

An Occasion for God's Glory

by Dennis Kinlaw

God allows wrong to exist in the world so that he can be glorified and show his power and love, and he pulls the plug in the sinner's life out of love and compassion.

Duration: 52:50

Scripture: John 5:1-9, John 6:1-14, John 9:1-3, John 9:16, John 9:30-33, Romans 7:18-19, Galatians 5:16-17

Topics: "Glory Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares his personal experience of witnessing extreme poverty in Columbia and feeling compelled to help. He recounts a story of being asked to befriend a black Muslim man who was struggling, and how this encounter led to a life-changing moment. While driving one day, he sees a disabled man in a wheelchair on a busy highway and decides to help him. These experiences serve as a backdrop for the speaker to discuss the power of God's work and the importance of doing His work, even if it means breaking societal norms.

Transcript

Turn with me to the 9th chapter of the Gospel according to John. I'm not going to go through the story that's there. I'm going to assume that you know it.

If you don't know it, I hope you will sit down sometime today and read it. I want to use it as a background for what I am saying. You probably are aware, and if you're not, you should pin this down, that in the Gospel of John, when you deal with the miracles of Jesus, you will find that oftentimes a miracle is the background and the occasion for his teaching.

Like in the 5th chapter, he heals a man who's been a paralytic for 38 years, and he does it on the Sabbath day. And it is out of the fact that he has healed a man, a paralytic, on the Sabbath day, he has said to him, take up your mat and walk, carry your, pick up the mat you're lying on and go on your way, your will. And the Pharisees turned and said, you've worked on the Sabbath day.

And because you've worked on the Sabbath day, or you've told a man to work on the Sabbath day to carry a load, because of that, you've broken the Sabbath day. You're not a godly man. You're not a holy man because you've broken one of the Ten Commandments.

Now, if that seems strange to you, I'd like to share with you a friendship that I had at Brandeis with a rabbinical student who was an Orthodox Jew who smoked two packs of cigarettes six days a week. And on Friday afternoon at sunset, he quit and didn't smoke again until after sunset on Saturday. And I said, see, why don't you smoke on the Sabbath? Do you think it's a sin to smoke? Oh, he said, heavens no.

If I thought it was a sin, I wouldn't smoke the other six days. I said, then why don't you smoke on the, on Saturday? Well, he said, it is against the law to carry any burden on the Sabbath day. And for the life of me, I haven't found a way to smoke a cigarette without carrying it.

So, here was a guy who was addicted to nicotine, but he believed that the law was such that he should not carry a cigarette. He didn't have a billfold in his hip pocket on the Sabbath. When he dressed for Saturday, everything that was in his pocket was taken out.

He carried nothing on the, on Saturday. So, now Jesus says to this guy, in that kind of context, take up your bed and walk. It was a deliberate challenge to the Pharisees and to the Jewish, to the Jewish authorities there.

And the miracles or the need and the paralytic gave Jesus an opportunity to do that, which forced the Pharisees to say to him, who do you think you are? Which was exactly what he wanted to get to, because that's what he came for, to let us know who he, who God is, who our Father is, and who he is. And so, that miracle gave him the chance to give his teaching and to communicate what he had to say. And so, when they said, who do you think you are? Why do you do this? You've broken the Sabbath.

Well, he said, my father worked all the time. Not six days a week. My father worked all the time, and I work with him.

I've come to do his work. And so, they said, now you've sinned twice. You've broken the Sabbath, but you've made yourself equal with God.

And so, he says, you're catching on. So, it is very beautifully done in the Gospel of John, the way he takes a situation and uses it to teach what he has to teach. Now, you know he did the same thing with the feeding of the 5,000, because here you have all these people that are hungry, a long way to waste many food supply.

There is no way that they can be fed without something unusual taking place. And so, he takes five loaves and two fish, and he multiplies them, and thousands of people are fed with five loaves and two fish. And then, they are ready to crown him king, and he disappears on them.

And it takes them 24 hours to find him. And when they find him, they said, why did you disappear? He said, because you ate the bread, but you missed the symbol. You missed the symbolism of it.

They said, what do you mean? He said, I didn't come to give you that kind of bread. I came to give you another kind of bread. And they said, what do you mean? He said, I came to give you the bread of life.

And they said, well, what is the bread of life? He said, I am. Now, if he had started out saying to these people before he fed the 5,000, I'm the bread of life, nobody even heard what he said. But when that context was developed, he was saying, I came to give you the real bread.

You ate that yesterday, and you're hungry today. But I've got a bread that if you ever eat it, you'll never hunger again. And they said, well, give us that bread.

He said, I am that. Now, he's talking about himself, you see. Now, then he comes to the ninth chapter, and you get this story.

And this fits with what we heard last night. As Jesus went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Neither this man nor his parents sinned.

But this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work.

While I am in the world, I am the light of the world. Having said this, he's spit on the ground, made some mud. This is a violation of the Jewish law from an orthodox point of view.

He's mixing mortar here, see. So that's a violation of the law. He takes his spit and some clay and mixes them together, puts them on the man's eyes, and says, go wash in the pool of Siloam.

And the man went and washed and came home seeing. Now, here is his chance to teach something else. But now, what I want to do here is not draw from this the main purpose of that miracle, which is found when he begins to let them know that he's the light of the world.

He has given a man sight. But the word which he speaks when his disciples say, teacher, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? And Jesus says, neither this man nor his parents sinned. But this all happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

That really is an astounding statement. And I think it, for a long time I took it as applicable to that blind man. But as the years have passed, I've come to believe that this is a universal statement and that he's not just talking about this man's blindness.

He's talking about my blindness and your blindness, my crippledness and your crippledness, my bondage and your bondage, my scars and your scars, my wounds and your wounds, anything negative in your life and anything negative in my life. He is saying, that is an occasion for God's glory. And you need to look at it that way.

Now, I think what we're getting at is here the fact that the purpose of wrong in our world, the reason it is here is so that God can be glorified. Now, that's a special interest to me because I used to teach Old Testament. One of the things that I kicked around for a while in Old Testament that was a surprise to me was passages like you get in Isaiah, you get it in Amos, he's evil in the city who has done it? Yahweh has done it.

Now, that was hard on me in my early days because, you see, I had these notions that God didn't do that kind of thing. But the prophet says he's evil in the city who has done it? Yahweh has done it. And then you find passages in Isaiah where it says that he creates good and he creates evil.

Now, I don't believe that anything evil ever comes out of God. But I think that all that's wrong in the world is due to the way he put it together. And what he did was he put the world together so it won't work right if it's wrong.

If it's wrong, it won't work right. And so I've come to the place where I think the only thing worse than a world without God which works wrong would be a world without God that works right. Because a world without God that works right would be a lie.

And so God won't let the world work right if he's not in it and if he's not in the right position in it. Now, that's not meanness on God's part. If anything happens to the mother who's bearing a child in her womb, that child is affected.

And if anything were to happen to poison the child in the mother's womb, you're not going to tell me the mother wouldn't be affected. And the world has that kind of symbiotic relationship with God. And if we aren't the way it's supposed to work, the world is not going to work right.

So that the wrong that's in my life may be a better testimony to the right than the right that's in my life. If you hear what I'm saying at that point. Because the blindness that the man had was Christ's opportunity to get out that he's the right of the world and to show who he was.

And this comes right in the vicinity of Jerusalem, right in Jerusalem, where the opposition is there getting ready to crucify. Now, that has brought me to this conclusion. That there is something in the nature of God that obligates him to explode everything that's false and see to it that it doesn't succeed.

And if he's going to be God and if he's holy and if he's good and he's right, he will have to see to it that wrong doesn't work right. So that if I am not living right, he's going to see to it that my life doesn't work right. And if I am living right, he will see to it that it works right.

Now, there may be a time lag that bothers me. Because you see, we want everything instant. We want to get our lives right with God.

That punches the button and everything goes right. And we want everybody who does wrong, that's punched the button, and the next day everybody who does wrong to get the consequences of that. But there's a time lag in all of this.

Because you see, if he did it instantly, everybody would be good for the wrong reason. Everybody would be good to get rid of the evil, not because good's right. And everybody would quit being evil to get the good, not because they don't like evil, but to keep the punishment from coming and the problems from coming.

So how is God ever going to get me to the place where I decide I want righteousness for righteousness sake? And I want God for God's sake. I want righteousness for righteousness sake because it's right. And I want God for God's sake.

And I want God for God's sake, not just because of what he gives me or because of what he blesses me with. Now we have an intuitive sinfulness within us and self-interest within us that says we're more interested in what God can do for us than we are in God. And do you know what happens when that happens in your family? If Elsie, if I thought for a minute that Elsie wanted me because of my wealth, and the ones who know me best will have the loudest on that, if Elsie wanted me, can you think of anything that would crush me faster than that? I remember that Madame Guillaume developed smallpox.

She was a very beautiful woman. And when she developed smallpox, she came away scarred. She was part of Louis XIV's court.

She was one of the hostages in Louis XIV's court. So she moved among all these people. And somebody came in and took one look at her and wept and said, your beauty, it's all gone.

You know what she said? Thank God, one less obstacle between me and my Lord. And what she decided was that God was better than his gift. But sometimes it takes a little pain to get us to the place where we decide that God's worth it if you don't get anything else.

In fact, if you lose everything else. Now, I think God is obligated to explode the wrong and the false. Now, I want to share with you, I've shared this with some of you, and if you've heard me tell this before, be patient with me.

But I noticed that Jesus repeated himself on some occasions. And there's some stories that put things into focus. It's a story with, about Sam Canolais, about 10 days before the Berlin Wall fell, called me.

He'd just come back from Romania. He'd been in an evangelistic crusade in Romania, which I didn't think could happen in a communist country then. And he said, the place was packed every night.

And he said, every time I gave an invitation, hundreds of people responded. I said, Sam, that's impossible. Under atheistic Josephko? And he said, it happens.

Now, an American couldn't get in, but he was not an American. He was an Indian, with an Indian visa, and he could. And so, as he preached, he said, hundreds responded.

He said, one night he didn't give an invitation, and hundreds responded anyway. He said, we watched Greek Orthodox priests come forward to receive Christ. And he said, it was an amazing time.

That was the first glimmer I got, that something really was happening behind the Iron Curtain in the communist world. Then he said, but one night, he said, Kenlo, I heard something in my audience that I couldn't explain. He said, it was a sound that was inexplicable.

Then he said, I noticed that it came in waves. Then it would disappear. Then it would come again and disappear.

Then he said, I noticed it came every time I mentioned the name of Jesus. And then he said, I realized it was the women in my crowd weeping. Then he said, it got louder, and I knew the men had joined them.

And then he said to me, Kenlo, by that point, every time I mentioned the name of Jesus, I was weeping. Then he said this, and this is what I wanted to get to. I'll never get over this.

He said, you know, Kenlo, when the last alternative option to Christ has been exhausted and shown for its true bankruptcy, the name of Jesus takes on great power and allure. I now think that is the greatest philosophical statement on the philosophy of history, human history, that I've ever heard. It's all spelled out in one statement.

When the last alternative option to Jesus has been exhausted and shown for its true bankruptcy, the name of Jesus takes on great power and allure. Now, I've decided that's what human history is about. It is the explosion of the false option.

Now, we live in a day when that is especially clear, because we live in a day when all of the idealisms have been shattered. Do you know how hollow it rings when Bill Clinton talks about a new covenant? Do

you know how hollow it rings when the Republicans try to come up with some counter-slogan to it? The reason is that most of us can remember the great society. Do you remember that? When we were going to change America and solve all our problems with education? And so, we're educating everybody now.

And I think that, you know, sort of explains it all to me, what's happened, or puts it into focus. Our daughter was teaching in a public school in Kentucky and had a lawsuit on her hands because she paddled a kid. Now, it's against the law to have a paddle in Kentucky in school, but we have metal detectors.

And so, education is going to solve our problem. Now, I'm old enough to remember the New Deal, and we've had our succession of political hoaxes, and everybody keeps thinking they'll get a new one. And we've had all these.

You know, we have lived, though, to see these shattered in a way that few generations have seen them. And I tell you, I sort of like all the cynicism. That may be horrible, but there's a lot more realism in the cynicism than there is in our false hope.

You remember the fellow I told you about who smoked two packs of cigarettes a day? He was a confirmed Marxist and an orthodox rabbinical student. I said to him, see, you're crazy as a loon. If Marxism won in the United States, you, an orthodox Jew, would be one of the first ones to pay a price for it.

You would be one of the ones that would have to be circumscribed. I will never forget. He looked back at me, open face, open eyes, and said, Kinlaw, if that's what it takes to feed the hungry of the world, shouldn't I be willing? That's what you call idealism.

And I looked back at him and said, you may be free to do that with your liberty, but you're not free to do that with my liberty. Oh, he said, they wouldn't bother you. You're a Christian.

That's how much he knew, you see, as an orthodox Jew. But I will never get over the way he looked at me soulfully and said, if that's what it takes to feed the hungry of the world, and do you know the supreme symbol of the failure of communism? Was the empty grocery stores in Moscow. The one thing you couldn't find was food, and the supreme communist state couldn't feed its own people.

The false options have to go, and they have to be exploded for what they are. And that's as true for Republicans as it is for Democrats, and for socialists as it is for Republicans, and for all the rest, the political hope. Because, you see, he is the one who's going to be the king of kings and lord of lords, and we're made for a kingdom that's not a kingdom of this world.

It is the kingdom of God. So, God's got to show us that the false messiahs, that they don't work. Now, that's true in the political realm, and in the historical realm, but it's true in the individual realm.

When I begin living my life counter to the way God intended it to be lived, then God has to see to it that it won't work. I had a conversation this week with a guy who had then come from a Jewish Orthodox family, and he became a banker. That fitted, didn't it? And he said, yep, money changer.

He said, I did what Burt Lance did, and I made some bad loans, and I ended up seven years in the penitentiary. He also ended up an alcoholic on drugs. And he said, when I hit the bottom, he said, I started reading Judaism, and that didn't work.

He said, then I read the New Testament, and I found the messiah, and he said, I wouldn't take anything in the world for that prison sentence. Not a curse, but a great blessing, because it was through that radiant Christian, radiant Christian. He's an Easterner, Yankee of Yankees.

It's fun to listen to him talk. It takes me back to New York and New England to listen to him talk. But as he tells about, it was that prison sentence, the hold of alcohol, and the hold of the drug, when he was shattered, that caused him to say, is there any hope? And he found Christ.

Now, so God does it in individual life. Now I want to say, you have no question about that. I know there's nobody in this crowd who has any question about that.

So that in the sinner's life, somewhere or other, God pulls the plug, and it is love and compassion that makes him pull the plug. It is not meanness that makes him pull the plug, and it isn't meanness that attaches aid to immorality. Now, there'll be people who'll be distressed with, would be distressed with me to say that.

But it's no accident to me that there are diseases attached to the misuse of the most sacred relationship that is ever possible for persons other than their relationship to God. Don't tell me there isn't symbolism in that. So when we live wrong, he pulls the plug.

That's the thing that caused most of us to come to Christ. In fact, I really wonder if it isn't the reason ultimately that causes everybody to come to Christ. That nobody comes to Christ until he knows the plug's pulled, and he doesn't aware of the turn.

F.B. Meyer told about sitting in a group one night, and he just went around to ask how many of them became Christians because they were scared as hell. There was only one person in the crowd who said no. All the rest of them.

We are sinners enough that something's got to happen to make us want to see change in our lives. That's what brings us to Christ. But then why all the trouble in the Christian life? And that's what I want to get to this morning.

I think he not only has to explode the false and show that it's wrong, but I think he has to teach us the difference between what the New Testament calls flesh and spirit. And I've tried to figure out how to say that. Let me see if I can put it this way.

You know, the guy who's unregenerate, who's never had the touch of grace in his life, says, I can do it. Just give me the opportunity and give me the resources and I can handle it. So God has to shatter him.

And then he says, let Christ come into his heart and there's sort of, now God and I can do it. And then God says, there's one more step. You got to learn that there ain't no salvation anywhere except in me.

And if not, you and I are going to do it. I'm the one that's going to do it. And that's a totally different thing.

Because after we become Christian and the thrust of grace comes inside of us and the newness of life, and we begin to tackle this thing of being a Christian man, we go at it. And then we have to learn the difference between flesh and spirit, self, what I can do, and what he can do. Now, how does he do that? I think he has to show us the emptiness of what we have to offer apart from him.

And we keep trying to do it on our own. In the High Calling, in the last edition, I referred to a conversation I had with a man who's on the board of Christianity Today. He's one of the top Baptists in this country, a man who has a real heart for evangelism.

And if you read it, you'll let me repeat that one, too. We were in O'Hare waiting for a plane. And, you know, these are the most precious moments in life.

He said, Dennis, I just want to share something with you. It was a very sacred moment. He said, I was in my early 30s.

I was on my way up in the Southern Baptist Convention. I was developing quite a reputation as being a good preacher. Moving well, things going right, my church very glad to have a preacher as competent as I was.

He said I'd been saved when I was 12, called a preacher when I was 17, came from a tenant farmer's home. I was the only member of my family who got a university degree. And he said, I thought we could do it.

And he said, but I had a group of old ladies in my church who prayed for me. And he said it irritated me because when they prayed for me, the implication was I needed something I didn't have. Did you hear that? The implication was I needed something I didn't have.

And I don't want you to think I've got any need. And so he said, an emptiness began to develop within me, a vacuum. And he said, I was in my early 30s.

And he said, the pressures came. And he said, one day I shut the door. I studied, got on my face before God, cut the light off and said, if you can't do more for me than you've done, then I'm in trouble.

And he said, it was as if I were a briefcase. And he took me and turned me upside down and dumped me out. And he said, I never knew how much garbage could be in a human heart as was in my heart as he dumped it.

And he said, then after he dumped it thoroughly, and I was aghast at the self-interest, the pride, the arrogance, the independence, the my way stuff, the self-sufficiency. He said when I, when he dumped it, then he turned it up right side up. And then he began to fill it with himself.

And he said, I wouldn't go back to what I was before that for anything in the world. Because you know the difference? Now it was not he who was doing it. He wanted to know what God wanted to do.

And the spirit was leading him in everything he did. He was not showing himself. He knew there was nothing in him worth showing except the Lord within him.

And so the spirit now filled him and controlled him. And the ego was taken care of. And the self-confidence had been shattered.

But it's interesting when the self-confidence was shattered, he wasn't shattered. He said my strength came when the self-confidence was shattered. Because the confidence in him gave me the strength I needed.

And he has had a worldwide influence for Christ. And he attributes all of it to what happened to him when he was in his thirties after he'd been in the ministry for ten years. When the spirit filled him and he was not walking in the flesh.

Now, that brings me to the third thing. Some way or other, God has to get us out of ourselves to where our interest is beyond us. Because our fulfillment is not in us, it's in somebody outside of us and something outside of us.

I don't know about you, but I'm convinced that the best moment anybody ever had is when he has a cause beyond himself that consumes him. You have energy then, you don't ever have it other times. There's a cleanness in it and a purity in it that if there's self-interest mixed into it will always contaminate it.

And the question is, how can God get me to the place where I give myself to him to where my life is wholly his and I live for something beyond me? Do you know, I've decided that's what it means to be a creature. And that's what it means to let God be God. Now, the illustrations I come up with, some of them my friends and my family think are weird, but they speak to me.

I'll never forget, I was an old man practically before I ever read Dante's Divine Comedy. And you know how Virgil takes Dante through hell and then he goes to purgatory and Beatrice takes him up into the imperium, into the presence of God. And Beatrice is his hope.

It's interesting, some beautiful things in that. Do you know how old he was when he met Beatrice, when he saw her? Never really met her. He was nine and she was eight.

And I think one of the purposes of that is Dante is saying there's an incredible mystery in human gender, the difference between a male and a female. So, he saw her when he was nine and never forgot her. Saw her once again, I think, when he was about 20.

And so, she was his, but do you know what the word Beatrice means? Beatific vision, blessing. Now, she was his blessing. So, you get to one of the final scenes in it and they're going up, they've left purgatory and they're ascending through the heavens toward the presence of God.

And she's the one who's led him all the way. And as she's led him, he's gotten to the place where he never takes his eye off her because he knows she's his hope as they speed through the heavens. And then suddenly he's aware he's in the presence of God, getting into the proximity of God.

And as he gets into the proximity of God, of course, everything within him causes him to turn and look for God instead of the one who's led him to God. And as he turns away from Beatrice, he's smitten with a sudden moment of guilt that he should look away from the one that has brought him so far. And so, he looks back at Beatrice to see if he's hurt her.

And when he looks back, she's laughing at him. And the reason she's laughing at him is because she knows what he's thinking. Should he be guilty that he's looked beyond the one who leads him to God, to God himself? Oh, no.

She as a creature has had the greatest privilege that any creature can ever have. She has brought a person to where that person looks beyond the creature to the one from whom he came and to whom he goes. So, she has received total fulfillment in getting him to where he looks beyond her to the one who gave her to him.

Now, that's a universal now for me, that that is when the creation is working right. And the funny thing is that I am my most fulfilled when I get anybody to look beyond me to the one who brought me there. Do you know the hollowest thing that ever comes? It's when somebody talks about your cleverness in preaching.

But you know the most satisfying thing that ever comes? It's when somebody says, God met me in that service. And they don't even refer to you. Now, I'd like to be clever.

And sometimes that gets in in the way. But I heard one of the great preachers that I ever heard, John Church, told me that in his younger years he had wanted to be an orator. And so he worked at it.

He would carefully write out sections of his sermons and get them memorized so that he said, uh, I worked hard at that. He said, I got invited to Asbury College to speak at commencement. And he said, I worked.

He said, the place was packed. The atmosphere was exciting. And he said, I stood up to speak and I launched into my sermon.

And he said, I got to my spot where I started my peroration. I had never heard of the word peroration. But I could see the circle, you know, going up.

And he was moving up. And he said, as we, I moved up, suddenly he said, I was aware I had that audience in the palm of my hand and I could do with it anything I pleased. It was like a puppet on a string with me.

And he said, stark terror struck me. And he said, I closed that service as quickly as I could, went to my room and got down on my knees and said, God, if you'll forgive me, I'll never do that again. Because you know, the most, the worst thing in the world is for you or me to try to take his place or to get some of the credit that he, the glory that's his.

But you know, the most fulfilling thing in the world is when he's central and when he's got the right place. And that always comes when we get delivered from ourselves, when we get out of ourselves. It never comes this way.

It always comes when we get this way. I got a manuscript the other day or a month ago from Word Publishers. Chuck Colston has a new book that's going to be coming out next month.

It's called The Body. And you want to get it and you want to read it. It's a wonderful thing.

A lot of things in it. It's a lot like his book, Loving God. And in it, there is one story that sort of counters that incredible testimony in Loving God of Solzhenitsyn's conversion.

But it's the story of a guy who is the deputy chief of staff for the governor of South Carolina. Any South Carolinians here? This guy was the deputy chief of staff. He was born in 1949.

This happened in the late 80s, so he would have been in his upper 30s. Not an old man. And he had been in a political position, in a media position earlier.

He had been invited by Richard Nixon, by Sununu, who was chief of staff for Richard Nixon. He had been invited by Sununu to become one of the speechwriters for Bush. And he felt he should not do that.

So he stayed in Columbia. And then his business, the political situation changed, and his business, which was in the media, some other people got control of it. And he found himself outside looking in.

And he started taking his Bible and reading it. And as he took his Bible and began to read it seriously, and as he began to pray, change began to take place in him. He had been aggressively ambitious, make his name in the political world and in the financial world, the social world.

Slowly as he exposed himself to the word, a change began to come. He said if it hadn't been for that, the next thing would have never happened. Or at least it wouldn't have turned out the same way.

He was driving down the street in Columbia one day, and he noticed on a four-lane highway, he noticed the car suddenly jamming up. And he didn't know, he knew there was something dangerous there. So he got wide eyed to watch.

And the car slowed down and began to park. And when he got up, in the middle of the highway was a wheelchair with a black that looked like he had polio because his two legs were useless, pushing the wheelchair down the middle of a four-lane highway at about a half mile an hour. And he said, I looked at that and knew that guy was going to get killed.

So he said, I slowed down and pulled over next to him and said, can I help you? And he said, the black looked up at me and said, I'm Odell. He's an old man. He said, what are you doing out here? You're going to get killed.

Well, he said, I have two friends. He had a friend, an old lady, the oldest he was, who had a 30-some year old daughter. And the two of them were sick and they had no food.

They were going to starve to death. They couldn't go anywhere. And he said, I'm going to the rescue mission because I know they'll give me some hot food for my two friends.

And there's nobody to take care of them. He said, I quickly figured and knew he had a seven-mile trip to make in his wheelchair. So he said, Odell, you can't do that.

He said, let's get you in here. So he said, I put him in the front seat, had to pick him up, put him in the front seat. Said, I probably hid his wheelchair in my trunk.

And he said, I took him and we got the hot food and we carried him back to the old lady and her daughter. And they were within a few blocks of the Capitol in Columbia. He said, I'd never seen human poverty like that.

He said, you see, I was a newsman and a politician and I had spoken about poverty and I had written about poverty and I had reported about it, but I'd never seen it. And he said, there was something inside and he said, you can't let people live like this. So he said, he got interested in the rescue mission that fed people like that.

He said, one day he said, one of the guys at the rescue mission called me and said, would you do me a favor? And he said, what's this? Well, he said, there's a guy on death row that desperately needs a friend. Said he's a black Muslim and he has just lost himself and is just out of it totally and nobody can get to him. Somebody needs to be his friend.

Would you try? He said, I was busy. I had a lot of things to do. But he said, I couldn't get away from that.

So he said, I went. Out of that, this guy developed an incredible ministry with the death row people in the main prison in South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina. Developed friendships with these.

Led some of them to Christ. Began having a Bible study with these guys on death row. He said, one of the guys was a mature enough Christian that I often turned to him for personal counsel.

He said, one night I had been with my gang, my church on a Friday night on death row and I was leaving. And he said, I walked past a cell on death row. A guy none of us had ever been able to get to.

The guy had been in prison for stealing. He had been in prison for murder. He had been in prison for raping and then murdering the women he raped.

And he had been a drug addict. He was on drugs, of course, when he did a lot of that. But he said, as I walked past his cell, we'd never been able to get to him.

I looked at him and he said, it was unbelievable. He said, the floor was covered with toilet paper and penthouse magazines and half eaten sandwiches. And he said, the guy was sitting there sicking.

And he said, his hair was matted and greasy and his beard. And he said, he didn't look like a human being. He was slimy, looked sort of like a shrimp sitting there.

And he said, I took a second look and there were cockroaches crawling all over him. And he wasn't even moving in the stupor. He said, you know, I looked at him and he said, I couldn't go on.

He said, I looked at him and said, Rusty, Rusty, look at you. You're a man made in the image of God and you don't belong to be like this. He said, I never sensed evil anywhere under any circumstances.

The way I did is I looked in that cell and he said, you know, I watched his lips move and then I kept pushing it. And I knew he was trying to say the name of Jesus. And he said, suddenly he started saying, Jesus, Jesus.

Now the guy had gone to church when he was a kid. Father was an alcoholic. His mother used to take him.

He said his greatest joy was when his mother took him fishing, but she'd take him to church. So as Bob talks with this guy, some of those memories came back and he said to him, Rusty, why don't you ask Jesus to come into your heart and clean you up and set you free? He said, finally he prayed. I want to read his prayer to you.

Jesus, I've heard a lot of people. Ain't no way I deserve you to hear me, but I'm tired and I'm sick and I'm lonely. My mama's died and she's in heaven with you and I never got to tell her goodbye.

Please forgive me, Jesus, for everything I've done. I don't know much about you, but I'm willing to learn and I thank you for listening to me. Isn't that an interesting prayer? Bob said, I went home.

Said by Monday I couldn't wait. Monday night I had to get back to see if it was for real. He said, when I came in, the guard who let me in to death row looked at me and said, Bob, if you keep coming so much, we might get you a cell just for you.

Isn't that interesting? Deputy Chief of Staff of the government. And he said, I went. He said, my heart quickened as I got closer.

And he said, first thing I hit was the smell of disinfectant. And he said, the next thing I looked and there was Rusty standing shaved, hair comb, dress, his wall clean, not a thing on the floor, his bed was made, everything was in its place. And he said, I stared.

And he said, Rusty looked at me and said, I figured Jesus wanted me to clean up. He said, took me all weekend. And he said, Rusty, may have taken you all weekend to clean yourself, but it didn't take but a minute for him to clean your heart.

That started an unbelievable friendship. I want you to read, it will be the last chapter in his book. It tells about how he faced death.

And as he did, he wrote to every person, every member of every family that he had hurt. Everybody that he could find related to anybody he had hurt, he wrote and asked them to forgive him. Said he didn't get letters back, but that didn't surprise him because he wouldn't have answered a letter those days, you know.

He had though, was ready to be executed and he got a last minute reprieve. And between that reprieve and his execution, Colson says, the final capstone on his life came. He got a letter one day and he opened it.

It was from the brother of the woman he had raped and murdered for whom he was being executed. And he said, I read the thing. And the guy said, I just had to write you.

You wrote to me. He said, I hated you. I hated you most of all because you were in prison and I couldn't find you so I could blow your head off.

And that's what I wanted to do. But he said, then I found Christ. And he said, when I found Christ, he said, my life began to change.

And then he said, one day I was praying the Lord's prayer and I heard what I was praying. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And he said, I knew I couldn't.

And then he said, I knew I had to. He said, it took me a while, but finally God put in my heart forgiveness. And I just wanted to write you and tell you that I had forgiven you.

Rusty said, greatest desire of his life then, before he died, was to see that guy. So the story tells, Colson tells about how that man and his wife, before Rusty was executed, came to see him. Bob said, you know, how's heaven going to improve on it? When you stand and watch two people like that with their arms around each other, loving each other.

Now that's what's going to be the end of all things. And all the false options are going to have to be exposed. But as I read that, I thought, you know, the joy that came through, that comes through in that chapter, in this deputy chief of staff of the government, the thrill it is in being in that kind of ministry.

It's interesting, from 9 to 5 he does all that, so from 5 to 9, 11, he can do the other. That's what he lives for. Nobody is fulfilled until he's set free from the tyranny of self-interest.

And that's what the Spirit of Christ wants to do in my heart and every heart. And that's what he does when we let him fill us. And he turns us inside out.

And the funny thing is, when we're turned inside out, we find that really is the right way to be. And that's what it means when it says, love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. But isn't that a wonderful story? But I don't know what the problems are and the tensions are in your life.

But I'm convinced that one of the reasons for the tensions, and I know he puts problems in our lives so we can identify with the people who are suffering, but I think he puts many problems in our lives to get us turned inside out to where we love God with all our hearts and our neighbors as ourselves. And he can do that. It is not by human effort.

It is not by human resolution. It is by grace. Grace alone can turn us inside out.

But grace can do that. And we need to trust him to do it.

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