

I. The Nature of a True Biblical Witness

Last week, we were in John 9:8-30, and we saw one of the simplest, yet greatest, stories in the Bible that truly illustrates, through the story of this blind man, his encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ and what a real biblical witness should be. That is what we learned last week. This story is an incredible story, and as I told you last week, 41 verses are dedicated to this event. It not only shows us what the Lord is doing for Israel and how He represents the nation of Israel in their blindness, but what a great picture it is of what a real biblical witness should be. It shows us that a real salvation experience will be a life-changing event. It will be a change in our direction in life that will be the evidence of a true conversion experience, and that is so missing today.

The change of the direction of our lives, that is really repentance. For years and years and years, and even today, the word repentance, as I have said before many times, is greatly misunderstood. It has nothing to do with salvation, but it has to do with a turn of direction. The Bible says in Genesis 6 that it repented God that He made man. It does not mean that He got saved over the fact that He made man. No, no. It means He turned to go another direction. When God repented that He made man, then He turned in the direction for the flood. Repentance, the word itself, means that when we trust the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, there has to be a change in the direction of our life.

II. A Personal Testimony of Conversion and Change

As I was putting this together this week, I thought of my own life and how the Lord truly worked in my world. I was out of church; we quit going to church probably when I was maybe eight or nine or ten. I went into the army when I was 18, and then when I got out of the army, God began to work in my life. God actually used the death of two men to really get my attention and to help me. One of them was my father. He died of lung cancer when I was just an 18 or 19-year-old kid, and the Lord truly used that in my life. My dad was saved, my mom was saved, Sharon, my sister, was saved, and John, my brother-in-law, was saved. That really began where God started to work with me, and it began to deal in my life with where I was going.

Then the Lord always does this: the second event that happened was I had just gotten back from the army, and my mom wanted to go to church that Sunday, so we went to church together. It was a work for her; she wanted to get back to going to church, and I needed to. So I went with her. That morning, she went to the main service, and I went to Mel Sabaka's singles class because that was the age group I was in. I sat in the back because I really was not where I needed to be yet. I was doing this for my mom, and the Lord had been working on me, but I was still kind of out there. I sat in the back. That morning, Mel Sabaka did not preach. A guy preached by the name of Tommy Thomas. Tommy Thomas was the director of the Brown Street Mission. He was an old Philadelphian preacher, one of the guys that grew up in Canton, Ohio, during the gangster years, like Phil Ward, those guys who had gotten saved and really turned their life over to the Lord.

He was preaching that morning, and he started out his sermon by saying, "I want to preach to you today a message on the second coming of Christ." He said, "And I have one question for you today." He said, "That question is, are you ready?" When he said that, he kind of slumped over, grabbed his chest, and started going down. Yet he said one more time, "Are you ready?" Then, as he got on one knee and hit the ground, he died of a heart attack in the pulpit. He pointed his finger, and with the last breath out of his mouth, as loud as he could say it, he screamed, "Are you ready?" And he went home to be with the Lord.

You can imagine how that would tear up a service. Mel Sabaka came up, and he never missed an opportunity, brother, and he preached on it. But I was sitting in the back, and I am telling you this, all I can tell you is that that last time when he pointed that finger and he asked the question at the top of his lungs with the last breath in his body, "Are you ready?" he was pointing to me. I knew I was not ready. I knew that there were things in my life that should not have been. It was the beginning, over the next couple of weeks, that God really began to work on me. Then I went forward three or four weeks later on a Sunday night, and I just gave it all up and gave it to the Lord.

At that point in time, I worked for a place called the Hoover Company. We made vacuum cleaners and washing machines. I had gotten a job there right after I got out of school, went into the army, and then came back to that job. I was working there now that I was out of the service. That weekend, when I went down front and gave everything to the Lord, Friday when I left work, I was just like everybody else. I was just like all the other guys. You would not have seen any difference in me than the guys who were unsaved, lost, and just in the world. But that Sunday night, after the events that took place in my life, was my eye-opening experience where God healed my blindness. God had been working on me. So Friday I was in darkness. Sunday night I went forward, got it right with the Lord, and Monday morning I was in the light.

I showed up at work that Monday morning. I will never forget, after I got everything right with the Lord, I ran to the bookstore before they closed and bought a New Testament, a little pocket New Testament. I grabbed a fistful of tracts. The next Monday morning, my life had changed. I showed up at the same place where I was just like everybody else, and this time I had a New Testament in my pocket and a fistful of tracts. I faced the same issue that the blind guy faced. I was thinking about this this week. I faced the exact same issues, and we all will. I am the kind of guy that I am either all in or I am all out. I am not a halfway guy. I knew that my new life, no matter what the price was going to cost me, I had to show up that Monday morning because a change had taken place in the direction of my life.

The reaction was just like this guy here. Some people were really happy. I had three or four older ladies there that were Christians, and they would witness to me. Those were the first ones that I went to, and I told them what had happened, and they were thrilled. The guys that I worked with, they were not quite as thrilled. Most of them did not believe that it was a real deal. Some of them thought it was a fad. Some thought it was just something you would get over, just one of those emotional things. I faced the exact same thing that this blind guy faced when God gave him his eyesight back. I understood that. I did not know much about the Bible; take that back, I did not

know anything about the Bible. But I knew that I had to prove myself. Later on, I found the verse in 1 Thessalonians 5:21. It says:

1 Thessalonians 5:21

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

I did not know that verse then, but I was smart enough or dumb enough to understand that I just could not ask them to accept my new life. In time, they saw the change and they believed it because they could not deny it. Even the guys who laughed at me, they made fun of me. They had this PA system because I drove a fork truck, and you had all these lines you had to supply. So when they needed something, they would call you over the whole plant. I was now "Preacher Al" over the whole place. "Preacher Al, we need you in 5.15" or whatever the department was. It became, I mean, I kind of liked that myself. I thought that was free press. But in time, my very critics—now, never forget this—the very guys who made fun of me, one time I was back in the storage area getting some parts out, and my worst critic came over to me with tears running down his face and asked me to pray for his baby who was in the hospital. You see, sometimes you have to pay the price to get to the point where people see the difference. You have to prove it, and it just took a while.

I told you the story of John Tony. John Tony was a black man who was also a fork truck driver. I wanted him to cry. I will never forget the day he got saved. He went home and threw everything away that should not have been in his life. He wound up being a preacher, wound up being a pastor. I had lost touch with him for 25, 30 years. Then, when Mel Sabaka died, he showed up at the funeral. He had never lost his faith. You know, it is one of those things where you have to take the time. You are going to get the opposition. You are going to get, just like this blind man, people who do not believe you are the real deal. They do not believe that it is a real change. You know why? Because they see so much phony Christianity everywhere. But that was the start of my new life, the start of my change.

Do not misunderstand me. I was just like Abraham. I mean, when he started to go with God, the journey to be God's friend, he made some mistakes. I made some mistakes. I was so exuberant. I was the poster child. If you would have looked in the Bible at that verse and said, "a zeal, not according to knowledge," my picture was there. I had such a zeal for the things of God, and I did not always use the best technique because I was young. All I knew is something had changed about me, and I wanted everybody to know it. I drove a fork truck that ran on propane gas and blew hot air out the back. I had to swing into tight places, and you have to put the gas down to lift the fork up and to blow hot air out the back. It was natural to me. All the people and the women on the line and the guys on the line, they would all cringe because that blast of hot air would catch them when I was putting up my fork to get some part. So I got the idea—not the best idea—to put a sign back there: "If you think this is hot, wait till you die, go to hell." Not the best way to handle those things. But I learned, I grew. It took some time for me to get used to the new light that was now in my life.

III. The Tabernacle as a Picture of Spiritual Growth

I remember one of the greatest things in my life that I thank God for every day is that in the 1970s, there was still the remnant of some of these old guys who were truly the warhorses for God. They were in their 70s and 80s, but they were still alive, and of course, they are all gone home to be with the Lord now. But it was the greatest thing for me to be able to see them and talk to them. Some of them took me under their wing. I remember one guy in particular took me out every Wednesday. He had a burden for Jehovah's Witnesses, and every Wednesday night he would take me out, and we would call on a Jehovah's Witness. They had another guy that he did his specialty, and they all took me under their wing.

I remember one old boy took me aside, and he showed me my first understanding and vision of that Old Testament tabernacle that I have taught you many, many times about, and how it was relevant now to me. These were things that I never knew existed in the Bible, never knew had any relevance to me. I thought they were just Old Testament stories. This is where it began in my world as I walked from darkness to light: God put people in my life that I needed to help me get where I needed to go.

He said, "Bob, that tabernacle back there," and he said, "I want to explain something to you because you just got right with the Lord, and you are trying to do what is right, and I want to help you as much as I can. Maybe this will show you where you are at." He said, "You know, that tabernacle back there, it was just a tent. It was not a big temple like Solomon built; it was just a tent. But it was covered with animal skins, and absolutely no light from the outside could get into that tabernacle. The only light that was in that tabernacle was found on seven candlesticks called a menorah, the seven-pronged candlestick that was in that tabernacle. Other than that, it was complete darkness."

He said, "Every day the priest would go into that tent, and he would have to go in there to do the work of the priesthood." He said, "Bob, when that priest went into that tent to do the work," and he said, "Now that is a picture of your ministry and where you are going to go and where you are at right now." He said, "In that were seven pieces of furniture." I gave them to you a couple of weeks ago; we will talk about them here in a little bit. He said, "That is a picture of what is going on inside you right now, the change, where you are really going to be the minister that God wants you to be." He said, "The Bible says over there in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that these are the furnishings that when you got saved, your new life, you start to put these furnishings in your life that God is going to use to do the ministry."

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

He said, "You know, you are coming out of the false light of the world, and you look up at the sun, it blinds you. Sometimes this world's light is so..." And yet in Matthew 6:23, the Bible says that the light of this world is actually darkness.

Matthew 6:23

But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

He said, "So when that priest left the light of this old world and walked into the tabernacle of God, which no light from the world could get in, but the only light there was the seven-pronged candlestick." He said, "Bob, you know what he had to do? He had to walk in there and stop. He had to wait for a bit. He had to give his eyes time to adjust from the light of the world to the light of God within that tabernacle." He said, "That is where you are at right now. You just came out of the light of the world, the darkness of the world that blinded you, and now you are in the tabernacle. Bob, you just have to be patient. You have to take some time and just let the light of God through the Holy Spirit of God get your eyes adjusted to where you have come from to where you are at."

That was the best advice anybody has ever given me. I have never forgotten it. To this day, I will use that whenever I get an opportunity to deal with anybody, our Bible study, or whatever the case may be. The greatest thing about that, that I want you young Christians to know, just like He did with me: when I came out of the darkness into the light, the first thing He did was put men and women in my life who knew what was going on, because I did not, to help me along the way. I do not know where I would be today if it was not for guys like that. I do not know if I ever would have made it. I might have gotten swallowed right back up in the world simply because I did not know what I was doing. I wanted to do it, I wanted to be everything, but I was finding all this opposition. God will put men and women in our lives early on to be that object lesson for us so we can grow into God's light. Here we do it with Discipleship One or Discipleship Two, or just dealing with you in the Bible through our Zoom classes or all the different aspects that we do.

Based on that, and only what happened in my own life, I really began to understand what a real witness was. A real witness will never simply be, as I said last week, just me telling somebody what God will do for them, but rather what He has done for me personally. To let that true light of this tabernacle shine through me to that seven-pronged candlestick, the Holy Spirit of God. Then, as I said last week, we take that and we build the dynasties of our families around the Word of God. We build the Word of God into ourselves first, our children, our grandchildren, our great-great-grandchildren, generation after generation. You want to remember Psalms 127:3 is always misquoted where it talks about our children being our heritage, and that is not what the verse says.

Psalms 127:3

Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

Your children are not your heritage; your children are God's heritage. We are to build that to keep that ministry going, generation after generation, a family that simply does the work of God, passing the light of the Word of God like a torch to each generation. As Hebrews 12:1 says, we are to run a race; we are in this race that is set before us.

Hebrews 12:1

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

IV. The Unrelenting Opposition to Truth

Then you remember last week I gave you five areas out of these 41 verses that He really uses as an object lesson for us: what the true witness should be. I showed you how to take a passage like this last week, that the real way to do it and get a better understanding is to break it down into smaller pieces and then put it all back together. So, having said that and showing you what we talked about last week, I want to continue on today and look at the rest of our story here. In this passage, we again will come across a really good, solid Bible principle that I want to focus on when we get there, that I want you to understand today.

Now I am going to read John 9:31-41, and here is what it says:

John 9:31-41

Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.

Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.

If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.

They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out.

Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?

He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?

And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.

And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.

And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.

And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also?

Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

Father, we do thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We love You. Thank You for today. Thank You for the Word of God. Please put us under the blood today, give us a clear thought process, and Lord, let us look deep inside ourselves, each one of us today, Lord, and just really find what God has for us here. Lord, we will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it, Amen.

Again, we continue to see the relentless attacks on this story by the religious leaders: our famous scribes, Sadducees, and Pharisees. All to deny who Christ is and the miracle that He has done. All this actually reminds me—and the longer you get in the ministry and the longer you work with people, the more you are going to see this—this reminds me of the tactics of people today, Christians who will attack other Christians who really have a work of God going in their life, and the people attacking them have nothing going on in their life. But they constantly will attack them. It is that thing: some things never change. They always attack the ones who are truly doing the work, just like back here in John 9. They, much like the brethren here, have nothing going in their life, nothing they are really doing for the Lord, no ministry. Yet, just as the scribes and the Pharisees, they wanted to project themselves as if they were right and Christ was wrong. They had no work; they could not do any of the miracles that He did. If He ever called them to a showdown, like Elijah did with the prophets of Baal back in the Old Testament, they would have been in trouble. They could not do one of the miracles; they had no power; they had nothing going for them. And yet, they want to attack the ones who do. In both cases, this will tell you what you are up against.

Years ago, I had a... and I always tell you this: when nothing else tells, time will tell. If you just let time play it out, the truth and the light will always come. Years ago, I heard a pastor preach a message, and I thought it was a great message. It was at a Bible conference, and like all pastors, he obviously had gotten clobbered in all kinds of things and situations. In your church, you always have people get upset, whatever the case may be. He had just gone through, about eight or nine years ago, a very bad church split. It was over the Bible that he wanted to stay with, and they did not want to. So, he preached a message that was for all of us to give us that perspective. I do not title my sermons; every once in a while, I might just for the fun of it, but a lot of guys title every one of them. His title was, "Where Are They Now?" He preached a sermon on people who have a problem with the Bible, and in time, time will always show you, because a man left to himself in sin does not get any better. He was talking about how that 20 years later, you see the results of somebody who is really doing what is right and somebody who is not. It was an incredible sermon because it, and I never forgot it, because it is so true. The people, like the scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees, they thought they were right. Jesus and the man born blind were in the right. They gave him such a tough time, but you have to wonder, 20 years from that point, where were they? Were they better, or were they worse? Are you better for forsaking the Word of God and the Lord in your life, or are you better off? Time will prove that.

In our passage today, the argument continues: who He really was, Jesus, and how can He do these miracles? It is the same today. It is hard to comprehend the miracles of God when you do

not have any in your own life. Now, look at John 9:34: "Thou wast altogether born in sin, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out." All this guy did was try to tell them again the truth: that Jesus opened up his eyes, did a great miracle. The picture of this is a picture of modern-day Bible scholarship with Bible teachers, pastors, and scholars. They are so filled, like these guys, with pride and worldly education that they are completely unteachable. He is trying to say, "Jesus healed my eyes. It is no big complicated deal. I was blind. He did not want me to do this and that, and now I can see." And their answer is, "Well, you were born in sin," as if they were not. "Well, you were born in sin, and now you are going to teach us? Do you know Greek? Do you know Hebrew? Do you have my education? No, you are just a blind man who was a beggar. You are just an old hillbilly from Raytown, Missouri, and you are going to tell, without any education, no Greek and Hebrew, you are going to tell me what the Bible says?"

You see, it starts right here. I call it the "unattainable of the unteachable." They will never get to the things in the Word of God because they have such an attitude toward the Book and people who love the Book. They will never attain to those things in the Word of God that God wants them to. It is amazing how, and I say this all the time, some things never change. Then in John 9:39-40, Jesus really lays it out to them. He is simply saying, "Look, it is your attitude, guys. If you get the right attitude and heart, you can see. If you have the wrong attitude and heart, you think you can see, but you are blind." So what was their response to that? They kicked the guy out of church, out of the synagogue. Translating all this, it simply comes down to: if you believe that the Bible you hold in your hand is the absolute perfect Word of God without error, and you do not need the help of Greek or Hebrew or higher education or somebody teaching you the Bible outside the Holy Spirit of God in your life, outside your church, you can never be one of us. Best news I have heard all day.

Jesus comes and finds this guy. They did not like what happened. They did not like this guy. They did not like Christ, but they had to get rid of him. They had to get him out of their circles. You know why? Because he would not shut up. He kept telling everybody, "I was blind, but now I see." "Where did you go to school?" "I never been to school. I was just blind. Met a man named Jesus, and now I see." "Did you get that out of the Greek?" "No, I just got it out of a man who spit on the ground, and He made clay and put it on my eyes." "You mean He actually spit on the ground?" "Yeah." "It was on the Sabbath day, right?" "Yeah, it was." "Well, He is a sinner. He cannot do those miracles." "Well, how come I can see?" "Well, it is just impossible." "Well, I will tell you what is impossible: I have been in your crowd in the synagogue for 40 years, and I am still blind. In one day, I met one man, and out of the darkness, into the light." See how simple it is? They do not like simple. You know why they do not like simple? Because you do not need them if it is simple. He did not need the scribes and the Pharisees. He just needed Jesus. Jesus is all you need. It is an incredible thing.

V. The Challenge to Biblical Authority and Scholarship

As a side note, you really see this around 1900, the turn of the century. You see where this thing is starting to go. By 1900, we are moving out of the Philadelphia church age and beginning to move into the Laodicean church period. The Laodicean church period is nothing more than

higher education and scholarship replacing that Book you have in your arms, and again, guys telling you that you cannot figure it out for yourself because you are too stupid. That is all it is. They kept the position that if you believed the King James Bible was the Word of God and it was absolutely infallible and perfect, you could not be a Bible scholar. So all these big-time preachers that wanted to be recognized as Bible scholars, they all went that way.

Now, I love Clarence Larkin's books. I think Clarence Larkin and his *Dispensational Truth and Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, and even his *Spirit World*, are great books; you have to have them. But if you want to see the actual effect of this, he writes around 1900. His big book that we sell at the bookstore called *Dispensational Truth* is a wealth of material. But I might suggest to you that if you buy his book, you also get an X-Acto cutter and just trim out the first two or three chapters that he deals with when he deals with the creation. He comes up with the goofiest, ridiculous, unbelievable, goofy stuff about Genesis 1-3 and the creation, about this cloud vapor, the drop... I mean, for years and years and years, I thought to myself, "How is this guy so good when he gets past that, and why is he so messed up on Genesis and the creation?"

Then it hit me one day when I grew up and learned a little bit. You know why? This was right at the time that evolution was coming into its own, from the Civil War time on up there, and everybody was accepting it, and everybody was... Nobody, nobody, nobody could be a scholar and a great bastion of education by getting up and somebody saying, "Doctor, would you explain to us just a little bit, give us just a capsule view of what is really transpiring on that great creation day?" "Doctor So-and-So, would you come up here?" And the whole place just applauds, and he says, "Yes. Young students, pastors, teachers, fellow, whoever you are, let me tell you, the great story of Genesis 1 is simply more that God and the devil got into a fistfight. The devil wanted to overthrow God. God said, 'You are not overthrown.' He says, 'I want to take my throne up to heaven,' and God said, 'You are not going to do that.' Devil says, 'Yes, I am.' God says, 'Not am, not am, not am.'"

And you know what happened? The whole universe got thrown into chaos. It put the craters on the planet. It put the astral belt out there where planets were busted apart. It was a great galactic war. Now, I know this is only 1900, and we do not have Star Wars yet or galactic battlefield, but that is where it all came back to. Why they threw him out of that school. They laughed at him. "That is not scholarly." It is not scholarly to say that God and the devil got into a knockdown, drag-out fight and kicked the universe into a disaster. So you have to have the encounter theory. You have to have the compassing of the cloud theory. You have to have something that sounds like it is scholarly. That is what happened. These guys, God bless them, I thank God for what I learned. But they wanted to be scholars more than they wanted to be Bible teachers, and they caved in to the brethren, the higher educated crowd that said, "If you believe the devil and God got in a fistfight and threw the universe in chaos, and you are telling me that the earth was up at the top of the universe and now it is down at the bottom and it is God's footstool and He has isolated the earth and He has got all..." No, we cannot go there.

You see, that is... and now today, it just gets a little bit deeper. "Oh, if you believe the King James Bible is the Word of God and it is perfect without error, you cannot be scholarly." Everybody wants to be a scholar. Everybody wants to be noted for their education. They want to be

recognized as some great mind in the Bible. They want to be an expert in the Bible. Let me tell you something: put the only note you get. When it comes to the Bible, there are no scholars and there are no experts. We all are students of an infallible Book on a little different levels. That is all it is. So, we see that.

VI. Understanding God's Hearing of Prayer

Now, having said all that, I want to look at a great principle found in this passage today, and I want to explain it to you. Maybe you will have a little better understanding as we slide into this, but it is John 9:31. It is a verse that I get asked about many, many times, and you will too. In John 9:31, it says, "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth." Now that verse says that God, on its face value, says that God will not hear the prayers of an unsaved man. In the context here, he is obviously talking about the scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Let me explain this. This verse will be based on what we talked about a couple of weeks ago out of John 8:44. This is where you begin to understand how you put this verse together. I want you to know this today because if you are going to work with people, you need to understand how this works, and you need to understand how it works for yourself. But he said in John 8:44:

John 8:44

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

You will remember that I talked to you about the two spiritual families in this world. One, your first birth puts you into the devil's family. Your second birth takes you out of the devil's family, changes your life, and puts you into God's family. You remember when we taught that? So what you have here is that God cannot, will not, hear the prayers, acknowledge the prayers of an unsaved man who is spiritually in the wrong family. Once you get saved, out of the darkness into the light, then God hears everything you say to Him. But God will not be involved in the prayer life of an unsaved man based on his spiritual family.

I always enjoy Christmastime. I like it just because of us, but I cannot get past all the pageants, all the church services. The big-time guys, like the Church of England, the Catholic Church, even some of the big neo-evangelicals, they will have this incredible deal with all this stuff for Christmas. All the prayers, and I remember watching one time over in England, the Church of England was having a big Christmas event over there, and all the royal family was there, and they would come up and they would offer the prayers. All the prayers, you read them, they are not out of man's heart; they are out on a piece of paper. You stand up there and you say, "Oh God, we thank the old Father for the great unity of the faith and the great universe and all the things that You do." You go on and on and on, and people are actually sitting there thinking, "God is listening to that." The Bible says, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."

It is one of those things where I watched the funeral of Bob Dole last week. Bob Dole was a great guy. I do not know if he was saved or not, and this is not a criticism whether he was or he was not. But if I ever become president, and I am not a president, and I die, I do not want my funeral in a national cathedral. That place is a morgue, much bigger than the one we have downstairs, but it is a morgue. These guys, these gals, these lesbian preacher women, guys, girls, whatever the case may be, getting up there and going on and on and on with all these prayers, they never get out of the room. The prayers never get out of the room because they are in the wrong family. The unsaved man is in the wrong family. John 8:44 says an unsaved man will do the lust of his father. John 9:31 says that if God hears our prayers, we have to do the will of the Father. There is a difference. It is just that simple.

VII. The Brazen Altar: The Foundation of Acceptable Prayer

Now, I want you to learn something today, and I want to show you how this works. I think prayer is the single most important thing in your life after the day you get saved. I think it is more important than the Word of God, though I understand they both go together. But I think it is more important than the Word of God because if you do not get your prayer life set, you can forget the Word of God, because that is where it all has to start.

I remember back in the 1990s when they had the Gulf War. General Schwarzkopf, he is dead now, but he was the commanding general over there, and he knew the way to win a battle was simple. It did not matter how many men they had; it did not matter how they would deploy. The Iraqis spent months and months and months over there getting their defenses ready because they knew we were coming. None of it mattered because in the first 15 minutes of the battle, it was over. Because the United States Air Force knocked out every communication system that the Iraqis had, and they absolutely had no communication with anybody, and they did not know what to do. They could not get any orders, could not get any information, and it was a rout. The devil knows that is true. So the first thing he will knock out of your life and my life is to disrupt our communication. When he takes that out of our lives, the battle is over. You say, "I still come to church!" The battle is over! When you lose your communication to Him, that prayer life, you are done. That is always the first thing that will go. You know why that is the first thing that will go? Because that is what nobody can see. The devil always hits you underneath the ground. He will get you where nobody sees it, and then by the time it is too late, then everybody sees it. That is how it works. He just knocks out your communication channels, and it is just that simple.

You will remember—I want to define this for you because this verse really will be the definitive of it—a couple of weeks ago, and I mentioned this a few moments ago, we were dealing with 2 Timothy 3:16-17, where it talked about the furnishings. I showed you how that New Testament passage of the furnishings—and that is the right word; it is changed in all the new Bibles—that is the right word because your body is the tabernacle, Old Testament. The seven pieces of furniture in the tabernacle match up to the furnishings we need to have in our life. We went through that already; we will do it again. But I showed you that there were three levels to that tabernacle, and your body has three parts: body, soul, and spirit. These three parts of the tabernacle will match up to your body, soul, and spirit.

If you want to understand how this thing works:

- Section 1: The Outer Section
- Section 2: The Holy Place
- Section 3: The Holy of Holies

I told you that two of these pieces of furniture represent our prayer life. One of them is the altar of incense; that is a picture of our prayer worship. The other one is the golden censer that he carried; that is a picture of our prayer life, as the book of Ephesians says, that you carry with you, that you pray without ceasing.

In the Bible, God is relevant to smells. He will talk about it in the Song of Solomon when He looks at the church, "You smell like a garden, a rose garden." He talks about the fact that when they offered a sacrifice, it was the smell of that innocent flesh burning that appeased God in His nostrils, that appeased Him of sin. I do not get it; I am just telling you. Yet at the same time, He talks about the fact that in the tabernacle, they burned incense. That incense was a picture of prayer. It is a picture that when we pray biblically, it sends up a sweet savor to the nostrils of God that He is connected to our prayer life.

I told you that all the fire that lights the censer and lights the altar of incense, it all had to come off the brazen altar. That brazen altar, as you should know by now, is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. On that brazen altar is where the sacrifice was made. That is where Christ made our sacrifice. The doctrinal teaching is simply this, saved or lost, and I want you to understand this. Because if you are ever going to do anything for God, it is going to come down to you understanding what I am going to give you right now. The scribes and the Pharisees could not get it; the blind man could get it, but you are going to face opposition in getting it. If my prayer, if your prayer, the incense of going up to God, if that prayer of incense is not lit by the fire of Christ's death on the cross for you and for me, you are wasting your time. It is not the altar of incense; it is the altar of nonsense. Because that brazen altar is where it started. Any prayer that I offer, that you offer, that does not originate from what He did for me and my understanding of it—you see, that takes all the personal out of it. "Well, I want this," or "I want that," because it all has to go back to His death on the cross.

Now, you go back in the Old Testament, you will find the story in Leviticus 10:1-2. It is a story of two guys, Nadab and Abihu. They were Aaron's sons, and they were corrupt priests. They were in charge of keeping the incense burning, keeping the censer burning. The Bible says that in Leviticus 10:1-2, God came down and killed them both.

Leviticus 10:1-2

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not.

And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.

I have had people ask me, "What is the big deal?" The big deal was when they lit the incense, God said they did it with strange fire. They did not get the fire to light the prayer, the incense, off the brazen altar; they got it someplace else. God would not accept it, and God killed them because of the strange fire. God would not recognize it because it did not start where the sacrifice started. You are told in Leviticus 16:12 that that fire to light that incense and to light those candlesticks has to come off the brazen altar.

Leviticus 16:12

And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil:

Without a biblical prayer life, there can be no relationship with God, because you are in the wrong family, or even if you are saved, because you are not going back to the brazen altar.

Now look at John 9:31. Note the two key elements here for our prayers being heard. He says, "If any man be a worshipper of God," and then the second thing he says is, "and doeth his will, him he heareth." You see, the worshipper of God is John 4:24: "We worship Him in spirit and in truth."

John 4:24

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

All of this has to come back to Christ's death on the cross. We live in a Christianity where Christ's death on the cross does not mean anything to us anymore. That is why when we get saved, or claim to be saved, there is no change in our direction of life. There is no real repentance. We continue to do the same thing. You know why? Because at the end of the day, I will just say it, that death on the cross, where He agonized for you and for me, and He paid the sin debt for you to go to heaven, it just does not mean anything to us anymore. Too many other exciting things out there. Too many other things to get involved in. So we stand around and throw up our prayers: "God, I need this. God, I need that. God, do this. God, do that." We order God around like we are ordering something off of Amazon. We just put in the right keys, hit our credit card. "God, why have You not answered it yet?" I will tell you why: because real biblical prayer, and a real biblical prayer life, and a real biblical relationship with God, starts at the cross. If you forget what He did for you, you can forget it as far as your prayer life is concerned. These two, worship and doing His will, are key. Worship is the spiritual side of it; doing His will is being more like Christ every day of your life, based on your worship.

When you do not have these two, whether you are saved or you are lost, your prayers will never get through because you are offering strange fire that God does not recognize, because it is not originating off the brazen altar. You remember several weeks ago, or a couple of months ago, I taught you the seven things that you lose when you get rid of your Bible. Two of them were John 4:24, no worship, and the second one was John 15:7, no prayer life.

John 15:7

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

It is all based on what God did for you on the cross. If you do not take it back, and it does not start there, you do not have anything.

VIII. The Impact of a Changed Life

Now, having said that, somebody will say—I am just jumping ahead here because I know how you ask questions, and that is good, and I have been asked this before—somebody will say, "Well, when I was unsaved, I prayed to God, and He answered that prayer. How do you explain that?" That is easy. That is not a hard one. Ask me where God came from; that is really a tough one. This is an easy one. There are two responses to that, or two reasons for that.

1. Because somebody else was probably praying for you. God could not answer your prayer because you were in your own family, but He honored their prayer because they loved you and cared for you. Look at Genesis 18-19. This is called an intercessory prayer in Abraham's life. I will never forget old Bill Denton. Bill Denton was a pastor up in Akron, Ohio, another old boy out of the old Philadelphia days. He died. I heard him tell this story; he was preaching, and I never forgot this. He was preaching on prayer, and he was in World War I. Of course, you now know that all the World War I vets are all dead now. We are losing World War II vets like 1,200, 1,300, 1,400 a day. It will not be long, they are all gone. Then Korea guys will be next, and then yours truly, Vietnam, will be next. But it is just the way time goes.

Bill Denton told the story that he was in one of those great battles over there, at Château-Thierry or the Marne, I forget where he was. But anyway, a German artillery barrage came in, and they were making an assault, and it landed over here, killed everybody with him. It did not kill him, but it rendered him to the place where he could not move. He was aware of everything going around him, but he was paralyzed. He could not speak, he could not move, he could not talk, he could not blink, he could not do anything. He lay that way for over a day in the mud and the filth of all the dead bodies around him. Bill Denton said that he was unsaved at that point in time. Before he went to France, he said his mama was praying for him to be saved. His mom loved the Lord, and she said, "I was a rascal and did not want to get saved, and my mom would pray for me. Every night I would come home drunk, and I would hear my mom in the bedroom on her knees praying for my salvation." He said, "That just drove me crazy." He said, "But here I am, I am lying on that battlefield. I cannot move." He said, "The day after the battle, the medics started coming in, and they started picking up all the dead bodies. They laid all the dead bodies in a pile, and one of them, two of them, came over and picked me up and laid me on a pile of dead bodies they were going to bury." He said, "I could not call out, I could not scream, I could not move." He said, "I lay there for a whole day and a whole night waiting for them to come and put me in the ground and put dirt over me, and I could not do a thing about it." He said, "I want you to know, I prayed. I prayed." He said, "Finally, on the next day, they came to take the bodies, and the two guys picked him up and began to carry him and put him on a stretcher and carry his supposedly dead body and put him in a hole to bury him. One of the men looked down, and he

could not move, he could not talk, but a tear was running out of his eye." That medic stopped down and looked and listened to him and found out he was alive and got him to a hospital, and he was alive today, and he got saved after that, became one of the greatest men of God and preached the Word of God for the rest of his life. But when he told that story, he said, "I thought it was my prayer." But he said, "God does not answer the prayer of an unsaved man. When I got home and I told my mom the story, at the exact moment I was lying on that pile of dead bodies, my mama was on her knees praying for me." That is how He does it. That is how He does it, because we are in the wrong family.

2. When a man or a woman starts to turn toward God in their heart, and yet they are unsaved, God will begin that work in your life. He will put people in it. He will put circumstances in it. He will come to the place where, as the Bible says in 2 Peter 3:9, that God is not willing that any should perish.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

The Bible says in John 1:9, we talked about it a couple of weeks ago, that He is the true Light that lights every man that comes into the world.

John 1:9

That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

When a man or a woman begins to move in that direction, even though they are unsaved, God will put people in their life to bring them along. That is as we know from Romans 10:13 and Romans 10:9-10.

Romans 10:13

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Romans 10:9-10

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

It will come a point, based on that and the prayers of others, where that man will utter the first prayer out of his mouth that God hears and accepts: "Oh God, be merciful to me a sinner." That is how the verse will lay itself out. You see, God's people should be a family. As a family, we want people to be saved. You see it here in an incredible way. People get saved here all the time. Why? Because people here care for other people. You go to school, you go to work, wherever you go, God will put somebody on your heart; they are lost, and you start to pray for them. You put them on your own prayer list, and you look for opportunities for God to use you. You are

smart, you see, you look for the open doors, and God uses you. Pretty soon, because of your prayers, because of your caring, God brings them to the place where He hears their first prayer, because we cared for others.

The devil's family wants to keep us blind, to keep you blind. He never wants us to be allowed to see what is really truth. In the New Testament, you see it so clearly with the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and all the New Testament books of the Bible. The devil will do everything in his power to keep you from changing your life, because it is a changed life that is all that is going to make the difference.

I will give you an example in the Bible you have in your hand today. In the New Testament, you will find five places that lay out a man getting saved and talk about the key elements of that man getting saved. But in a religious world, you will find that today, John 8:44, they will try to do everything they can to keep you from getting the truth. So you are going to find in the first case, in John 9:35, where we are at; the second case in Luke 23:42; the third case in Acts 9:5-6; the fourth case in Acts 8:37; and the fifth case in Acts 16:31. These are places where you actually see somebody getting saved.

Luke 23:42

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

Acts 9:5-6

And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

Acts 8:37

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Acts 16:31

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

Just like the scribes and the Pharisees of Jesus' day that did not want anybody to see the truth, every new Bible on the market will change these verses so you cannot get the key word out of it. In fact, in Acts 8:37, they just take the whole verse out. Why? Because the devil wants to keep you in the dark. The devil wants to keep you from getting that light. God will do everything. He died on the cross for us. He died on the cross and paid the price for every man and woman on this planet. Once we get saved, we enter into a cohesiveness of trying to bring people to the Lord Jesus Christ. It all simply comes down to not what we say, but do people really see the change?

It took me a while at the Hoover Company. Everybody knew who I really was, and it was hard for them to believe on that Monday morning that I was somebody different. But I never got

discouraged. I stayed with it because even though they did not know it was real, I knew it was real. God will take those things, and He will use us if we are just patient. Stand still, let the light of God's Word change your eyesight from the brightness of this world to just seeing things through the seven-pronged candlestick, the light of the Holy Spirit of God. I am telling you, learning the great lessons of how God and the devil will work, this is why you need to understand that the key to your Christian life is your prayer life. We have tremendous people here that pray. But I am telling you right now, it has to go back and originate on the day that God saved you. You have to have the fire off the brazen altar. It cannot be someplace else. It cannot be of a selfish motive. It cannot be because of some personal thing you want. It has to go back; it simply goes back to what He did for you. When you start your prayer life there, then you are in a better place to accept whatever answer God gives you, because you know the only thing sharing your heart, you know it is your prayer started at Calvary. That is where it all started.

The devil, I know he wants to keep people from getting saved. I understand that. I know everything in the world, everything that he has created, goes against it, everything that God did. I get all of that. But I am going to tell you the real thing that upsets him. The real thing that upsets him is not so much the salvation, but the real thing that upsets him is the change that happens in our life at salvation. Because you can claim to be saved and have no change and never affect anybody. But you cannot truly be saved and be changed and not help affect somebody.

It is a thing where I told you over in 1 Corinthians 3, the foundation that we lay the day we get saved, no other man can lay any foundation in Christ Jesus. The day you got saved, you laid a foundation in your life. Then, if you notice that passage, you are to build three things on that foundation that are good.

3. The first thing that you build is gold. Gold represents the deity of Christ. The first thing after you get saved that you need to put on that foundation is you need to learn everything about God you can.
4. The second thing they build on that foundation is silver. After you learn everything that God did for you, the next thing—God is for you—then the next thing you want to learn is the silver, the price of redemption. You want to learn everything about the price that was paid for you because you are moving in that direction. That is the direction of a changed life. You find out who He is, find out what He did for you.
5. The third thing you build is precious stones. In the Bible, precious stones are people. I just make it really simple: you cannot find out who He is, you cannot find out what He did for you, and not want to tell somebody about it. The precious stones. It is a life changer.

So the devil, he does not want you to get saved because he does not want that changed life to affect other people. But if you do get saved, he has Plan B. That Plan B will simply be: let you go to heaven, let you be a Christian, but never let your life impact anybody else's. Do not change. That is why the churches today are geared to the world and everything that goes on with it, so you can go to church, claim to be a Christian, but you never have to change. You are not separated from the world; you become one with it. The devil goes out the door laughing. Because the only thing that will be our witness will be the change of the day we got saved. Everything we do has to go back to that brazen altar.

This is why I want you to understand this today. We have a great host of young men and young ladies here who are getting into the Word of God, and you are growing, and you are doing well, and God is going to use you greatly. I am amazed at what He is doing here with the people that you guys are bringing in and getting saved, and all the things that are happening, it is overwhelming. But I am telling you right now, if it does not go back to Calvary for the rest of your life, you never forget that day. That day changed you forever. There is nothing in this world—no six-pack of beer, no carton of cigarettes, no marijuana, no nothing—that can compete with that day when I was blind.

Another goofy thing that I did: at the Hoover Company, you could not get in until seven o'clock. Everybody by quarter to seven, there were a hundred people out there waiting to get in. Personally, I can see waiting to get out of work, but I never saw the value of waiting to go to work. But I looked over there and I thought to myself, "Wow, there are 50, 60 people." So I got the idea, I would just go in there, and they were not going anywhere. So I walked into the middle of that crowd and said, "Hey folks, you all know me, I am Bob, I am a fork truck driver down there in department 63. I just want you to know, I got saved a while back, and God made a deal in my life, and He changed everything about me. I love you guys, we are all a big family here. I just want you to know, if you ever want to know how to go to heaven and want to know anything, or if you have any problems that I could pray for you, everybody, just come and see me. No big deal, I just want you to know you are all here. I love you all, praying for you all, and I am here for you." You know what? I do not know how many times I got somebody afterward, maybe not right then, but later, who would call me down and say, "Hey, would you pray for this? Would you pray for that? I want you to know I have this need." There has to be a change that people see. You cannot just keep being the same old me. Because when I got saved, I do not know where the same old me went, but he is gone, and he is never coming back. That is what needs to happen.

We will hold up there. That was a thing I want you to get today. Next week, next week is going to be—I know you are not going to believe this, it just happened to fall on it—John 10. Next week is the real Christmas message.