

Do You Bear Fruit?

Paul Washer | *illbehonest.com*

Let's open up our Bibles again to John chapter 15.

Before we read our text, I'll just like to make a note of something very important that has been said thus far. It's simply this: To your own ears this morning was read a passage of terrifying judgments that are falling, and would continue to fall upon the Earth until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. To the degree that your heart trembled this morning, it demonstrates your belief in the Word of God. Many heard what was read this morning, and it did not bother you a bit. And not simply because you have assurance of salvation, but because there is something of a callousness that has grown over your heart. You just heard terrible things.

Today you'll even hear, although I am speaking about the Christian life, that this is a serious matter between life and death. And yet, even though these words are weighty, they can come in one ear and out the other.

Now I've been brought here to teach on how to be more godly, to be more Christlike, to stand with greater assurance before the throne of God. But I will say this: There are people here, who, although you would not say this with your mouth, with your life you demonstrate it. You care very little for these types of things. They really do not matter much to you. If that angers you, then let me ask you a question. How much time during the day do you think about yourself? How much time during the day do you think about things that are temporal? Your physical strength, or your beauty, or your clothing, or your relationships, or the joys and pleasures of this world? How much time do you spend thinking about that? And then, how much time do you think about cultivating godliness? About becoming more chaste, more innocent, more Christlike? How are you working and laboring towards a greater assurance of your salvation?

You see, and even now as I speak to you, you'll put your head down and not listen to a word that I am saying. I want you to know that to sit under the word of God is an extremely dangerous thing. For the same sun that melts butter, hardens clay. Beware of sensuality. Beware of the things of this world. Beware of your own heart. Ask yourself: Is there really, really – I mean, come on – is there any evidence whatsoever that you have been born again?

Are you here today because it's Sunday? Are you here today because it is appropriate in your family to be here? Are you here today because you're forced, coerced? People who have truly been regenerated by the Spirit of God find it a pleasure to come to the house of God. And, although at times, we recognize that even those who love the Lord must endure boring sermons, still we come, because we want to hear a word from God. But then, when the regenerate heart leaves the church, that regenerate heart does not leave behind the desire, but what God has done in that life is reflected throughout the week.

If I followed you around with a video camera and videoed your life, how much time would I see you preoccupied with you? Preoccupied with the temporal, preoccupied with the things that will not last? Vanity, mirrors, makeup and muscles. Cars and homes and certain brands of clothing.

If I followed you around and could look inside your heart, how many thoughts about yourself, how many thoughts in your heart, wondering what other people think about you, and then trying to do all in your power to attract them and to gain their attention, rather than seeking to attract the view of God?

You see, there are some here today and you are unconverted. And you will go to hell. You will. And you will be surprised on that great Day, when you hear, "Depart from Me, you worker of iniquity. I never knew you." What He's basically saying in that passage is: "Depart from Me, those of you who claim to have something to do with Me, and yet you lived as though I never gave you a law to obey. You took nothing serious of all the weighty matters I laid before you every Sunday. You were sensual, worldly, carnal. You were not Mine." It's a dreadful thing to say. I'm aware of that. That's why I'm saying it calmly. But it's true.

I will teach on how to be godly, but there are some of you here today and you simply don't care. You don't care to be godly. And if you argue with me, then I will say, "Show me the evidence. Show it to me. Show me how much time you spend in front of the mirror and how much time you spend in front of the Word of God. Show me how much time you spend trying to attract human relationships, and spend no time to beautify yourself before the Lord, that you might attract Him." Be very careful. Be very careful.

Some of you are just biding the time until this Lord's Day is over, so you can go on to things that are more pleasurable to you. Be afraid. These are great, these are weighty matters. And one of the worst things that you could ever adopt is to take on to yourself a very presentable religion that gives you just enough morality to gain a reputation, but there's no love in your heart for Christ. Be terrified. Be terrified.

Let's go on to John chapter 15 verse 1, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that bears fruit He prunes it, so that it may bear more fruit."

Now we've already spoken of this text but let me just bring this, because I'm so burdened about this fact. Do you see what it's saying here? He doesn't say, "Everyone who denies me verbally." He doesn't say, "Everyone who stands against Me publicly is going to be removed or taken away." No. He is talking even about those who confess Him as Lord. Those who pretend to be branches, united to the vine. He said, "But the evidence that they truly belong to Me is that they bear fruit." Let me ask you this question: Do you bear fruit? Do you bear fruit?! Why do I say it in that way with such emphasis? Because one day, you will be turned out and sent to hell, and the last thing you will hear is, "You did not bear fruit!"

Do you bear fruit? Answer that question now. Because if you do not, what does it say about you? He, that is God, will take you away. What does it mean that God will take you away? You're a person. Maybe your father is Christian, your mother is Christian. Maybe they're even distinguished in the church. But you, your heart is dark. It desires the world. You may profess to be a branch. You may even be somewhat moral. But what will happen to you on that great Day? What does it mean to be taken away? Look at verse 6, "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned."

It is very common in evangelicalism today to say that God does not throw anyone in hell. I want you to know that is a direct contradiction of the words of our Lord and Savior Jesus

Christ, who warned His disciples, "Do not fear the Roman legions." That's what He told His disciples. Now, I want you to know, if ever there was something to be feared, it was the Roman legion. Not just because they were so well trained, but because they were vicious. They were brutes. They delighted in killing people.

If there was something, if you were a Jew in Palestine during the reign of Caesar, one of the things that you would most certainly fear would be the Roman soldier, the legions - vile, cruel, killing, mauling, raping, abusing. Jesus said, "Don't fear them, because they can only kill your body." And then Jesus said this, "I will tell you who you should fear." Do you know who He was referring to? His Father. That God could not only kill your body, but then, afterwards, He could throw you in hell. Do you realize that one day, when you die, it is God killing your body. And that when you are put in hell, it will be God who throws you there.

People tell me that you do not see manifestations of the judgment of God in this world today. I beg to differ with you. Do you know that death is not natural? It's not. People say, "Well, it's as natural as birth and death." No. I'm sorry. Birth is natural, death is not. Death is supernatural. It is a judgment of the living God. So, you do not think that the wrath of God is displayed on our planet? It is displayed every day, as hundreds of thousands of people are killed and thrown into hell. And some of you will join them if you are not careful. I know it's a hard word, but it is true. It is true.

The church, or what is called the church is filled up with so many unconverted people. And I fear, especially for you young people, for my own children. You see, it's so dangerous to be raised in a family, not with perfect mother and father, but with sincere mother and father who seek after Christ. It's dangerous to go to a church that may not be the most spectacular thing in the world, but it is a true church. It's a terrifying thing to be homeschooled if it's for the right reasons, that you may be brought up to know the Lord. It's terrifying to have all that laid at your feet, and then to turn from it. I desire – and I feel it's from the Lord – I desire, my great hope is that many of you would be afraid today. That you would tremble. That you would be scared over your situation. That you would wake up. Awake, O sleeper. Please, you're in a terrible state.

Now He goes on in John 15: 3, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lays down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you."

Now, so far we have studied that Jesus is the true vine. That apart from Him, there is no true spiritual life. There are a lot of fountains out there, but God refers to all of them as false

cisterns, as broken cisterns. They are fountains that can produce no life. It is Christ alone. All spiritual life flows from Him. Another thing that we have already considered is this, that the Father is the vinedresser. One of the greatest evidences that you have truly been converted is the relentless, consistent, manifestation of the providence of God in your life.

I can honestly say that sometimes I feel like a prisoner in this sense: I know that God, as my Father, hems me in. I know that yes I could do certain things, but I would never get away with them. I know that He is constantly guarding my life, watching me, doing works of providence, bringing trials into my life, bringing disciplines into my life, teaching, instructing, working, with the greatest degree of patience and love, but also with a very firm hand. I cannot run wild like a dog in the yard. I know He will come after me.

Are you a person who can run wild in the world, walk in the world without circumspection? Can you do what unbelievers do? Can you delight in their delights? Can you walk as they walk? Can you join them in their fun, and then put on a religious mask on Sunday morning? Can you do that? That's evidence that the Father is not a vinedresser for you. He's not a Father for you. Because if you go without discipline, being able to participate in the dark works of the world, it is evidence that you are an illegitimate child and not a son or a daughter. Young lady, listen to me. Young ladies go to hell too.

So we learn that the Father is a vine dresser and that, as Jesus said in verse 3, He said, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you." Which means this: That there are certain elements to God's working in our life. There's the working of the Son, that through His teaching, through studying, learning, memorizing, applying His teaching, we become clean and we become a vessel that can be fruitful. We become a clean branch, a branch that can bear healthy fruit. But also, we have the Father working, taking the teachings of Christ and applying them to our lives through the experiences that He has orchestrated in our lives, such as trials, and even discipline. And then, we also have the third Person of the Trinity, who is at work in all of this.

You see, the branch metaphor is very important. Why? Because here, the branch must be connected to the vine, primarily for one reason - so that the life-producing sap of the vine might flow through the branch. That life-producing sap is the Holy Spirit. You say, "Christ is dwelling in me." Well, so is the Father. And yet, the Father is in heaven and Christ is seated at His right hand, how is it that the Father and the Son are dwelling in you? It is through the work of the Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact, all of God's works on this planet are being carried out by the Spirit of the living God. And so, here we have the Trinity. The Son is teaching you, the Father is applying that teaching, the Holy Spirit is empowering you.

Now, we all know, as in the book of Galatians, for example. The book of Galatians chapter 5 sets out for us that the Christian life is a struggle, and will always be a struggle. But there's some problems in certain aspects of the Reformed movement, not so much in Reformed theology, as modern-day Reformed guys. They almost seem to boast in the fact of sin defeating them. They think they're super spiritual or understand the weighty matters of holiness, because they say, "Wretched man that I am, and I'm just a sinner." I wanna tell you something, some of that language is wrong. If you are truly a Christian, you have the teachings of Christ, you have the providence of the Father, you have the Spirit of God working in your life. And my dear friend, there ought to be victory over sin.

Yes, we will struggle with sin. And, yes, at times it will be 3 steps forward and 4 steps back. It is a real raging battle. But if over the course of your life you are not seeing victory over sin, it is a good indication that you do not know God and God does not know you. Remember what He says? "I will cleanse them from all their filthiness and their idols."

If I were to describe my Christian life, if I were to look back on my Christian life, the last 30 years, that passage applies more than any other passage. I can see God cleansing me from my filthiness and my idols. And He will continue to do so, until the day I die, because glorification is when we reach perfection. But, make no mistake about it, you can become transformed. I have met many a saint, in their 70's and 80's and 90's that glowed with holiness. And the Bible gives us many great promises that we can change.

Remember my testimony this morning, I told you how God saved one of the greatest liars who ever walked the planet. And then, after my conversion, still struggling with truth. And God just, relentlessly beating me to death. You see, He who began a good work in us will finish it. He will. And there will be victory over sin.

Do you have victory over sin? Now let me put it this way. The Christian life is not: You get saved, and you go linearly upwards. That's not the Christian life. But, it's not a flat line either. Flat line means you're dead. It means you've never been regenerated. "Then what is it like, brother Paul?" It's kinda like this. Let's say that here I am at sea level, and I am going to go up into the beautiful mountains of Virginia. Do I go up linearly? No. Do I go up on a flat line? No. Do I go up on a flat line and then vertically? No. Not even an airplane does that. Well how do I go up? I go upwards, then downwards, then upwards, then flat level, then upwards... At some time in my life you may see me progressing greatly and say, "Ah, there's the evidence." At other times in my life, you may see me stalemate for a while, you may even see me decrease in the things I've gained. It's possible. But over the full course of my life, if I'm Christian, you will see a consistent rising. At any given moment, you could see a dip. But, through the full course of the Christian life, you will see progress in the things of God.

Since you were converted, can people see progress in the things of God? Can you honestly tell me that you are growing in grace? That He who justified you is now sanctifying you? That is a very important question.

Now, one of the reasons that we learned for this work that God is doing, is because God loves His Son, God seeks to exalt His Son, God seeks the pleasure and delight of His Son. And that pleasure and delight is a pure bride. God does not desire that the vine, His Son, be united with all sorts of twisted, unfruitful, and dead branches. He does not. For that reason, some of you who are born again, like me, and like the pastors, you will go through discipline. God will deal with you in so many different ways. There will be times in which He makes you grow greatly in grace, by simply carrying you with His power. And there will be other times in which He makes you grow by scourging you. And so, He will make the vine beautiful.

Others of you, in order to make the vine beautiful, He will remove you. Now, how will He do that? He will either do that, well, in some cases in the New Testament, He did it by killing you. Literally, He's had enough. He took out Ananias and Sapphira just like that. Why? They were making the vine look really bad. He would not tolerate it. Some of you will be removed in this: You'll be set free from your parents, finally, and set free from their authority, and you'll simply walk away from the church. Oh, you may go join another church, where you can easily

be an unbeliever and still participate in religious things, but He'll take you out of a genuine church, a true church, and put you in something false, to get you away. I know that's frightening, but it is true. He does it all the time. Okay.

So, God is doing all these things so that we will be fruitful. And then, we finished up yesterday by reading some promises that believers... I want to read some of them again because I want you to be encouraged. God has ordained that you bear fruit. "He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. And in whatever he does, he prospers." (Psalm 1:3). Jesus said this, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also. And greater works than these he will do, because I go to the Father." He is saying, "Because I am going to the Father and I am going to pour forth the Spirit upon the church. And the church, collectively, is going to do such magnificent works. And individuals in the church are going to do such magnificent things. They are going to bear fruit."

Now, we said we needed to be careful with regard to defining the word, fruit, didn't we? If you just do a word study, you're going to come up with all sorts of concoctions. You just need to look basically at the context. Fruit has to do with everything that has to do with the life of Christ. In a sense, a godly character, or the fruit of the Spirit, is Christ living His life through us. Fruit is Christ carrying out His ministry through us. Is there any sense in your life, when people look at you, of other-worldliness? Does anyone get a heavenly flavor around you, when they watch you, when they listen to you talk? Are they in any way touched by eternity because your view is set on eternity? Is anyone impacted in a biblical manner when they come into contact with you? Are people helped, progressed in their faith, are sinners convicted when they come into contact with you?

Are you a fruitful vine? Then tell me, point to your fruit. Just think, right now, in this moment. Just point. Just think in your own mind: How am I fruitful? Do you know most evangelicals can only say this: "Well, I go to church on Sunday." Really? How are you fruitful? If you find it difficult to find fruit, then you should find it very easy to be afraid.

Now we are going to go on, and I want us to look at some things that are very important. First of all, in John 15: 4-6, He says, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

Now, I want us to look at some things. First of all, He says, "I am the vine." - That is not subjective. It is not dependent upon something else, another person or circumstance. He's stating a fact. And this is very important. Sometimes believers get confused in that they take facts for promises. And that's not what you should do. This is not a promise, it's a fact. He says, "I am the vine." It's not contingent upon any other thing. He says, "I am the vine." He is the vine. He is it. No matter what else happens, Jesus IS the vine. You say, "What's important about that?" What He then says about you: "You are the branch."

You are a branch. Now this is very important. Why? He's not saying that as a genuine believer, you now have to do something to become a branch. You are one. Now this flies in the face of modern day evangelicalism that says, basically, you can become a Christian, and yet, not bear fruit at all. And if you want that higher life, then you need to start discipleship and all

these other things. And then, you become a fruitful branch. I'm sorry, that's not the idea being portrayed here. What He is saying is, Jesus is saying, "I am the vine. If you are truly My disciple – that means you've truly been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, you've been made a new creature – you have also truly been united with the vine. You are a branch. You are going to bear fruit, you are going to do it." Okay.

That's why He can say, "You will know them by their fruit," because there's never a question in the New Testament: Can this person be a branch and never produce fruit? There's just no question about it. No, he cannot. That's why He says some will produce fruit a 100 fold, others 60, and others 30 fold. So the least Christian mentioned in that parable is bearing fruit 30 fold. Do you bear fruit? Do you bear fruit? "I am the vine," He said, "You are a branch." And because you ARE a branch, you will bear fruit. If you do not bear fruit, I mean, at all, then it indicates that all you are is a broken dead branch that just seems to be connected to the vine, but you are not.

You know, I walk through the woods; I spend a lot of time in the woods when I can. And you'll come across, you'll be looking as you're hunting, and you're looking for something out of place, and you'll see branches coming down off of a tree. And you can see several branches coming down off of a tree, and you're looking, and they all appear to be connected to the tree. But when you get up there, you kick one, and you see it just automatically falls off. It really wasn't connected to that tree. As a matter of fact, it's an oak tree, and the branch is an elm. It just happened to fall in that direction, and it looked, for a moment, like a real branch but it wasn't. The way to tell is this: It doesn't have the same bark as the vine; it doesn't have the same leaf as the vine; and it doesn't bear any fruit, and it's withered up.

Some of you have always been withered. You've never really been green for Christ. You've never really bore fruit. You see, if you are a Christian, you are a branch. And if you are a branch, you will bear fruit. Now it is true that discipleship is important, cultivating a relationship with Christ, that's what these meetings are about. But we cultivate our relationship with Christ that we might bear more fruit. We're not saying that we have to do it, or we'll have no fruit and still be Christian.

Now, the branch metaphor is absolutely spectacular, and I just wanna say this: A physical branch cannot bear fruit of itself. It can't. You know that. I cut off a branch and what do I have? I have something dead. It may appear to be alive, but only for a few days. What's going to happen? It is going to wilt. It is going to wither. So, what we have here is: A branch cannot produce fruit of itself unless it's connected to the vine. If I say any other thing, it's an absolute absurdity. If I bring a branch in here, and say it's a fruitful, producing branch; and yet, you look at it and it's dry and withered, what are you going to say? You're going to say, "This man is mad. This is preposterous. He is saying something that is an impossibility to the point that it's an absurdity." Now, I am driving this point home because I want you to see something.

It is absurd to think that a branch can produce fruit apart from being connected to the vine. It's absurd. Well, let's follow the metaphor. The believer also cannot bear fruit of himself. It is the believer's real, spiritual, ongoing experimental relationship with Christ, through which the life-giving, fruit-producing Holy Spirit (the life of Christ) works within him. What I want you to see is, so many believers would say, "Well, I can't do this, and I can't do that." No. No. You can't do anything. Okay? So let's get that out of the way. You can't do anything. You're not being humble

by saying, "I can't do this," or, "This is beyond me." You can't do anything apart from the life of Christ in you. Now you must understand, to think you can is absolutely absurd. But this is also wonderful. If you cannot do anything apart from the life of Christ in you, then you can do anything according to the life of Christ in you.

You see, so many times (and I see this in people who write biographies) there'll be very spiritual men who write biographies; but when they get to biographies, it seems like they throw their spirituality out the window. Because they'll talk about a Charles Spurgeon, and automatically what do they do? "The guy had a photographic memory." "The guy had unbelievable energy." "The guy had this, and the guy had that." How did a person have really good theology, and then start writing this book, and throw all their theology out the window? You can't explain a Charles Spurgeon by natural talent, by gifts. It wasn't his head. It wasn't the size of his heart, it was the Christ within him. Do you see that?

Let me give you an example. I am going to mention a biblical character, and the moment I think of that biblical character, I want you to draw an image of him. Okay, it's not going to be God, so you can do this biblically. I want you to draw an image of this person in your mind, the moment you hear his name. Samson. What does he look like to you? A Jewish Arnold Schwarzenegger, right? I've been to Palestine. There isn't a man on this planet, I don't care how big his muscles are, who can rip up the gates of a city, throw them on his back, carry them up on a hill and throw them down. There is no man who can take the jawbone of an ass and whip a thousand Philistines.

Now what's my point? My point is this: We're always thinking physical. We're always thinking talents. We're always thinking this. Why was it that they came to Delilah and said, "You're going to help us out because we can't figure out where this guy gets his strength." Really. Well, if he had muscles all over, like the Incredible Hulk, it would have been very easy to figure out where he got his strength.

He was probably just something of a normal man. Probably thin and sinewy. Where does he get his strength? Only the Spirit of God can rip the gates of a city up. Only the Spirit of God can kill a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass.

Do you see what I am saying? We're always thinking carnal - "Well, he's gifted, he's eloquent, he's this, his mind works so fast." Honestly? Doesn't that contradict everything that the Scriptures say? It's the Spirit of God. That's why God converts a liar to tell the truth; converts a coward to be bold; so that everyone will see that the power is not in a man. It's in God who gives life to the dead, and calls things that are not, to be. And this is a marvelous thing. There is a real sense in which, I know, I am convinced that there is nothing within the realm of God's will that is impossible for me, if Christ dwells within me. It's again, going back to, in the Reformed movement, we need to start talking a lot more about the positive. We need to start talking a lot more about the promises, and the power, and everything that's been given to us as our inheritance.

Now, apart from Christ we can do nothing. This becomes especially clear to us when we look at what we're called to do. Now I find this very important and I want you to really think about this a lot. This is extremely important, what I am about to say. The impossibility of the Christian life becomes clearer and clearer, as we begin to understand just what the Christian life is to be. Let me give you an example: How many of you can live the Beatitudes in your own

power? Or let me throw this one out on you. Husbands, how many of you can live 1 Corinthians 13 with your wife? Ephesians 5? Alright, so we're all in agreement, that the simplest commands of the New Testament are absolutely impossible.

Now, here's the problem. A lot of people recognize that because of their understanding of conversion and because of their understanding of their own failure. But, in looking at that, what do they do? They just curl up and say, "It's impossible." What does the New Testament command us to do? To recognize the impossibility and run to Christ for strength. Our weakness is the thing that is supposed to drive us to Jesus Christ. Do you see that? Instead of weakness, the devil getting in the middle of it and lying to you, and telling you that your weakness and your sin ought to cause you to curl yourself from Christ and go hide in a corner. Every sin, every weakness, every failure in your life, the moment you recognize it, stop moping, stop believing a lie. The moment you recognize that sin and that weakness, run straight to Christ. 'Cause then you're believing Him when you do things like that.

Now, let's look at the ministry for a moment. This is a quote I was looking for yesterday and I finally found it in another sermon. And it was in this one. I want you to listen to the Christian ministry as described by Richard Baxter in *The Reformed Pastor*. Now this is unbelievable. "If my wife says, 'How was your day?' This is how I answer her: We are seeking to uphold the world, that's what I've been doing today. I've been upholding the world. I've been saving it from the curse of God. I've been working to perfect all of creation. I have been working to attain the ends of Christ's death. I have been working to save myself and others from damnation. I have been fighting and overcoming the devil all day. I have been demolishing his kingdom, I have been setting up the kingdom of Christ. And I have been working to attain and help others into the kingdom of glory. That's what I have been doing today, wife."

That's how Richard Baxter describes the Christian ministry. Is there anything in there that's possible for a man? Is there anything in that description that is possible for a woman? What is the Christian ministry? Seeking to uphold the world, advance the kingdom of heaven, fight the devil in hand-to-hand combat. Is any of that possible? Absolutely not. But in the power of the Holy Spirit - Yes.

My little boys ask me; Ian asked me one time, then one time playing around with Evan I did the same thing, when they were much younger. Ian finally looked at me one day, and he goes, "Dad, what do you do? I see you get on planes, you go to different countries, you come back tired and sick, what do you do, dad?" And I thought, I am just going to try to press home a point. So I said, "Son, I don't know if you're old enough right now for me to tell you." Of course, you know what that did. It got his attention, didn't it.

"What do you do, dad?" I said, "Son, you wouldn't believe me if I told you." And then, he's like following me around, "Dad, now what do you do?" I said, "You really think you're strong enough to handle this? And will you promise to believe me?" He said, "Yes." And so I said, "Okay, you wanna know what I do? I fight dragons." He goes, "Aww dad, you don't fight dragons." I said, "You promised you would believe me. I fight dragons." "Really?" "Really." "Big ugly heads?" "Ten of them, son." "Do you have a sword?" "Yes, I do."

Now, you may think I am lowering myself to speak in riddles to a child. I fight dragons that oppress people, and kill them, and enslave them. I fight dragons. You may think this is a bit romantic. I don't care, that may be your problem. You look at everything physically, don't you?

That's why your life seems so boring. That's why you look at television to find some excitement. You can watch the Lord of the Rings, or you can live it. There are people dying, children starving, oppression everywhere, wicked governments, bondage, slavery, everything you can imagine, thousands of babies being murdered in the wombs of their own mothers. I fight dragons. It really changes the way you look at things.

Can we carry out this Christian ministry? Absolutely not. We can not. It's amazing, the repetition of the word 'cannot' in verses 4 and 5. Christ is seeking to remind us, over and over and over again, one great truth: We CANNOT, independent from Him; and we CAN, in dependence upon Him. There is nothing too difficult for Him. Nothing too difficult. When I'm teaching missionaries, I try to tell them: Give me one man, and a Bible, and bended knees, and we'll take that country. It is for this reason the Beatitudes begin with poverty of spirit. "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit." It is for this reason God's providence is constantly at work to prove to us our weakness. It is the reason for every trial and every hardship. Are you hearing me? The reason for every trial, every hardship, every rough wind in your life is to show you your inability, your weakness, and to chase you back to God.

Look with me for a moment. Hold your spot in John, and go with me to 2nd Corinthians 4: 7, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves." Look at the language he's using. Paul is identifying 'surpassing greatness of power' with his life and ministry, but he is also recognizing that it comes from God, and not from himself. But make no mistake, Paul is saying things like, "The power that works mightily within me," so that a man can be moving in the realm of his gifts under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and move with such power, that when the deed is done, his physical body is literally vanquished.

That's why many men have said, I believe Ian Murray, I don't want to misquote him, but that the reason why true revival is not sustained - does not continue on and on and on - is because the human body and human psyche could not endure it. We simply could not, it would wear you out. Be in the presence of God for a few minutes, do you know what it is like? It's like kneeling down 3 feet away from an EF5 tornado, it's what it's like.

But he says here, he says, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

Do you see what he's saying? All these things, workings of God's providence, are designed to give Paul no hope whatsoever in himself. If I hear one more time about the apostle Paul's great intellect, I'm going to start shooting Bible scholars. This is ridiculous. Is there any time in the New Testament, where Paul the apostle talks about his great intellect? No! So why are we identifying all these great works of Paul with his intellect? When Paul said what he was seeking to do - not that he was seeking to be ignorant of the things of God - but he is making it clear he is trying to free himself from just intellectual endeavor. And he could speak a lot better than he actually spoke. He spoke in such a way so that men's confidence would not be in his intellectual powers, but in the power of God.

Look at...well I'll just read it to you. 2 Corinthians 12:10, "Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses." Let me ask you a question: Are you well content with weaknesses? This is something I struggle with, because you can read this passage and not have any struggle because you're not even understanding what's being said. I know, most people are angry and bitter in their heart because they are self-centered and because of unmet expectations, either from others or from God. They want life to be a certain way and when it's not, they get mad. But, to be content with weaknesses, to be content with defects, problems, trials, even afflictions in our own bodies. To be content with that, and then with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties for Christ's sake. Now why is he content with it? He says, "For when I am weak, then I am strong."

The very things that Paul the apostle says are the useful instruments to weaken him, so that he may be strong, are the subjects of most prayer meetings, to avoid. Most prayer meetings are about avoiding all of these things, or either if they are going on, to get out of them. And Paul said, "I'm content in the middle of them," because he had learned something. When he is beyond all hope in himself, then it turns him to the Lord Jesus Christ, and drawing on His strength, then he is truly, truly strong.

Is it not true, If you want to be used of God (I call it Gideon's call), you're going to have to adopt God's procedure of Gideon's call. You say, "What is that?" "Gideon, you're going to save us from the Midianites." Okay, first, look at who He chose. A guy so afraid that he's hiding in a wine vat. And then He goes, "Gideon, get an army." Gideon gets an army. God stops Gideon. Problem - what's the problem? - it's too big.

You see, your problem is what? You say, "I can't do this." Why? "I'm too small. I don't have the talent, I don't have the giftings, I don't have this, I don't have the wisdom, I don't have... I don't have... I don't have... I don't have." God sees all that as advantageous. God tells Gideon, "Gideon, we got to cull this army." Why? "First of all, it doesn't matter how big of an army you think you can muster. You can't defeat the Midianites. But I can, and when I do it, I don't want you getting the credit for it." But you know what's the terrible thing? Even though God did every conceivable possible thing for the people to see that it was of God alone, and Gideon really had nothing to do with it, they still made Gideon a god. We do the same thing. It really is only His power. It really is.

Sometimes I wish, well I wish and I don't wish, that all of you could come home with me. Why? To see me with my family. I really do. Why? Because you could learn so much? Absolutely. But it's not what you think you would learn.

Now I hope I'm a sincere man. I believe my wife is a sincere Christian. I hope that we are not hypocritical, I hope that we truly desire to honor Christ. And we do. We have standards in our home, we teach our children, we do all kinds of things. But I think that you would see that. I do. We don't seek to be disobedient with regard to our family. But I think what you would be most amazed about is how common all our problems are. And that the very things that afflict you afflict us. All the lack of character that causes you problems, causes us problems. I'm not saying that because I want you to think that you can't have a Christian life. You can. And we do have a Christian life and a Christian family. But what I want you to see is that we're just all common people.

We all have the same problems. We get in arguments over stupid things. We're just flesh. Everyone is. But the power of God works through our weaknesses. I so appreciate the fact of my wife that she knows what I am, yet she doesn't use it against me because she understands something of the Christian life. She knows there's times when I get upset because I can't find socks. I mean, can you imagine not looking like Jesus because you're suffering from the great trial of not being able to find grey socks? But she doesn't say, "How can you preach? Look at you, you're upset that you can't find..." She knows she is married to, I think I've proved, a sincere man, a man who wants to follow Christ. But here's the thing: Just a man. Do you see that? Because sometimes I preach, God does things, and people think, "Oh my gosh, how must he be?" How must he be? You'd be surprised.

Some guys came one time I preached at this school, and a revival broke out. Well, a revival and a riot at the same time. Half the school were very happy, the others wanted to kill me. And these students said, "Oh brother Paul, can we come to Peru to just bask in your glory?" I said, "Sure." "To learn from you O man of God?" I said, "Sure, come to Peru." They got off that plane thinking I was the apostle Paul. Two months later, they got on that plane praying for my salvation. [laughter]

Now, again, I take holiness seriously. If you're a person who just thinks, "Ah, whatever," I'm not your type of person. But what I am trying to show you is, your pastors, I hope they are sincere, I believe they are. I've been with one of them for a couple of days in his house, I see sincerity, I see a desire, but just a person who probably also can't find socks. Do you see what I am saying? And I want you to see that because I want you to be gloriously used of God. But many of you think that you reach this certain spiritual level, and then God really starts to use you. If that's true, I don't know what that level is, and I most certainly haven't found it.

My uncle told me one time, he was in the ministry, one of the greatest truths I ever learned. He said, "Paul, most men never do anything for God because they are always waiting to reach some certain level when He kicks in, or perfect circumstances before they go out and do something." He said, "Go now."

Now we're going to bring this to a close and take on this again tonight. But I want to say one other thing. And this is a truth that if the sincere Christian would grab a hold of it, it will help them. Weakness is not an obstacle to the Christian life, but it is the catalyst. The problem is not that the believer is weak, but that he does not really believe that he is weak.

I can tell you how weak you really think you are. Okay, you want to take the test to see how weak you really think you are? How much time did you spend in the Word of God this past week? How much time did you spend in prayer? If you say, "Very little," you really don't think you're that weak. Are you cultivating drawing upon Christ through prayer and His Word? If you're not, don't come to me with that false humility. I'll hit you with the Bible. You see, you really don't realize how weak you are.

Do you know where I think you have a biblical understanding of weakness? When you wake up in the morning, your eyes open up, and you think to yourself, "I'm not moving a quarter of an inch to the left or the right, until I call upon the name of my God in prayer, asking for grace. Because Lord, I can do more sinning before I get my foot on the floor of my bedroom without your grace. I can fall from even this spot to the bedroom floor. I can fall without your grace. I need thee O God." That's the whole thing. "Lead us not into temptation" - what He is saying is,

"Lord, that's a petition for grace. Apart from grace, Lord, I will fall. I will fall, I have no strength in myself."

Now you may say, "But brother Paul, we have grace." Yes, but should we not ask for more? In light of our weakness, in light of the impossibility of the Christian life, in light of the impossibility of the Christian ministry, should we not ask for more and more and more grace? The greater a man's recognition of his weakness, the greater his urgency in running to, and clinging to Christ, and then the stronger and greater he is. Do you see that? This is just absolutely essential.

I don't want the trials and the disciplines and the providences of God in your life to be in vain. They are all designed to run you to Christ, asking for strength. The Devil is a liar, he is a murderer, and he murders through lying. So the moment you fail, let's say you fail in a sin that you sinned the day before, which was a sin that you sinned the day before, which is a sin that seems to be besetting in your life. And so, you commit that sin, and immediately what runs into your mind is, "If I go to Christ right now asking for forgiveness, If I run to Him and cling for strength, am I not being a hypocrite? I mean, I repented yesterday and I am doing the same thing, so obviously I didn't really repent. And I repented of that sin yesterday which was a sin I committed the day before, so obviously I'm just hypocritical."

And then, you hear a voice that's saying, "Yeah, you hypocrite, you are hypocritical. Don't run to Him, He doesn't want you. Get this right, you go to the penalty box." That's a lie straight out of hell. True repentance is forsaking that sin, but a mark of true repentance is not sinless perfection. "I forsake that sin. I hate it." My great sin, you want to know what it is? One that I struggle with, is unbelief and worry. Unbelief and worry. And I find myself, over the smallest matter, becoming afraid and worrying. And then I realize it's sin. God has delivered us every time from great problems. And I worry. And then I repent of it, and I hate it, and I forsake it. God delivers us. Then another situation springs up, and instead of learning from the past of how He saved me, I find myself over the smallest thing again, worrying.

Now does it mean I truly did not repent before? No, I repented. This is an ongoing procedure, it's an ongoing process. And then, little by little, you start seeing greater and greater victory. But what I have learned is this: I shouldn't sit there and go, "Gosh, I've committed this sin a hundred times, I can't go back to Him again. It's just so superficial." That's what the Devil would have you believe. Whenever you notice a recurring weakness, you ought to recurrently run to Christ. Because that's what He said, does He not practice what He preached? Did He not tell Peter? Peter said, "How many times do I forgive my brother? Seven times?" Jesus said, "Seventy-times-seven." He wasn't giving number, He was saying infinitely. Will He not practice what He preaches?

I am not talking about a person who is nonchalant about sin, doesn't care, and uses Jesus as a ticket out of hell. But I'm talking about many of you who are sincere Christians, who struggle with sin, but in the midst of your struggle, you keep thinking you can't run to Him. That there's something wrong. That grace can't be this free. You know the hardest thing you're ever going to have to do? Mark it down. The hardest thing in the Christian life you're ever going to have to do, the greatest mountain you're ever going to have to climb, are you ready? It's the hardest thing you're ever going to have to achieve. It's this: To believe that God loves you as much as He says He does. That's a wonderful mountain to climb, isn't it?

Now the unconverted churchman will hear that and go, "Great, since there's grace, let us sin that grace may abound." But the regenerate Christian, the true Christian will go, "If it is this way, if love is this unconditional, if grace is this free, If I run to Him after every malady, no matter how many times I repeat it, if I can run to Him and He will greet me with open arms and forgive me of all my sins and cleanse me from all unrighteousness, then how I long to be holy. How I long to be more devoted."

Well, let's pray. Father, thank You for Your Word. Lord, help us to believe You, to believe Your promises. Lord, we have to admit, it is not because You've given us any reason to doubt. It's just that there's no one else like You. There's no other example like You. There's no love, there's no grace like Yours, seen in any other thing. Sometimes, Lord, it's hard to believe because of the greatness of these promises. They seem to be too wonderful for us. Lord, help us to believe and show that we honor You by believing. In Jesus' name, Amen.