

Ecclesiastes 7

Sunday 4/17/2022

I want you to turn to the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 7. Let me start by saying this, and I want everybody to clearly understand what I'm about to say so you don't miss whatever God has to say to you today. If you are a Christian and you've been saved for any length of time, you should know by now that there are no accidents with God. God is not a God of happenstance. God has a purpose for whatever He does. Many times we don't understand that purpose, but I never deny the fact that it is His sovereign purpose.

My job, your job, when God opens up something for us, lays something before us, or changes things up that is not the normal norm of things, our job is to find out or try to find out what God is trying to show us through that. All life is that way. This is why we have issues in life. I know many times we have issues in life because we do wrong things; we do dumb things. I get that. But it doesn't take away from the fact that you're not going to have issues come up in your life when you do everything that God wants you to do, because that's how God speaks to us. That's how God reveals Himself to us.

I cannot deny the fact today that the circumstances surrounding this Easter morning are so bizarre and off the chart that God has something here for all of us. Now, don't take this as a criticism in any way, shape, or form, because I'm not intending it to. But you know as well as I do that you always have more people that come to Christmas service or Easter service than you will last Sunday or this Sunday. Now, that's not too much here, but that's true in most churches. A lot of people just come to church for the Christian holidays, and I understand that.

That being said, Bob Gregg went home to be with the Lord this morning. He's in heaven right now. Knowing Bob the way I do, if he was here right now, he would say, "What's the big deal about this?" That was Bob. But I'm going to tell you right now, God is the great orchestrator of events. God could have taken Bob home any time that He chose to. He could have lived for another 50 years, another 40 years. He could have died 20 years ago. He could have died last week, last month. He chose this morning in the most bizarre circumstances that got a hold of every one of our hearts this morning.

I'm telling you this, believe me or don't believe me, the reason why you were here this morning is because some of you need to find the same Jesus that Bob found. This Christ died for you on the cross. He paid on that cross, which everybody's celebrating today at Easter. He died on that cross and paid the price for your sin. Now you may have problems in your life. You may have issues that have complicated your life. You may have lost your kids, lost your marriage, lost this, lost that. God didn't die on the cross so you could get your job back. God never died on the cross so you could even get your marriage back. Now maybe you will, maybe you won't. God didn't die because you got into drugs. God died because you, as a human being, have a personal sin debt before a holy God. Everything else in your life comes down to that.

When He died on that cross, when He hung on that cross, He died with your names on His lips. He died knowing full well that you would spend an eternity in the lake of fire if He didn't come down and do what He did. Now there was a time in Bob's life when he trusted the Lord Jesus

Christ as his own personal Savior. I've known Bob for 40 years. It's no accident that God took him home this morning, that God would rip the sermon that I had all prepared, and it was a good one. You'll hear it next week. I can kind of take the week off this week; I don't have to prepare anything.

You know, I've got to honestly say, I love it when God... Christianity in life is like a sports event. You know that? It's like the game of life. In football and in basketball and all those things, the coach will see something going on and he'll call in what they call a play from the bench. His scouts will look up there and see something that changes everything, and they'll call down to the coach and they'll say, "Run plan 26.5 left because of the way they're set up." So the quarterback is out there and he's all ready to go. He's got his little arm sleeve thing on. He knows what he's doing, and suddenly in his little microphone, or they call a timeout, the coach calls him in. He says, "No, no, run this play."

I love in the ministry when God does the same thing. This morning God's calling a play in from the bench because some things need to be said today, because I'm telling you, there's somebody here this morning that needs to hear what I have to say. Yes, Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for your sins, but it might just be that God took home a soldier of Jesus Christ this morning so you could hear this message. So you better listen.

I. The Wisdom of Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes chapter 7 has always been a powerful chapter to me. I use it every time I preach a funeral; this is my text because I don't know of a better text anywhere to get across the point of what Ecclesiastes chapter 7 is trying to say. Solomon has always been one of my favorite characters. He has been called the wisest man that ever lived, and that is true. He was. He writes a number of the wisdom books; there are five in the Bible, and he writes a number of them. In writing them, he gives us incredible insight into everything in life.

When it comes to the book of Ecclesiastes, he says some things that will go against the grain of the way that we think. If I've learned anything about God in my 50-some years in the ministry, if I've learned anything about the Lord Jesus Christ and my relationship with God, it is the fact that God doesn't think on the same level that I do. His thoughts are not my thoughts. Isaiah 55:11. His ways are not my ways. He looks at things one way; we as human beings totally look at it another way. That's why so many of God's people go to church, service after church service, they hear the Gospel a thousand times in their life, and they never respond to it. The reason is because you're looking at it from the world's standpoint.

He says, over there in the Gospels, "The last shall be first and the first shall be last." We try to put everything first in our life, but He tells us there that the first is going to be last and the last is going to be first. We put a high premium on life, to try to live as long as we can, but the Bible says that he that loses his life finds his life. If I learned anything, I have learned that in my process as a human being, trying to understand and deal with life and a holy God, I have learned that we're not on the same level of thinking. So we need to change that, and the way that we change that is to let this mind be in us which was also in Christ Jesus.

Now I'm going to preach this message because this is what Bob would have me preach this morning. I know Bob; I know what he would say; I know what he would have me to do. So I'm going to do it based on what God is doing, because I'm telling you right now, there's somebody in this room that needs this message, so you better listen. The Bible says, "Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Bob had no idea yesterday when he got up that it would be his last day on earth. He had no idea when he played volleyball last night that that would be the last game that he'd ever play. I'm sure he got up this morning ready to come to church, and he was all ready to preach, have Logan sing. He had no idea.

It goes to show you, my friend, and you better let this sink in, how fragile life is, because we all have this tendency that we're going to live forever, don't we? Especially you young people, you think you're invincible. You think you can live forever, defy the odds, and do everything that you want to do. No, you can't. So when the wisest man that ever lived wrote Ecclesiastes chapter 7, in these first couple of verses here, he said something. Let's read it.

Ecclesiastes 7:1-4

A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth.

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.

Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

Father, help us today. Help me today. Help us to look into this and to see these events that have taken place that are so out of the ordinary. Lord, there has to be something here for You to orchestrate what You have today. Lord, I don't know all of these people, but You do, and You're looking right down inside their hearts today, and You knew that they needed for their salvation a greater object lesson than just the old standard Easter message. Help us today, Lord. Help us not only to glean from the life of Bob Greg and learn the things that we learn from him, but help us glean today from the lessons in his death, and we'll thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

II. The Reality and Certainty of Death

Now the first thing I want you to notice here, he says, "the day of death is better than the day of one's birth." We don't look at life that way; we really don't. Then he says in verse 2 that it's better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting. Now that's a contradictive concept. Nobody likes the mourning process at a funeral home. Nobody likes the death of somebody that you have to go through and feel all the emotions that many of us are feeling right now. We don't enjoy that.

I cannot describe to you, as I was driving over here and my phone went off and Logan and Kim gave me the first reports, the sick feeling that was in my stomach. I can't tell you how a million thoughts raced through my mind of what I've got to do today and asking myself how, how do you

function? Whatever we all had planned today is ultimately changed in many dynamics, and even if we go through with it, which most of us will, you know as well as I do, it'll never be the same.

As he lays this thing out here, he says it's better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting, and we look at that and we don't... nobody loves going to funerals. I don't know of anybody that I know. You look through the movies in the theaters, which you can go to. I don't know anybody that looks through the obituaries to see where you want to go to a funeral this weekend. We want to put death as far away from us as we can, but he says, the wisest man that ever lived, he says that it's better for us to have the mourning in our heart today of a loss of a brother in Christ that we loved than to be out partying and have a good time at a picnic or whatever we do.

Now I want you to see the reason for that. He says, "It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men." Now he's saying that it's better for us to be in a situation where we're feeling what we're feeling because every one of us is going to die someday, and we want to put that idea as far from us as we can. Nobody gets up in the morning and thinks this may be my last day. Nobody plans for that. Nobody plans for the car wreck that will take their life. Nobody plans for whatever cut their life short. Nobody plans to go boating and drown in the lake.

What he's saying here, and there are four concepts that Solomon lays out that I want you to understand this morning in facing Bob's death.

1. There is a reality in death. The first thing that if Solomon could expound on this or preach this, the first thing he'd say here is that for you and for me, the first thing that we need to understand is that there is a reality in death. We're all going to die. Death is something that is real. It came into this planet with Adam and Eve when he died spiritually, and death passed upon all men. God's plan in this life, the cycle of life in Ecclesiastes chapter 1, 2, and 3, there's a time to be born and there's a time to die. If you're sitting here this morning, I want you to know, the reality of death is real. It's something that you're not going to get away from, as far as we want to push it, as far as we don't want to think about it. Death is a reality.
2. There is a certainty in death. The next thing he says out of here is that not only is it a reality, but it's a certainty. The Bible says it's appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment. We all have an appointment with death. Bob had an appointment with death. Now we all make appointments with dentists, with doctors, with people, all kinds of things, and you can cancel your dentist appointment. You'll get a text now from your doctor before you go and see him. If you're still coming, text yes, or do you know if you're not going to cancel the appointment. You can cancel your doctor. You can cancel your dentist. You can cancel. You'll never cancel your appointment with death with God. I want you to know you have an appointment this morning. Not only is death a reality, death is a certainty. You're not going to escape it.

I know we like to fill our lives with all the fun things. We like to get to the party, do the drugs, do the booze, do all the things the world does. You know why we do that? Simple: to escape the fact that there's a reality of death and a certainty of death. We think that if we can fill our lives with

all that fun stuff, we can cut that day short. You won't. No, death will come to all men. I don't care if you live in a 60 million dollar building, a house. I don't care if you live in a cardboard box under I-435. When the death angel comes and knocks on your door, you're going. You're going.

III. The Price of Salvation

Now you see, this is why Christ came down and died. This is why God looked down into the future and He saw everybody here. He saw everybody in the world. He saw you and He saw me in our sin, wrapped in our filthy rags of unrighteousness. He knew that there was a reality of death and it was a certainty of death, and I and you were going to have to keep that appointment. You know what He did? He loved you enough. He loved me enough that He came down.

We talk about that. I guarantee you this is not the Easter message that I had. I've got a better one. We'll put an Easter part two next week. But you know, this is what Easter is. Easter is a bunch of people getting up there and a bunch of choirs singing little songs and having a little potluck, you know, and all those things. It's a thing where a preacher gets up and he talks about the resurrection of Christ and the death of Christ. It's so... I've got one word for it: it's anemic. It doesn't deal with the stark terror of that day.

You know why God's people don't grab salvation, and even the ones that do grab it, many times they'll do anything with it? Because we really don't understand the price that was paid for you and I to have it. You go to these lame, blame pastor churches where they get Christ up there on the cross and they talk about the whippings, and His torn beard. You ought to go to Job chapter 30. You ought to go to Psalm chapter 29. You ought to go to Isaiah chapter 53. You ought to go to Psalm 16. You ought to go back in the Old Testament where you see the real price that was paid. The fear and the terror in His heart. The Father turning His back on His own Son. The blood running out His side. The spirit departing.

Oh, I've thought so many times when Jesus Christ is hanging on that cross and He's going through the agony, and He looks at His Father and He says, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" You know why God forsook Him on the cross? So I wouldn't have to forsake you and me in hell. He cries out, "I thirst." You know why He cried out, "I thirst"? So you and I in the lake of fire wouldn't have to cry out for Him. We put our little sermonettes together about the little Jesus hanging on the cross when we don't have a clue of the price that was paid for Him, or paid for you and for me on Calvary's cross.

We live our lives the way we want to do it, even as so-called Christians. There's no sacrifice in our life. You know why? You don't understand the sacrifice that He paid for your salvation. We do what we want to do when we want to do it. We come to church whenever we feel like it, and we come to the place where we just go through life tiptoeing around His sacrificial death for you and for me. I'm going to tell you right now, He paid that price on the cross. He died.

I've thought many, many times when He's hanging there, and I've seen it from Job and Psalms and in so many places in the Old Testament. I've seen it so many times in Isaiah. I've seen when He's hanging on that cross and He's going through that agony. Now you know God turned His back on Him, okay? I get that, but God didn't want to turn His back on Him. He was the apple of

God's eye. God loved Him more than anything on this planet. He was His beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Matthew 17. He didn't want to turn His back on Him, but He turned His back on Him because of you and me. Don't you understand that?

I think when He's hanging on that cross, I think when God looked down over the banisters of heaven and saw His Son crying out to Him, saw His Son just weeping, "Father, Father, Father, Father, help Me, help Me." Then one of those old Roman soldiers down there gambling for His garment. He's over there, and they're laughing, and one of them's always a tough guy in every crowd. He says, "Watch this," and he picks up that spear and he lays that thing back and lets that spear fly. You know what? He wanted Him to die quickly. They had some places they wanted to go in town that night, and they had the cross duty, and they would have had to stay there till He died. So he, like both soldiers, he's just hurrying things along. He's just a soldier.

It happened in World War I. It happened in World War II. There were many times in World War II when a guy was told to take three or four German soldiers back, and you can't eat till you get them down there. He just marched them around the hill and shot them. Went to eat. That's what soldiers do. That old Roman soldier picked up that spear and he says, "Watch this, guys, here we go." He threw that thing, and the Lord Jesus Christ went as that spear went up in His side. I'm telling you, about that time God had all He could stand. God had watched them spit on Him and pull His beard out. God had watched them fillet His back with a cat-of-nine-tails. God watched them put those nails in His hands and His feet, and that was all God could take.

About that time, God raised His hand to send down a cordon of angels to wipe out humanity on planet earth. Hey, one angel back in First Kings, one angel, killed 186,000 people in one night. God raised that hand. He had enough, man. Oh, I've seen it in my mind so many times. How a loving Father, how He just could not stand it, and He was done with it. About that time, Jesus looked up and He said, "Father, Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." Translation: If You do that, Bob Alexander will spend an eternity in hell. If You do that, every man and woman in this room will spend eternity in hell. If You stop that. If You let Your love for Me override Your love for the people in Old Paths Baptist Church, they'll all be in hell. So God's hand was stayed, and His Son died on the cross for you and for me.

That's why you're here this morning. No accident that you decided to come to church today. There's no accident that God took Bob Greg home this morning. God wanted us to mix the two together so you could see. He didn't want you to have the message I had for you. He wanted you to have this message: that there is a reality in death and there is a certainty in death.

IV. The Comfort of the Resurrection

I want to tell you, my friend, there is a reality in death, and yes, there's a certainty in death. That's the bad news. The good news is there's a hope in death. That hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. The hope is the fact that you don't have to spend an eternity in the lake of fire unless you just want to go. You've got all these people who say, "Well, I think God predestined some people to go to heaven and some people to go to hell." I don't believe that. Hey, let me tell you something, that Bible tells me that hell was never prepared for you in the

first place. It was prepared for the devil and his angels. God never thought that you, after hearing the story of God's death on the cross, would walk out that door and refuse it. But you did. But we did.

I'm not upset with you. I walked out the door the first 20 years of my life. I didn't want to hear it. You see, I could relate to this morning because it was an event just like this that God called me back where I needed to be many, many years ago. So I understand how the circumstances of Bob Greg's death over here can impact what's happening here, because it did for me. My mom and dad went to church when I was a little kid, and then they got out of going to church, and they didn't care about anything. So, you know, it's just like all kids with their parents. Moms and dads, you don't send your kids to church; you take your kids to church. My mom and dad didn't.

I can remember my mom dressing me up to push me out the door to go to church right across the street. She went back to bed. They got mad about something. To this day, I don't know what it was all about. But I know that's the last thing that I needed, and I fell in with that crowd. I grew up just like everybody else. I went to middle school and high school, and I was with everybody else. I didn't care about God. I didn't care about anything. I didn't really care what God did for me or what He didn't do for me. I knew better. I knew better.

I went into the army when I was 19 years old, and I thought that that's really what I wanted to do. God had other plans. You know, you have in your mind today what you think you want to do. God's got other plans. Don't go through the really tough times to find out what that plan is. I remember my dad passed away. I was just a young man, 19 or 20 maybe at that time, and I was just a young guy, and he died of cancer.

Can I talk to you young kids here for just a moment? You better respect and love your parents while you have them, because there will come a time when you want to tell them you love them, but they're stone cold and they can't hear you. I read a story one time of an old farmer, a good man, hard-working, and he had up there, you know, he was growing crops out of rocks. It was a terrible land, but he didn't have a lot of money, but he had a wife. They went into town one day to buy some groceries and just to keep themselves going, and he's getting this stuff, and he looks over, and you know, back in those days it was all in one store, and his wife's over here looking at all this pretty lace that the women make dresses out of, and it's white and lacy and it's pretty, and she's looking at it, and she said, "Do you think maybe I could get some of this to make a new dress?" And he says, "Absolutely not. We don't need stuff like that." And she quietly put it back, and they went on their way.

His wife, about seven months later, she died, and she was all this old boy had. His people didn't see him for a long time, and they got worried about him. So one night, it was a terrible night, it was a rainstorm, thunder, lightning. They were going to drive out to check on him. So two or three families got in their little buggies and began to go out toward his farm. They came down around the field, and there was a cemetery over there where his wife was buried, and as they went down there, they saw back in the cemetery a little light. So they thought, "Well, we better check that out." So they pulled in there, and he drove up, and there on that tombstone of his wife,

pouring down rain, him laying on his knees, crying like his heart was coming out of his mouth, and across those tombstones were yards and yards and yards of white lace. Too late!

You better say some things to your mom and your dad. Husbands, you better say some things to your wife. Wives, you better say some things to your husband, because Bob Greg had no idea that today was his last day. Life is so fragile. "What knoweth not that your life is like a vapor, that appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away."

I got out of the army, came back. My dad then, later on, a couple of years later, passed away. I went to church one morning. My mom got right with the Lord and needed to go back to church, so I would go with her. I'll never forget, I had just gotten out of the army, and wasn't out yet, and still had my... I went to church that morning with my uniform on. I don't know how I wound up. I usually sat with my mom, but that morning I wound up in the single adult class, the college and career for kids up to being married, Mel Sabaka's class. I sat way in the back. They had a guest speaker that day. His name was Tommy Thomas. Tommy Thomas was the director of the Brown Street Mission. He was the last of the Philadelphia preachers. There were several of them that were still alive back then. He died shortly. Well, they all died shortly after this event, but Tommy was preaching that morning.

I was sitting in the back, and I'll never forget, he got up to the pulpit and he said, "I want to preach to you a message on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." When he said that, he said, "And I want to ask you a question this morning: Are you ready?" When he said that, he grabbed his heart and he started to slump over the pulpit, and he said it one more time, "Are you ready?" The last time he was on his knee, down before he kicked off and went home to be with the Lord, and he pointed his finger and he yelled with the last breath in his lungs, "Are you ready?" And he died and went home to be with the Lord.

The place was as chaotic as it is this morning. Mel got up, like I've gotten up, like I'm trying to get up, and preached a message, and I'm telling you, the altar was filled with people. I didn't go forward that morning. But I'm going to tell you this: You who were part of my ministry that found your Bible, found the Lord Jesus Christ, a part of what I do, or you're not part of what I do but you got salvation, got the right Bible, we got everything because of our relationship. You can take the common thread back to that morning. Because when that old boy hit the ground for the last time, pointing his finger, screaming out, "Are you ready?" he was pointing at me. I walked out of there that day knowing that I wasn't ready. You see, God used his death to get me right with God, just like He wants to use Bob Greg's death in your life today.

Do you actually think that there was an accident that I went to church with my mom that morning? And normally sat in the main service, but that morning somebody invited me to go here, and I said, normally I would say no, that morning I said yes, and I went. I sat in the back. But if you've got the Bible and you're saved because of my relationship with you and my ministry, take it back to old Tommy Thomas dying in the pulpit. Don't give the credit to me. I was nothing. He was willing to let God take him home that morning. I can't speak for anybody else that morning, what they ever did with it. But I'm telling you right now, I know what I did with it. I can't speak to you this morning on what you will do with it, but I am going to tell you

this morning what you better do with it. Because there is a reality of death and there is a certainty of death. But bless God, there's a hope in death.

You don't have to go to hell. You don't have to be eternally separated from God. I'm telling you right now, God orchestrated the events to have you here this morning because He wanted you to hear what I'm saying out of Ecclesiastes chapter 7: that there is a reality, you're going to die, and it's a certainty, you're not going to escape it. God will use things in your life just like He used in my life. He will put things together, orchestrate the events, because Bob went home to be with the Lord, because God saw and thought in His eternal wisdom that He could get more honor and glory out of his death than He could his life. You know what? Bob was okay with that, just as Tommy Thomas was okay with that. Because that's what God does. Yes, there is a reality of death, my dear friend, and there is a certainty of death. But there is also a hope in death, and from that hope, for us as believers, we find a comfort in death.

V. The Comfort of the Resurrection

Turn over to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

You see, there is a reality of death because there is a certainty of death, but then there's a hope in death. Jesus Christ died on the cross. "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 whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Because of the hope in death, and you taking that hope and trusting Christ as your own personal Savior, when your appointment does come, that's the comfort.

Wouldn't it be a terrible thing today if you atheists were true, that there was no God, there was no eternity, that you're just, you know, come out of the slime of a river someplace, that is the meat as an amoeba? You once were a monkey in a banyan tree, and now you're a professor with a PhD. Wouldn't it be a terrible thing if that was really true? Wouldn't it be a terrible thing that, as

the world's view of God, that there's no real God, there's no real heaven, there's no real hell, it's all an illusion, religion is a crutch? Wouldn't it be a terrible thing if that was true today, because if it was true, then when somebody dies, it's all over, it's done, there's no future, there's no eternity, there's no nothing, just that great blackness like you were here and now you're gone.

Boy, I'm so thankful that God had a plan. I'm so thankful that God had a plan because He knew that there was a certainty and a reality of my death, and He came down and died on that cross. He paid my price that I could have the hope, and through that hope, we all have the comfort. You know, I tell this when I use this for your funeral, it's one of the most amazing things that I've ever really seen in the Bible. It talks about in verse 17, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

I want you to notice verse 17. When the Lord comes back, you see, He understands our grief and the loss of a loved one. He understands the pain of being human. He understands the pain of losing a father or mother or husband or a wife, a child. He understands that. You know, I've done funerals where the parents lost a child and they were angry at God, or somebody lost a spouse or whatever and they're angry at God, and I always think to myself, "What did you think life was? You think life was going to go on forever?" You missed the whole point that yes, there is going to be death because there's a time to be born, there's a time to die, but praise the Lord, the Lord took the sting out of death. When He took the sting out, you know what He did for those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our own personal Savior? He put in comfort.

So when He comes back, look at this: "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds." You see that? We have loved ones that die and go to heaven right now. We take up in the rapture of the church. You know what the Lord does? He understands how we have a longing to see our loved ones. You know what He does when the rapture takes place? He allows us to meet our dead loved ones first and then go meet Him together. It doesn't get any better than that, because there is a reality of death, there is a certainty of death, but there's a hope in death, and that hope is in Jesus Christ.

If you're here this morning, you're not here by any accident. I'm just telling you, you may walk out of here and you may one more time turn your back on the Lord Jesus Christ, but I'm telling you, God loved you enough to orchestrate the events that you could hear the words that there was a reality of death, a certainty of death, and then somebody to tell you there's a hope in death and there's a comfort in death. It's up to you. I'm sure that there are people sitting here this morning that if you died right now, you don't know for sure that you would go to heaven. I don't mince words and say, "Have you been saved? Have you trusted Christ? Do you know?" Everybody's got their own definition. I simply cut right to the chase and ask all of you a question: If you would die right now, Bob was sitting in a seat ready for church service to start. He fell out of that chair, went home to be with the Lord. If that would happen to you right now, do you know beyond any shadow of any doubt, not hope, not think, "Well, maybe when I was a kid I was baptized in a cold river water," no, no, no, no. Do you know right now that you'd go to heaven to spend an eternity with Him? That's the question.

If you can't answer that question in the affirmative, then that's why you're here this morning, my dear friend. God loves you that much. He cared for you to use a saint and a soldier and use his death, orchestrating it in the events that here we are. I'll be honest, when I walked in here after it, I paced back and forth, had my cry, had my deal. I had to tell the boys in the band they were going to play this morning, they just, no way they could do that. Bob was their bass player for years and years and years. But I will tell you, I walked up and down and I said, "Lord, I don't know what I'm going to say today. I just don't have it within me to get up there because I've got people who on Easter Sunday, are you kidding me? You came to get something. You didn't come in here to see me say, "Well, we can't have service this morning because we're all broken up." You came. I said, "God, I said, I don't have it within me. You're going to have to do what needs to be done." God just spoke into my ear and He said, "You know what? Don't worry about it. I'll give you what you need to say. This year was for today." God said, "Put that one away. I want you to do Ecclesiastes 7." I said, "Okay, I know what that play is. You snap the ball, the Bible. I fade back, Holy Spirit of God runs the length of the church, and I throw the ball, and it just dissipates all over the crowd this morning."

You need to be saved if you're not. You may have walked in here not knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, and if you were to die today, you'd go to hell. Don't leave that way.

VI. The Drawbridge Illustration

Back in 1952, I was two years old. I don't find that funny. I don't find that funny in the least. I'm from Canton, Ohio. Most people know it because the Football Hall of Fame is there. Someday it'll be known as the birthplace of Bob Alexander, but not today. Down along the Ohio River, there's a little river town called Steubenville, Ohio. Steubenville is a steel mill town. It's where Hank Williams died, by the way. He died in a taxi cab in Steubenville, Ohio, of an overdose of drugs. That's beside the point.

Back in 1952, I've heard this story used by preachers many, many times. Back in 1952, there was a bridge, a drawbridge that was a train bridge that went across the Ohio River. The man who was the operator sat in a little box there on the edge, and when the ships came down, they'd hit the horn, and he'd raise the bridge, and the ships would pass through, and then he'd put it back down, and the trains would go across. Well, he had a little boy who was about, oh, I forget exactly, maybe five, six, seven years old. Like all little kids, he always wanted to go to work with his daddy. So one day the daddy gave in. He says, "Okay, you can come to work with me. You can't touch any buttons or controls, but you can come to work with me." So it was a thing where the little boy was thrilled. So he sat there all morning, and the ships would come down and blow the horns, and the bridge would come up, and they'd go through, and they'd put it down. The little boy watched the trains go across, all these things.

A ship was coming down that early afternoon, blew its horn, and the bridge was raised up, and it started just to start to go through. The phone rang, and it was his dispatcher, and he said, "Hey, we've had a glitch in an emergency, and there's a high-speed passenger train with 300 people on it that's only 30, 40 seconds, maybe a minute from that bridge. You need to make sure that that

bridge is down." Well, the bridge was up. The ship was just starting to come through it. In that moment, he heard the train whistle right up around the bend. He honked his thing, and the ship began to cavalcade backwards and pulled out, and he went to get the bridge down because he could hear that train getting close. When he did, he turned and he knocked his little boy over the guard railing down into the Ohio River, and the little boy was crying, "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!"

The guy began to crawl down to get him, and when he did that, he heard the train was just a couple hundred yards away, and he got back into the controls, and he put the controls, and the bridge started coming down, and he saw his boy, and he started to leave again, and the train was there, and the kid was screaming, "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!" That man was in tears. That man went back, put his hands on those levers, tears running down his face, pushed those levers down. That bridge went down, and that train went across, and 300 and some people were saved from going into the river. But his little boy's body washed up about two days later.

300 and some people went across that bridge never knowing that they were saved because a man's son paid the price for them to get across that bridge. I'm telling you, there was a day when God's Son looked off that cross and He said, "My God, my God, why?" And God kept His hands on the lever that you and I could get across that bridge from hell to heaven. He paid my price. He paid your price. Just like those people going across that bridge in that train, they were drinking, partying, talking about where they were going, what they were going to do, and nobody knew the price that was paid for them to be saved. So many people today, they party, they drink, and they go through life, and they have no idea that the price that was paid for you to be saved. You're here for a reason today.

VII. Call to Salvation

Now I have been honest with you. I've not preached some flowery message. I preached what Bob would have me to preach. I told you the truth, and now I'm asking you to be honest. You don't have to be honest with me, but you need to be honest with God. You need to look deep inside yourself right now, now that you've heard that there is a reality in death and there is a certainty in death, but there's a hope in death and there's a comfort in death. What will you do with this man called Jesus?

Every head bowed and every eye closed. I'm not going to belabor this. I've done everything I know how to do. God called one in from the bench, and I said, "Lord, I'll give it my best shot on the play," and I did the best I could. I was honest, I was open, I didn't hide anything, and I put it, as they say in baseball, right across the plate, waist high. Now let me ask you this, every head's bowed and every eye closed, and no one's looking around except me, but I want to pray for you.

Right now, with every head bowed and every eye closed, and nobody looking around, if you're here this morning and you would say to me, "Bob, I don't know for sure that if I would die right now like Bob did this morning that I would be in heaven," would you just put your hand up? I won't embarrass you. I won't say anything. I just want to pray for you. Here's my hand. Thank you, sir. I see it back here. Yes, God bless you. I see it. Anybody else? Yes, I see it. This is the

time to get real this morning. Yes, God bless you, sweetheart. I see it. Anybody else? Anybody else? "I am not sure." Yes, God bless you, buddy. God bless you. Praise the Lord. Anybody else? "I am not sure." I can't see out here in the foyer. I think John's out there. John, if you see anybody, let me know. But anybody else? Yes, God bless you. I see it, honey. Thank you. Put it back down. Anybody else? Just going to wait a moment. Yes, God bless you. God bless you. Anybody else? Just going to wait a moment. Just going to wait a moment.

See, this is serious stuff. Bob's up in heaven right now, and he's just rejoicing over the fact that, you know what? I'll tell you something else, if God called Bob over to the throne right now and says, "Bob, you know what? If you want to, I'll let you go back." Bob wouldn't go. He wouldn't go. You know why? Because he died that you might hear this message this morning, and he's okay with that. Anybody else? One more time, we're just going to wait. Anybody else? I appreciate the honesty this morning.

Now, Father, we do thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. Lord, I may still be at a loss in my own feelings and emotions, and thank You for allowing me to put those aside. I'm sure they'll come flooding out later, but thank You for binding them up that I might be able to, with a clarity and a heart and mind, do what I needed to do today. Thank You for having faith in me that You could call one in from the bench and You'd know that I would fulfill it. But Lord, I pray for these folks that raised their hand. I knew it this morning when I heard the news that Bob was not going to make it. I knew that there was a reason, because on this Easter morning, there were going to be people here that do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, and if I'd have preached my other message, they probably never would have responded to it. So You took the events in hand, just like You did so many years ago with me and Tommy Thomas, and You orchestrated it that out of this, out of one man's death, many people may find eternal life.

I pray for them. They were honest enough to raise their hands. Now help them be honest enough to do what they need to do, and we'll thank You and praise You in Jesus' name. Every head bowed and every eye closed. Now look, here it is. I'm down front here. If you raised your hand, you're not sure that you're saved. I don't care where you're at. I want you to get up and walk down here and meet me, and I'll have somebody take you in the room here and show you for sure how you know you'll be saved. You'll be first. Come on, let's go. You raised your hand. God bless you, sweetheart. God bless you, sir. Anybody else? Come on, now's the time. Just walk right on down here to me. Come on, come on. God bless you, buddy. Nikki, you know Barb, Aaron, Jimmy, I love you, buddy. You want to take both these? Go with you. Anybody else?

See, this is how God works, folks. Please, please, please do not come and hear what I said and see the example that God gave you and walk out that door this morning if you don't know for sure. You're out of your mind, man. Anybody else? Come on, I'm waiting for you. See, normally I'd just have you stand up, but no, no, no, no. I want to hug you. I want to shake your hand on this morning because a good friend of mine went home to be with the Lord that you may hear this message today. So I'm shaking your hand for him and me. Who'll be next? Come on, who'll be next? We may have gotten everybody. I don't know. A bunch of them came down, but I'm telling you right now, if you're here and you're not sure, one more time, across over here to my left, anybody? How about the middle here? How about over here to my right, far right? It's for

you, pal. Ma'am, it's for you. He died for you, and He sang it, "Wounded for you, wounded for you." Anybody else before we pray, close out? Had a whole bunch of them come down, man. Praise the Lord.

Father, we do thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. I love You, Lord. I thank You for today, as hard as it is, as hard as it was, and I know that ain't over yet. It's just started this morning. But Lord, I thank You for giving all of us the right spirit this morning. This isn't about me getting up and preaching what God gave me. This is about a church that bands together behind their pastor as the pastor would band behind them, that together we work and do whatever God calls us to do. Thank You, Father, for everything that You have given us. Thank You, Father, for Your love and Your mercy to us. We pray now, Father, that You'll just take these ones that even now are working with our people, that they will truly find the Lord Jesus Christ as their own personal Savior.

I pray, Father, that You'll continue to bless those that are here. Pray for Bob's family, Lord. Lorinda and the kids and everybody in that church over there, Lord. I don't even know how to put it into words what they must be feeling, but Lord, I pray You'll let them know that we love them and we care for them and that we're there, we're here for them. We love You. Thank You for today. Thank You for an obedient church filled with an obedient people who are obedient to Your word and tender to Your spirit. May we love the people, Lord, that You've given us, and now recognize that there was no accident today that those people were here. We ask You now, Father, to just give them the grace that they need, and yet if there's somebody else still here, Lord, that maybe didn't have the courage, they could come and see me afterwards. I'll be here, and we will do and help them however we can by simply opening up the word of God and showing them God's truth. We'll be thankful and praise You for all that You do in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask. Amen.

Thanks, guys. God bless you. Have a good Easter. You're dismissed.