

Genuine Regeneration
(First Baptist Church of the Lakes)

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Let's open up our Bibles to the book of Ezekiel chapter 36.

Before we read our text, let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, I praise you for your kindness, your loving kindness toward us. Your mercies are new every morning. You have taken all our sins and put them as far from you as the East is from the West. You have done great things in your Son who died and rose again from the dead, through your Spirit who makes the dead alive and causes us to call out, "Abba, Father," to love you, to have a passion for the things that are important to you. Father, we need you, your strength, your grace, your power, your mercy. Apart from your Son we can do nothing. Father, I do not have a handle on you to coerce or manipulate you, but I would ask in the name of your Son and for his glory and honor that you would work among us, that you would instruct your people that they might understand your works and see that they are perfect and in you there is no fault, that they would grow and they would be all that you would have them to be. Father, give us wisdom for it is inherent in you and any wisdom that we have is derived from you. So with faith and hope we ask for wisdom to know your Scriptures and that your truth would be applied to our hearts. Father, help us and we will be helped. Change us and we will be changed. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Before we go to our text I want to summarize a few of the things we have gone through so far this week. First, we started out dealing with the evidences of true conversion. We live in a day and age in Christianity where everyone in America believes they are saved because one time in their life they prayed a prayer and asked Jesus to come into their heart.

We know that men are saved by repentance and faith and whoever does call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But salvation is a supernatural work of God that will always produce fruit. And the evidence, not the cause, but the evidence of salvation is a changed life, a changing life. Jesus made this very clear in Matthew chapter seven when he said, "You shall know them by their fruits."¹

¹ See Matthew 7:16

Paul was clear when he said, “Test yourselves, examine yourselves to see whether or not you are in the faith.”²

There is no such thing as a continuously carnal Christian. Do Christians sin? Yes, absolutely. But can Christians live in a state of sin without discipline and without being brought back in obedience to their Father? Absolutely not. Are people saved by making a decision? Yes, we must make a decision of the will. We must repent. We must believe. But how do we do that? We do that by the power of God and the work of the Holy Spirit that regenerates the heart and makes us able to repent and believe. For even repentance and faith are gifts from God. They are works of his grace.

But we have a problem today. For decades in this country we have heard evangelists tell us about the hour of decision and the need to make our decision. And so most people today are trusting in a decision and the sincerity of their own heart when they made it.

For example, if you ask someone, “Are you a Christian? Are you going to heaven?” most will say, “Yes.” When you ask them why they will say something like, “I made my decision. I prayed my prayer.”

They are hoping in a decision, the sincerity of a decision instead of looking unto Christ.

How are we saved? Not by simply making a decision or praying a prayer. We are saved by looking unto Christ. We have looked at ourself in the light of God’s Word and we realize that we cannot save ourselves, nor can we help God save us. We repent and we mourn because there is nothing in us of virtue and merit that would cause God to accept us before his throne. But we are not left in despair because the same Holy Spirit that convicts us of sin also reveals to us the glory of God in the face of Christ, the salvation of God in Christ. And so we look to Christ and we believe. We trust in Christ. As the old hymn writer said, “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling.”

And we come to make this foundational statement that I am saved for one reason and one reason alone, that Jesus Christ shed his blood for my soul. I hope not in works. I hope not in ethics. I hope not in baptisms or church membership. I hope in Christ alone.

And we went on last night and we spoke something of the gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ. In America today the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of our blessed God—as Paul said to Timothy—has been reduced down to nothing more than four spiritual laws or five things God wants you to know.

We ask a person if they are a sinner, if they know they are a sinner. If they say, “Yes,” we ask them if they want to go to heaven. If they say, “Yes,” we ask them if they would want to pray a prayer. They pray the prayer. We ask them of their sincerity. They are not sure, but we assure them they are saved.

² See 2 Corinthians 13:5

But, you see, the fact that you need to understand is: You ask a man, “Do you know you are a sinner.” If he says, “Yes,” it means absolutely nothing. The devil knows he is a sinner.

The question is not: Do you know you are a sinner? The question is this: Since you have heard the preaching of the gospel has God so worked in your heart that the sin you once loved you now hate? And the question is not: Do you want to go to heaven? Everyone wants to go to heaven. They just don’t want God to be there when they get there. The question is: The God that you have ignored and lived without and been unconcerned toward—and even the scriptural language is this—the God that you have hated, do you now esteem him, desire him, want to seek him? Has God so worked in your heart that he has become of great worth to you? And then the question is not: Do you want to pray a prayer and ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart?

Do you know there is nowhere in the New Testament where that language is used? Absolutely nowhere.

And people say, “Now, wait a minute. What about Revelation chapter three verse 20?”

Well, what about it? He is not knocking on the door of a sinner’s heart. He is knocking on the door of a church.

And someone says, “Well, I told an evangelist that a long time ago and he said, ‘I know that is not the context, but it works.’”

The thing is we are not allowed to use Scripture because it works. We are not called to be pragmatists. We are called to be theologians. We do something not because it works, but because it is true. Men are saved by repenting of their sins and believing the gospel.

Can men...are men saved by calling on the name of the Lord? Sure. But there is a great difference between someone calling on the name of the Lord with repentance and faith and someone simply repeating the prayer of an evangelist.

And although as preachers we have the authority to teach the gospel and we have the authority to tell men what the Scriptures say about biblical assurance, we do not have the authority to tell men they are saved. That is the work of the Holy Spirit.

And then we went on to talk a bit about the cross. We began with the great declaration against men that all have sinned. Of course, again, that means nothing in a culture that drinks down iniquity like it was water. And so one of the tasks of the preacher is not only to say that mankind has sinned, but explain to them the heinous nature of sin so that the Holy Spirit using the Word of God will convict them of the heinous nature of sin. And it will produce in them something that Joel Olsteen would never want someone to feel, self loathing.

Part of repentance in the Old Testament and New is, "I hate myself. Oh, wretched man that I am who will save me from this body of death?"³ It is coming to grips with the reality of the ugliness of sin and the reality of that ugliness causing us to turn to Christ.

You see, sometimes as an illustration I will pull out a pair of keys and I will jingle them in the pulpit. And I ask people. Does that bring you joy? And most say, "Well, of course not."

And I say, "Well, it doesn't bring you joy because you are not locked away in a prison. If you were locked away in a prison the sound of keys jingling would bring you at least a spark of joy and hope."

It is the same way. One of the reasons why Christ is not truly precious to men is because preachers are not telling men about their sin, not telling them that they are condemned in it, not telling them that God is holy, God is righteous. In America God looks more like Santa Claus than Yahweh of the Bible, than the God of Scripture.

One of the greatest statements that C.S. Lewis ever wrote down, it is found in the *Chronicles of Narnia* and it is this. "He is not a tame lion. He is not a domesticated God. He is God and he is both glorious and terrifying. And you can't have one without the other."

So all men have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.⁴ It doesn't mean that God had a wonderful plan for your life and you failed it. It means this. You were created for one glorious purpose and that is to glorify him. But the Bible says, "Although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks."⁵

All have sinned, but men are justified. That is, they are declared legally right before God only one way, through faith in Jesus Christ. But when we say that Jesus Christ saves men or that men can be justified we are confronted with a terrible problem. It is the greatest problem in all the Scripture and it is this. How can a just God forgive wicked men and still be just? You see, that is the greatest problem in Scripture. If God is just he cannot forgive you in the same way that if one of our judges on the earth simply pardoned and let murderers go in the name of love we would have him all thrown off the bench. We would say that he was a wicked man, that he was not just.

See, the greatest problem in all of Scripture is if God is just and we are truly wicked as Scripture says, then he cannot forgive us unless, of course, a sacrifice is made and not merely a sacrifice, but a sacrifice of infinite worth. In order to be saved God must become a man. And as a man walk upon this earth as a perfect man. And then, according to the foreordained plan of God, he must go to a tree and on that tree he bears the sin of his people. He carries the curse of them. And on that tree he dies and there is two important aspects of that death. He dies abandoned and forsaken of God. You and I

³ See Romans 7:24

⁴ See Romans 3:23

⁵ See Romans 1:21

should die forsaken of God, abandoned because of our sin. His face of displeasure turned against us. That is the way we should die. But in order to be saved from that death and that eternal death the Son of God died in our place. As John Gill used to say, “died in our law place, stood in our law place carrying our sin and died forsaken of his own Father.”

Never buy into the romantic idea that the Father turned away from his Son on the cross because he simply saw the Son suffering and couldn't bear to see it. That is not what Jesus says. Jesus says, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”⁶

God is holy. His eyes are too pure to look upon sin. His holy Son at that moment bore our sin and the Father turned away from him. But that is not all. For God's justice to be satisfied his judgment had to be poured out. His wrath, his holy hatred against evil had to be exhausted, extinguished and there was only one way. On that tree Jesus Christ, the Son of God, drank the cup of God's wrath. All the furious, holy, righteous anger, violent wrath of a righteous God that should have fallen upon his people, fell upon his Son.

As Isaiah says, “It pleased the Lord, it pleased Yahweh to crush him, to crush his only Son.”⁷ And in crushing him, in pouring out his wrath upon him the justice of God was satisfied, the wrath of God was appeased and now God can forgive the wicked and call them righteous because his Son has died for them all.

So many times we will read the story of Isaac and Abraham going up to the mount and Abraham is called upon to sacrifice his only son. You all know the story. The man ties his son to a bundle of sticks, makes an altar. He lays his hand upon the brow of his boy and comes down with the full force of his might with that flint knife to slaughter him.

But as the man's will gave way to the will of God his hand was stayed by God. And you applaud. What a beautiful ending to the story. But you don't understand. It wasn't the end of the story. It was the intermission. Hundreds of years later God's Son is on the altar and God takes the knife out of Abraham's hand and God lays his hand on his only begotten Son and thrusts the knife down and slaughters him. It pleased the Lord to crush him.⁸

That is why there is so much more meaning than what you think in John 3:16 when it says, “For God so loved the world...”⁹ You see someone had to die under the wrath of God. It was God's Son who did it. It was God's Son who did it. Having died he made it possible for a just God to declare wicked men righteous and yet still be just.

Now God calls upon all men, he commands all men, all people of every place to repent and to believe the gospel. Jesus said it himself, “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. Now repent and believe the gospel.”¹⁰

⁶ See Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34

⁷ See Isaiah 53:10

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ John 3:16

¹⁰ See Mark 1:15

But we have taken that “repent and believe,” as I have said, and we have turned it into a mere intellectual decision, a tiny little ritual that people participate in. And if they participate in it we tell them popishly that they are saved. And that’s wrong, very wrong.

You need to understand. The evangelical community in America is very wrong.

Now you say, “Now, brother Paul, how can you say that? I mean what arrogance is in you that you would stand up there and say it is wrong?”

Well, again, let me refer back to a principle of hermeneutics, a principle of the science of studying the Bible. We are always to do our theology in the context of the Church. That means that when we interpret the Bible we should take our interpretation and walk through 2000 years of Christian history. If nobody agrees with us we are probably wrong.

Well, if you take modern American Christianity and compare it to 2000 years of Christian history you won’t find much in agreement between the two. We have developed our own little instantaneous easy believism American form of Christianity.

“But, brother Paul, you have said we are saved by faith.”

Yes, we are saved by faith and not of works, no man can boast,¹¹ but what you need to understand is that the person who is saved by faith is also the person who is born again. Now herein lies the problem. Born again in America...everybody is born again. They give polls on, “Are you born again?” Sixty-five percent of the people in America say they are born again. But explain to me what is born again? What does it mean?

I’ll tell you what it means. It has been reduced down to this. I made a decision. I prayed a prayer.

You know, I spent many years of my life in South America where almost everyone in South America believes that they are saved and right with God because when they were infants they were baptized. They are saved. They can be a Mafioso, a mafia person. They can be a thief. They can be absolutely anything but they are saved because one time in their life when they were a child they were baptized. And so they are saved. The priest says so.

Now evangelicals in America mock that and laugh that and say, “That is so wrong, that is not right. Just because someone is baptized as an infant doesn’t make them saved.” But we can’t see that we do absolutely the same thing just because someone prayed a prayer one time for five minutes we tell them they are saved. And even if afterwards they live like the devil all the days of their life, we still assure them that they are saved because one time they prayed a prayer. That is not found in Scripture nor is it found in Christian history.

¹¹ See Ephesians 2:9

Are we saved by faith? Yes. Does the God who saves us also keep us? Yes. But what does it mean to be born again? Born again also can mean born from above. And what it is referring to is this. That salvation is more than simply a human decision or an act of the human will. Salvation is a supernatural work of God whereby he regenerates or makes the heart alive.

As we are going to see in a moment he takes out a cold dead heart of stone and replaces it with a living heart. “If any man be in Christ he is a new creature.”¹² That is not poetry. That beautiful statement was made just so that we could write it on some Christian trinket and hang it in our house. It is a truth. If any man, not some men, but if any man truly be Christian he is a new creature because God has radically changed his nature. Being born again or the idea of born again is a supernatural work of the Spirit of God.

You understand that in Genesis chapter one we see that in the creation the Spirit is hovering over. As some would say, I wouldn't much agree, but hovering over chaos. The Spirit is an instrument there in the creation of the world. But the Spirit is also the instrument in the recreation of a man. And I stand in line with many, many old dead theologians in the next statement I am going to make. And it is this. The salvation of a man demonstrates more of the power of God than the very creation of the universe.

You see, the universe was created—as the Latin scholars used to say—*ex nihilo* which means out of nothing. But when a man is saved he is recreated out of a corrupt mass. It is easier to create out of nothing than it is to take something corrupt and transform it into something or someone that loves God.

So, you see, the lost doctrine in America in the 21st century is this. The doctrine of regeneration, of being born again, of the work of the Spirit of God.

Is it not true that if we were to dismiss this little flock here tonight and were to go to every place in this city and talk to every one in this city, most people in this city though at the very moment that we speak to them are living as the devil, would tell us that they are thoroughly Christian. And when we begin to investigate the reason for the hope that is within them, they will tell us that one time in their life in a church or an evangelistic crusade they prayed a prayer.

Oh, my dear friend, the evidence that you are saved by faith is not that one time in your life you prayed a prayer, but that he who began a good work in you continues it.¹³

You know the term justification. That means the moment a person believes they are declared righteous before God. It is a legal term. But do you understand the term sanctification? It is a work of God making us more and more conformed to the image of his Son. The evidence of justification, that God has declared us right with him, is the continuing work of sanctification that God continues working in us all the days of our life to conform us to the image of Christ.

¹² 2 Corinthians 5:17

¹³ See Philippians 1:6

Now, that was our introduction. Let's go to our text, verse 22 of chapter 36.

Therefore say to the house of Israel, "Thus says the Lord GOD, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD," declares the Lord GOD, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight."¹⁴

Now in this first part of our text we find something very, very important, the reason or the motivation behind God's saving work. Did God save Israel because of some worth or merit that he found in them? No. He specifically states with all clarity that Israel had profaned his name among the nations. There was no cause that he could find in Israel to save them. But he does say this, "For my own name I will save you, for the sake of my own name."

Why does God save men? That's a great question.

And you say, "Well, it is because God is love."

But then you have just backed up the question. Why does God love men? Because, you see, men are not holy like God is holy. Men are not righteous as God is righteous. Men contradict God in every aspect of his nature.

Why does God demonstrate love toward men? There are two reasons. One, God is love. That's who he is. But, secondly, he does so in order to demonstrate his glory. The world was created as a stage, a theater and God has arranged every thing in this world so that he alone takes center stage and every thing that can be known about him is known through the works he does among men. And in the saving of men something magnificent is made known: mercy and grace and loving kindness.

Men are saved not because of themselves, but in spite of themselves. You owe your salvation—if you are indeed saved—you owe your salvation to God.

When this comes up in the book of Deuteronomy, why has God loved Israel, he answers with a tautology, with a taunt. He says, "I have loved you because I loved you."¹⁵ And what he is saying is this. "Israel, my love for you had nothing to do with you."

It is the same. God did not set his love upon you because of some inherent worth he found in you or some virtue. He loved you because he loved you, not because of you, but in spite of you.

¹⁴ Ezekiel 36:22-23

¹⁵ See Deuteronomy 7:7-8

Now do you see why the true gospel of Jesus Christ is so offensive to a humanistic culture? We are a culture that has sought to tear down every altar to the one true God to set man on top of his own altar. In America today and in most of its Christianity, or so called Christianity, man is the center of all things. God does everything for man. We are humanistic. Considering ourselves to be wise we became fools and changed the glory of the incorruptible God and began to worship that which is corruptible, men and beasts and reptiles.¹⁶

We are humanistic and therefore we hate it when someone starts talking about man as fallen, man as corrupt, man as sinful, man as having no worth, man as needing a Savior, man... Those who are saved are saved not because of them, but in spite of them. We hate it because it tears down man. And we will have no part of it.

He says, "Why have I saved you?" He saved you for his own name.

I like what R.C. Sproul says. "God saves us from himself for himself and by himself."

You say, "What do you mean, brother Paul?"

Well, just listen for a moment. When someone says, "I have been saved." I always ask them, "From what? From what?"

"Well, from sin."

No, sin is an inanimate thing. From what are you saved?

Do you know what the proper theological answer is? If you have been saved, you have been saved from God because God was the one coming after you. God was the one who had a problem with you. God was the one judging you. God was the one, according to Jesus Christ in chapter three of the book of John, God was the one who was pouring wrath down upon your head.

So when we are saved we are saved from God. And why are we saved? For God. Not for 40 days of purpose, not for a purpose driven life, not for your best life now were you saved. You were saved for him. And if he wants to exalt you or tear you down, you were saved for him. If he wants to put you in a life of ease and comfort it is for him. If he wants to send you to the most vile place in the world to die there as a martyr, it is for him.

We don't like that. What about me? It is for him. He saved you for himself. And he saved you by himself. It is not 1% you and 99% God. It is 100% God and if it had been any other thing you would not be saved. You and Jesus don't have your own thing going.

Now. He says that he saves this nation, but now we have got to come to grip with some things, some things that are extremely important in verse 24. What happens? What happens when someone is truly saved?

¹⁶ See Romans 1:22-23

Throughout Ezekiel we have something magnificent. In different parts of Ezekiel we have these wonderful illustrations of the doctrine of regeneration. What happens when the Spirit of God hovers over a bunch of dry, dead bones and lifts them to life? The doctrine of regeneration, regenerate, reanimate, give life to.

And that is what we have here in Ezekiel 36. What happens when someone has truly been made alive, truly been saved, truly been born again? What is the evidence?

Well, first in verse 24: “I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands.”¹⁷ Now here is a something you don’t hear of very often. When God saves a man or a woman or a child or a youth you will begin to see a work of separation in their life. God will begin to separate them from this world.

Now when I mean this world I am talking about everything, everything in our culture, everything in our society that contradicts the nature and will of God that stands in opposition to who God is and stands in opposition to his purposes. God begins to separate his newborn child from them. He guards over that child zealously.

One of the greatest honors in my life is to be a father. One of the greatest hardships in my life is having to leave my children at times. Oh, I guard over my children. I am careful to discipline them. I will protect them with my life. I will lay it down.

How is it that we think such mean and simple thoughts about God? What would you think about me if I let my children, from the moment they were born until they left the house at 18, I let them run wild and do absolutely anything they wanted to do? What would you say about me? That I was a derelict father? Yes, you would. That I was wrong? Yes. That I was not just? Yes. That I did not love even? If you are biblical that is what you would say about me.

Yet how is it that you say that God has a whole bunch of children in the United States of America and yet he lets them run wild and live in sin and follow the devil all the days of their life until he brings them home?

The very things you demand from an earthly father you don’t even believe your heavenly Father accomplishes. My dear friend, God zealously guards his children. That is why it says in Hebrews chapter 12 that if you claim to be a child of God and you are with out discipline there is no reality of God disciplining you and training you and teaching you and leading you and guarding over you zealously, then you are an illegitimate child.¹⁸ You are a false professor. You have never come to know him. He has never come to know you.

You see, God will begin to separate us from the things he hates, from the things that are wrong. He will begin...he doesn’t drag us, but he so works in our heart to change us that

¹⁷ Ezekiel 36:24

¹⁸ See Hebrews 12:11

he begins to cause a separation between us and that which is evil inwardly. The true Christian has a changed heart so they begin to hate the things that God hates and to love the things that God loves. A work of separation.

Now, but notice something very important. “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.”¹⁹ Now, a relationship with God is not simply defined by the statement, “Thou shalt not...” God does not separate us from the evil in this world in order just to separate us from the evil that is in this world. That is a pretty pitiful existence. You are caught out there in limbo with nothing. You have been separated from this world, but that is all. That is not what God does.

God begins to work in our heart to separate us from sin, to separate us from that which defiles in order to gather us to him and to bring us into the land of his will. He brings us out of the world in order to bring us to him.

Someone who simply separates themselves from the world is basically a legalist, taking pride in their moral purity and their separation. Let me put it this way. As I said earlier, I think, this week. When I married my wife my relationship with my wife changed. But also my relationship with every other woman on the face of the earth changed. The moment I said, “I do,” to her I said, “I don’t” to every other woman on the face of the earth.

It is the same way with separation. We say, “I don’t,” to the world in order to say, “I do,” to God, you see. Very important, very important.

Now so when God saves a man or a woman or a child or a youth, one of the things that you are going to begin to see is that their life changes with regard to their relationship to the world.

Now let me ask you a question. Is that a reality in your life? I am not talking about perfection. But since you have claimed to come to know Christ can you see God working in your life, in the attitudes of your heart, exposing sin, leading you farther and father away from the things that displease him, bringing you to himself to love him, to cherish him, to have a relationship with him? Can you see that in your life? Because, my dear friend, if you claim to know Christ and that Christ knows you and you are still a lover of the world and there is no work of separation, no growth in godliness, or, as the author of Hebrews says, no holiness without which no one will see the Lord,²⁰ you have got a problem. Is there a reality of God working in your life?

Sometimes I will ask people this. “Do you feel sometimes like you are a prisoner, that everybody else is just running free and can do almost anything they want to do and the moment you step out of the box just God comes?” I mean it is like you are a prisoner, but you recognize it is good. That is because you are a child. You are a child of God. And he zealously watches over his children.

¹⁹ Ezekiel 36:24

²⁰ See Hebrews 12:14

Let me share with you something. It says “Jacob I loved and Esau I hated.”²¹ Now, in Hebrew “hated” there means hated. If it meant something else they would have wrote something else in English. It does. It means, “Jacob I loved, Esau my wrath, my displeasure, my anger abided upon him.”²² That is exactly what it means.

Now, if you sit under preaching that tries to take that term and make it say something other than hatred, you are sitting under a perfect example of watered down American preaching. But it says, “Jacob I loved, Esau I hated.”²³ But when you study both of their lives you find something absolutely amazing. God blessed Jacob. God blessed Esau. He fulfilled every promise he ever made to Esau and to Abraham about Esau. He did. As a matter of fact when Jacob came back into the Promised Land Esau was so blessed he didn’t need anything that Jacob offered him.

So how is it that God demonstrated his love toward Jacob and his hatred toward Esau? Well, there is only one difference between the two men. God let Esau do absolutely anything he wanted to do and God beat the living daylight out of Jacob. Look at it. Do we see one time where God is disciplining Esau? But we see in Jacob’s life that God is literally every day putting the rod upon him so that when he comes back into the land he is limping, but he is God’s man. He is God’s child.

Do you see God coming to you, to keep you, to discipline you, to train you?

Now, when I say discipline realize this, that discipline in the believer’s life is never punitive. Once a person is in Christ God never again comes to them as a judge. Even when he judges them he does not come to them as a judge, but as a father. When he disciplines them he comes to them as a father. A human illustration would be this. At the moment I am disciplining one of my boys. At that very moment I still love them so much I would die a thousand deaths for them. I do not discipline them as a judge, but as a father.

Now so he says, “What is going to be one of the evidences when a person is truly born again?” It is going to be this. God is going to do a work of separation in their life and a work of gathering them unto him.

Now verse 25. He says, “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean.”²⁴ My, my. Look at that. “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean.”²⁵ So much for the thing that God really wants to work in your life but he just can’t do it because you won’t cooperate.

²¹ See Romans 9:13

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ezekiel 36:25

²⁵ Ibid.

I remember when I was a little boy I lived on the farm. You can tell farm boys, just get close to them. You know exactly if they are a farm boy or not because they have got dirt in every crevice of their body. And I would have dirt in my neck, dirt on elbows, behind the knees, everywhere, dirt, dirt, be playing out all day in the dirt. Farm boy.

And my mom, I would come in, I would say...she would say, "Take a bath."

One day I realized, I was about nine years old and I realized I'm a man. I don't need to take a bath.

So mom said, "Take a bath."

I said, "No, I don't think so."

This was back when it was legal to kill your children. My mom looked at me and she said this. "You will take a bath." And that's all she had to say. That's all she had to say.

Isn't it amazing? My mother has more sovereign authority over me than your god. I am so tired of hearing evangelical Americans say, "God wants to do so much, but he just can't because you won't cooperate."

Just look at the text for a minute. Just look. Verse 24. "I will take you from the nations."²⁶ Look at that. He doesn't say, "I hope to, I want to, gee, I hope everyone cooperates." He says, "I am going to do a work of salvation and this is how it is going to happen. "I will take you from the nations. I will bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and all your idols. I will give you a new heart. I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove your heart of stone. I will give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you. I will cause you to walk in my statutes and you will be careful to observe my ordinances."

Now what do you see there? Do you believe in the inspiration of Scripture? What do you see there? You see a God who says, "For my own glory I am going to do a work of salvation with an impossible people and the work I begin, I will finish. I will do everything I plan on doing." And that is why they call him Lord of Lords, King of Kings, the absolute sovereign. That pagan king Nebuchadnezzar knows more than most preachers today in America because he says he does whatever he wants to do in the heavens and on the earth and he lifts up his hand and no man can hold it down. He holds his hand on the desk and not one man can pry it up.²⁷

He will do it. And why will he do it? I'll tell you why. His reputation is riding upon it. Do you remember when he brought the Israelites out of Egypt? And he tested Moses on that fatal day when Israel committed its greatest crime against God. God tested Moses

²⁶ Ezekiel 36:24

²⁷ See Daniel 4:35

and said, “Moses, get out of the way. I am going to kill them all and I will make a people out of you.”²⁸

And Moses said, “No, Lord, because your enemies will say that although you were strong enough to bring them out of the land of bondage, you were not able to bring them into their own land.”²⁹

And that is what most preachers are teaching today. God is strong enough to save you and get you to heaven, but he isn’t strong enough to change you. He can’t finish the job.

But the name of God...he is demonstrating his power every time he saves a man. He will finish or perfect the work that he begins. That is why Paul said with such confidence, “confident of this very think that he who begins a good work in you will finish it.”³⁰

So he says here in 36. “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean.”³¹

Going back to my mother. So I get in the bathtub. You know, farm boys can swim in ponds. They can play in the rain all day, but something happens when they get in the shower. Water is dangerous for some reason. I have never understood it, but I always felt that I was afraid of that stuff coming out of the shower. And so I would get a little bit of water and dab it on me, jump out, grab a white towel and turn it into a black towel. And everything was going just fine until my mother walked in the door.

My mother worked on a farm. She had hands rougher than a man. She put a washcloth between her hand and our body because her hands were so calloused and rough. When my mother got through cleaning me it looked like the shekinah glory of God was coming forth from my body.

And what did she say? “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean.”³²

God says to his children, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean.”³³ “I’ll make sure of it.”

Isn’t it amazing? You have an average congregation on an average Sunday and most of them live in sin without any thought of God throughout the entire week, but a remnant of that group, it is as though God guards every moment of their life. When they watch something off colored, God convicts them of sin. When they say things they shouldn’t say God convicts them of sin. When they walk in a way that they should not walk, God makes it known to them. He is before them and behind them and beside them and above them and below them. Why does he treat one group of children one way and another

²⁸ See Numbers 14:12

²⁹ See Numbers 14:13-16

³⁰ See Philippians 1:6

³¹ Ezekiel 36:25

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

group of children the other? It is because the one group doesn't belong to him and the other does.

You say, "Well, I never heard of such a thing."

Then you need to change churches.

And he says, "I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols."³⁴ Now this is not a warning. This is a promise. This is a wonderful promise. And before I go into the thing about regeneration let me just say this to the Christian, some of you young guys.

Sometimes we get to the point where there is a besetting sin in our life and we struggle with it and struggle with it and we come to believe, "Well, this is just the way it is going to be. This is just one area in my life I am never going to get victory over."

That is not true. God says he is going to cleanse you from all your filthiness and all your idols. It is not talking about perfection in the Christian life or a Christian is sinless, but what it is saying is he will work in such a way through the course of your life that you will gain greater and greater victory over the things that once beset you.

Now, I want to say something here. "I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols."³⁵ I would have to say that if I were to take one verse out of Scripture that I think most describes my 25 year pilgrimage of walking with God it would be this. One of the greatest evidences that gives me assurance that I have come to know him is I have seen this in my life. Not that I stand before you without any idols or without any filthiness, no. But over 25 years I can see God disciplining to work these things out of my life.

I always kid people. I say, "You know, there is more metal in me than a Tonka truck." Both my hips have been replaced. My wrist is all full of metal. I hurt right now. My wrist right now is broken. The problem is my broken wrist doesn't feel any different than my one that is not broke. God has beaten my body and no, TV preacher, it wasn't the devil. It was God being very faithful to do whatever must be done to conform a stubborn sheep to the image of his Son. And I would kiss the rod that worketh to change me more than the blessings of this world that might cause my heart to betray my God.

When my little boys can't sleep sometimes I will sing them a song from old Keith Green. "My sons, I am weak and I am trembling for the Lord I am always remembering, oh, what a strong shepherd holds you in his arms. He will break you and make you his own."

Years ago there was a song that was very popular. It was the song, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I, but Christ who lives within me."³⁶ I was preaching several

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See Galatians 2:20

years ago and I happened to mention that I sang that song many times in moments of pain and distress when I was working in Peru during the war and working in the jungles and all alone and hurting and would sing that song. And I said that that night not knowing that that the author of the song was sitting in the congregation and about ready to sing. And do you know what I notice about that man? He looked like stained glass window. Something about his character and his personality...do you know how a stained glass window is made? You take all this glass and you lay it on a table and you get a hammer and you just beat it to pieces. You have got all these fragmented pieces of glass and then the master, the artist comes and begins to put them all back together and it creates the most beautiful illuminating window. But the cracks remain, the lines remain. And that is what he looked like. God had beaten him and broken him. But by doing that he made something through which the glory of God would shine.

Oh, my dear friend, you can have your prosperity and your TV preachers that promote it. You can have your health, your wealth, your wisdom and every thing else. Take it. The goal of Christianity is conformity to the image of Jesus Christ, to be like him, to be like him. And God will use every manner of thing to do that.

I think it was Samuel Chadwick, I am not sure, but I think it was Samuel Chadwick, he was walking out one day down a country lane trying to think about what the Lord would want him to preach. And he comes to a blacksmith's shop and he sees this giant monster of a man with this huge mallet pounding upon an anvil, a piece of metal upon an anvil. And he sees standing right beside this monster of a man, this tiny framed man with a suit on standing there pointing at different things.

So he walks over and he says, you know, to the man dressed finely, "What are you even doing here? This monster of a man is doing all the work."

And the finally dressed man looked at Samuel Chadwick and said, "I am the blacksmith. I am the artist. This man beating with this mallet, this monster railing against this anvil knows nothing. He hits only where I tell him to hit. He hits only as hard or as soft as I tell him to hit. He thinks he is destroying a piece of metal. I am creating a work of art.

Thus, you have the relationship between the devil and God in the believer's life. The devil will stand there and beat thinking he is destroying you. But in the sovereignty, absolute sovereignty of God he can only hit exactly where God says to hit and he can only hit as hard as God tells him. That's a wonderful thing. That's a wonderful thing.

So he says, "I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols."³⁷ Is that a reality in your life? Can you see God doing that? Isn't it amazing? Have you ever said this? "Man, some people can just lie and cheat and commit murder. They can do anything and nothing happens to them. I tell one whit lie and the whole world falls apart on top of me."

If that is true you need to praise God. You need to praise God.

³⁷ Ezekiel 36:25

Now, how does he do this? How does he make us clean? How does he cause us to follow him? Does he wrap a leather whip around our necks and drag us? What does he do? No. He changes us. And that is what we have here.

It says, “Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”³⁸

Now, the word “flesh” especially in the Greek New Testament always refers to that fallen or mostly refers to that fallen aspect of the Christian, that unredeemed part that we really can’t put our finger on, but it is there. That is the flesh. But in this case that is not what he is talking about. He is talking about the difference between something inanimate and something animate.

If I have...take the largest man in Las Vegas and make a stone statue out of him I can prick him, I can prod him, I can kick him, I can punch him and he is not going to do any thing. Why? It is inanimate. It is not alive. It is stone. But you take the largest man, strongest man in Las Vegas and put him up here on the platform and if he will let me get him under the tender part of his arm with my two fingers and pinch and twist with all my might I am surely going to evoke a response.

It is the difference between animate living or an inanimate dead. Now, understand this. If you can understand this it will solve a lot of problems for you. The Bible teaches that men are born spiritually dead. You understand that. Now dead is dead, not mostly dead, dead, dead with a capital D dead.

Now that presents a problem. If men are spiritual dead how can they ever come to God? How can they ever come to Christ? How can they even hear his voice if they are dead? Let me give you an example. There is a dead man laying on this platform and I walk over to him and I said, “Look. There is a hospital quite near and if you will just get up and follow me over there they will put these things on you full of electricity and they will hit your heart with them and you will come back to life. Come on.”

He doesn’t move.

I look at him and I say, “What’s the matter? Do you want to be dead for the rest of your life? Get up.”

Now I could stand there all day. What is going to happen? Absolutely nothing. Why? He is dead.

Now let’s use Lazarus as an example, a very good example. There is a problem there when Jesus tells Lazarus to come forth. And what is that problem? He is dead.

You say, “Yeah, but Jesus can make him alive.”

³⁸ Ezekiel 36:26

No, understand. He said, "Lazarus, come forth."³⁹ If Lazarus is dead he can't hear him. Did you ever think about that? If Lazarus is dead when Jesus says come forth he is talking to a dead man. Dead men don't hear. So when Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth,"⁴⁰ he also at the same time had to impart life to Lazarus so he could hear and come forth. And that is what we don't understand in evangelism today.

We can preach all day long, but unless the Spirit of God gives them life they are not going to hear and they are not going to come forth. It is a supernatural work of God and you can't manipulate it even though you sing 438 stanzas of *Just as I am*.

God must do something supernatural.

Let me give you another illustration. And I know it is late, but, hey, you came to hear preaching. So let's just continue. And don't worry about me. I'm not tired. I want you to think about something here. The way preachers preach.

Let's say that I had a curtain here and behind it was standing Jesus. There are preachers that say today, "All we need to do is preach Jesus. Tell people about Jesus and if people see Jesus when we are preaching they are going to come to him."

Well, that would be true except one problem. The audience you are preaching to is blind. Lost men are blind. That's what the Bible says, spiritually blind. So we could pull back the curtain with our preaching and show the audience Jesus, but if the audience is blind they are not going to see anything no matter how far we pull back the curtain. Do you see that?

And you say, "You are right, brother Paul. That was silly of me. I should not be so superficial. In order for men to come to Christ we need to preach Jesus. We need to reveal Jesus to them in our preaching, but the Spirit of God must come and give them sight so that with that sight they can see Jesus and if they see Jesus, they will come to him."

No, they won't because there is a problem, an ontological problem, the problem of their nature. If you show this beautiful, righteous, holy, Jesus and you open up the eyes of sinful, wicked men, when those sinful wicked men look at the perfect holy Christ they will hate him. They will not come to him. They will run from him.

You see, you have to understand ontology. You have to understand the idea of nature. Wicked men hate righteousness. So if you have a bunch of lost people without Christ, born dead, born in sin, born in corruption and you give them sight and you show them Jesus, the Jesus they see they are going to hate him more than they ever have. That's why Paul says in the book of Romans chapter seven that the more you press the law upon an unconverted man, the more he kicks against it because he hates it. That is why Paul

³⁹ John 11:43

⁴⁰ Ibid.

says in Romans that it is in ungodliness, in unrighteousness that men suppress the truth they know about God.⁴¹ Men are evil. God is holy. Evil men hate God and the more they know about him the more they hate. So for a man to truly come to know Christ what must happen? We must preach Christ. The Spirit of God must give them sight. But not only that, the Spirit of God must take out their heart of stone and put in its place a heart of flesh. He must take out that dead spiritual mass, that dead, defiled nature and replace it with a new heart, a new nature, recreated in the image of God.

So what happens when someone is born again? This is what happens. Christ is presented. But that God hating, Christ hating, sin loving heart of theirs that would reject Christ by the work of the Spirit of God it is so called taken out and in its place is put a new heart, a new nature, recreated in the image of God in true righteousness and true holiness and with that new heart and that new sight they look upon Christ, they see him as altogether lovely and they are irresistibly drawn to him.

You present a beautiful Christ to a wicked heart and they will hate him. You present a beautiful Christ to a new heart, recreated in the image of God through the work of the Holy Spirit and they can have nothing but Christ. They must have Christ.

Now let's go on. "I will put My Spirit within you."⁴² Look at that. God comes to dwell within a man. And yet he remains unchanged? The heavens themselves cannot contain him, that Spirit hovered over chaos and created a universe and yet he can dwell within the heart of a man and the man not be affected in the least.

No. That's not true.

Then why do we say these things?

It is the only way we can explain having large churches full of carnal, wicked people. That's why.

"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you..."⁴³ That word can be "make you."

"No, God can't make you do anything. "

No, God can make you do absolutely anything he wants.

"Well, God can't violate my will."

God can do anything. God is going to violate a lot of people's will on the day he throws them in hell. Don't you see? God violates...he thwarts the wills of kings. He stops angels in their tracks. He is God. Do you see what we have done in America? We have created this god who is subservient to the wills of wicked men.

⁴¹ See Romans 1:18

⁴² Ezekiel 36:27

⁴³ Ibid.

No. Not at all. Not at all.

He says, "I will put My Spirit within [them] and cause [them] to walk in My statutes."⁴⁴ But, again, we must be careful here because he doesn't cause them by force. He causes them to walk because he has put his Spirit within them and he has given them a new heart.

Now, let me explain it to you this way. Let me use an example. It may help you. Let's say that I become the pastor of a church. I am brand new in town and someone tells me that there is this guy over there in the trailer, right over there from the church and he hasn't been in church in five years and I need to go over and talk to him.

So I go over and talk to him and we are in Alabama, ok? So...where everybody is polite to the preacher.

So I go...I am in Alabama and I walk up to the trailer. He sees me coming, throws that door open and says, "Well, come on in, preacher."

So I go on in.

He says, "You want some tea?"

I say, "Well, I think...I would love to have some tea."

And then after we would talk a little bit we would get serious and I would say, "I am the new preacher here and they tell me you haven't been in church in five years."

"You're right, preacher. I haven't been to church in five years. I need to start going to church. I just need to do the right thing. I need to start going to church, ok?"

"They tell me you have been...you are pretty much the wild man with the ladies."

"Yeah, you're right again, preacher. You're right. I am and I just need to stop it. I just need to stop it and I need to do the right thing. I just need to be faithful to my wife. I just need to do the right thing."

And then I said, "And they tell me you are pretty much the drinker."

"Oh, yeah. I drink. I drink just...I drink. There you can look in the fridge, preacher. I won't lie to you. I need to stop it. I just need to stop doing that stuff and I just need to do the right thing."

So, you think, "Wow. Brought him back to Christ. Praise God."

⁴⁴ Ibid.

No, you know what you have just seen? A lost man. That's what you have seen. Because you know what he is saying? "You're right, preacher. I need to stop doing all the wicked things I love and start doing all the righteous things I hate so that I can go to heaven."

My dear friend, when God saves a man he changes his nature. He becomes a new creature. He wants to do righteousness. He hates wickedness and when he does fall into wickedness it tears him apart because he is a new creature. A Christian is not somebody who stays away from all the wicked things he loves and clings to all the righteous things he hates so that he can go to heaven. The fear of the Christian is not going to hell. The fear of the Christian is being separated from Christ. It is a new creature.

We give an example from Charles Spurgeon. Let's say that we had a pig in the back there, a hog, a swine, whatever you want to call it. It is back there in the back doors. And then I put here the finest meal that can be bought in Las Vegas and I put here over on the other side a barrel of slop and I tell you, "Loosen and let him go. Let the hog go."

Where is the hog going?

Now, most of you don't look like farm people, but you probably can figure out where the hog is going. It is going straight to the bucket of slop. Why? Because it is a pig. That's what pigs do. He does what he is. He loves what he is by nature. He has the nature of a pig and pig natures do pig things.

But let's say he runs down here as he does and what is he going to do? He is going to stick his head in that bucket. He is going to be eating slop. He is going to be wiggling his tail. He is going to be so happy. But let's say in one moment I have the power to reach forth and change that pig into a man. What is he going to do? He is going to throw his head back out of that bucket. The thing that he delighted in he is going to be disgusted with. The thing that he was gobbling down and that felt whole in his belly is now going to nauseate him and he is going to throw it up. He is going to writhe with disgust and then he is going to turn around and look at you and be ashamed.

I just described your conversion. I just described you.

"You didn't describe me."

Then you are not a Christian.

Men are born in sin. The Bible says men are love sin. Job said they drink down iniquity like it was water.⁴⁵ But when God changes a man, when he saves a man, he changes his nature from a sin loving nature to a sin hating nature, from a God hating nature to a God loving nature. That is what happens in conversion.

⁴⁵ See Job 15:16

Now you understand why I preach in a lot of churches once. Now, but here I want you to think of this. I am not the prophet or the son of a prophet.⁴⁶ Everything I say I must look into Church history. Does anyone else say the same thing? Just about everyone else until you get to America in the middle of the 20th century where man all of a sudden started becoming better and God started becoming smaller and salvation not that big a deal.

Never forget. I was in Peru. I was missing worship in my own language and someone sent me a cassette and I looked on it and it said, “Amazing Grace.” And I thought, “Whoa. Great.” I put it in my little cassette player, turned it on, listened to the first verse, stopped the cassette player, grabbed the tape, threw it in the trash can because this is what it says. “Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a man like me...” I thought to myself, “I think when it started out it was a worm like me and then it went to a wretch like me.” Or maybe I have those two reversed. I don’t know. So we have gone from a worm to a wretch to a man. We have improved.

There is only one problem. Men don’t need to be saved. Wretches do. And if you are not a wretch you have no need of grace.

Oh, my dear friend, it feels like an uphill battle sometimes. We live in a world where preachers smile and have nice hair and talk to you about your best life now, who don’t want you to be sad and want you to be filled with self esteem. And they are lying to you. They are not going to talk about sin because they don’t want anyone to feel bad. That’s what Jesus talked about. They tell you that they don’t preach on hell because they just want to preach the words of Jesus.

Do you know this? Any many who tells you that is either ignorant of Scripture or he is a liar. Do you want to know why? If it were not for the teachings of Jesus we would know almost nothing about hell. You find almost nothing about hell in the Old Testament, just glimpses. You find almost nothing about hell in the writings of the apostles, just glimpses. Almost everything we know about hell comes from the teachings of Jesus who taught more about hell and sin than he did heaven.

Be careful about the Christianity that you embrace because it might not be Christianity at all. There will come a time, doesn’t Scripture tell us, where they will amass teachers who will tickle their ears?⁴⁷ What does that mean? To tickle someone’s ears is to make someone feel good. And how do you make men feel good? You make them feel good about themselves, but not tell them the truth.

Christianity is about life and death. It is about heaven and hell, salvation and damnation. Choose you this day whom you will serve.⁴⁸ What does it profit a man to gain the whole

⁴⁶ See Amos 7:14

⁴⁷ See 2 Timothy 4:3

⁴⁸ See Joshua 24:15

world and lose his soul?⁴⁹ You cannot be my disciple unless you hate your mother and your father.⁵⁰

“Lord, don’t you know they were offended when you said that? That’s why they are leaving.”⁵¹

“Do you want to go, too?” he said.⁵²

Oh, my dear friend, I have greater respect for an Atheist—or claims to be an Atheist because there is really no such thing. All men believe in God. They are just lying about it when they tell you they don’t. But I have more respect for a man who disavows and disowns Christianity entirely than someone who will take Christianity and morph it into something useful for carnal men.

If you disagree with me tonight you have that right and I won’t be angry with you. But I will challenge you to come up with Scripture, with Scripture and talk to me. I’ll talk to you all night. Tell me these things are not so. Tell me it is another way. Show me.

You know, preaching...we are going to end right here. Preaching is dangerous. You see, it is dangerous for me. If I don’t preach according to Scripture then the book of James tells me that on the Day of Judgment I will undergo greater condemnation for claiming for myself the title of teacher. So preaching is dangerous for me.

But preaching can be dangerous for you. How? If what I am teaching is not true then the preaching is not dangerous. You are not bound by it. If what I say is not conformed to Scripture then you can go out of here and you are totally free. Don’t think another moment about it. But if what I say is true, then now the danger is on your side because you will be held accountable for the truth you have learned. That’s preaching. That’s preaching.

Now I have been giving an invitation now for about an hour or more so we don’t need to give another one. I will tell you this. If you are concerned about your heart, your life, concerned about heaven and hell and you need to talk to someone, I’ll talk to you all night, all night. So that’s the invitation. That’s the invitation.

And don’t be discouraged, church. Whether we preach to 60 people or 6000 doesn’t matter. God, where two or more are gathered, he is there.⁵³

Let me give you just a word of encouragement. Several years ago in Peru, many, many years ago I was pastoring [?] the Church of the Savior in the district of Lima called Baranco. And it was the World Cup. Now for Americans that doesn’t mean a whole lot,

⁴⁹ See Matthew 16:26; Mark 8:36

⁵⁰ See Luke 14:26

⁵¹ See Matthew 15:12

⁵² See John 6:67

⁵³ See Matthew 18:20

but for everyone outside of America that is the biggest deal going, the World Cup. I mean life stops in Latin America when the World Cup is on.

Well, the World Cup was in full swing and I was going up the stairs of the church to the roof. We do a lot on the roof in Peru because there's...well, there's no air conditioning and the roof is a lot cooler. And as I was going up there on that roof to get something because we were closing down the church. It was time to leave. It was about nine o'clock at night, a little Indian woman about the...I mean she was no more than five feet tall named Delia...while I was coming back down actually she started coming up the stairs and she had a bottle of...a Coke bottle that was empty, a plastic one...well, it was empty of Coke, but it was full of water. She was going up the stairs and I was coming down and I said, "Delia, you know, [?] we are going to shut the church. We need to leave."

She goes, "Oh, I'm staying."

I said, "What?"

She said, "I'm staying. God's told me to pray."

She went up on that roof for seven days and she fasted and prayed.

Do you know what's amazing? Literally billions of people are watching the world cup, but God was watching one tiny, uneducated Indian woman on the top of a roof crying out to him.

All throughout this city right now people are praising the gods of gold and silver and fame and lust and entertainment. That is a god in this country, maybe the biggest. As Leonard Ravenhill used to say, "On the tombstone of this country it will be written, 'They entertained themselves to death.'"

God doesn't care about any of that. His eyes are on a few people that belong to him gathered in his name. As he told the Church in Asia Minor, "I know where you dwell, the very throne of Satan, but you have held on to the faith,"⁵⁴ you see.

So as Jesus would say, "Little flock, don't be frightened and don't be dismayed."⁵⁵ He said these things would happen.

Let's pray.

Father, help us. Strengthen us. Lead us. Father, if there is someone here that doesn't know you, that they might know you is our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

⁵⁴ See Revelation 2:13

⁵⁵ See Luke 12:32