

I. The Biblical Definition of Sacrifice

We finished Chapter 8 of the Book of John. The Book of John has been a great book for us; I have really, really enjoyed it. We looked at probably the most in-depth study in the Bible dealing with the real meaning of sacrifice when Jesus talked about the fact that Abraham saw His day and was glad and rejoiced. I took you back to probably the greatest chapter in the Bible that really shows you Christ's death on the cross and His sacrifice, back in Genesis 22.

Every doctrine of the Bible, every concept of the Bible, will have a definitive verse, a place where you can go. That verse will define for you through the rest of the Bible whatever that subject is. For understanding the concept of sacrifice, you have to go back to 2 Samuel 24:24. Most of you know the story that takes place back there. David wants to buy the threshing floor of a guy by the name of Araunah. He wants to buy it because he wants to make a place of sacrifice for the Lord. The man who owns the property says, "No, no, no, no, you're the king, please take it, and I want to give it to you." David says, "No." David says, "No, I want to pay for it." The man insists that he says, "No, just please, you're the king, David, please just take it and do what you want to do with it."

David makes one of the greatest statements anywhere in the Bible that defines for us what sacrifice is when he says in 2 Samuel 24:24 that to give a sacrifice, it must cost me something. That is the biblical definition of a sacrifice. Little did anybody know at the time—I am sure David did not know at the time—but that threshing floor that he bought when he made the offering to the Lord, that is exactly where the temple was built in Solomon's time. That is where the millennial temple will be built. If you would go to the Holy Land now, you would find that right now the Muslims have that piece of ground, and it is where we call the Dome of the Rock. That is the original place where that threshing floor was that David purchased and then offered to sacrifice. Little did anybody know the consistency of how God would take that all down through history.

I told you this story in John 8:56 was built around Genesis 22, where Abraham offers up his own son Isaac as a sacrifice to the Lord. We went through all of that, and I showed you how that was a picture of what Christ was referring to when He said, "Abraham saw My day." It is an Old Testament picture of Christ's death on the cross, becoming my sacrifice, taking my place. All the key things are in place to make the parallels.

1. It took place on Mount Moriah. That is where Calvary's cross was.
2. It takes place on the third day, and there is a resurrection connected with it, just like Christ came out of the tomb on the third day.
3. There were two other men there that represent the two thieves.
4. You have wood that Isaac put on his back, which is a picture of Christ carrying the cross for you and for me.
5. You had the fire, which was a picture of God's judgment.

6. You had the knife, which was a picture of God dividing Himself from His Son.

The greatest aspect, I think, was the total obedience of Isaac, that he did not fight his father. He trusted his father. He did exactly what his father asked him to do, climbed up on that altar, and was willing to become a sacrifice. Every aspect of his sacrifice is laid out in an Old Testament study that shows us what we should be in our lives for the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. Parental Responsibility and Spiritual Development

I never got into this last week because there was so much there, but Genesis 22 is a great chapter for parents and their own children. I do not know if you saw that or picked that up or not, but parents are the key to how their children turn out. The Bible says in Psalms 127:4:

Psalms 127:4

As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth.

As parents, you and I take our children like an archer takes an arrow, and you launch them through life to hit a target. In an archer's world, it is a bull's eye or a deer or whatever, but for you and for me with our children, it is heaven or hell. You launch them in that direction. It is an easy pattern to see: kids who wind up doing nothing for the Lord usually come from parents who do nothing for the Lord. This is why I try to instill in every one of you, no matter where you are at in your spiritual life, you need to begin to allow God to develop you and use you.

I have talked with many, many parents over the years that tried to tell me that their children were causing problems in the home. I always tell them the same thing: children never cause problems in the home. Children just reveal the problems that are in the home. That is such a truth, and it is an easy pattern to see.

I have spent all my ministry. Now, I am a great believer in sports. I was never an athlete myself, but I think when your kids get involved in sports, it is a really good thing. I think it develops their character, their athletic ability, and all their senses and skills. I know there are a lot of churches out there that just say that you never should do that. Let me tell you something, if you keep it in the right balance and you keep it and understand the procedure by which it has to run, it is an incredible, incredible thing. I think it is good when your kids get into choir or they get into band. I think anything that stretches them, that allows them to develop themselves in one area, is really good, as long as they are still developing themselves in their own relationship with the Lord.

I have seen it all my ministry. I have seen parents make every mistake they could ever make with their kids. I have always told people that if my kids did not turn out right and they did not do the right thing and were not involved in ministry with me, I had nobody to blame but myself. Why? Other than the fact that it is my responsibility, because over 50 years in the ministry, I have seen every mistake every parent ever made.

It is a thing where you learn to understand that I have seen parents make sure their son or their daughter gets on a football team, a track team, a volleyball team, a baseball team, a basketball

team. They will do all that they can to see that. You have no idea in high school what these kids in volleyball and baseball and track—the thousands of dollars that their parents can shell out to ensure that they become better, better, better, better at whatever sport they want. I have watched that pattern all my life, and they will do all that they can, spend thousands of dollars to get them trained, but they will never consider putting them on God's altar. They will turn those kids over to a coach to mold and train their lives in athletics, but they will never take the time to put somebody in their life to mold their spiritual character. Then they wonder why at the end of the day they are scratching their head, "What went wrong?" It is just the way that it is.

I have seen it all my life, all my ministry. Everything in life, and you know this, everything in life has to be a balance. Many churches take the position, "Don't do this, just do this." That is out of balance too. You have to have a balance, but the Word of God and God has to have the predominance in your life.

I grew up in churches. I got right with the Lord around 1970-71, somewhere in that area, 68-69, I cannot remember the exact date. But back then, Baptist churches, anyhow—and I know we are a Baptist church, but I have no love for Baptist churches. I have love for Bible-believing Baptist churches. But I grew up in that era of the 60s and the 70s when Baptist churches were just about as goofy as they could be. The only difference between now and then is they are more goofy now than they were back then.

We would have, and I had to be part of it—I was on a church staff in several places, and I did not have any say in anything, I was just a gopher—and it was a thing where we would have baby dedication day. I am going to tell you right now, baby dedication day was the biggest farce that you could ever put on your people in any church. It was not a fact that they cared about the babies. I was on the inside; they wanted a crowd. Back then, a crowd meant nickels and noses. You get a crowd, you take a big offering, so you use the babies to bring them in there. Oh, it was spectacular! You would line them all up, all the new parents, bring your grandparents, bring your aunts and uncles. You are going to line down the front holding that baby, and some goofy preacher is going to pray some prayer of dedication over them, and that is supposedly going to make everything good.

Probably some of you right now are thinking to yourself, "Well, what is wrong with that?" Well, I will tell you what is wrong with that. I am glad you asked. Babies do not need to be dedicated. Parents need to be dedicated, not the babies. It was a trick of the hand. It was a spin-off of a Catholic church who wants to make sure that you raise your kids Catholic, so they put all the emphasis on scaring you. So the Baptist preachers would scare you that if you do not bring your kid and you do not bring your kid to baby dedication, something terrible is going to happen to them. This is going to ensure that now they are going to be okay because you have dedicated them to the Lord. Forget dedicating your child to the Lord; dedicate yourself to the Lord, because your kid is only going to go where you lead them to go, as arrows are in the hands of a mighty man.

So next Sunday, we will have baby dedication in our church. No, I am just kidding. I have dealt with people all my life. Sometimes parents embrace stupidity like it was a virtue. They just—it is

right there. You have one shot at your kids, maybe two, certainly probably not three. God's plan, and we saw this last week, God's plan was to take moms and dads and build generations of families. Generations of children who were raised up in a spiritual environment and trained and taught in the Bible, giving the balance between the world and Christianity and keeping everything in its proper perspective. Children, and then grandchildren, and then great-grandchildren, and then great-great-great-grandchildren, and endless generations of children that are dedicated because of a family mindset of ministry for the Lord.

This is what I love about so many of you young singles here and you young couples, and more of you are becoming less single as the day goes on. I think that is a good thing. Many of you came out of—and this is not a criticism against your parents, please do not look at it that way, it is just life—but many of you came, before you came here, you came out of dysfunctional families where mom and dad did not care about the Lord, mom and dad did not do anything with you, and I understand that. That is just the way life is. I just thank God, and I want to tell you something, it is no accident that you are here today. It is no accident that you are part of this church. Why? Because God wants to break that cycle. That cycle has to start somewhere. Somebody in time has to say, "Okay, from this point on, me and my house, we are going to serve the Lord." Sometimes it starts right here. I watch you young singles getting married and becoming in love with not only each other but the Word of God and the Lord. Then you begin to work, and I know that your families are going to be built down the line. You are going to make sure that everything is done, that you understand the biblical concept of making a real sacrifice, and you pass that on to your children.

We are a Christianity today that does not make any sacrifices for God. We are a Christianity that does for God out of our own convenience, and it all goes back to Genesis 22.

III. The Blind Man of John 9: A Historical, Inspirational, and Doctrinal Study

So today, we are going to start Chapter 9, and I just want to read seven verses here, and then we will get into this.

John 9:1-7

1 And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.

2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.

5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

6 When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay,

7 And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

Let us pray. Father, we ask You today, Lord, to open up our hearts. We thank You for the men and women that are here today that want to serve You. Lord, always keep presenting those opportunities for us so that these people can get in and learn and grow and teach. There is no greater asset to our spiritual growth than being able to teach the Bible, tell a Bible story, involve our lives with somebody else. It is exciting to see what You have done here, not only with the high school and the Timothy ministry, but now an opportunity for these moms and dads, these men and women, to be able to go into the Bible Explorers and to learn and begin those first steps. No matter where they are at in their spiritual life, they can begin to be used of God and then grow from there. We thank You for that. We love You. Now today, pray Your blessings upon all that we endeavor to do for You. Put us under the blood today. May we find the freedom to preach and the freedom to hear the truth of the Word of God. In Jesus' name, for His sake, we ask it. Amen.

This will be our first blind man that we encounter in the Gospel of John. As you read through the New Testament, you will find there are several different blind men in the Gospels, and they again will all form for us a really good study.

We know that the Bible will break itself down into three applications:

7. We have a historical application.
8. We have a doctrinal application, some specific teaching given to us around Christ's coming.
9. Then we will have an inspirational application: how does this story apply to my everyday life?

Historically, this is a real blind man. The story is true. This was a real guy that Jesus met, and the story is absolutely true. Inspirationally, it will be a picture of an unsaved man. It will be a picture of a man who is blind to the things of God, that he cannot see. He is blinded by this world; he is blinded by sin. As the old song says, "I once was blind but now I see." That is what the picture is. Doctrinally, it is specific teaching in the text here. This is a picture of the blindness of the nation of Israel. We now know from John Chapter 8 and everything in John, they have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. The leaders of Israel, they now even have said He has a devil. They have totally rejected His ministry to their nation, the nation of Israel. Now we understand the real fundamental reason. We have looked at all the other aspects: they are blind. They are blinded to the truth of what God has for them.

Looking a little deeper in this, I want you to be able to get this in your Bible here. Look at verse 2. A question arises with the disciples, and they want to know if this man's blindness is because of some sin that he did, that God struck him blind, or something that his parents did, that God had him born blind. We are told in this particular case that no sin was involved in this man's blindness. That is very important because we also know that in Mark 2:5 and again in 2

Corinthians 11:30, we know that in some cases, sin can cause an infirmity in our lives or some man's life. So we know that it goes either way.

The important thing right now is this story. This story is going to illustrate something. This story is going to show you and me some great things about the issues of life. This story is a really good lesson, not only giving us the picture of the nation of Israel and their spiritual blindness, but it is also going to be a great lesson in just a few moments of how we have to deal with the things in our life. I do not do anybody any favor, no preacher does, if all he does is get up and rah-rah about this and have a great time of this and do this and do that, or he just gets up and spouts off stuff. You have to face the world tomorrow. You have to go back out among the wolves. Your family, your kids have to go back in scenarios that I cannot even imagine when I was in school. You need more than a pep rally this morning. You need something in your life that you can take home, that when the tough times come—and they will come—you can fall back on. That is what the Bible is all about. That is what we do.

Now in verse 4, I want you to see a few things here. Jesus tells us that this man's blindness was not part of any sin, but He says this, and this is a real key: "It's part of the work that God sent Him to do." Then He says, "Work now for the day because there's a night coming when no man can work." That is a great picture of the church right now. We are to do the work because there is a time coming in the Tribulation that nobody is going to be able to do the work. Then in verse 5, He tells us that He Himself, the Lord Jesus, is the light of the world. So we are kind of building a little case here, and we know that that would be the true light of John 1:9, "the lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Then in verses 6 and 7, He performs a miracle on this guy that will restore his eyesight.

Watch the sequence here. Watch the events as they unfold right before our eyes to see what we have here concerning the nation of Israel. In verse 6, the Lord Jesus spits on the ground and made clay. I will just say this: in the Bible, everything that He does means something. There is no filler material in the Bible. There is no, "When they were putting the Bible together, well, we got a half a chapter left, let's just put some stuff in here." Everything that He does, everything in that Bible, will have a meaning for you and for me in one way or the other.

Now, it may seem whatever that He spits on the ground and makes clay, and somebody may ask themselves, "Now, what is that all about? Why did He just make the guy see? I mean, He has done that before. Why the theatrics here of spitting on the ground and making clay?" Because that is a picture to the nation of Israel of Christ's humanity. Clay in the Bible will always represent the humanity of man, and that is a picture that He is the Son of Man coming to a blind nation, Israel.

When you go back to Jeremiah 32:14, you will find a great story back there about Jeremiah going down to the potter's house. In the potter's house, you will read that story: the potter puts a lump of clay, and he fashions a vessel out of that clay. That is a picture of God as the Master Potter molding the nation of Israel to be a vessel that God can use. When we have this thing where He spits on the ground and takes the spittle and mixes the clay, He is showing us that the nation of Israel is blind, and they are made of clay.

If that was not enough for you and for me in an inspirational, practical thing, 2 Corinthians 4:7 says:

2 Corinthians 4:7

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

You see, right now, this body, this physical body you got, when it was made, it was made from dust of the ground back in Genesis. Adam means red-brown, out of the dust of the ground. God made Adam, and He made and fashioned him out of this very earth that He is making into clay. God, just like the nation of Israel, the day you got saved, He puts you on the potter's wheel. You know as well as I do, if you want to make a beautiful vessel out of clay, you get a big lump of clay. That is a picture of you and me today. That is all we were the day Christ found us, is a big old piece of lump of clay. God took us and put us on that potter's wheel, and then it spins, the wheel goes around. But I want you to know, He does not come back in three or four hours and there is a beautiful vase or a beautiful pitcher or a beautiful whatever. No, once it goes around, He gets His hands involved, and He applies pressure to the clay. He squeezes it, He presses down on it, He molds it, He shapes it, He adds water to it, and it is pliable, and He makes it with His hands. When He is finished with it, He has a vessel that is fit for the Master's use. That is your life and my life.

We know in the Bible that the Bible says that God has vessels of honor and He has vessels of dishonor. You get to decide which one you want to be. But right now, you are all on the potter's wheel, and right now, as we see coming through this, there will be sometimes that God will squeeze you. Sometimes He will apply pressure. There are sometimes He will want to make, you know, He will put His thumbs in that thing. Well, that hurts. Then He will shape you. He will put pressure, and He will make it big at the bottom, and then He will choke you in the neck. That is what God wants with you. That is what this church is all about. Any church should be: it helps you as a clay vessel, being fit for the Master's use. You are going to have tough times come into your life. You are going to have things that are going to be hard for you. We are going to talk about that in a minute, and you have got to see it as it really is, not as it appears. So keep that thought in mind as we move on down through here.

Then the next thing, the key word here now, is the word "anointed." He takes the spittle that He makes in the clay, and He anoints the eyes of the blind man. Jesus Christ is not only the Son of Man, but He is God's Anointed, and He is the Son of God. The word "Christ" means "Anointed." So now we see all the elements here of Christ coming to the nation of Israel.

If that was not enough, Israel is blind. We know that from Matthew 13:13-16. The only way that their blindness is going to go away is if they accept the Lord Jesus Christ, the clay, as the Anointed of God, the Son of Man, as He came to them, who in actuality was the Son of God. As the Bible says in 1 Timothy 3:16:

1 Timothy 3:16

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

He came in clay, which is what we saw in John Chapter 8. The leaders of Israel, they will not accept Him; they rejected Him. So Christ uses this man's blindness. Remember, He said this guy did not sin. "What I am going to do is use him as the work that God sent Me to do." But it was the work that God sent Him to do: come to the nation of Israel. So He says in verse 3, "So the works of God should be made manifest in him."

God will use another great lesson for all of us: God will use object lessons in our lives. That is what He is using this young man for. This young man has become an object lesson to the nation of Israel that if they will pick it up and get it and understand it, that they will be able to get the blindness of that nation taken off the scales of their eyes. Our ability, flipping back to you and me, our ability to see every circumstance in life that God puts in us, to see the value of what we can learn from it, and of course, the ability to understand through our own relationship the object lesson that is before us.

A while back, we talked about making righteous judgment, not on appearance, but judge through a righteous judgment. I preached to you that morning, or I talked to you that morning, about we never should judge people, but we should judge for our own personal involvement what they do. The Bible says, "He that is spiritual judges all things," not people. In my life in the ministry of 50-some years now, I can actually say that, barring everything else, just taking the two main things God gave me from my understanding of the ministry, God gave me two object lessons. God gave me a man who probably was the greatest example, an object lesson for me of ministry that any man could ever want. Then God gave me another scenario where it was the worst scenario you could ever want, and I learned from both. I never got caught up in the emotion of liking or not liking the person. I never got caught up in judgment of that. I realized that in my young growth, in my young Christian life, and where God wanted me to go, He uses object lessons. I was never critical of either one. I was never critical of anything. I realized the value that God was allowing me to experience to see so I could in time form, based on my relationship with the Word of God, what God wanted me to be and wanted me to do. God will use people in your life. God will use circumstances in your life. God will use situations in your life, good and bad, as object lessons. The problem is, we get our emotions involved way over the principles of the Word of God, and we get our lives so extended out there that we miss the lessons, and of course, that is a tragedy many times.

Here is a great key to this story. Look at verse 7. He was told to go wash the clay off. Once He anointed his eye with clay, he is told to go wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam, and when he does that, then he sees. Again, you look at that, and you are saying, "Is He just doing this for His own amusement? Does He want to see if this guy is going to follow some of this stuff that sounds pretty ridiculous?" I mean, if I brought you out in the parking lot and spit on the ground and wanted to rub dirt in your eyes and then tell you to go wash in the third drinking fountain, how many would do that? That would be tough. We only got one drinking fountain.

What is He doing here? The pool of Siloam goes all the way back to Isaiah 8:6. It is spelled differently back there, or called differently back there, but it is the same pool. The pool of Siloam may be—and I do not have any proof for this, but I will just throw this out—it may be when David in 2 Samuel 5:8 went up through the guttering of the water from the pool to take Jerusalem. There is a good chance that this was the pool that he went up through because the word Siloam means "sent," or it depended on how you lay it out, it means "sent" or "sent one" or "to be sent." In our story, this pool here is chosen to illustrate that Christ, the humanity, sent a man, Son of God, the Anointed One of God, was the Sent One to the nation of Israel.

If you go back to Chapter 8, with a trained eye again, looking for those things, you go back to Chapter 8, the word "sent" is found five times in reference to Christ being sent to the nation of Israel.

In verse 16 of Chapter 8, He says, "sent Me."

In verse 18 of Chapter 8, He again says, "sent Me."

In verse 26 of Chapter 8, He says, "sent Me."

In verse 29 of Chapter 8, He said, "sent Me."

In verse 42 of Chapter 8, He said, "sent Me."

Five times in the previous chapter, He makes a reference to Christ being sent to the nation of Israel. So when He is giving this object lesson, He is sending him to the pool to wash off the blindness of his eyes that represents the One sent to the nation of Israel. In Isaiah 6:8, that great passage about God and Christ having a conversation, God coming down to man, Israel doctrinally, me inspirationally, He asks the question:

Isaiah 6:8

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

See how that all works? You have to learn in time to develop the trained eye that you know what you need to look for. So that is the doctrinal approach here. Remember, all the stories—and I have told you this before—all the stories in the four Gospels dealing with people will all be a picture of Israel's spiritual condition. So the various blind men that we will find in the Gospels will always doctrinally represent that.

IV. God's Purpose in Affliction: Six Considerations

Now let us see how it applies to you and me very quickly here. This story will be a great truth to us in the New Testament church, and it tells us that not everything that happens to you and to me in this life will be because we have done something wrong and we are being chastised for our sin. The great book of Job is a great example of that. Job went through some horrendous things in seven days, and he was an upright man, and he eschewed evil; he hated evil. So now when

something hits us that is negative and we get impacted by it and it is a major issue, the lessons that I am about to give you will be invaluable if you pay attention.

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

That means "all things" there means all things, even the bad things. So let us look at it for a second quickly and allow me to give you a biblical process to check what is going on when the dark clouds roll in, and they will come. Somebody said one time, "Into every life a little rain must fall." If you can tell me what movie that line came out of, I will have a surprise for you. I am waiting. No, I am just kidding.

Here is what you do. The first thing you do is examine yourself. Obviously, make sure that there is nothing in your life that will be the cause of what you are going through, because we have seen in 1 Corinthians 11:28 that we are told that "every man examine himself." We are also told that in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "examine yourself." Now when something bad or horrendous happens in your life, this is the first place you go, and the reason why this is the first place you go is because this will only take about 10 seconds. You will know immediately. It will not be, "You have to pray over God showing me, did I not do something right?" The Holy Spirit of God will point that finger like Nathan to David, "Thou art the man," and you will know in a heartbeat. Now the real question is, what do you do with that? Believe me, the Holy Spirit of God will let you know. Conviction of the Holy Spirit of God through the Word of God. We saw that in John Chapter 8, did we not? If you want some good advice, be totally honest with God when you are dealing with Him. When I sin and I have to take it to God, I talk real plain to Him. I do not try to hide it. I do not try to flower it up. I do not try to make it something it is not. I just talk real plain. Why? Because it is already plain to Him, so you just get it on the table.

So that is the first thing you do. When you check that box and you are okay, then you have to understand, based on our study today, that there are six things that you want to consider after you get the first one done. Six things why God will allow things to come into your life that are unpleasant, that are ailments, that are issues that will change the course of your life. Six things to remember:

10. A lot of times, God will allow something to come into our life because He wants to keep us humble. For all of us, it is easy to become self-righteous. I do not mean self-righteous like really self-righteous. I mean just self-righteous. People do not do what you think they ought to do the way they think they should do it. You want to criticize them. They are good people. So somebody does not follow it the way that you did or do the exact same thing the way you did it, and you begin to fall into that semi-self-righteous mode where because they did not do it your way, the way you thought it should be done, that there is something wrong with them, without ever knowing what is on the inside of their heart and what their motive was of why or why they did not do what they needed to do. Now I realize that there are some people that are way out there that it is very obvious that I am not talking about that. I am talking about people that we all associate with, people who are in the ministry with us, and it is easy to get

an attitude towards somebody because we do not like the way that they did something. Then we become invaluable in the ministry because now you are a bona fide heart reader. I am calling you up and having you read the meters of people that I need their hearts read. Now you have come to the place where you and I can really spiritually read somebody's heart. You know what God has to do sometimes when we get that way? Knock us down a couple pegs. That is a good thing. It is better than getting hit with a bus. It is a thing where you have to get to the place where you have to get back on your focus, and sometimes God has to take us down a peg or two to get us to focus, to quit looking at somebody else's heart and just start looking at our own. I cannot speak for you, but there is plenty for me to look at in mine.

11. The second thing: sometimes negative things will impact us. Some bad thing will happen, and I am not talking about the air conditioner at work broke today and you sweat it all day. I am not talking about you had a flat tire. I am talking about some real things. This guy was born blind. Sometimes God allows those things to draw us closer to God and to make you more faithful. This is why the book of Psalms is probably the number one book for God's people in the time of trouble. They are drawn to that book, but they do not even know why. You know why you are drawn to that book? Because that is a book where David is going through the tough times in his life, and brother, he went through some tough times, and that whole book is a picture of him drawing close to God and getting back with God what he needs. It is a record of David going through his tough times. Sometimes we get so professional in the ministry, and we are not bad people. We are not out drinking and running around and doing all those things. We are in the ministry; we are working with people; we are doing things, but we just get that professional mindset. The disciples had the same problem, and they are walking with Jesus every day, and they are out there. One time, I can just see them, all these little dirty little kids come up and want to see Jesus, and they just got their white robes out of the cleaners, and they do not want these dirty little fingerprints all over them, these little rat claws. So they say, they try to put them away. Well, Jesus sees it, and He walks over and He says, "What are you doing?" And He says, "Well, we are here for the masses. We are here for the, you know, we are getting a luncheon set up and a rally over here, and we just do not have time for these kids. Look how dirty they are. Look how they are." They said, "I mean, we got this big bus back here that says 'Jesus Tour Across the Middle East,' and they are trying to climb in there to see what it is like and leaving their candy bar wrappers on the seats." Jesus said, "You know what, boys, let Me tell you something, except you come to Me as a little child, I want nothing to do with you." You know what happened to them? What happened to us? Got professional. That is what happens to most pastors. Most pastors get so egotistical in their mindset that they do not have time for their people. You can never see him. I always told you, if you ever go to a church, the first thing you know if you want to stay there or not is ask the pastor if you can have his cell phone number. If he says no, out of that place. What is he there for? What is his job? But we get so elevated someplace that we just want to hands off. "I am the pastor," and all those things. I am going to tell you right now, that is not the way Jesus handled it. Sometimes we just get too professional in what we do. You know what Jesus did with His disciples when they got that way? John Chapter 6, we studied in great detail. He put them into a little boat, put them into a storm, did He not? In the middle of the night, three and a half miles out,

waves raging, crashing, that little boat sinking. Sometimes that is exactly what God has got to do to get our perspective back, that we are not who we think we are.

12. The third thing: sometimes we have to go through so we can sympathize with somebody else of what they are going through. With all that we see on TV and all that we hear, I get it. In a 24-hour period watching television, you will see 60 murders, 18 rapes, four cases of incest, 160 shootouts, nine bank robberies. It just goes on and on and on. These young kids out here, and this is not a criticism because I do not really care, but I watch these guys play all these war games on their video thing, and you get all these, you get these little—I have never played them—but you get these little, I mean, you have not really had a war game until you had an M16 and the tracers coming across your head. They are out there playing all these games, and all this stuff, and killing all these people, people blowing up, people following it out. You know what that does? It desensitizes you. You watch NBC, Fox News, ABC, CBS, and all those things, and all you see is, there was a time when somebody in this country died of prominence that we lowered the flags to half-mast. We just need to leave it there because every week there is another reason to put it at half-mast. This country is insane. Nobody cares about life anymore. This whole world, especially this nation, is desensitized to anything that is going on with somebody else. There are people in the subways in New York, somebody is being raped, and somebody is over here being stabbed or mugged. They are videotaping it on their phones. That is the world we live in. I am just telling you, I have to say this, it can happen to you and me too, maybe not to that extreme, but we lose our burden for people lost and dying and going to hell. We lose our burden for people that we work with or people in our neighborhood or people here, or the people that God wants to put in our world. But we are desensitized to it. We have seen so many things that we have just lost our edge to it. You know what Stalin said? He says, "When one person dies, it's a tragedy, but when six million people die, it's a statistic." I will tell you what, we get to the point where there is so much death around us and all the things that we could evolve in this fantasy world of shooting people, killing people, watching people die, watching television. We are like the GI I saw one time back in the Korean War in the Chosin Reservoir when they could not get out, and they had to stack the dead bodies up so high, they are like cordwood. You know what that old boy was doing? He was sitting on a pile of dead GIs eating his K-rations. Why? Death had become an everyday thing. With you and me, sometimes that is exactly the way we are. We do not care about the person sitting next to us. We do not care about the person that God tries to bring into our life. We are desensitized to it. The ability to feel what somebody else—and I will tell you right now, there is sometimes there is nothing to say. Sometimes all you can do is hold them and cry with them. Sometimes Baptist preachers are famous for keeping on talking when there is nothing left to say. Sometimes you just experience what Christ did, and across that is real in your life, you can transpond that into what somebody else is going through.
13. The fourth thing: sometimes tough times will come into our world and our lives to distance ourselves from the world and make heaven more real to us. Sometimes we get our roots down too deep in this world. It is easy to do. I do not think you get up in the morning and mean to do it. You just get caught up in everything. You go to the mall and you see in the windows all the things that you do not have. You go down the street and you see the

billboards of all the things you should have. Your cell phone used to be something that was private; it is not now. I get phone call after phone call all day long from somebody wanting to sell me something. I fixed them. Somebody called me the other day. I have got them down pretty good. Somebody called me today, and he says, "Hey, I'm from Medicare. We hear you have back issues, and we want you to know that you qualify for this, this, this." All they want to do is hitchhike off of Medicare and then send you something that you will never use. He said, "Is this Mr. Alexander?" And I said, "No, he passed away two days ago, and I just happened to pick up his phone." They do not call anymore. You say, "You shouldn't do that." Why? You want to take the phone calls? I will forward them to you. But I am telling you, nothing is sacred anymore. They are after you for everything. They want you to buy this; they want you to buy that. They put on the TV, they put the commercials about the cars and about the trucks and about this and about that, everything. It is easy to just forget this when you have all of that. You have to work at it. I have to work at it, and sometimes we lose our perspective, do we not? We lose our focus. We lose our purpose. It is easy to do. I tell you how Solomon, who is given the wisest man that ever lived, that he probably was, but I also find out that what caused his problems when he got all messed up, the Bible clearly tells us that he was seven years building the house of God, but he was 13 years building his own. Anytime anybody, me or you or Solomon, spend more time building our own stuff than we do God, we are going to have some problems. Sometimes God just comes down and gives a little tap on the shoulder, gives you a little wrap on the head, gives you a swift kick in the seat of the pants, and it shows us how weak and how foolish and vulnerable we really are. Like Abraham, he is a great study. Abraham in Hebrews 11:10:Hebrews 11:10

For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. That is what I am looking for. I do an 8308 Woods and Drive. You can have it. I am looking for a city that He built, New Jerusalem, for me. The Bible says in Proverbs 9:1-4:Proverbs 9:1-4

1 Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars:

2 She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table.

3 She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city,

4 Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, saith she to him, A city that has foundations. You know what I have learned in this life in 50-some years? I am 71, but I have been 71 years in my life. I have learned that nothing in this life has any real foundations to it except one thing: the Word of God.

14. A fifth thing, moving along here: sometimes God will allow those things to come into our lives to show you that God's promises are real. There will be no greater time of importance to God's people than when we are afflicted or we go through some kind of trial, knowing the promise that God has for us, and in any and all circumstances and situations that God will come through for you. That can be hard sometimes. You get a bad doctor report, or you get this or you get that, or somebody says this, and it is easy to forget. I do not care what Dr. Fine, Dr. Howard, Dr. Fine says. I do not care what anybody says. Your life, my life, is in the hands of Almighty God, and it is just that simple. Hebrews 13:5-6 already told me:Hebrews 13:5-6

5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye

have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

6 So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. He will never leave me nor forsake me. I mean, I will leave Him, forsake Him, but He will never leave Him, forsake me. That is a pretty good deal. So it is a raw end on His part, but praise God, He is going to stick with us, and sometimes we just lose sight of that. So affliction comes, issues come, and then all those things become more real to us. One of my favorite places in the Bible that I always go to when I am faced with something, no matter what it may be, is 2 Corinthians 1:10, where Paul was going through his great times. They were out to kill him; they were trying to murder him, and he was going through some tremendous times through no fault of his own, just doing the work of God. You know what he said? 2 Corinthians 1:10

Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; He said, "You know what about God who hath delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver, in whom we trust He will yet deliver." You know what he just told me? God is going to take care of the past. God is going to take care of what I am going through now, and God is going to take care of what I am going through tomorrow. It does not get any better than that.

15. Then number six, as you probably have guessed by now based on our story: sometimes God will put us through some tough times so He can simply get the honor and glory out of it. That is a question for all of us. Sometimes God will put us through something, and this will take us back to last week, being God's sacrifice, Romans 12:1-2. The real question is, what are we willing to allow God to do with us? How much of us are we willing to lay on that altar? How much honestly are we willing to trust God as our Father, as Isaac trusted Abraham, to crawl up on that altar, carry the wood, there is the knife, there is the fire? You know what the best position—and I cannot speak for you, but the best position I have ever found myself in as a Christian is being out on a limb with God, way out there, and then look back at the tree where the limb is hooked onto the tree and see God standing there with a saw in His hand and a smile on His face, trusting through it all. That is the real question for all of us. It is not about how you are doing today. It is not about, "Are you saved or you are not saved?" That is all immaterial. The real question today for 99% of you here: how much are you willing to let God use you? What limitations do you put on God? "Well, God, I will do this, but don't do this. Oh, God, yeah, I will go here, but don't send me here. Oh, I will do this, Lord, but don't ask me to do that." God forbid—and I please God forbid this would ever happen to anybody—but I am just talking to you here. Would you be okay with God giving you cancer if God wanted to put you in a cancer ward someplace where you could win somebody else to Christ? I am not saying I would. I am asking all of us. That is the bottom line.

You see, that is the thing that women like Mary Reed, who was a missionary to the lepers, I told you about last week. She was willing to get leprosy if that is what it took to go to be a missionary to the lepers. She could have had a long stick with tracts on him and passed them out to them. She went down and lived with them for 50 years and never got leprosy. She bathed them, she carried them, she washed them, she taught them the Bible. You see, this is the difference between Christianity then and Christianity now. How about the Moravians that I talked about last week? Some of those old boys selling themselves into slavery for the rest of their life to reach the black

man with Christ. And we will not even go down to the Bible Explorers to learn how to teach some kids in this church to help them in their future be what God wants them to be, or the Timothy group, or the high school, or my ministries. I am telling you, I have people all the time, and many of you have done this, where you put those promises on 3x5 cards. You know, whatever you are going through, and you will get about 20 of them, and you will keep them with you, and when tough times come, you just go through that. That is the beginning of you taking those 3x5 cards and those promises and those principles and getting them into your heart. They are not into your heart yet; they are on the card. But in time, if you do it, they will be in your heart. You will not need the cards anymore. Sometimes we lose sight of that. Sometimes we lose sight of the fact that all of the things that come into our life, that God maybe just wants to use me and you like He did the blind man for the work of God to get the honor and glory out of it. I do not mean this wrong, and I certainly have not arrived by any stretch of the imagination, but I will tell you this: I do not think probably—probably should not even say this—but I do not think any Christian, no matter where or who or when, is ever really ready to do what God wants them to do. So you are ready to do that, and I think that is a process you have to get to, and I think that the day and age that we are living in, you are going to see it in a real way if things do not change.

V. Leadership Forged Through Crisis

Those are the six things, but in all of these, there is one single truth that I think stands above all, and I would—all the six that I gave you—and it would be a real amiss if I did not give you this. This truth is completely lost today. God's people are big on talk, but they are short on the inner courage. In the Christianity we live in today, fear runs 99% of God's people's lives, almost in every direction. I have worn out watching the pattern of people that it is one thing to have the Word of God and claim you have the Word of God, but it is something else to be able to apply it and trust it when you go through some really tough times. The one basic truth will be the key to either our ministry or running out the door and not doing the ministry.

It is simply this: understanding this, whatever you go through, whatever tough time comes, whatever like happened to this blind man, whatever befalls us in life, whatever happens to us as a church, whatever happens to all of Christianity in the crazy world that we live in—and there are plenty of crises that we have been through, and I will tell you right now, there are plenty more crises coming—but I will tell you something, and you better leave with this one thing today: it is through crisis that God makes leaders. Nobody ever became strong in the Lord by not going through things. The potter's wheel demands pressure. It demands thumbs, fingers, squeezing. It demands molding, making. We actually think that we are just a lump of clay. God puts it on there. 20 years from now, since you have been saved for 20 years, you come out as a perfect little vase. Out of the smoke of ashes of any disaster or tough times, watch how the crisis will either make the man or break the man.

It is the difference between in any combat situation that when you are pinned down and you are going to get slaughtered, everybody else is hiding behind a log or a rock or whatever they got, and one guy will crawl out in the immediate fire and expose himself to save the rest. That is leadership. Leadership is not getting up and saying, "I got a name tag that says I'm the leader."

Leadership is leading through any crisis. If you are ever going to do the ministry, and you are ever going to be in the ministry, and you are ever going to do what God wants you to do, you have to learn that your leadership skills will be purged through the fire of the crises of life that you have to face and work your way through with God and come out on the other side.

The elephant in the room for almost three years now, COVID-19, has thinned out the ranks of God's people everywhere across this country. The mask mandates, the stupid inconsistency of leadership in applying anything or talking double or giving in clear, the shot mandates, the shutting down of restaurants and businesses and churches and everything out there, it is just an absolute. But it is not going to go away. It is where we are at. People are scared to death over things like this. We got the first COVID-19 pandemic, and then when we are all breathing a little more, Delta came in. Now we got the Delta kind under control, and now Omni is coming. You might as well get used to it; it is not ever going to go away. It has been designed and set up, and it is going to try to shut down and control everything and everybody on this planet. I cannot stop it. I cannot fight it, but I can definitely with my Bible find a way through it.

We came through the first bout. People left. I get it. I am not criticizing anybody. It is okay. You have got to do what you have got to do. It was a thing where people were scared. I had one guy tell me, "When I come home from work, my wife meets me in the garage. I have to take all my clothes off, and she hosed me down with a hose, and I have to put clean clothes on." That is pretty drastic. I have known people that wear masks in their homes. I do not care whether you wear a mask or not. I respect all of that, but I am saying none of it should stop us. It is just that simple. I cannot speak for anybody else. We have navigated through the first one. We have navigated through the second one. We will navigate through the third one, the fourth one, the fifth one, the sixth one. It is okay because right around the corner is our promotion to glory anyhow. I am okay with it. I do not want to be in the rear with a gear when He comes. I want to be on the firing line. I cannot speak for you, but I would love to. I have no problem crawling up on that altar and saying, "God, whatever You want to do." I have been too many years seeing how the world does it versus how He does it. I am with Him because I do not care what happens. I know He is—you know what David did one time? David really messed up, and the Lord said, "Okay, David, you're going to get whacked, but I'm going to let you choose. David, there's three doors up here: door number one, door number two, and door number three. Behind every one of those doors is going to be a judgment on you and the people for your bad choice. Door number one is I'm going to plague the fire out of them. Door number two is the enemies are going to come down. Door number three, I'm going to deal with you." You know what David said? He said, "Lord, there's something you don't have to pray about. I'll take door number three. I can't trust the plagues, and I can't trust my enemies, but I know whatever You do to me will be right." It does not get any better than that.

Are you His? Are you His? Are you sure you are His? Because I am not sure you are. Are you sure you are His? Well, then He is going to get us through. I do not know what to tell you. Mask, no mask, whatever you want to do, whatever you have got to do, I do not care. The ranks of the fearful have been filled, and you know what? When we went through everything we went through today, as we stand here, we are stronger, we are tougher, we are more determined, and

we are in better spiritual shape than at any time in our 18 years. Why? Because we decided we are going to keep on doing what God has called us to do no matter what anybody else tells us not to do, and God's blessings are overflowing the walls of this place because of it. Because in the tough times that come, reveal the tough people, and leadership is built out of chaos, and that is building leadership. The test of your mettle, the tension of your steel, the tip of the javelin. We do not—I am like General Patton—we do not retreat. We are not going to pay for the same ground twice. I do not want to get into reports that we are holding ground. We are going to attack in the morning. We are going to attack in the afternoon, and we are going to attack in the evening. We are going to attack all day long, and we are going to attack and attack, and we are going to stay on the—why? Because we are going to move forward. There is never a time that Jesus said, "Okay, time out now. I'm going to take a break," or "Nobody likes Me." He went forward. Paul went forward. The Waldensians went forward. The Moravians went forward. And we are going forward, and we will continue to build leaders. Whatever happens, it will forge through this church the men and the women who come out of the dust and the ashes.

I told you this was going to happen. Zach went down and preached the funeral right on the border of Missouri, down there, a little church. The pastor and him spent some time together, and the pastor called me last week, and I told you this was going to happen. It does not stop; it keeps moving forward. Here is a little church down there that runs about 75 or 80 people, and he met Zach, and they love Zach preaching at the funeral down there. The guy called up, and he says, "Hey, he says, I want to know about your discipleship program." So I explained it to him, and I said, "Here's what I'll do, Pastor. I said, whenever you can, I'm going to bring you up for three or four days, and I want you to see what we've got here, and I want—and I'm going to put you in some discipleship groups with people to watch how they do it, and I want you to understand it. I'll spend some time with you. I'll put key people in your world that they can talk to and help you, and then you go back to your people, and if you want, I'll send a team down there to teach your people how to disciple." First one in a lot of years. There were times that we did it all over Europe. We did it in Russia. We did it in Ukraine. We did it in Hungary. We did it in South America. We did it in Central America. We did it everywhere. There were times when I had teams crossing over in the Atlantic in jet planes going from one place to the other. Now, it all got shut down, but now it is all starting again. Why? Because God is taking the leadership and bringing you to the point where now we are going to take these guys out here who really want to learn how to teach the Word of God to their people and give them what they need, and God is going to use you guys to do it. It is just another unending deal. It is just what we do. Out of the ashes of any crisis comes leadership. As the world gets smaller and more controlling, we expand our freedom through Christ to do what God wants us to do. Nothing is going to stop us. I have got the men. I have got the women to get it done. God has given us the opportunity. He has given us the Word of God. He has given us the material. I just need men and women who are willing to crawl up on that altar and let God use them. We have got him.

VI. Call to Action

I am done. Praise the Lord. The bottom line is this: some of you people that are not involved in the Timothy or the high school, that you are just out there and you are ready to do something, go

over to Jim's class and let him talk to you. Let him start with you. I do not want to put a bunch of people doing the same thing. I want to build dedicated people to each ministry: the high school, the Timothy, and then the Bible Explorers. They need to get into church here to be part of this, but they need to have the ability to train you. So I want to see some of you over there after this message. You better get over there and do something that God has got you to do. Let us have a word of prayer.