater love than you will ever know. It's the greatest love that any human being, or that the whole universe, will ever know. God says: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love'.

Do you know it? Have you ever considered Him? The book of Hebrews exhorts us to consider Him who endured such contradiction of sinners. Maybe you're seeing Christ crucified for you this evening, and God by the Holy Spirit has given a vision to you of Calvary, and you're beginning to see it. You're like the man in the dream, who was dreaming that he saw Jesus being put on the cross, and the nails going into His hands, and the mockery and the scorn, and the whipping and everything happening - and he saw the soldier there nailing the nails. He ran to him in his dream, and he pulled his shoulder and turned him round to stop him - and when the face turned round it was himself!

Do you feel like that? Do you see the blood of the Saviour on your hands? I tell you that it is on your hands, because He was suffering for you, and He was suffering for me. There at Calvary, I'm telling you, can you see that it was you that put Him there? It was all your wrong, all the things that you've done in the secret places - you think you've forgotten, but sometimes they come out of your mind and out of the cupboard. The things that you wish you could bury but, like a seed when you put it under the ground, it just shoots out and sprouts out and bears fruit. You lie and lie again to try and forget about it, to try and cover it over, but it never goes away!

Would you not trust the Saviour? Will you not forsake your sin because it was laid upon Him? Can you not see that it's finished, it's done for, and all you need to do is forsake your sin and trust what He did for you at the cross? Can you not see that it's all over? You don't need to add anything to it! You don't have to clean yourself up, His blood cleans you up! Have you ever considered Him? It's the only way to be saved, my friend.

There was a man had a dream on one occasion that there was this ladder that went to heaven. You know, there are piles of people in our wee land and they're climbing this ladder - they think it leads to heaven. He had only three more rungs to get there, and each rung was a good work or a good deed, or giving to the poor or something like that. Lo and behold, one by one, he was getting those rungs put into place. Then, as sure as he had hoped, he reached the pearly gates - he couldn't believe it! He got there to the gate, and all of a sudden the gates opened and he saw the Lord Jesus Christ! But to his shock the Lord was pointing His finger in his face, and He was saying: 'I am the door, he that entereth not by the door but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber'.

Jesus said that! Do you know why? Listen: if God put His Son through such a thing for you, God made Him bleed and God made Him die, and God put Him through your hell so that you wouldn't have to, God did that to Him and forsook Him and turned His face away from Him - do you not think He should be angry with you if you think that you can get there by your good works? Do you think your good works were better than what Christ did for you at Calvary? Because if you do, all power to your elbow - you try, you try, just try and see if God will accept it. Nothing for sin can atone, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

The word of God says that there is a day coming, and do you know what my greatest fear this evening is? That some of you folk that are unconverted in this meeting are going to walk out that door without Christ - because I believe some of you have seen Him tonight, but if you see Him tonight and you walk out unrepentant and unsaved, not born-again, lost - if you go away there's going to be a day, the word of God says, that'll you see Him crucified again. You find it in the book of Zechariah, it says that there is a day coming when you will look upon Him whom you have pierced - and then it will be too late.

There's a story told about a man who was out on the road, the highway. He was in trouble, and he was about to be killed by the bandits. A judge was coming along the road, and all of a sudden he got out of his cabin and he saved the man - and the man got away with his life, free. The next day that man that was saved was caught for a crime, and he was brought to the court. He was brought into the dock before the judge, and to his amazement and astonishment the judge that sat there in judgement of him was the man who had saved him the day before! He looked at him, and he thought: 'Great!'. He said to the judge: 'Sir, do you know who I am? You saved my life yesterday!'. The judge looked down at him, just as He will one day at you if you don't trust Christ, and he said: 'You know, yesterday I was your Saviour, but today I'm your judge'.

I ask you a question that is found in the word of God: is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Does it mean nothing to you what I am suffering, the sorrow which is done unto Me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger? Jesus Christ, by the Spirit of God, is pleading with you this evening: 'Does it mean nothing to you that I died for you? Does it mean nothing that I did all this, that I went through hell, that I shed My blood, that I suffered as your sin and your filth - does it mean nothing to you?'.

You need saved my friend, and you need saved now. You need saved tonight. You need saved - and don't you fall into that trap, and I'm going to preach on this one night, of thinking that you can get saved when you want! You can't! You can only get saved when God is revealing the truth to you at this moment, when God is striving with you, you can only get saved then. If God is speaking to you don't shun it, because it could be the end, the last chance!

What are you going to do? There's a story that's told of the mission field, about the Boxer Rebellion in China, and the Communists turned against the word of God and the preaching of the word of God. There was a little missionary station there of God-fearing people, little boys and girls as well. The Red Army had come down to get people to deny their faith in Christ and rebuke Him as their Saviour. They came in with their guns, and they put a red cross at the door of little mission station - and if you wanted to get out with your life you had

to spit on that cross on the way out, and you'll be free. One by one they spat on the cross - that's what you're doing tonight if you're rejecting Him, you're spitting on the cross. Then this little girl, six years of age, knelt down at that cross, pulled up her sleeve and wiped all the spittle away - and she was shot!

I heard a story of a man whose wife died. He'd loved her for years. On the day of the funeral, lo and behold the old prodigal son had come back - the son who had wandered away, not come near his mother when she was sick or when she was dying, and here he was. But the father was glad to see him. They got the funeral over, and the wake and everything - you know what it's like, some of you, at nighttime it's very lonely after all the people have gone. That was a wild son of his, and do you know something? He was determined to go out on a night like that. He wanted to go out and get full, get a few women - the father said to him: 'Son, of all nights, not tonight. Will you not stay at home? I'm lonely, your mother has just gone, it's the day of her funeral, would you not stay?'. He says: 'I'm going out!'. The father pleaded: 'Will you not stay?', the father said, 'Look, over my body you'll go out on the night of your mother's funeral' - and he lay across the floor in front of the door! That old rascal walked over him.

There are some of you tonight, and the crucified Christ is across that door, and He wants you to stay in here and get right with God, He wants you to get saved. You've heard about the blood of Christ, you've heard about the cross of Christ, you've heard about the cry of Christ to you to be saved tonight - and you'll walk out, and you'll walk over Him! God help you! Every soul that does that, and I say this, is worth the fires of hell for all eternity. You might have walked over your father's prayers, my boy, a mother's tears, the preaching of a pastor, or the testimony of a church - and you can walk over them, you can walk over my name tonight, I don't care - but woe betide any soul that walks on the blood of Christ! For hell will be ten hells for you!

What are you going to do? Now come on! What are you going to do? Are you going to add your slap to the Saviour's face tonight? Are you going to add your spittle to Him now? Or are you, with open arms, with tearful eyes, with a penitent heart, with a Spirit-warmed heart, are you going to accept Him? Are you going to believe Him? Are you going to trust Him? What will you do with Jesus that is called Christ?

Let's bow our heads. God the Holy Spirit is here, and He is speaking to your heart - are you going to listen? Are you going to trust the Saviour tonight? Are you going to listen to that voice that may never speak again? Are you going to look at that vision of Christ, and plead the blood of Christ, and trust the way of the cross that leads to Glory? Are you going to do that? Well, do it now. Say: 'Lord, I repent of my sin. I know that Jesus died for me. I turn away from my sin and I turn to Thee. I know that He died for me there, and I ask that you'll cleanse me in His precious blood. Save me, Lord, save me from hell, and make me live for Thee. Take my life and make me something Lord, I'm nothing, take me. Save my soul, in Jesus name, Amen'.

Now, if you've trusted the Lord tell us, tell us on the way out. If you want to trust the Lord, if you want to speak to me, if you want a piece of literature, please say something at the door, or sit where you are. But whatever you do, listen: I believe God is speaking to some of you - please listen to His voice and trust the Saviour this evening.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the crucified Saviour. We thank Thee that His blood is able to cleanse the deepest dyed sinner, and we thank Thee that He is a risen Saviour. He has risen from the dead to prove that the cross work of Christ is accepted in the throne of heaven. Lord, there are some here this evening and they have never known the reality of sins forgiven, they have never known what is to be washed in the blood of the Lamb - Lord, if we could wash them we'd wash them now, but we can't. Only You can do that, Lord, and we pray that You'll do it. We've done all we can by preaching Thy word, Lord it's time for You now to work, and for You to come in and save souls in this place and restore the backslider. We thank Thee for Thy presence, and we pray now that we may go in the blessing of the Lord, in Jesus name. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2001

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"The Serpent"

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We're reading this evening from Genesis and chapter 3, the third chapter of Genesis, and we're beginning at verse 1. Genesis 3 and beginning to read at verse 1: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them."

If you don't have a Bible don't worry about it, we'll be going through the passage together - but if you do I want you to follow it with me, for what is written there is very important for our gathering this evening. Just before we bow to look at the word of God, we will bow in prayer and ask God's help tonight, because we need Him more than anything this evening, and we come now and let's unite our hearts together - those of us who are God's people - and ask His help in prayer: Our great Father in Heaven, we come into Thy presence and we pray in and through the name of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ, that we may know Thy presence and that Thy presence may exclude all other presence. We pray that the evil one may be bound, we pray for the authority in the name of Jesus Christ, we pray for the blood of Christ to show its power here tonight in saving fullness. We pray for every believer to be armed, and shod with the very armour of God. And, Lord, we pray for the Holy Spirit of the living God to fall afresh on us. Fill us we pray, in Jesus name, Amen.

My message this evening is entitled simply: 'The Serpent'. There was a song written, some years ago now, by a Christian artist by the name of Keith Green. The song was written about the devil himself - Satan, Lucifer.

The song went a bit like this, speaking as if Lucifer was speaking, it goes:

"My job keeps getting easier, as time keeps slipping away.
I can imitate the brightest light, and make the night look just like day.
I put some truth in every lie to tickle itching ears,
You know I'm drawing people just like flies, because they like what they hear.

I'm gaining power by the hour, they're falling by the score.
You know it's getting very simple now, since no one believes in me anymore.
I used to have to sneak around, but now they just open their doors.
You know no one's watching for my tricks, since no one believes in me anymore."

I wonder what you think, tonight, of the idea of 'the devil'. I wonder what you think, or what your mind conjures up, when someone mentions the name 'Lucifer, the Devil, Satan, the Evil One, the Wicked One' to you? Perhaps what you conjure up is what the media would conjure up, and make us to believe: that he is a horned being, like a humanoid with horns, with a tail, and with a pitchfork, and he's red. Is that the way Satan is? What way is he? Is he, as the Bible says, an angel of light? Is he a messenger of God who's gone bad? Or is he demonic in his likeness, in his features, in his appearance? What is the devil? Who is he like? What is he?

The Bible passage that we read together this evening, in Genesis chapter 3, gives us some of the story just after the creation of the world. The Bible says that when God created everything that He created in the world, He made a declaration about it, and He said that every single thing was very good. I want to tell you something, this evening, about this person, Satan: He hates everything that God has made. And immediately when God cried, "This is good, My creation is good", Satan wanted to make it bad, Satan wanted to destroy it. And right there in the Garden of Eden, as we read this evening, untried, innocent, Adam and Eve, a perfect man and a perfect woman - standing there in the garden in their perfect innocence and sinlessness - they face great subtly, and in verse 1 we read "The serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made".

And this is the first thing that I want to bring to you this evening, it's simply this: the serpent. The serpent, who was the serpent? Verse 1 begins with the word 'now', and in the Hebrew language that the Old Testament was written in, that word could also be 'and'. It's like a continuation from chapter 2, and the reason for it is simply this: that in chapter 2 everything, all of God's creation, is declared beautiful and good. But as we go into chapter 3 we see that something happened - where, if you like, God's beautiful oil painting of creation was finished, it was achieved, God was pleased with it, but something tragic happened. And in chapter 3, as it were, someone took their dirty paws and just smeared all of God's picture, God's creation. But the reason why that little word 'and' or 'now' is there is simply this: that chapter 3 shows that it was a very creature, it was one of God's creatures that He had called good, that came in and that smeared His beautiful work of art.

Who was that creature? It says, in verse 1, that it was the serpent. My friends, I don't want you to get a picture of the serpent tonight as a snake as we know it, something that is rotten, something that you wouldn't go near, something that you would be fearful of. But, my friends, God said in chapter 2 of Genesis, that everything that He had made - including the serpent - that it was good. And as you, tonight, would look at that serpent, as it was in chapter 2, you would see a beautiful creature - a creature with finely detailed, intricate colourful skin and scales. It was one of God's, perhaps, most beautiful and delicate creatures. But this, folks, is the truth about the serpent: that in that garden something supernatural happened - and it's happening all over our world today - where Lucifer himself, by his spirit, entered into this serpent, this beast of the field. And that thing that was beautiful, and remained on the outside to be beautiful, to be attractive, to

be covered in delicate beauty - but in, within its depths of its being, it was the most evil creature that ever was.

Satan has not changed. Young people, Satan hasn't changed. There is nothing new under the sun, the Bible says, and Satan certainly hasn't any new plans to come at you with, he has no new plans to deceive the world - because still today in our world he comes, the Bible says, as an angel of light. Right there in the beginning, when God created Lucifer, he was a good creature also, he was the most beautiful creature God created, and he served God. If you like, he was God's 'right hand man' in heaven. And what gets most of us here on this earth, at sometime, got him right at his heart, right in the depths of his soul, it started to rot him - he had pride within him. And in heaven, it says in the word of God, he wanted to be greater than God, he wanted to ascend above God, he wanted to be like God, and immediately he did that God said 'Get out' and cast him out of heaven - and he became a fallen spiritual being.

Satan has not changed, because he is still the angel of light. And you know it more than I do tonight, friend. Unsaved person here, those who are not born again, those who are in the world, living in the world, and the things of the world, you know as well as I do - and all the Christians here know - that the things of the world are so attractive. The drink of the world, the places of the world, the discos, the raves, the dances, the entertainment, the music, the fashion of the world. Everything in the world, it has the bright lights, it has the nice music, it appeals to our senses, it appeals to us - something within us - and we wander after it like a moth after a light, only to find that after it all, behind the appearance of light, behind the appearance of attraction, there is a deadly venom that will get us all if we will let it! Often Satan and his devices are attractive, but when we follow after them it's like a mouse trap that attacks, a bite that we cannot hold and, before we know it, it's too late and we've gone deeper into that sin, we've gone deeper into that attraction - until we are between the jaws of the serpent himself.

Friends tonight, nature tells of it, nature testifies it. Some of the most beautiful creatures on God's earth are the most deadly. You might learn at science that the insects of the Amazon, those that are the most detailed colours of yellow and black - beautiful to look upon - are the ones that will take you from this earth to eternity quicker! Some of the most beautiful plants that you could ever look at, they are the deadliest - even to touch some of them, when the very poison and venom comes upon your skin it will kill you within hours! My friend tonight, take the warning of even nature, if you don't even believe the word of God, that at times within our lives, some of the most beautiful, attractive things to us can be the deadliest.

Sure that's why the Lord Jesus Christ called Satan himself: the liar from the beginning. He comes in disguise and that's why, as Keith Green said in the song, that's why no one believes in him anymore. 'Huh, Satan? A personal Satan? I believe in evil and I believe in wrong - but to imagine a one spiritual being, a person who has imagined all this evil up, who is conjuring it, who is plotting, who is following after the souls of men, who one day will go to hell, and will take as many people with him as possible? Get real! That's not reality! That's not the real world!'

My friend, could I ask you a few questions tonight? The Bible describes Lucifer, Satan, as a serpent for some reason. One of the reasons is this, the first reason is that: a serpent - an ordinary snake of the field - it fascinates its victim. The snake has intriguing power, to look upon it is beautiful, it's almost hypnotic. The cobra as it mounts up in the air, as it spreads its neck and as it looks into your very eyes, it can almost hypnotize you - snakes intrigue and fascinate their victims. And if you're here tonight, my friend, and you're in the world, you know - I don't need to ask you, I know it tonight - that you are fascinated. You are titillated, you are intrigued, you are aroused by the things that this world offers you - and it may well, without you realizing it, have you in its grip!

Another thing about snakes is that they fasten their eyes upon you. And you might not be aware of the presence of a snake, within a building, or within a mud hut, or within a room - but, friend, that doesn't

matter. And you may not be aware tonight that Satan is here, that Satan is even in parts of your life, even in parts of your every day walk, and his eyes are fastened upon you, he wants to make you his prey - you mightn't think it, you mightn't want to think it, friend, but that matters not.

The third thing about snakes is this: that they are noiseless creatures. That they approach you unaware, unseen, they come low, they come unexpectedly, you may not know they're there. And my friend tonight, my unsaved friend, you might think that Satan, if he's even there, if he's even real and alive, that he's nowhere near you. Maybe everything's going well financially, with your health, with your family, with your career, in the place that you live - but friend that could be the deadliest lie of Satan ever, because do you not even see that in that very lie, he has you in his clutches! He's telling you that there's nothing to be worried about, he's telling you that there's nothing to fear, that all is well, that everything is going on as it ever will go on, or ever has gone on, nothing will change, there is nothing at threat.

The fourth thing about a snake is this: that it can perplex. In wild and cycling folds it can come to you - and one minute it's over here, and another minute it's over there, and then it's behind you, then it's in front of you - and a snake can come at you from all angles. Now I know that there are people in our world tonight and they feel that trouble, and evil, and everything is coming at them from every angle, every area, every compartment of their life and they don't know what to do about it - is that you tonight? For it could be that it is Satan and his devices.

Another similarity between Satan and a snake is this: he is capable, he is capable of crushing. Maybe some of you have seen the Boa Constrictors how they can come around you - and some of them can even do it without you feeling them touching you, without your awareness of it - and before you know it, they have crushed the very breath out of your body until you are dead! The snake, the naturalists tell us, is a creature that can lie dead - apparently dead - for months on end. And maybe you're here tonight, saying: 'What's this preacher going on about? Satan? Such a laugh, such nonsense!'. My friend, let me tell you tonight, that if you believe that, if you have let that lie take root in your very soul, Satan has won! Satan has gained the victory in your life, because you believe the greatest lie: that he is not there.

When roused the snake can out-climb, it can out-swim, it can out-wrestle any animal in God's kingdom. And my friend, if you don't realize the clutches you're in tonight if you're not saved, if you don't realize the power that the devil has in your life - even without you knowing it - you won't know it until it's too late. One very solemn fact about a snake is this, tonight: that snakes do not hunt their victims. What do I mean by that? I mean simply this: snakes, serpents, wait 'til their victims come to them. And without you knowing, with that small sin that you think hasn't got a hold of you, with that thing that intrigues you, that's pulling you in - like a line bringing a fish into the catch - before you know it, my friend, it could have hold of your whole life, your very soul and spirit.

Snakes have the habit of finding their way into every corner, and through every barrier, and every crevice, under everything that you could have in your home - and friend tonight, Satan will do that. If you give him an inch he will take a mile, if you think you've only given him a little bit of your life, or a little bit of your pleasure, or a little bit of your senses, listen: eventually the great serpent of the word of God will be into every area of your life.

Satan is like a raven, Satan is like a vulture - he is the scavenger of the dead souls of men and women, those who are not saved. He is the parasite that comes and links himself, and feeds himself off your life, and off your sin, and off your wickedness, and off the things that you don't think harm anyone but yourself. Are you there tonight my friend? Are you under a sin or under a habit - whether it be of mind, of body, of soul - whatever it may be, are you under it tonight, and you can't get away from it? No matter what you do, no matter how many advice places you call into, no matter how many groups you sit around with and exchange

their problems, no matter how many people you talk to, churches you go to, you can't get shot of it. Perhaps, indeed I don't say perhaps, but I say definitely, Satan, subtly, like an enemy army - do you know what he's doing to your life? He's surveying the ground, he's surveying the walls of the city of your life and he's looking for the crevices, he's looking for the breaks, he's looking for the lowest part of the wall that he can scale, he's looking for the part - the weakest bit - that he can break through and take over.

Satan sold humanity three lies in the Garden of Eden, and the first one was this: God doesn't love you. Verse 1, God doesn't love you. How could God love you, if He won't let you have something? That's what the cry of many Christian young people is today: 'If God doesn't allow me to do this, how can He say He loves me?'. Maybe you're a backslider tonight and that's what you're saying. That's what Satan said in the Garden of Eden.

The second lie that he sold humanity was this: You shall not surely die. And there are people walking around our world today, and you'd think they were never going to die by the things that they build up, in materials, and in money, and in pleasures that they make, and luxuries for themselves - you'd think they would live for ever! And indeed, perhaps, built into all of us tonight, is this feeling that we will never die. You never think about dying, perhaps, in the future - especially for the young people, it's just not something that you think about. It's not something on your horizon and perhaps this evening, Satan has dealt you the card - the lie - that you shall not surely die.

And the third lie that he sold humanity was this: Ye shall be as gods. You will be as gods! You might say, 'David I don't believe I'm a god'. But let me ask you tonight: who decides your destiny? Do you think this evening, that you're in charge of your life? That you plan things? That you will decide - perhaps [like] some people I believe, tonight, are even walking about with the preconceived idea that they are in control of the very day that they die. They think that they are gods in charge of their own life. My friend tonight, I know that Satan, the Bible says that Satan is the prince of the power of the air - that means that he inhabits the air space, he inhabits the sky. And I know that tonight he is around our town, he is in our town, he may well even be here this evening, and he doesn't like what he's hearing, and the Bible says that he's like a roaring lion - and one thing that we know about lions is this: that in the jungle, when the thunder and the lightning roars, the lion roars louder. And this evening as the word of God is read, and as it is preached, and as Jesus Christ will be preached tonight, Satan is hearing the thunder and lightning of the Gospel - and I know this evening, that he is shouting into both of your ears, into your soul: 'Don't listen! I can give you more!'

Oh, the serpent is the deadly deceiver, but I don't just want you to just see the serpent in this passage, I want you to see the sin in the passage. Because the serpent said to the man and woman 'Yea, hath God said?' - and what he did was, he excited their interests. And they thought 'Perhaps, perhaps God hasn't said this. Perhaps this is legitimate, perhaps it's legal'. And what he did was, he created a doubt in his mind, and being devious he said that God had told them that they couldn't eat of every tree - but sure God didn't tell them that. God told them they could eat of every tree, except the one - the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And then, what they began to think was, that God was begrudging them enjoyment, God was robbing them of a pleasure, God was denying them something that would make them feel good, and they began to doubt God's wisdom - maybe that's you tonight - and God's goodness in their life and they began to think, 'I know better than God. I know what to do, I know what way my life should go'. And gradually sin weakened their loyalty, and their thinking, and their perception of their God.

And, in verse 4 and 5, we see that Satan's words were so ambiguous, because he told them, 'If you take of this fruit your eyes will be opened!', and Satan was right - but he was wrong. He was right in the sense that their eyes were opened, but when they were opened they didn't see what they thought they would see. They didn't see a vision of bright glory, and beauty, and what they would be as gods someday, perhaps inhabiting heaven - but the Bible said they saw their own nakedness, and what a sight that was. Oh, but sure Eve had

only looked - she'd only looked at the fruit - and it looked good, and she took it; and then she felt, that'd be good to eat, the lust of the flesh, she felt, 'I'd love to experience that'; and then the pride of life within her, she said 'It might make me feel better. I might feel more satisfied, I might feel a purpose in my life, meaningfulness'. But when it happened, and when their eyes were opened - and maybe you feel like this tonight - they saw things that they could never dream, they saw evils, and perversions, and dastardly ways of sinning that they could never imagine were possible! And their absolute fright in the face of God says that, in verse 10, they ran and Adam says, 'I hid myself'.

And maybe tonight my friend you're hiding. Maybe you're hiding from your sin, you don't know how to stop it, it's got a grip of you, you don't know what to do. Maybe you're hiding from Satan. Maybe tonight, as Adam was, you're hiding from God! And you don't want to deal with your sin, you don't want to face God and have done with your sin, and put it behind you. My friend, I'm so convinced of the sinfulness of mankind, tonight, that I believe that a soul, a soul that is in hell tonight that has never had the voice of God talk to them, and the soul that has never been reached by the saving power of Jesus Christ and they're in hell tonight - if they were able to come out of hell, and live for another lifetime, without God speaking to them, they would run to their sin as usual. I believe that. You see sin is like a sword, sin is like famine, sin is like disease, sin is like the coal that blackens, it burns, sin rots our names and reputations, it eats our body, it eats our morality, it eats our family, it destroys everything we have. Sin, in the Garden of Eden, it put the barrier between man and God, it unsheathed the sword of violence and bathed it in the human blood of men and women, and boys and girls. Sin dug the first grave. My friend, tonight, have you ever thought that if it were not for sin, you wouldn't know a person who had been widowed, you wouldn't know of an orphan tonight, you would never have seen any tears, heard any sighs, experienced any sorrows and any death.

And the results of sin, we see from this passage in verse 8, was remorse: oh, they were sorry. And in verse 9 they discovered things they never hoped to discover: evil, and selfishness, they began to blame one another, it was her fault, it was the serpent's fault. And then they had sorrow, and eventually in verse 19, we read that it brought death. You might say, 'David, you're talking about great sin tonight' - I'm talking about all sin, my friend!

There's an Indian story about a little dwarf, and he came to the king one day, and he said: 'King, if I can take three steps of your kingdom can I have the land that I step over?' - a little dwarf. The King said, 'Surely', and in one large leap that small dwarf spanned, and shot up into a massive giant, and in the first step he took all the oceans, in the second step he took all the land, and in the third step he knocked the very King off his throne! Are you sure, this evening, my friend that your little sin is not like that?

But finally, tonight friends, I want you not just to see a serpent, and not just to see a sin, but - praise God, tonight! - I want you to see a Saviour! For this passage says that, in verse 15, God promised - right there when they fell into the mud bath of their own degradation and depravity - God said, 'I'm going to save you!'. He says, 'I'm going to crush Satan's head, Satan will ambush My Son's heel, but I'm going to crush him, I'm going to destroy him and I'm going to save you'.

You might ask me tonight, 'David, well when's this going to happen? Oh, I'm so destroyed with my sin, it's got the hold of me. David, when's this going to happen?'. Listen my friend: this has happened! And - praise God, tonight! - we can declare to Satan, we can declare to the world and all evil, that Jesus Christ has triumphed over death and hell! And from the grave He rose and defeated death itself - the grave - and we can say tonight: 'Death where is thy sting? Oh, grave where is thy victory?' - hallelujah! For at that cross of Calvary, where Jesus was hung between heaven and earth and where He was like - if you like - the lightning director, where God directed the sins of man upon Him and judged Him, where God punished Him, where God put your sins and my sins on Him, where He took your place - have you ever heard that my friend tonight? - for the sins that have grabbed hold of you, for the sins that Satan is pouring upon you - Jesus Christ on the cross suffered for them all!

And I can almost see Him tonight, His very spirit, after He cried, 'It is finished!', and He gave up the ghost, as He hung on the cross - His body died, but His spirit, I can almost see it pouncing off the cross, and Satan - who must have been sitting there thinking: 'We've got Him! We've dealt a deadly blow to the Son of God, He's dead, He will never save the world now!' - I can see Christ jumping down, and grabbing him, and taking him to glory, and setting him at the feet of God the Father and saying: 'Your work is done Father!'. And Jesus led captivity - the one who captivated all humanity - He led him to heaven, and set all mankind free.

My friends, on May 21st 1946 a man called Louis Slaughter (sp?) and seven others carried out a dangerous experiment in Mexico. He was using pieces of plutonium, which become deadly radioactive when enough of it comes together, near one another. And accidentally as they were carrying out this experiment, two pieces, two pieces nudged themselves together - just close enough for a large surge of radioactivity to fill the whole room. And Louis Slaughter - realizing the deadly nature of this - he ran and with his own bare hands, he moved and pulled those two pieces of plutonium apart from one another. And when he did that he exposed himself to a deadly amount of radioactivity and a few days later he died - but the seven other men, they lived.

Listen friend tonight, I'm finished but I just want to say this: you have no need for Satan to keep hold of your life. The sins that are binding you, my friend listen: Jesus took them at the cross of Calvary, Jesus suffered for them! Perhaps what you're going through now, you don't need to go through it, because Christ went through it at the cross. The judgement upon your body that sin is wrecking, the judgement upon your soul, upon the depths of your being - Jesus Christ took it all, He bore your iniquity on Him. What will you do tonight? Will you come to Him? Will you confess your sin? Will you leave it at the cross of Calvary and just say simply, listen: 'Lord Jesus, save me' - and my friend, He'll do it and He'll free you from sin for all eternity. Glory to His name.

Let us pray - and let me ask you tonight, if your head's bowed and God has been speaking to you - heed His call. And if you've heard His voice tonight, harden not your heart for He never might give you a chance again to hear it. I have booklets, and I'll have them at the door, they're absolutely free - why not take one, and read a little more about how you can be saved? If you want to get saved tonight, you can do it here and now where you are, where you stand. If you want to talk to us, we're free, just talk to us at the door and we'll come into a private place and speak with you. But my friend tonight, get saved, heed the Saviour's voice while He calls.

Our Father we pray that Thou wilt give grace, that Thou wilt bind the strong man here tonight, and Lord that Thou mayest set the captives free. Those that are even unaware of the hold that the very one of darkness may have upon their life, we pray tonight that they may experience the knowledge of it by knowing the freedom that Christ brings. Lord come and liberate, and lead captivity captive, consummate Thy work on the cross tonight, we pray, through the salvation of sinners. Come by Thy Spirit we ask Thee and take us all now to our homes in safety for Christ's sake. Amen.

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"The Troubles - What's The Answer?"

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Now, there are two passages of scripture that I want us to read before we look at this vast subject of the problems here in Northern Ireland. Second Corinthians is our first passage of scripture, 2 Corinthians and chapter 5. Now let me say, before I begin, that I'm not going to make any moral or political judgements upon the situation here in Northern Ireland. So you'll not know what I am, in political persuasion, when you leave here this evening - that is not my purpose in looking at this subject. But I hope to analyse some facts for you in the light of the word of God, and then I want you to weigh up the judgement.

Second Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 19: "To know, that God was in Christ", meaning that when Jesus Christ came to the earth, He was God and God was in Him - what was God doing in Him? Look at it: "Reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation". Why did Christ come? He came into the world to reveal God. What was God doing? He was reconciling the world to Himself, not accrediting our sins to us. In other words: not putting our sins upon us, but putting our sins upon Himself, that is the word of reconciliation. Verse 20: "Now then we" - Christians - "are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray" - we plead - "you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him", Jesus Christ, "to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him". Remember that passage.

Now Ephesians 2, and we've been studying this passage recently in our Bible readings, Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 13. Ephesians 2 and verse 13: "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile", there's that word again, "both unto God in one body", watch this, "by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God".

Most people think that the subject of history is simply a matter of correlating and establishing accepted facts and figures, don't they? Learning dates of the kings and of the battles and everything like that - that is history, learning the Presidents of America, the Prime Ministers of Great Britain - and we have this concept that that is what history is: facts and figures. Now although history may involve that, certainly, history is much more than only that. And it's quite possible - and you may know this from studying history, perhaps at school or university - that you could go into a library in a university and take down two historical books, by two different historians, on the one time in history and you would get two different conclusions. That's so, because history is not simply about studying accepted facts and figures, but history involves interpretations.

People can look back a hundred years - and I heard recently, on Radio Four, them talking about a battle, hundreds of years ago, and trying to analyse the motives of the king that sought to win the battle. Why did he do it? What were the reasons behind it - motivating, politically, religiously, economically, socially within the nation - what drove him to that battle? Now there was only one fact that did it, but we don't know that. Therefore historians are looking back and they interpret, they're analysing, trying to look into it. So history is not exclusive, history is not absolute, but it is interpretive. Now that captures - if you want to think about it for a moment - that captures our problem here in Northern Ireland. We have the one history, we have the one island and the one nation here, but there are two different interpretations of the one history. And our

difficulty in Ulster is: both of them are mutually exclusive. They're both historical opposites. One isn't simply a different shade of another, or just different in a couple of places, they both cancel one another out. They're exact opposites - we could say that they are enemies, ideologically speaking.

It goes even more than that because, as far as one side is concerned, the other side's wrong and they're right! Yet the other side say that they're wrong and we're right! And it goes further than the political realm because, if you go deeper, and deeper, and deeper into the interpretation of our history, you find that there are not only political differences and divisions, but there are religious ones and even moral ones. The unionists might say about the nationalists: 'His ideology is morally wrong'. The nationalists could say about the unionists: 'You are morally wrong for being a unionist' - that's the way, what happens in people's minds here. It is such a deep divide, it's such a deep scar that it goes beyond a political idea. It goes into the depths of religion, faith - the things that move men and women and make them live - and it even goes into the depths of morality, so that one party can say to another: 'You are wrong!'.

What a problem, but it's not unique to here - and I know there are times you could watch the news and read the newspaper and you'd think that Ulster was the only place that has these problems. I would vouch to say that probably every country, in smaller or greater levels, has this problem - because there are many ethnic conflicts in our world and all of them, all of them, feature these characteristics. And we in Northern Ireland are only one of many countries who have an ethnic, religious, political and cultural diversity to deal with.

They can't even agree as to when it all began! It's very difficult, in fact, to pinpoint the chronology of the whole thing - when the problems in Ulster began. Opinions differ, some would say [it was] the sixties when the troubles began. Some would go farther back to the twenties. Some would go to 1916. Others would go several hundred years to the Battle of the Boyne, or before it when Britain started mingling, and fiddling about in Irish affairs. And you have all these different ideas of when the thing began. So, if you have all those different ideas of when it began, you can be sure that you have many different ideas about what the answer is. Isn't that right? We're all agreed that we have a problem, that's accepted in face value. We only need to see empty seats, scarred lives, disabled police officers, ruined homes, reputations, blown up cities and towns - you can see it all around you. We can see the symptoms, but what is the problem at the depths of it all? And what is the answer that we have to give, or that anyone has to give? Now that's logic, because if you go to the doctor what he does is he looks at you physically and then he maybe looks in your mouth and so forth, and he's looking for symptoms. And by those symptoms - they're like a map that will guide him to the deeper problem that's within, and he can't see the problem within unless he opens you up. So he has to go by the symptoms that are at the outside and before he finds that he cannot deal with the problem, or treat and give a cure.

Now let's look at how our people, and our government and our politicians, have diagnosed and attempted to treat this problem in Ulster. What is their answer? Well, one answer - and I give you the first one - is this: conflict. Many have thought that conflict is the answer - mainly the terrorists. And terrorists have attempted to redress the imbalance as they see it - in other words, they want to solve the problem that they see to be the problem, with force and conflict. Republicans see the problem to be the forced British presence in Ireland against the will of the majority. The loyalist sees the problem to be the republicans, who want all the Brits out, including themselves - and therefore they are there to protect, and actively strive to crush republicanism. Then there's a third group that believe in force, and they are the law-abiding citizens - some of them. And they believe that the only way to solve this problem is by a campaign of force - the security forces - to eradicate all terrorism and all of the problem...the problem being the terrorists. So the republicans believe the problem is the British. The loyalists believe the problem is the republicans. And a lot of the law-abiding citizens want to wipe out the whole lot by force.

Now, the problem with these problem-solving measures is that they have all failed in solving the problem! Republicanism has not achieved their ideal of a 26 county Irish-Socialist Republic - and that's why, at this

moment, they're in politics, they're in a cease-fire, to try and bring it about by politics. The loyalists have failed in stemming, as they see it, the tide of republicanism and terrorism in our land - and in fact, the influence of that movement, and the IRA itself, has grown greater and greater after years of loyalist conflict. The security option has failed in the past as well, and when the government and the security forces adopted a heavy hand on all the terrorist organisations - if I can turn scripture around a little bit - the blood of their martyrs was the seed of the organisations. Isn't that right? Their membership soared sky-high. What are we saying? Some people believe - in fact a lot of people believe - that conflict is the answer. Listen: conflict has been tried and has failed!

Then there's politics. Many of the hard men of the bomb and the bullet have changed, we often hear it said, to the ballot box. Why? Because they believe it is the way to solve their particular understanding of the problem. Now the difficulty - our difficulty - all began, arguably, with politics. Many would say that politics has got us in the predicament we're in - and if you think about it, politics has existed over the whole course of our problem for hundreds and hundreds of years, but it has never ever brought the answer to Ulster. Neither unionist nor nationalist ideologies, over all the years, has been able to bring the two factions genuinely together for time. Why? Because, as I've already said, they're mutually exclusive, they're opposites, chalk and cheese. You can't mix them, they want two, separate, different things - constitutionally they are different. And those parties that have tried to amalgamate the two of them fail. Sure the Alliance party can't even get an MP, because the two sections are so divided, and it's ingrained within the depths of their being that they cannot intermingle. They cannot come together and they will never come together under politics. You see the people who believe in a political solution do so because they believe that our problem is a political problem. Can I say: politics has been tried and has failed - and is still failing.

Thirdly, religion - and there's a wee band of people that believe: 'Get rid of the other religion, or turn them over to your side' - whether it's Roman Catholicism or dead Protestantism - 'get it out of the way, exterminate it. Ethnically cleanse that religious cult, or system, or people away from this land - and, once you get rid of all the other people, then the problem will be solved'. So they raise up religious orders, the orange, the black, the arch purple, the hibernians, or the legion of Mary - each distinctive - to hold, and designed to cultivate and to conserve the so-called 'faith' that you were born into. You see, some see it as a religious problem - and usually the problem is the other person's religion. Therefore they will do everything to preserve their own and everything to exterminate the other. Let me say this - and I say it from a church pulpit: religion has been tried and, boy, has it failed!

There's conflict, there's politics, there's religion, and fourthly there is reconciliation. In my short experience of hearing about places like Corrymela (sp?) and Rostrevor, they haven't changed the face of Ulster. Why is that? Because it doesn't matter how sincere, at the beginning, that thought of reconciliation is, or to how much an extent people have been trying to reconcile to one another: when something happens - you know what I mean, something magnanimous in a political scale, or there's a bomb, or there's a shooting, or there's some discrimination as one side sees it - all of a sudden those who are trying to be reconciled and reconciling others, their orange blood, or their green blood, boils up again. Isn't that right? And we're in the problem...and we begin to talk about 'your side' and 'the other side' and 'our side' - and all over the years of cross community work, we are still segregated in education, still segregated in housing and in ghettos, and even in our work places we are segregated. Why? Because reconciliation has tried and has failed.

Now, that tells me that those four symptoms and four attempts to address the problem have failed for one reason: they are only symptoms of the problem, they are not the problem itself. Conflict is not our problem, it's only a symptom, it's only an outcome of a deeper problem. Politics is not our problem, religion is not our problem. There is something at the depths of the men and the women that live in Ulster that is causing all the murder and the mayhem across our province. Do you know what it is? It's the age-old problem of men. The

Jews hated the Romans, the Romans hated the Jews. The Gentiles hated the Jews and the Jews hated the Gentiles for hating them! The blacks hate the whites, the rich hate the poor - and you have it all over our world, a problem of hate, hate, hate. Hate someone different than you, hate someone born into a different tradition or culture, hate someone that looks by the eye to be different than you, and what is it? It is hate, Jesus says, that comes from the depths of man's heart. And all these symptoms exist and stem from what is called, listen: sin! Jesus said Himself, Matthew 15:18 and 19: 'But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies' - sin! The breaking of God's holy law, the blatant disregard of the Almighty - and it doesn't matter what colours you're wearing when you do it - it's sin!

Do you know that the Ten Commandments still apply in Ulster? Nations have struggled throughout all time - you read your Bible and you'll find that out. That even in the belly of a woman two nations, the Bible said - twins in Rebecca's stomach, in her womb - twins were struggling with one another, Jacob and Esau. They would become two great nations and they would fight the bit out among one another. There has been ethnic conflict for all time, it's not something new in Ulster. Religions have fought with one another for years. In fact, in the very beginning Cain slew Abel, why? Because he wanted a man-made religion, not God's faith. So he fought and he took a life.

My friend this evening, our problem goes further back than the twenties. Our problem goes further back than 1690 - it goes right back to the Garden of Eden. To where God created man and woman in His own image, and where He told them: 'Of all the trees of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die' - and they ate, and they sinned, and they died!

That's where the problem comes from, where man disobeyed God - and he is still disobeying God in Ulster! He is proud, he wants everything his own way, he wants everyone to conform to his way - and he will even go to war, and take life, to get his own way - but God has already diagnosed his condition. God says: 'All you like sheep have gone astray, and you've led everyone to your own way. You've gone your own way, for you believe your own way to be better'. You've strayed away from the law of God, the holiness of God, the requirements of God. Do you know the problem in Ulster? I'll tell you the problem: the devil himself has manipulated this little land. Satan, Lucifer, the angel of light - the Lord Jesus Christ says that: 'He was a murderer and a liar from the beginning and the father of all lies'. Do you know what I believe? You mightn't agree with me, but I believe tonight that Satan has Ulster round his wee finger. He is controlling this nation. He has blinded the people of Ulster to their need of Christ because they're so preoccupied with their own communities, their own political and religious struggle, that he's taking them to hell! And they don't know it! He gets them caught up with the paramilitaries, or with so called Protestantism, or the bands. He gets them taken up with nationalism. And all of a sudden they're following this cause from an early age, and year after year, and decade after decade, until they're in their seventies and they're sitting - they can hardly walk - and they're still shouting at the television set, because all they can see is their politics, and the old devil's laughing for he's got them!

You know, the big picture of all nations is found in the book of Daniel, and when you go into the book of Daniel, do you know what you read in Daniel chapter 10? - and you can read it when you go home. You find there that God teaches us that behind every nation there are spiritual beings operating, influences guiding, politically and religiously in the whole land - and we in Northern Ireland are no exception. There are principalities and powers that are guiding our nation in the direction that it is going in - and those principalities and powers have their sway within Ulster, and with Ulster people, with Ulster children, because he ultimately wants to claim Ulster for himself and all the people in it, he wants to take this land to hell!

Do you ever wonder why there's a UVF flag on nearly every pole around East Belfast? He's claiming the ground! Do you believe that? I believe that. I believe that that's not planned in some wee back street room with a few hard lads, I believe that's planned somewhere else - in the courts of Satan himself, trying to blind, trying to pull people into this whole thing. If you think about it for a minute, the church of Jesus Christ perhaps, itself, has got caught up with this whole thing. They've got mixed up in the plan of Satan and have fallen for some of his lies and under the bondage to him - think about our two communities. One is influenced either by idolatry in the Roman Catholic Church, or by Celtic paganism that dates back to the druids before the dawn of Christianity. And then in the other community, it would surprise you how many are shackled by the Masonic and Occultic influences of Orangeism and Black preceptory and the Royal Arch purple. And there's that influence in one community, and there's another influence in another community, and they're all living for their wee thing, their wee ideology, their wee political idealism - and God sees them blinded!

Why do you think the greatest evangelised part of the whole world is hardly seeing anyone saved at this moment in time? Because Satan, I believe, has a grip of her people. I'm led to believe - and I can be corrected in this - that the name for Ireland, and I'm talking about the Republic of Ireland, 'Eire', is the name of an ancient Celtic goddess. And do you know what that goddess requires? The blood of her son. Imagine if there was a principality and a power behind Eire, and behind our little land here, Northern Ireland, and behind the United Kingdom, and behind the whole of Europe - principality, a demon, and even a goddess! Planning, thinking, scheming so that there would be blood shed on our land, why? To take souls to hell! And he doesn't care whether it's a Protestant or Roman Catholic, all he cares about it is if it's a soul that's not washed in the blood of Christ! All he cares about is if he gets another one!

And what is the answer? What is the answer to such a problem, a spiritual problem as this - an evil such as sin and hatred, that is orchestrated in the very courts and councils of Satan himself? Listen to our text! Ephesians says that, 'He has made peace'. He can reconcile two divided, opposing, mutually exclusive communities by one way - by the cross! Oh, if you would see this: that the cross is God's way! The cross is the way that He saves men, and He can even take two warring factions in a land like ours, and bring them together in one new man, one new nation under Christ and under God! That's the only way we will have lasting peace in Ulster. That's the only way we can have a hope for the future of our children, because if you think about it: even there at the cross, two arch-enemies, two empires of all time, the Roman empire and the Jews united together to crucify the living God in flesh. And the great irony is that they didn't realize that, by uniting together against Christ, one day it would be possible for them to be united together by the very blood that they were shedding. For there He was dying for sins, there He was suffering the punishment for all the ethnic sins in all the world, for all the hatred, all the false bigotry, all the sins that we see across our land, the murder, the hate, the lies, the deceit - there at Calvary the Lord Jesus Christ was dying for sins such as that. You see the cross is the answer - the cross is the only answer to our need as human beings no matter where we live.

Do you know that Jesus Christ suffered on the cross for Ulster's sins? Do you know what that means? He can be the only Saviour of Ulster. He's the only one that suffered for our sins, and therefore He's the only one who can deliver us from the morass that we are in. And it's not Christ and loyalism, it's not Christ and nationalism - it is Christ and Christ alone can save!

Oh, I've heard, 'For God and Ulster' - and don't get me wrong, I'm patriotic, because I believe the Bible teaches that you're to respect those that have the rule over you within the country, as appointed of God. But let me tell you this: do you see if your 'For God and Ulster', hinders you from Christ and takes you to hell? You can be sure that it's not of God. Do you know what Jesus said? Listen to His words, 'No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other'. You cannot serve God and this world's things!

I don't know whether you know this, but when God looks down on this world He doesn't see a border. He doesn't see any divisions but one - the only division that counts - saved or lost. And there is coming a day - and forget about all the political scene for a moment - where every man, every woman, every teenager, every person - whether they lived in Ulster or Timbuktu - that they will stand before the Great White Throne of God, and the word of God says, they will answer for their works, their hatreds. They will answer for the things that they have vented upon others, and if they are not saved - no matter who they are - the word of God says they will be cast into the lake of fire and will suffer for their sins. And they'll be cast in with the devil who deceived them, and they'll spend eternity with the devil himself.

The Psalmist says, 'But Thou O God shall bring them down into the pit of destruction, bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days, but I will trust in Thee'. Will you trust in Him?

I'm finished, but I want to leave this one little story with you. In the 1920's, in our wee land of Northern Ireland, there was a state of chaos - and fear and uncertainty filled the minds of the people, and the politicians were at their wits end of what to do. Murder and mayhem seemed to be on the throne of Ulster. The situation was absolutely hopeless, it went from bad to worse, but to the Christian there was hope because they had God! And God sent a man called W.P. Nicholson and he was used to preach Christ and His cross, and thousands were brought to Christ, and a civil war was turned into a revival! And God can do it again!

My friend, Christ is the only solution and the only answer for the problem of Ulster, for their problem is sin. And Christ, and His cross, and His blood is the only answer for you, for your problem is sin also.

Let us pray together. There is a literature table on the way out of the church, all the literature on it is free. Please take one, a leaflet or a booklet. I'm here for you to talk to, I'll be at the door. We'll have a cup of tea upstairs, you can come up and chat to me or someone else upstairs. But my friend, if God has been speaking to you, get right with Him and be reconciled to Him and finish the whole problem of sin in your life, that is reflected in the sin of the nation, and let Jesus save you. He can save you now, where you are, if you just cry out to Him in faith and ask Him to forgive you your sins, and turn from your sin and turn to Him and say, 'Lord I know that You died for me at Calvary, save me and come into my life now'. Why not do that now?

Our Father in Heaven, we thank You this evening for the great message of the Gospel. That whosoever will may come, there's no conditions of what religion you are, or political persuasion, all you have to be is a sinner - and we're all sinners here tonight. So we pray, in Jesus name, that sinners that know You not will come tonight by the way of the cross - the only way by men can be saved - and that they would see the crucified Christ for them, and that they would take that gift of salvation by the grace of God. Lord, give them grace tonight we pray - and bless us now and bless the refreshments that we will partake of, and bless those who must go. But grant that none may leave without Christ in their heart. For it's in His name we pray. Amen.

Transcribed by Judith Watkins, Preach The Word - November 2000

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"The Unpardonable Sin"

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We're turning in our Bibles to Matthew's gospel - the gospel of Matthew and chapter 12. As I've said on previous evenings, and I think it bears repeating, that what I bring to you is what I believe God's message is to people here in our gathering who are without Christ and even those that are backslidden, who have once known Christ and known the reality of walking with Him in fellowship but, for some reason, have lost sight of Him.

This is a message, perhaps, that you have never heard or have often wondered about, for I want to preach to you upon: 'The Unpardonable Sin'. Matthew chapter 12, and we'll begin reading at verse 22 to get the context: "Then was brought unto Jesus one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad. Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come".

Let us pray together: Our Father in Heaven, we tremble at Thy word, at the severity of it, in fact, the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Lord, we pray that we would be faithful to His words, that we would deliver it as He delivered it. But Lord, we pray that the Holy Ghost of God may come and that He may deliver it home to the heart of someone that is on the verge of committing the unpardonable sin. Lord, we need Thee. I feel the heavy weight of this responsibility O God. Fill me, I pray, and descend upon this meeting, in the name of Jesus Christ Thy Son. Amen.

Is there such a thing - maybe you've thought about it at times or discussed over the dinner table, or maybe at school even - is there such a thing as the unpardonable sin? Such a thing as something that we can commit, as sinners, that God cannot and God will not forgive? Is there such a thing? If you stopped a man along the street and asked him that question from the human standpoint you'd get very varied answers. Some people might tell you that rape is an unforgivable sin, or murder, or terrorism, or homosexuality, or abortion, or adultery, or coveting, or even converting to another faith. All of these things, in many people's minds, and their own little new-fangled religions, are unpardonable things. I wonder what you would say is the unforgivable sin?

I heard a story about a young girl who got married and they were planning all about it and then they went to the altar and they got married, and they went away on a lovely honeymoon and enjoyed a beautiful time together. They came home and the girl was to go to work the next day and she turned into work, and when she turned into work she found out that she'd got the times of her shift wrong. She was told that she could go home a little bit earlier. She went home and she opened the back door, and she walked up the stairs and

opened the bedroom door, and there was her new, newly wed, in bed with another woman. Some people would look at that and say: 'That's unforgivable! How could anybody do the like of that on a young girl? Surely God couldn't forgive someone like that!'

Or maybe you look over the ocean to America, and you see madmen, some of them even school pupils, that walk into a playground or into a classroom and open fire on innocent people, and stop lives in the peak. Maybe you think of child abusers - all sorts of perverts and criminals and people that are locked up to keep society and civilisation safe from them. But, my friend, I wonder have you ever asked the question of society at large, within the church, or in your own heart: 'Is there something that I could do or is there something that I could commit, and even the blood of Christ could not help me?'. If you've ever wondered about that, listen: Jesus says - now look at the verse, verse 31: "Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men". Hallelujah! Now listen, there's no sinner too deep-dyed, there's no person so far gone in sin, there's no one individual, specific, particular sin that God says: 'I cannot forgive that'. Hallelujah! 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin'. When He hung on that cross, and when He bled and died, and when He suffered God's anger, and God poured on Him - the Bible says - the iniquity of us all, it says that he bore in His own self, in His own body, our sins there on the tree. Paul says that He became a curse there - that God cursed Him instead of cursing us. He is able to forgive us but He didn't forgive His own Son for our sins. He poured out the wrath of a holy God upon Him and because of that, Jesus says, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men. What a glorious gospel!

But the Bible also says that there is 'a sin unto death'. What do I mean? There is an unpardonable sin. There is something that you can do spiritually, and it is not a specific, particular kind of sin, but there is a step that you can take as a spiritual being that will mean that God will never forgive you. What is it? In the book of Genesis, in the Old Testament, you find this sin. Genesis 6 and verse 3, and God is saying before He judges the world with a flood - He's talking about this judgement that is going to come upon people and, in that context, He turns to men whose lives are flowing away (we thought about it last night) like a vapour, like steam. They just disappear, and He says to them there, talking about their age: 'My spirit shall not always strive with man'. Have you ever heard that verse? He was saying this, my friend: 'You're not going to be alive forever'. Now, if you get your 'threescore and ten' you'll be doing well, but at that point your spirit will be taken from your body and you'll have to stand before God and, after death - which it is appointed unto all men - there is then the judgement.

But you find a little bit more in the Old Testament. You find the 'Weeping Prophet', Jeremiah, as he's weeping for the people. Listen now, God came to him and God said to him, three times, on three occasions, not to be praying for certain people because there was no hope for them. God said of His tribe, Ephraim - and we talked about it on a night gone by - He said: 'Ephraim, do you see Ephraim? He is joined to his idols. Let him go! I can do no more for him. He has rejected Me. He has said for the final time, 'I will not have this Man to reign over me". Oh, we often hear the verse: 'Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved' - Romans chapter 10, verse 13 - and that's true! That's God's word! We often hear that those that seek God and search for God with all their heart shall be found of Him. If you cry to God, the Bible says, you shall be heard; but listen to this message tonight from Proverbs chapter 1: 'Then shall they call on me and I shall not hear'. Have you ever heard that one? Have you ever read John chapter 12 and verse 39 where Jesus went into a certain town and, it says, that He was performing miracles, and they looked upon it, and they would not believe. It says later: 'They could not believe'. Something had happened - they had taken a step, and God had said that they had taken the last step. It says in the book of Romans that there are people walking around in our world, and they feel that they are alive as alive can be, but God has given them up!

There is no sin - now listen - there is no sin that cannot be covered over. There is no hell too deep that the blood of Christ cannot reach. There is not a particular kind of sin of filthiness - think of the demoniac of Gadara; he was filled with a legion of demons. A legion could have been anything up to 600 or more demons

within this man, and Jesus was able to forgive him. Hallelujah! He was full of the devil, and a man or a woman that's full of the devil, if they do what he did, and run to the feet of Christ and fall at His feet, they can be made whole. David was a murderer and an adulterer but David cried unto the Lord, and the Lord heard him. The Lord lifted him up out of the miry clay and set his feet on a rock, and put a new song in his heart, even praise unto his God! And God was able to forgive him!

Noah, the great man, who was chosen to continue the civilisation and the human race after the flood - only 8 of his family and himself were saved in the ark - yet when Noah landed there on Mount Ararat, it says that he became 'an husbandman', a farmer, and he planted a vineyard and he got drunk. Praise God, drunkenness can be forgiven. Hallelujah! Because there's some of you here tonight that wouldn't be here, and saved, and cleansed, and on your way to heaven if drunkards couldn't be saved. There is no sin - what can wash away my stain? Nothing but the blood of Jesus!

So what is this unpardonable sin? Well, it's spiritual suicide. It's not a specific sin, but it is an act of a condition of the soul. It is an attitude that continues to a certain point, that no matter how much God speaks, no matter how much the word of God pricks your heart and troubles your conscience, and softens your heart, and troubles your soul, no matter how much you continually reject God - and God says 'You've done it one too many times! I'm not going to speak again'. It could be any sin, any sin that takes you over that line. But there is a line!

'There is a time, we know not when;
A place, we know not where,
That marks the destiny of men,
From glory or despair.

There is a line, by us written
By which each path is crossed,
Beyond which God Himself hath sworn
That he who goes, is lost!'

What is it? It's rejecting Christ one too many times. Have you committed that my friend? Maybe you have spent sleepless nights worrying whether you have committed the unpardonable sin, worrying whether you have done something that will never be forgiven. People say: 'Oh, I'm afraid, pastor, that I've committed the unpardonable sin'. They come to their missionaries, they come to a gospel evangelist, and they say, 'Have I committed this thing? I'm so afraid'. You see, if you're like that - now listen - and you're afraid that you've committed it, praise the Lord! Do you hear me? Praise the Lord, because that is a sure evidence and sign that you have not committed it. If you're still sensitive to the word of God in such a way, John 12:39 says about the Jews: 'They could not believe'. They'd went so far in rejecting Christ and His gospel, and what He was doing, that God had blocked their ears, He had blinded their eyes, He had hardened their hearts, and they could not believe!

You don't need to worry about it. You need to be saved now! You need to hurry up and be saved, but don't think that you've committed that sin. But listen - anybody in this meeting that would rather be in the public house right now, or would rather be at home watching the television, or even you would endure going shopping rather than be in this place tonight and listening to a message such as this - and if you do not fear God, if you don't tremble before the word of God, and the gospel of Christ, if you can look and see the crucified Lamb of God bleeding and expiring for you on the cross and it means nothing to you: you may well have committed it! For the man or the woman, whatever they feel, they feel nothing in their conscience, they cannot act upon anything - and maybe you're here and that's you - I say, in Christ's name and in God's place as I represent Him tonight, if there is a little flame, a little spark of feeling within your soul that God is able

to blow on, fan it, oh man! In God's name seek it out, because if there's nothing there my friend what have you?

We see this all around us, but we're that blind that we don't see it. You see, this is a law of nature and it says this: that if a man will not do a thing in time, there will be a time when he's bound not to be able to do it. Do you get that? If you don't do a thing there will come a time when you won't be able to do it. If you tie your arm up in a sling for a year I guarantee you that, when you take it down, you'll hardly be able to use it. If you cover your eye with a patch for a year, I guarantee you when you take it off your sight will be marred, and you maybe won't be able to see. If you tie your leg up and you begin to limp and take a stick - even if there's nothing wrong with you - my friend, once you stop using that thing wilfully, by your own choice and will, there will come a time when you won't be able to.

Some of you have been hardening your hearts to the gospel since you were a child. You've seen it on the railings of churches. You've seen it on the wayside pulpit. You've heard it in the gospel missions so many times that it's a disgrace that there are people in the world that have never heard it once - and if they heard it once they would come to the feet of Christ, but they haven't a chance. You've been spoilt, my friend, perhaps in a Christian home - a mother who's read Bible stories, prayed over you, implored you, pleaded with you, brought you to church and hoped that you would hear something that your soul may be saved - and you've walked over it! There'll come a day when you'll harden your heart and you'll cross that line, and you'll never be able to come back.

It's a law of nature. It's also a law of psychology. It's a psychology of sin, and it says this: that age hardens the soul. You see, after - you know well! - after you say 'no' the first time, it gets easier to say 'no' the second time, and every gospel meeting you've gone into and the older you are the easier it gets. It's the law of metaphysics. It's something in our mind, and people who are educated in these things tell us that the first thought of this subject - the gospel - the first moment a decision comes to you, and you decide that you're going to reject the gospel, your brain, in the future, every time that decision comes again, will recall the first decision that you have made. And the chances are, it's 'no, no, no, no', until all the 'no-s' of your lifetime, and all the 'no-s' of every gospel meeting are combined into a rubber ball and thrown in the face of almighty God - and the 'no' comes one too many times.

Some people say to me 'You know, it's strange the way not a lot of old people get saved'. Is it? Is it really? Think about it! Some of you here, and you've hardened yourself. You've desensitised yourself; perhaps running into your sin to numb yourself to the gospel, plugging your ears, coming into a meeting like this and counting the rafters, trying to ignore the gospel, thinking about what you're going to do so that it takes your mind of the whole thing, my friend. Is it any wonder? Is it any wonder the children come? And 90% of Christians came as boys and girls. You know what I'm talking about. That young houseman in the hospital, and he wants to be a surgeon and he's able to use the knife. He gets to that stage and he passes his exams, and he's in a very important operation and it's his first chance to prove himself. And as he's there he watches the machine and the life is just going out of his hands and he can't do anything about it. And that man dies and it's his first patient that he's lost. He's devastated.

Go now to the consultant, 65 years of age, and by that time he's got used to it. Isn't that true? We talked one night about the frost, and how layer upon layer makes it harder and harder and harder, but it's also hard not just because of the layers, but because the night is falling. My friend, if you have no sensitivity to your sin, to the gospel, to your guilt, to hell that is before you, for your need to trust Christ and repent of your sin - if you have no thought of Christ on the cross dying for you, it's probably because night's coming. What is night? It is where the sun has set, and for some of you it's been almost one too many times and the night is coming and the Sun of Righteousness is about to set on your life. Jesus Christ is about to walk away for the final time, never to speak again, never to say another word, never to prick your heart again with a gospel text or

with the word of a family member. My friend, do you not see the danger that you're in? God knows, I can see it! I can feel it, but you could be so far gone - you're maybe one step away from the line, and that one step could be out of that door tonight - and you don't see it! How can you avoid it?

I heard two stories: one of a young man. He was intellectual, no religion, and he's lying dying, and the doctor who was a believer came to him and said: 'Sir, do you know that you will meet your God?'. 'God? I don't have a God. I have cursed the name of God. I have fought against God. I've fought against my mother's prayers, and if it means that today I will be in hell, in hell I will be!'. His mother fainted and his father began to sweat on his brow, and that son looked into the eyes of his father and castigated him and cursed him because he had brought him on his wayward road. That young man, coughing and spitting and screaming and cursing and blaspheming, went into hell. Occasionally, an older man or woman snuffles and whines for mercy on their deathbed, but that's the exception. That's the exception! These deathbed conversions are in a lot of peoples' head, you know. It's a wee hope that they have, and they've made it reality because it's the way that they want it to be for them. They want to live their life up and they want to, just at the end, just get in by the skin of their teeth, and never live a life for Christ. But, you know, the line isn't always death. The line could be your final rejection of Jesus Christ, and it could be here tonight.

The second story is of an old man. He shows no signs of conviction - listen - no signs of guilt for his sin, no sign of waiting or going towards an afterlife. And he's lying there and his minister walks in. He says: 'Do you want a Bible?'. 'No!'. 'Do you want me to pray with you?'. 'No!'. 'Are you afraid of dying?'. 'No!'. 'What about meeting God?'. 'No!'. Do you know what Paul calls that? 'Past feeling'.

Can I plead with you again - if the bleeding Lamb of God means anything to you, if your sin, and the weight of it, you can feel it in the slightest little ounce or gram - in God's name, will you listen to the word of God? If you're a backslider tonight, don't think you're exempt from this. You'll never be in hell - that's true - but in the epistle of John we read about a sin, a Christian sinning unto death. That means that they have wandered away from their first love. They've walked away from Christ and the narrow way, the way of holiness, and they've gone headlong into the world, and they are smearing and smudging and blaspheming the name of their Lord Jesus so much that He says: 'That's enough! That's ruining My name down there. Take him home!'.

No matter how old or how young you are, if you have trusted Christ and you're now turning your back on Him, beware! You'll not lose your soul in hell, but you could lose your life down here. You're not your own! You're bought with a price! You can't do what you want; you've got to do what God wants you to do, my friend. But whatever your situation is, if God is speaking to you listen, please listen! You don't need to be in a coffin, or in a graveyard, or in a mortuary, to be dead. There are thousands of people in our little province walking around in shoe leather, and because they've rejected Christ one too many times they're as sure as in hell as if they were there.

I'm glad I'm not an angel this evening. I'm glad I don't have the sight of God. You see,

'Angels see that fatal sign and shudder at the sight,
And devils trace that livid line with hellish delight.
For on the forehead God has set indelibly a mark
Unseen by man, for man is yet blinded in the dark'.

If God was to come down into our meeting tonight and rip your forehead over, and look at the mark that is on your head, what would the mark be? Would it say: 'Bought with the blood of Christ', or would it say - God help us! - would it say: 'Too late'? 'Too late'.

One of the biggest lies of the devil about today is this: that you can be saved when you want. I heard of someone, and they recently felt God speak to them, and they said: 'Maybe another time'. Can I tell you this? You must believe, and can only believe, when God is speaking to you. That's a biblical fact! 'Call upon the Lord while He may be heard, and found while He is near'. 'Seek ye the Lord', because you can't seek Him when He's not near! If you wait, it may be too late.

Napoleon Bonaparte was sitting in his camp, and he was dejected. Half his army was annihilated. He didn't know whether he was going to win or lose - and remember this was the conqueror of almost the world. One young soldier came running into his camp, and he said: 'Cheer up sire, you've gained the victory!'. 'Yes', said the General, 'but one more victory like that could lose me my kingdom'.

God has given me this message tonight. That means that He has it for somebody here. That means that there could be somebody here and they're just about to go too far. They're just about to commit that sin that God will never forgive, and even when they lie on their deathbed and they recite John 3:16 and they pray the Sinner's Prayer, it's not from their heart. You've heard about that, haven't you? People that know their need to be saved, but when they're going out into eternity they can't be saved - and they know they can't be saved, because they didn't listen when He was speaking.

Have you gained the victory over your mother? Over your father? Over your pastor or over your minister? Over your church, over your school, over your district? You've gained the victory, but one more victory could cost you your soul in hell.

Let us bow our heads. I believe that God is speaking this evening and I believe that some of you have heard Him. I also believe that you should be shaking in your boots, because if this message is for you, it could be the last chance. What are you going to do? Are you going to gamble your soul into hell?

Backslider, what are you going to do? Are you going to take the chance that God might let you off and take you to Glory at a ripe old age? Are you going to wait until He says 'That's enough, let's take him home'?

What you need to do is, you need to repent. You need to turn from your sin. Forsake it and leave it and turn to Christ, and ask Him to save you and trust the death of His own Son on the cross to be enough to save you - the finished work where He took your place. Ask Him, by faith, to save you, my friend, and He will do it: 'For all manner of sin may be forgiven unto men'. But whatever you do, don't reject Him tonight, because that is a sin - that is a sin that will keep you out of heaven.

I will be at the door as usual, and I've sensed over recent nights that there have been people who have walked out and almost said something to me. Don't be shy if it's the salvation of your soul, my friend. Get saved tonight - or backslider, return unto your Lord and have this thing dealt with and finished with. Make sure that you'll not live the rest of your days in a prison where you cannot believe.

Our Father, we thank Thee for the sharpness of Thy sword, and we pray that there may be some slain of the Lord tonight. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcribed by Trevor Veale, Preach The Word - April 2001

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"This Could Be Your Problem"

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We're turning this evening in our Bibles to Luke's Gospel and chapter 15. We've been thinking these Sunday evenings - and this indeed is the last Sunday evening we'll be thinking upon the parables - about these stories that the Lord Jesus Christ told. We're thinking this evening of quite a well-known one, which is the parable of the lost sheep.

Luke chapter 15 and verses 1 to 7: "Then drew near unto him", that is Jesus, "all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance".

Let us pray: Our Father, as we come to Your word this evening we thank You for it. We thank You that, as believers this evening, we are not resting in our own thoughts, or own philosophies, or even our own abilities - but, Father, we're resting and abiding on the Rock of the word of God. Father, we know that the law without the Spirit brings death and bondage - but we pray, our Father, that the Spirit would bring life here tonight, that He would apply the word that He has inspired on these pages - Father, that men and women, teenagers, even boys and girls, would see these words, would see them portrayed through the love of Christ to them, and would yield their all to the Lord Jesus Christ in salvation. Help us, Lord, tonight - help me - help us all to pray. Father, we pray that one lost sheep, even ninety and nine lost sheep, would come into the fold tonight through Your word this evening, for we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

'Black sheep' is a name that no-one would like to be given. Many people within families have been labelled 'the black sheep'. Perhaps a family has been good living, perhaps it has been religious, moral, up-standing in the community, but there has just been one - the runt of the litter, the one who never stood up to the expectations, perhaps, of their parents or the rest of the family. In fact they went the opposite direction, they went into areas, perhaps, that were frowned upon - they were seen as the black sheep.

Perhaps you're here tonight, and that's the way you feel. Perhaps you're here, and that is what you're called. Even if they do not call you that, you know that in their thoughts that's the way they think. You could be a backslider, a person who was once a professor of the gospel of Jesus Christ - you once professed to be saved, but now you're nowhere, now you're a black sheep. Perhaps you're not saved, perhaps you've never been saved, perhaps you don't know what it is - and all the pleasure that you find, all the joy in life that you have, is in the pleasures and the sins that this world offers.

I wonder have you ever been lost? The title of my message tonight is this: 'This Could Be Your Problem'. I wonder have you ever went to one of those mazes and they're made of hedges, or made of walls. You go into the maze, and at every corner you turn, or at every corridor you go down, it seems to be a dead end. You just wish that you could fly, and you could lift yourself up above the maze, or you could walk up a mountainside or a hillside, or go up in a helicopter and look down upon it to see how you get in and out. Maybe you have done that, and you know the feeling of being lost. You know what it feels like not to be able to know or even find your way. You've got into this situation and you can't find your own way out.

It's a feeling of being in a desert, isn't it? There's nothing scares me more than thinking of being in a desert, like the Sahara desert. If you imagine being dropped right into the centre of it, right in the middle of it, and all around you you can only see a horizon of sand. A horizon of sand, and above it all you see is the sun and the blue sky scorching down upon you. You can't seem to find a way out, you don't have a compass, you've no direction - all you see around you is sand. How frightening that must be! Or to be parachuted into the Amazon jungle, and all you see around you is trees, plants, rivers - but you don't know where you are, you don't know where to go, you don't know what direction to take - you feel lost.

Do you remember those feelings of childhood? Perhaps you're in the supermarket, or the ordinary market, or out on the street doing the shopping with your Mum or your Dad - and suddenly you turn around and they're not there. As a child usually what you did was stood there, and you panicked and you cried, and you just stood waiting for your mother or your father to find you. You didn't move, and cried - such a feeling within you, can you remember what that was like? You felt insecure, you felt lost, you felt a feeling of dependence you felt a lack, you felt a need, you felt a fear - total insecurity.

That's what this parable is about this evening. We see in verses 1 and 2 who this parable was addressed to, because it says that the publicans and sinners came to hear the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I take great comfort in this: the publicans and sinners came to hear Jesus Christ! Now let's get this: it wasn't the religious fuddy-duddies, it wasn't the hierarchy of the religious system of Judaism of His day, it wasn't the high-fluting statesmen and politicians, it wasn't those type of people - it was the outcasts of society, the outcasts of the church of the day, it was the publicans and sinners.

Maybe you feel like an outcast tonight, an outcast in this church, an outcast in our nation. Perhaps people in the community frown upon you because of the lifestyle that you have led in the past, or are leading now. Well, take comfort tonight because Jesus came - listen - Jesus came for you! Not for righteous people, for righteous people don't know their need - they think they can get there on their own steam and their own effort. People like publicans and sinners, people who have reached rock bottom and can't go any further, those people know that they need help - they cannot help themselves.

These people were lost, these people were lost - and the irony of it was: it was the religious leaders that had come, it says in verse 2, the Pharisees and the Scribes murmuring and saying 'This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them'. Now to eat with a sinner in this society was not the same as eating with someone today. In fact, just as the Lord's Supper portrays Communion, every meal and every eating session in Palestine back then portrayed communion, portrayed fellowship. What was happening here was: these Pharisees, these legalistic religious hypocrites, were looking on, they were seeing Jesus Christ who claimed to be the Son of God, claimed to be sinless, and He was sitting with the dregs of the earth.

Which one are you tonight? Are you lost in your sin? I want to tell you tonight - and this is glorious, and I rejoice in this, even to think of it again - you are not only lost, but you are loved. Have you got that? You are loved! You could say to me: 'David, now hold on, you don't know my background, you don't know my life'. I'm telling you this evening that no matter who has failed to love you in the past - whether it be father, mother, husband, wife, son, daughter, brother, sister - you are loved by someone tonight.

In verse 4 we read about a shepherd who had 99 sheep whom he left. He should have had a hundred sheep, but something went wrong. What had happened was one of the sheep went missing. Because that sheep went missing, that shepherd was committed and was able and was willing to leave the 99 sheep that were OK in his fold, and to go out and fetch the one that was missing. If you're a farmer here tonight, you might think: 'Well, that wasn't too practical' - but listen, practicalities didn't come into it. Do you know why? Because this shepherd loved his sheep individually. Have you got that? He loved them individually, he loved every single one of them, every single one meant as much to him as the other.

It's like your children, isn't it? You maybe have five children, and you don't have number one son and number two son, and you love number one son more than number two son - that's not the way it works. You love them all, don't you? You love them all individually, perhaps in a different way, perhaps for different reasons, but you love them all nevertheless. There is individual love. That's the same with God. God loves you so much tonight - and listen, please, to this - He loves you so much, and He is interested in you so much, that He knows every intricate detail about your life.

You know that problem that you had this week that no-one knew about, or you thought no-one knew about? God knew about it, God was concerned about it - and if you only had opened yourself up to God, He would have tried to help you and soothe you and comfort you and love you in that situation, but you shut Him out. In fact the word of God says that God knows you so much, and in so much detail, that every hair of your head is numbered (that wouldn't be too hard a job for some of you!). But think of that: every single hair! He says that every little sparrow that falls - a sparrow! Sure you could be going down the motorway and bang one with the windscreen, and that's another one away. Insignificant, you think, but God Almighty in heaven is such a God of love that every single one that falls He knows about it!

Scientists tell us that black-haired women have 110,000 hairs - think of that, when you look in the sink, men, you know all about that, in the morning, how many hairs they have! Blonde women have 140,000 hairs - I don't know about dyed blonde hair, whether that increases the amount that they have! But the average woman loses 100 hairs a day - and listen, I'm not exaggerating here this is what the word of God says: every one of those 100 hairs that you lose per day, God knows about. That is how much He cares for you. He knows everything, He cares about everything, He wants to get in and - if I can say it reverently - muck in with everything in your life, be concerned, be involved, take control. He wants to do it because He loves you, but you won't let Him in!

You're loved - but you see verse 4 shows us also that you're lost. I want you to try to imagine the situation here: this shepherd goes one night and he takes all the sheep. He's walking with the crook, he's walking perhaps in a wintry scene with the wind blowing in a cold icy night in Palestine. He's walking over the mountains and the rocks and the crevices, and he brings all those sheep - he thinks - into the fold safely. As they did in Palestine, he lies across the door of the sheepfold - but before he does that, he counts the sheep. When he counts them he can't believe it, because there's only 99 and he can't remember leaving any of them anywhere, he can't remember even seeing one straggle behind - but he knows that he had 100, he knows every one of them by name - but one of them is lost.

If you can see it tonight: out on a mountain in the wild and bare, with a cold wind gale blowing, hitting that little lamb, with the hail beating down - standing on a pinnacle with those little matchstick legs shaking, and the knees knocking together - a little lamb standing, waiting to fall. It's lost. I wonder are you lost tonight? I heard a story about a miner, he was down in the pits in Wales. When he was walking back to the tram that would take him back up to the surface, he realised he had missed the tram. Suddenly the lights went out, the electric was cut off and he was standing in pitch darkness. He shouted, he stood where he was, he was afraid to move - and he shouted out for help. There was a woman in a house above that pit who could hear the faint cries of that man. When they sent a rescuer down to get him they found, when they brought the torch into that pit, that that man was standing right at the edge of a ravine. That man was lost, but listen: if that man had taken one step by himself he was damned.

Do you hear that? If he tried himself, just like the sheep sitting on a pinnacle, to move or to help himself, he was damned because he couldn't do it. He was in darkness - and if you are lost, if you're not saved, and you think that you will be able now or at some stage in your life or before death to help yourself - listen, I say to you in grace: you will only damn your soul!

A newspaper article featured two photographs. One photograph was of the Council, the local town Council, and the other photograph was of a flock of prize-winning sheep. As often is the case, the editor of the newspaper mixed up the captions at the bottom. Underneath the Council he had these words: 'Naive, vulnerable, they huddle for security against the uncertainties of the outside world'. Of course it should have been under the sheep, but that tells us so much about ourselves, doesn't it? We're naive, we're vulnerable, we huddle together for security to feel good - and because there's plenty of us like ourselves, and do the things we do, we feel secure against all the uncertainties of the outside world. But what does the word of God say? It says that we're all like sheep, we're all like sheep, dumb sheep! We have gone astray, we turn every one to his own way - we lead others astray! We're lost.

Charles IX of France, on the St Bartholomew's Day massacre, was lying in a pool of his own blood, choking on the clots in his throat. All he could be heard to say was: 'I'm lost'. Are you lost tonight? Listen, if you're backslider you might never have been a 'frontslider' in the first place - and you have no security of it. You could be lost tonight, you might not have even been saved. Are you lost? Well, I want to tell you from this parable this evening: not only are you loved, not only are you lost, but the word of God and Jesus says that you are looked for.

In verse 4 of the parable it says that he went after that which was lost until - listen to these words - he went after it until he found it! Who's looking? The shepherd is looking, but it's not just an ordinary shepherd, because what ordinary shepherd would go after one little seemingly insignificant sheep when there's 99 good ones. Think of it: he leaves the good ones to go and get the lost one - who would do it? Listen: he's a good shepherd, isn't he? Better than that: He's the Good Shepherd, He in fact is the Chief Shepherd - there's no other Shepherd like Him! I can say, and many here in the meeting can say, that the Lord is my Shepherd - can you say that?

Do you know why we can say it? Because He went after us until He found us! Is He your shepherd? Who do you follow? Are you like a sheep without a shepherd? Do you follow every whim and every feeling and every emotion that comes within you, or the trend that is without you, or the fashion of the world? What do you follow? Do you follow someone who is dependable? The Good Shepherd of the sheep.

But where is He looking? Well, that Psalm that I quoted: 'The Lord is my shepherd' - we all know it well, we've sung it many times - it tells us where He is looking for us in verse 4 of Psalm 23: 'Yea', David says, 'though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil'. Do you know where the Shepherd is looking for you? Listen: in the valley of death. Yes, you see that shepherd in the valley of death, putting his life on the line when the wind is blowing. He has no companion with him, he's going alone down that valley, to climb that ravine, to get to the pinnacle, to risk his life and to take that sheep and to bring it back to the rest of the fold. Can you see him tonight doing that for that lost sheep?

John 10 verse 11 says of Christ, listen, that He is the Good Shepherd who not just lays His life on the line for the sheep, but gives His life - lays His life down, dies - for His sheep. You know a shepherd would do anything for his sheep. I've been told that a shepherd goes to any lengths to protect and care for his sheep in snow and hail, in storm and wind - in every situation - at the edges of rocks. What makes him do it? Is it the market price of the sheep? Well, if pigs are anything to go by today, I'm sure it's not. What is it that keeps him going?

I heard of an incident, and this is a true story, of a storm that hit a little hillside in Wales. There was a flock of sheep that were on the mountain precipice, and all the full force of that storm - wind, hail and even snow - was beating upon that flock of sheep. There was a snowdrift which had blocked the way over the mountaintop. The only way that that shepherd, a little shepherd boy, was to get that flock of sheep out of the

danger was to bring them along a very thin ravine. The only hope of those sheep not falling over was for that young shepherd boy to stand at the edge of the ravine, between the sheep and the falling snow. Think of it: if those sheep had panicked, if there had been a rush, a bottleneck, that little child would have fallen down to his death - but he stood at the edge, he took the risk. Do you know why? Because he loved his own, he loved his own.

Do you know something? The Lord Jesus Christ loves His own, and He loves you tonight. When He was on the cross of Calvary, when He was bleeding, and the sweat and the blood were mingled flowing down His lovely face, when His eyes were stinging with the sweat and blood, when His face was marred, when His scars were evident and open and weeping and oozing - when He was there in agony and blood, listen: He cried to God, 'My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?'. Do you know why? Because He was walking through that valley to find His lost sheep. I don't know what He suffered, but I know this: that none of us ever knew how deep were the waters He crossed, or how dark was the night that the Lord passed through 'ere He found that sheep - this sheep that was lost. He was crushed, He was ripped, He was bruised, He was broken, He was bleeding in order to find that sheep - but He went for it because He loved it.

Sheep are thankless creatures - and you could be thankless tonight for what Christ did for you. In fact, you could be openly ignoring it - even now contemplating how you're going to get around rejecting Him, even now you're thankless for the blood that He shed for you to free you, to find you, to look for you and get you. Listen: He's going to seek you - listen - until He finds you. He's looking for you here tonight. He's looking for you in this meeting. He's looking for you in your life, day by day - and you could be here tonight, and you're running day by day from Him! Are you not tired running from Him? Are you not fed up? Will you not throw down those arms of rebellion? He's catching up on you, do you not see Him catching up to get you? Will you not give up and cry to Him tonight?

There was a mother sheep on one occasion - this is a true story, again from Wales. She gave birth to a little lamb, and when she gave birth the shepherd helped the birth through and everything, and cut the cord and washed and bathed the little lamb so that it would be clean. He brought that little lamb back to its mother and left it beside, but the mother nosed it away - didn't want anything to do with the lamb. The lamb began to get thinner, it wasn't being fed, it wasn't being cared for, it was kept cold because the mother wouldn't make it warm. Eventually the shepherd had to pick the little lamb up and he had to feed it with a bottle, and he had to warm it with a hot water bottle - he had to take care of it because that mother sheep wanted nothing to do with it. Until one day the shepherd was walking across the courtyard of the farm with the little lamb in his arms - and the little lamb, for the first time, gave out a little bleat. As soon as that lamb bleated, a little insignificant bleat, the mother sheep stood still and straight, came running to that lamb - because she recognised its cry.

Listen tonight: all God requires of you - as He says and Christ said: 'All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me', and listen, 'Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise', no way, 'cast out'. If you cry, like the little lamb, to Christ tonight - He will hear you, God will hear you, and He will come like the father of the prodigal and run to you with open arms. He'll take you into His fold. John 10 says you will never perish, and no man will ever pluck you out of His hand. You cannot fall, you cannot go to hell, you cannot be judged according to your sins, but you must - tonight, listen - cry to Him.

You're loved, you're lost, you're looked for - but I want to tell you finally, listen: you can be lifted. Now this is wonderful: you can be lifted! Verse 5 says: 'And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing'. Listen, many people say: 'I'll not be able to keep this Christianity. How could I live like that? It's all good living'. Listen tonight, He will lift you! He will set you on His shoulders! He will carry you! He will look after you! Psalm 40 says: 'I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock', and listen, 'and established my goings'.

The Lord will sort you out. The Lord will take care of you. The Lord will not leave you alone. Americans now have devised a collar, a collar that goes underneath the skin of sheep in the wilderness in America. You see, coyotes would hide behind rocks, and the wild dogs would wait until they saw a sheep out on its own, and they would just pounce. The place where they go for first with their teeth is the neck of the sheep. These scientists have devised a collar, and inside that collar is poison - so that when the coyote pounces and sinks its teeth into it, all it gets is poison and it drops dead.

Listen: if you're worrying about a husband or a wife, or someone in your family, or someone in your work who will oppose you if you trust Christ - or the hard time you will get - listen, if you come to Christ tonight you will be a child of God, and as Zechariah 2 and verse 8 says: 'He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of God's eye'.

'There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold.
But one was out in the hills away,
Far-off from the gates of gold.
Away in the mountains wild and bare,
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.

Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine,
Are they not enough for Thee?
But the Shepherd made answer: 'This of mine
Has wandered away from Me.
And although the road be rough and steep,
I go to find My lost sheep.

But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Or how dark was the night that the Lord passed through,
Ere He found the sheep that was lost.
Out in the desert He heard its cry,
Sick and helpless, and ready to die.

Lord whence, from where, are those blood drops all the way
That mark out the mountain's track?
They were shed for one who had gone astray
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back.
Lord, why are Thy hands so rough and torn?
They are pierced tonight by many a thorn.

But all through the mountains, thunder riven,
And up from the rocky steep,
There arose a cry to the gates of heaven:
'Rejoice, I have found My sheep'.
The angels echoed around the Throne:
'Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own'.

'I say unto you', Jesus says, 'likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance'.

Our Father, we thank You for tonight, we thank You for the Gospel, we thank You for these wonderful parables of the Lord Jesus Christ that illustrate so well for us the gospel of His grace. Father, we pray that that Gospel would be effective tonight, to the saving of precious souls in this place, the restoration of backsliders, and to the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord. Give grace tonight, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Transcribed by Andrew Watkins, Preach The Word - June 2001

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"An Education From Hell"

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Turn with me to Luke chapter 16, Luke chapter 16. Those of you who were at this morning will know that I announced the subject as "An Education from Hell". I want to look at this portion of Scripture, and please do note that this is not a parable, for often parables that the Lord Jesus told were not true stories in the sense of real stories, but He conjured them up in His mind to illustrate a particular spiritual truth. But this story is different because it is factual, there are many spiritual truths within it no doubt, but it is a story about two real men and two real places. That's why the Lord begins this story by saying: 'There was', verse 19, 'a certain man'...

"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead".

Let's pray: Our Father, we sense Thy presence with us. Lord, we just pray and hope and trust that Thou art here to save, and to bring lost sheep home. So we ask for Thy help and for Thy voice to be heard. We claim that promise that Thy sheep hear Thy voice, and they follow Thee. We pray that tonight Thou wilt give them eternal life, and that none of them will perish. Amen.

The Lord Jesus told of two men. One man was rich, one man was poor. That is the division of life, the division of the class system. Some are better off, some are born with a silver spoon in their mouth, some have greater privileges, and some work their way up the ladder. But nevertheless it is a very real division that you can see with your own eye here in our society today. One was rich and one was poor, both died - but one went to heaven and one went to hell. If rich and poor is the division of life, heaven and hell is the division of death. It is the only division, for when you get into eternity there is not a tab on the back of your neck that tells God whether you were a Protestant or a Roman Catholic. There is nothing in your heart that will tell God with His laser eyes that you were moral or immoral, that you were religious or irreligious. There is simply the divide of those who were saved by the grace of God and those who are not. Those who are saved by God's grace will end up in heaven, and those who have rejected the grace of God and the Son of God will end up in hell.

It's very simple, but the fact of the matter is: so many men and women and boys and girls today complicate the matter, even men in the pulpit do it - the reason being that the things that are seen, the Bible says, are temporal, but the things that are unseen are eternal. I'll illustrate it by using the story that the Lord Jesus told.

The rich man looked OK, everything was going his way. He fared sumptuously, he had everything that he needed of luxury and affluence, he had no want - yet this poor man was at the bottom of his gate and was begging every day. He had sores all over his body, and the dogs came and licked them. The thing that was seen was the thing of time, in other words: this rich man had everything and the poor man had nothing, but that was only what was temporal. My friend, the things of eternal are not to be seen with the naked eye, you've got to go deeper to unseen things - and the only way that we as human beings can see what is unseen is to see in God's word what He has revealed to us about eternity and about the matters of salvation.

In the temporal realm this fat rich man fed his body, but when he got to hell his soul was starving and parched. This poor man, Lazarus, was poor and starving and begging, and the dogs licked his sores, but when he died the angels came in a holy royal train and brought him to heaven because he was a child of God - do you see the difference? So what you see tonight doesn't matter: how a person is dressed, whether they're in or outside of church, whether they're moral or immoral, whether they're poor, whether they're rich, whether they have everything going for them or nothing going for them - the fact of the matter is that the great division of eternity is invisible and it is this: whether your soul is washed by the blood of the Lamb, or whether it is still in its sin. Whether it has been to Jesus for the cleansing power, whether it has been to Calvary and looked upon the Saviour and seen your sin and your iniquity on Him, and turned from your sin, asked Him by faith for cleansing and, knowing the peace of God in your heart, gone into eternal life with Him - that's the great division.

I don't care what any Orange institution, any Roman Catholic church, any Unionist party, Nationalist party, 'we ourselves alone' party may say; any Muslim religion, Buddhist religion, or even denominations of Christendom - there is one divide in humanity: those that are saved and those who are lost! Now my question to you tonight is simple: are you living for time, or are you living for eternity? Are you living for things that are seen, or things that are unseen? The reason I ask you that question is because your eternal destination will be determined by the choice that you make, not after death but in your lifetime. Whether you end up in heaven, or whether you lift up your eyes being in torment in hell like the rich man, will be determined by what you do with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in your lifetime. In meetings like this, when you read the gospel tract, when you listen to the gospel tape, when you see the gospel text on a church or on an electric post, wherever you go, wherever you hear the word of God, wherever you see in nature the fingerprint of the Almighty Creator, the God of heaven - you will be responsible in eternity for what you did in time with God's Son.

The tragedy of this story that we read in Luke chapter 16 is that it was too late for this man. The blessing that we have tonight from such a tragic story is that from the predicament that he found himself in you have a privilege, and the privilege is simply to learn now what he learned too late and couldn't do anything about. So, we're going to look at this education that this rich man gives us from hell. I want to call it tonight 'The A, B, C of Hell', I want to make it as simple as I possibly can.

The 'A' simply is that all who go in never get out. All who go in never get out. I hope it's not too elementary for me to say tonight that you cannot get out of hell. This man knew he couldn't get out of hell, why? Because he never asked to get out - you would think if he thought he could get out he would ask it right away, but he didn't ask because he knew he couldn't get out of this awful place - and if he didn't know beforehand, he certainly knew after Abraham told him: 'Look, there's a great gulf fixed, and even though you're thirsty and you want Lazarus to take a dip of water on his finger and to touch your tongue that is parched, it can't happen because there's a great gulf - and those who would come to you cannot, and those who you would go to, you can't go to them because there is this inseparable gap'. Once you go into hell, you don't get out.

You see, it's a place where there's no hope, it's a place where prayer avails nothing. It's a place where this man that addressed Abraham and asked him to go and get Lazarus and bring the water to touch the tip of his

tongue with his finger, but the prayer was not answered because the prayer that this rich man prayed was too late to be prayed. I want you to see this tonight, because if this man had addressed in his lifetime, and if he hadn't addressed it to Abraham but had addressed it to God through Jesus the Son, and asked God to save him - he would have been saved! When he had time, God would have heard him, but now he's in hell and God's not hearing him - and so he prays to Abraham, and Abraham cannot and does not answer his prayer. Let me just say in passing this evening that there are many people in our land and they are praying to the wrong people. They're bringing their confessions to priests in little confessionals; they're coming to Mary the mother of our Lord Jesus, and they're bringing her their repentant prayers and their contrition and their penance. These people whom I love and whom I pray for are on their way to hell - yet they're praying to the wrong person to get them out of hell, like this rich man, because the only One that can get you out of hell is the Lord Jesus Christ! But once you get there you can't get out...and if you're to be saved, you've got to pray this prayer in your lifetime. You've got to pray this prayer now.

This man prayed too late. I did say that his prayer wasn't answered, but I was wrong in one sense because God did answer his prayer and He answered it with mockery. He answered it, I believe, in the sentiments of Proverbs 1:24 when God said: "I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge when they had it, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices". Do you know where the largest prayer meeting in the universe is tonight? It's in hell, and God only answers them with mockery - because once you go in, you cannot get out.

The 'B' of this education is this: before the grave there is mercy alone. Have you got it? Before the grave there is mercy alone. You see that this rich man cried to Abraham: 'Have mercy on me, and get Lazarus to dip his finger in the water', and when Abraham turned to him he said in verse 25: 'Son, remember that thou' - mark that - 'in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things'. In thy lifetime - he said that because mercy is only this side of the grave. It's remarkable this, because this rich man that had no thought of God in his life was on his knees praying in hell. This rich man who had never thought of the mercy and grace of God ever was now in hell, and he's on his face and he's begging mercy, he's feeling his sin, he's feeling his need of a Saviour - but he's praying too late, he's feeling too late, and he's begging too late, because there's no hope in hell at all! There's not even any water in hell!

It's remarkable, for people this very night, at this very moment, are in hell, they know that they cannot get out of hell, they're praying in hell, they're feeling in hell, they're thirsty in hell, they're in torment in hell, the flames are licking at their flesh in hell, all their nostrils are filled with is the sulphur of hell, their eyes cannot see anything but the darkness of hell, all that their emotions feel is the separateness of being cut off from God in hell, they're remembering their sins in hell, they're feeling all the guilt of their shame in hell - yet when they were on earth the Lord Jesus said: 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled'. Isn't that what He said on earth? He said to a woman at the well in Samaria, in John chapter 4 and verse 14, these simple but profound words: 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life'. He says through the Revelation of John in chapter 21 and verse 6: 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely'. Chapter 22 verse 17: 'And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely'.

The tragedy of hell is that at this very moment, as I preach this message, I am conscious that there are those in hell who are praying but they cannot get out; there are those in hell who are feeling but they cannot repent;

there are those in hell who are thirsty, and if they had been thirsty when they were on the earth they would have been saved - but it's too late for praying, it's too late for feeling, it's too late for anything! Mercy is only before the grave. I'll tell you, if someone could offer this rich man in hell tonight water, I think he would jump at it. He would give absolutely everything to take it if he could, but he cannot. I'm asking you tonight: you are offered week, after week, after week in the Gospel meeting and through other sources and resources, the water of life to drink freely, to have eternal life, to have peace with God through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on Calvary's cross - yet you don't take it! But there will be a day that you will lift up your eyes in hell, and you would give absolutely anything and everything to have it, but it will be too late!

You don't feel your need of it now, but I tell you: that rich man was like that at one time. On that day when you lift up your eyes in hell, you will feel your need of it then! He, at this moment, is crying through all of eternity for a deliverer, but he's never been able to have one and neither will he ever have one - because there is no saviour, there is no redeemer or deliverer beyond the grave! But my friend, as you stand living in shoe leather tonight, there is a Saviour, there is a Redeemer, there is an Emancipator! There is a Rescuer who can lift down His nail-pierced hand, and as you sit condemned already in your sin, believing not in the Gospel, He is able to save you now, He is able to satisfy you and cleanse you in His own precious blood, and give you that eternal life, that water of life freely!

Perhaps you don't feel your need of it...my friend, this Saviour is the only Saviour of men, and I present Him to you now as the only Saviour from hell. Do you know why we preach Christ and Him crucified? Do you know why, from this book, that we tell you that wicked men took Him, and they nailed Him to a cross after stripping Him naked and mocking Him, and plaiting a crown of thorns and putting it on His brow, after buffeting His face and pulling the hairs from His beard, after spitting upon Him, and ploughing His back like a field? Do you know why we tell you that, as He hung on that cross, and as His blood was trickling down to the ground, that God clothed the heavens with dark clouds so that men could not see what He was about to do to His Son? In three hours all the judgemental wrath of God for our sin for all eternity was compressed into time, and was poured upon the Son of God! Why do we tell you that? We tell you that because that alone will save you from hell! We tell you it because the gruesome nature of Calvary tells you of the gruesome nature of hell, because if there was no hell there would be no need of Calvary!

Our Lord Jesus didn't go to hell, but I'll tell you this: hell went to the Lord Jesus. As He hung on that cross we can hear Him crying that all the waves and the billows of God's anger against your sin and my sin were poured upon Him - they went over His head! I can hear His holy soul saying: 'I am sinking in the mire where there is no standing'. I can see Him preparing for Calvary in the garden of Gethsemane, and there He is praying and contemplating the cup of the wrath of God that He would have to drink for sinners - don't tell me there's no hell! If there was no hell, Christ would not have been near unto death and crying and sweating great drops of blood as He contemplated what He would have to go through for your forgiveness and your salvation! There, as the Lord laid upon Him the iniquity of us all, your sin and my sin, He was bearing in His own holy soul our hell! Your hell! The eternal hell of everyone who would ever believe in Him, and put their trust and faith in Him, was compressed and was put into the body of Jesus, and God sent down - God, who is a consuming fire - all of His anger, His wrath and indignation against sin, and He just poured it out to the point of exhaustion upon His own Son! No wonder the hymn writer could say:

'What He endured no tongue can tell,
To save my soul from death and hell'.

Did He have any mercy at Calvary? Well, let me take you there, because as He's hanging on the cross He says: 'I thirst'. There was no fingertip, whether of man or of God, that reached down with a little drop of water to help Him, but He says that His tongue was cleaving to the roof of His mouth. He was thirsting there, He was parched because He was going through your hell, your punishment for your sin, so that you would

never thirst and lift up your eyes in torment! Oh, that this rich man in his lifetime would have prayed for mercy, oh that this rich man would have felt his sin when he could have, and would have turned in contrition and in repentance!

Oh, that you would see tonight that all who ever go into hell will never get out of hell, and before the grave at this moment there is mercy. 'A', 'B', and then 'C', that you would see that the chance to be saved is for the living. The chance to be saved is for the living. When I say 'chance' I'm not talking about 'luck', I'm talking about the sense of opportunity, because this man as he was in hell knew that it was too late, he knew that now he'd gone in he would never get out, he knew that any mercy and opportunity of forgiveness was before he went into the grave, and he now realises that the chance and opportunity to be forgiven and to be saved from this awful place is only for the living. That's why he says to Abraham: 'Go and send somebody to my five brethren, that they may go and tell them never to come to this awful place of torment'.

Imagine if there's a brother or sister of yours in hell tonight, and that's exactly what they're saying about you: 'Oh, would you send somebody to go and tell them', and I'm standing here tonight and you're not even listening. Abraham said: 'Sure, they have Moses and the prophets, they have Moses and the prophets'. 'But if you send someone from the dead, then they would believe' - but Christ has come from the dead, that's the Gospel that we're preaching! He died for your sin, but the third day He rose from the grave. God was so pleased with His finished work at Calvary, that He brought Him back to life, but also to give you eternal life forever. He is the resurrection and the life, he that believeth on Him, though he were dead yet shall he live - there is eternal life through an eternal, living Saviour, and He's come back to tell us, yet you still don't believe it! Abraham was right.

The opportunity is for the living, and the only way that they can take the opportunity is to believe the word of God. That's what Moses and the prophets are that he's speaking about, it's simply the word of God, the Bible, the law of God that declares your sin, makes you naked before the holiness of God. Everybody has broken the law of God, the Ten Commandments or whatever you want to call the book of Genesis right through to Deuteronomy, we've all failed and fallen short of the glory of God. But, oh, that you could see your broken state, the fact that you're condemned: he that believeth on the Son hath life, but he that believeth not on the Son hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. You're under the wrath of God tonight, you're as much in hell as if you'd died and gone there!

The word of God tells us that there is a judgement coming, and that we will be judged for our sin, and that the only way to be forgiven and to get out of hell, and to have salvation from our sin and its penalty is to trust in the blood of the Lord Jesus, to trust in the One who was slain there to cover our sins, and to just blind God's eyes to all that we have done. The tragedy about this rich man is that Abraham, the father of the Jews, called him 'Son'. 'Son, remember', he was a son of Abraham, but he wasn't a son of God. What a tragedy: to be a church goer, to be a gospel-hardened hearer, and to end up in hell - what a greater tragedy to be a son of a godly parent, and to be called 'son' in hell.

Does your heart not mourn tonight for your sin? Oh, my friend, will you not come to the cross and be saved? I have been praying in the quiet place that the pangs of hell itself would compass you and get hold upon you. I have been praying that the hell itself that we read of in this chapter would enter into your very bones, that it would put you on fire, that it would make you flee from the wrath to come - because the devils even believe and tremble, they know there's a hell, they know they're going there, and it makes them shake in their boots! Yet you can be sitting here tonight and not believe that there's a hell, not believe that you're going to - I'm telling you: there's a day coming when you will believe, when it will be all too real for you, when you will value the precious blood of the Lamb of God that could have got you out of it!

Walter Hooper, C. S. Lewis' secretary, once chuckled reading a gravestone which said: 'Here lies an atheist, all dressed up with no place to go'. C. S. Lewis didn't chuckle, he said: 'I'm sure he wishes he could believe

that now'. Listen my friend, all who go into hell never get out; before the grave there is mercy; and the chance to be saved is for the living. Why am I telling you all this? You might say: 'See you hellfire damnation preachers, you are so harsh, you are so unkind'. Let me tell you what the Psalmist says in Psalm 116 for a moment, I just want to turn to it, for in Psalm 116 the Psalmist tells us that the thing that drove him to God was strong crying and tears - exactly what we're preaching on tonight. He said: 'The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful' - but what drove him there? It was the fear of hell itself! It was the guilt of his sin! What will drive you to Calvary tonight is realising that you are a sinner, realising that you will be damned for all eternity! Oh, that you would suffer the terrors of the Lord tonight and be distracted from your sin and driven to Christ! The greatest curse in all of this universe is a man whom God leaves to be at peace in their sin and bound for hell!

It would be better for you tonight to be afflicted with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season and end up in hell. I'm finished, but all I've got to say tonight is this: man, woman, you're a sinner, you're on your way to hell, but there is a Saviour in this place and at this moment who will, can, and is able to save you, and will save you now if you come by faith in His sacrifice. I leave you with the word of God: 'Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your heart'.

Let's bow our heads. This takes a lot out of me to preach on a subject like this. Do you know what terrifies me? It could take more out of me than it does out of you, and you're going there. Isn't that awful? Some of you here tonight, and you think you're backsliders, and you're living in the depths of sin, up to your elbows - I wouldn't be too sure you're not going to hell, friend. You've got to make sure by putting your trust and faith in the Lord Jesus, and repenting from your sin. There are people here tonight and they've sat under the gospel I don't know how many times, I'm telling you: your hell will be a millionfold hell for the privilege that you have received, yet turned your back on. I don't want you to go there, I don't want any of you to be there, but it is my duty to tell you you will be there, if you don't repent tonight and put your faith in the Lamb of God.

Father, bring them in - oh God, bring them in kicking and screaming, drag them into grace we pray. Somehow, get them through the door which is Christ Jesus. Lord, if we have to get a bit burnt in the process, let it be - but that we would save some from the flames, from the fire. Pluck them, tonight, as brands from the burning, bring the backslider in. Oh Lord, our children, bring them in, let there be none told: 'Son, rememberest thou in thy lifetime thine upbringing and thy childhood'. Oh God, may men and women and young people, and even boys and girls tonight, flee from the wrath to come into the arms of Jesus, and may they sing tonight: 'Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe in His gentle care'. We wait upon Thee, and upon the work of Thy Spirit now, Amen.

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