

# Signs of His Presence

by Dennis Kinlaw

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*Jesus' pedagogical method involves using metaphors and analogies that are familiar to people to describe eternal realities, and the family is a key symbol of our relationship with God.*

**Duration:** 53:32

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:1, Genesis 2:7, Malachi 4:2, Matthew 1:1-6

**Topics:** "Presence of God"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the historic meaning of comedy and how it relates to the future of human history. He emphasizes that the end result of history will be a wedding and an eternal relationship between the body of Christ and his people. The speaker also references Dante's Paradiso and highlights a significant insight from the passage. He concludes by discussing the importance of remaining faithful to God and not losing sight of Him, using the example of Dante taking his eyes off Beatrice as they approach God.

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## Transcript

For a scripture, I'd like for us to pray the Lord's Prayer together. That scripture isn't. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

One of the things that we have been interested in in our time together here is, how do you preach the gospel in the end of the 20th century? And we have to think in terms of different places where it's preached. How should it be preached in a third world, which is one context, and how should it be preached in a secular, pagan America, which is another? And how do you preach it when the language that once was understood and commonly agreed upon has changed on you? With that question in mind, I became interested in how Jesus reached his own culture. Because when he came, what he wanted to do was talk about a world that can't be seen.

And the reality is, it's a world that we have no language to describe. Because if you check the New Testament and check the Old Testament, and if you just check human language itself, our language is based on what can be seen and what can be touched. You see that in many ways.

One of the ways that you see it in the New Testament is that the word for eternity in the New Testament in Greek, they simply put an S on the word age. But if eternity is qualitatively different from time, no matter how many ages you stack up, you still don't have eternity, you've still got time. But there is no word except a negative word to express the eternal.

Having worked with Old Testament, I find it, from my point of view, even more interesting. They just simply use the word age, except that occasionally in Hebrew, you will have the expression l'olam va'ad, which is for an age and unto. And the eternal God is for an age and unto, and is no object to the preposition unto.

It's left open-ended. So this is the way, this is illustrative of the problem that we have in explaining, we prayed a few moments ago, our Father, who art in heaven. We are dealing with eternal realities, realities that cannot be seen, that cannot be touched, that cannot be measured.

But we know that they're more real than what can be seen and touched and measured. But how do you explain that to a world that doesn't believe that? And how do you explain that to people who don't believe it? I noticed that that is a perpetual problem in the history of the Church. And it was a problem from the beginning.

We have talked a lot about holiness, but it's interesting that in the Hebrew, in the book of Genesis, the only person who is called holy in the book of Genesis is a prostitute. Because the Hebrew word kadesh is the word for holy. The feminine form is kodeshah.

And the story that you get in Genesis 38 is the story of the woman who played the role of a prostitute, and she is called the holy woman. Now, when you come to the New Testament, we are all called holy. And the supreme word, which is used about Yahweh, is the word kodesh in the Old Testament, and hagios in the New Testament.

Now, how do you move from a prostitute to the holiness of Yahweh, the Holy One? You have to do that with language. And so there is a remarkable conversion in the Old Testament in the language that takes place, as well as in the hearts that take place. So we have to be perpetually sensitive to that so that people are understanding or may be able to understand what we have to say about the gospel.

With all that in mind, I sat down and read through the Gospel of John to see how Jesus did it. And it took me about four chapters to get in tune with what I was looking for. And it was the woman at the well story that caught me first.

Here he is sitting in a well at noon in Samaria, and a Samaritan woman comes up. She never expected him to speak to her because she could tell, obviously, he was a Jew. Jews didn't speak to Samaritans.

And above all, Jewish men didn't speak to Samaritan women. They didn't even speak to Jewish women in public. And so she went about her business knowing that he, as far as she was concerned, was not there.

And as far as he was concerned, she was not there. When suddenly her solitude was interrupted as Jesus spoke and said, would you give me some water to drink? And she turned in shock and said, that's astounding. You're a Jew.

And you asked me, and you're a Jewish man. You asked me for water. Not only are you a Jew, but you believe that if you drink water out of my jug, you've defiled yourself because anything a Gentile owns or a Samaritan owns is unclean.

How is it that you, a Jew, ask drink of me, a Samaritan woman? And he says, well, if you knew who I was, you'd ask me, and I'd give you the real water. And I thought that's interesting. He started with what was the subject of the conversation.

Now, I used to teach some grammar. And the way that came home to me was I thought, for heaven's sake, there's water with a little w and there's water with a capital W. And he starts with the water with a little w and begins to talk about the water with a capital W. Well, when I saw that, by the time I got to the sixth chapter, I was prepared. Because when you come to the sixth chapter, he takes five loaves and two fish and feeds the thousands that are there.

They're delighted. This is better than electing the Democrats because you don't have to worry about food from now on if you can have him around. And so they seek him out, but he disappears on them.

And it takes them 24 hours, you know, for them to find him. And when they find him, they say to him, why did you disappear? And he said, because you saw the bread, but you didn't realize what it symbolized. There's bread with a little b and there's bread with a capital B. And you eat the bread with a little b and you hunger again.

You've got to be fed again tomorrow. I came from a world where there is a bread that if you ever get it, you'll never hunger again. It will satisfy something in you that is eternal.

And that satisfaction will have an eternal character to it. So Jesus said, there's the bread, it's a symbol, but it's a symbol of a reality. And I came to give you the reality.

Now, by the time I got to that point, I decided I ought to start reading the gospel of John over again because I'd missed so much in the first three chapters and the fourth. You've got things like new birth. You know, everybody I know has been born.

I don't know a single exception. I've never met an exception to it. You have in the first chapter, he was the light of the world.

You and I live. If we're in the middle of the night, we wait for the light. We live by the rising and the setting of the sun.

And if we don't live by the rising and the setting of the sun, we live by the substitutes for it that we've produced because of what comes from the sun and so forth. So you can go through the gospel of John and these analogies are everywhere. These metaphors are everywhere.

It's not just a New Testament thing and it's not new with Jesus. We don't have time to go into it, but you take the Old Testament, it's loaded. The last chapter of the Old Testament gives the hope that we find in the New Testament because you will remember the prophet Malachi spoke and said, there will a day come when the son of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings.

That's the last chapter of the book of Malachi. And the first chapter of Matthew tells about the appearance of the son, except it's not S-U-N, it's S-O-N. And so you've got even a linguistic similarity there in English,

but you've got light and light, light with a little L and light with a capital L and he is the source of the true light.

Now with that in mind, I began to realize as I read through the gospels that Jesus had a genius for starting with what the subject at hand. And he found that I gained the impression he could have started anywhere with anything you had before you. So at that point, I began to think, for heaven's sake, this world is incredibly compatible to his pedagogical purposes.

Now that's an implication of the doctrine of creation. I think that's what we're dealing with, the doctrine of creation. So when you look at the world, it's theological, whether you want it to be or not, it's theological.

So the world about Jesus he found incredibly compatible for his pedagogical purposes. It was as if, almost as if it were made for his purposes. And at that point, I did the same thing you did.

I was sitting alone, I laughed out loud. He didn't make it. Could it be that he made the whole thing so that nobody had ever missed the point? But you see, Wesley talked about nature's night and our eyes have been blinded and we don't even see what's right under our nose when it is there.

I think that the symbols are everywhere in our world and we need to regain the doctrine of creation so that when we look at a total pagan, he is a creature of God and he is in a world made by God and the world that God put him in has witnesses all around that pagan if we have the sensitivity to know where to hook in. Now, I noticed that I have trouble finding a single place where Jesus quoted scripture at a center, a pagan particular. Now, I don't want to underplay the importance of the word.

You remember the rich ruler came to him and he said, the rich ruler said, what do I have to do? And he said, well, you know the commandments. So he started with him, with the commandments, but remember he was a Jew. But when you take the Samaritan woman and when you take some others, he started with what was there so the world is compatible to his pedagogical purposes.

Now, that's caused me to begin to look at the world around me and the daily newspaper and everything that I find in a little bit different way. It's as if he made it so nobody would miss him. Now, this is illustrated in the use of metaphors in scripture.

But as I lived with this, I began to notice that two metaphors that I believe are different. The metaphors that he uses like water and bread and the way and the door. Isn't it interesting? He says, I'm the door.

How many doors have you gone through today? I don't know anything much more common than doors. And there's nothing more vital to your existence than doors because that's the only way you can get where you need to go. And he is the door.

Nobody's going to get where he's supposed to go apart from the door. And he is that. Now, these are all earthly creaturely realities that are creaturely realities that are symbolical of eternal realities.

But you know, as I lived with it, I found I believe there are two metaphors that are different that have something eternal about them, that they are not, first of all, a part of time. They did not originate in time. They originated in eternity.

And if that's true, then these are much more important metaphors than any of the others. And very quickly, I think you know what those two are. One of them is the family and one of them is married, human

sexuality.

Now, you don't have to think long once you're reminded of it, but I think I was 60 years of age before I thought about it. Do you know how long I've been fiddling with theology? And if you would ever ask me, I would have said, well, of course, but it was not a working canon of mine. You see, I always thought that history began with a family and the family it began with was Adam and Eve.

But you see, biblically, once you think about it, you think for a moment, history began with a family, but it didn't begin with Adam and Eve, it began with the Father and the Son. And before Adam and Eve were ever created in the bosom of eternity, before God, when God waked up in the morning, if you'll let me use that kind of language, one member of the Trinity didn't look over, and I'm glad for this, he didn't look over and say, Judge, our morning Lord, but one said Father and the other said Son. Now, I wish I knew how to make that as dramatic as I believe it is, because do you know I've never met anybody that didn't have a father? And I've never met anybody that didn't have a mother? And when you take the parental relationship, you got everybody that ever existed in this race except for Adam and Eve involved.

All the rest of us, that relationship is a part of our existence. Now, when I was young, I grew up in the days when liberalism was just beginning, they called it modernism in those days, to sweep the church. And so I can remember being taught in Sunday school and in vacation Bible school that the genius of Jesus was that he would take this most beautiful of all human relationships, the parent-child relationship, and decided to use that human relationship to describe our relationship to God.

That's what I was taught in church. It's interesting how that's 180 degrees off, isn't it? Exactly 180 degrees off, because the original is not a human relationship, it is a divine relationship, and God said, when we put them together down there, let's put them together the way we're put together. And if we put them together the way we're put together, it'll be easier for them to understand us, and there'll be more of a basis for fellowship and a basis for communication between us and for true existential understanding of each other.

You'll notice that biblically, the family was here before the state, and I notice that the family is going to be here after the state, because if you read 1 Corinthians 15, when every knee is bowed and every tongue is confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, then the Son is going to deliver up the kingdom to the Father from whence it came. The kingdom came from the Father and was a gift from the Father. He was a father in the beginning, and he's a father in the end.

Now, as I've lived with this, a lot of the Bible has become different for me. You know, for years I read the gospel of John and saw Jesus as the main character. Now, I wish I knew how to say this enough so you'd hear what I'm saying, but if you read the gospel of John very carefully, Jesus never for one-tenth of a second thought of himself as the central character in the gospel.

Everywhere you turn in the gospel of John, Jesus is saying, My Father who sent me. And as he speaks about his Father, he says, My Father has life in himself, and he's given to me to have life in myself. It's interesting, Jesus never saw himself as the ultimate.

He is the second person of the blessed trinity. In fact, in the Greek, you'll find an interesting grammatical expression. He refers to his Father as the sending me Father.

That's what the Greek says, the sending me Father. So that for the first time in my life, it began to come home very existentially to me that when I look at Calvary, the central figure there is the one you can't see.

And I'd like to ask you, who suffered most on that day? Are you going to tell me there wasn't pain in the heart of God that day beyond the pain that was on the cross? You see, the atonement reaches to the depths of the eternal deity, the depths of God.

So we have the capacity to understand God in a sense that no other people in the world have the capacity to understand God. Because, you see, we're the only people in the world who have the doctrine of monotheism and also of Trinitarianism. You take Islam, you know enough to know that it is almost the unforgivable sin to pray the Lord's Prayer to Allah.

I met a lady one day in a conference. She was the wife of a member of the cabinet of a Muslim nation, and she met two Baptist missionaries. And those Baptist missionaries began to develop a friendship with her, and she responded.

And one day they gave her a New Testament, and she began to read, and she was very impressed with what she read. She was likewise impressed with the quality of life of those two Baptist missionaries. And so as the friendship developed, her heart began to yearn in hunger, and she wanted to become a Christian.

But the obstacle was the Lord's Prayer, because to her, to call God Father was blasphemy. God transcended all human analogies. And you see, to her, the family was a human reality, not a divine reality.

I'll never forget her telling of her conversion. And when she finally got up the courage and prayed the first time to the Christian God, when she said, Our Father, she collapsed on the floor physically, terrified. And the lightning didn't strike.

And when she got up, she said, Yes, and I'm his daughter. Now, we're the only people in the world who've got that kind of knowledge of God. And the thing about it is, God has given us that so we can reach a pagan world, because somewhere or other, everybody is looking for family connection.

Have you ever dealt with a person who was adopted who wanted to find his or her true mother? If you've never had that experience, I'm hesitant to say I hope you will, because if you're close, it'll be very painful. You can watch people who will turn their total lives upside down to find their parents. The depth of that within us is incredible.

God said, I want to make them, put them together the way we're put together. And so we all come in families theoretically. We all come in families physically.

The great tragedy is that we destroyed the symbol. Now, what's the purpose of the family? I said so that we could know God. I've almost decided that if you have a broken family, you're going to have trouble not being an idolater.

Now, the reality is that everybody has trouble not being an idolater. It is not easy to think the true God, who among us has not had his own thinking greatly corrected. I've always been grateful I had two years at Princeton.

They saved me from a substantial chunk of Armenian heresy that I didn't even know I carried around with me until I found myself in nose-to-nose dialogue with hard-nosed Calvinists, deeply committed Calvinists. Now, I didn't come out of Calvinist, but they surely cleaned me up in a lot of ways. And it's not easy to think the true God.

But what about a person who's never known a father? You see, I'm convinced there's something that can be learned in the family that you have no other place to visualize it, to see it, and to experience. But we don't have time to develop this, so let me drop stuff fast. I now see the family as the one place where you see the Old Testament and the New Testament in the same chair, where you see Sinai and Calvary in the same seats.

You see, you don't see it in a classroom. You don't see it in a court. You don't see it on a date.

Where else do you see law and self-sacrificing love in the same person except at the kitchen table? Now, that's very dramatic in my life because I can remember my father came in the Depression one day, and he had six silver dollars, mint condition, those big old things. I was a little tyke, and I thought, man alive, what I couldn't do with one of those. And so I said, may I see it? And he said, well, yes.

He put it in my hand. I stared at it and learned what lust was. And as I stared at it, you know, out of a certain feeling toward him, I kept watching him, and then I closed my hand on it.

And then as I kept watching, I put my hand behind me. And as I kept watching, I took a step back. And when I did, he put out his hand and said, give me my dollar.

And I said, uh-uh. And I got my first lecture on property rights. My father was a lawyer, and when he got through, that thing was so hot, I was happy to get rid of it.

And then it must have been about 14 years later, it was Christmas, first of January, New Year's Eve, I was getting ready to come back to Asbury College as a senior. It was my senior year. I'd never known my father to borrow money until I was a junior in college.

He was an old Scot, and between 1929 and 1943, he financed 21 years of college for five kids. I was the last one. So he was running out when I came along.

But my last time, my last Christmas home of my college career, the night before I left, he handed me a check for 500 bucks. And he said, well, let's pay you out to your A.B. degree. I said, yeah.

He said, good. So I put the check in my pocket, came on to Asbury, registered, paid my bill in full June. On the 10th of February at 5 o'clock in the morning, the night watchman rapped on my door, Fletcher Dormitory, and said, you have an emergency phone call.

It's the only phone call I received in four years in college. That's how different the world was in those days. And so I went to the girls' dormitory, Glyde Crawford, and they had a phone in there.

So I picked up the phone. It was my mother. And she said, honey, dad's gone.

I said, what happened? She said, I waked up, and he was headed for the kitchen. I waked up again, and he was lying in bed quoting scripture verses to himself. I waked up again, and he had touched me.

And when I touched him, he was gone. Now, do you know it was years before I would let myself think consciously what I thought? Because the first thing that went through my head when she finished that was, well, he's finished his work. And do you know what I thought I meant by he'd finished his work? He'd gotten me an A.V. degree.

In the depths of my being, I knew that my father lived for me, and that everything he owned was available for me if I had to have it. Now, when I didn't have to have it, he wasn't about to give it to me. He was an old Dewar Scott.

But when I had to have it, everything he had. Do you know it has been much easier for me to believe that the Old Testament and the New Testament both belong in the Bible? You see, I grew up in the day when we were told that the Old Testament is that bully god of the Old Testament. You know, just think about him.

He's such a nasty, unpleasant judge. Jesus came along and told us about the good God. I never had a problem with that, because I had seen justice and love sit in the same seat at the table.

My mother was the same way, and it was one witness. Now, I've had an easier time trusting God. I've had a lot easier time trusting God, when God said to me, no, because I learned early that no's could be expressions of love.

And time demonstrated that. Now, what about the kids in New York City who've never seen their father? What about our society where the family is stripped apart? It intensifies the problem that we have of communicating. But let me tell you, it says something else.

It intensifies the demand that your family and mine be biblical. It may be that the greatest witness any preacher in this crowd will ever give will not be his Sunday sermon, but his family, because everybody's looking for that down underneath. And one of the reasons for the crime in our streets is the deep hostility in the hearts of people who've been cheated by life.

Now, the greatest educational institution in the world is not the school or the church, but the greatest educational institution is the family, where there is the opportunity for the true and living God in his holy love. Not just love, and not just holy, as we tend to think of it, but holy love. Not just justice, but love, and not just love, but loving justice, where it's combined in one person.

You can't split God, because the same God that died on the cross is going to shut the door to sin eternal. Last chapter in the Bible says, he that is filthy, let him be filthy still. He that is unjust, let him be unjust still.

He that is righteous, let him be righteous still. He that is holy, let him be holy still. God is not going to tolerate evil eternally.

He's just, but he's going to do everything he can do to give everybody in the world a chance to get out of his sin, and we are a people who have a responsibility to share that. Now, the other thing, we could keep going, but you see where I'm going with that. Now, the second analogy that transcends the family, the parent-child relationship, its root is in the very nature of deity.

The reality is ontologically based in the nature of God, the ultimate nature of the ultimate one in the universe is family related. Now, the second thing is marriage. Now, marriage is not, human sexuality is not in the nature of the deity in the sense of maleness and femaleness as we see the two at us, but it transcends time in that when God planned the world, I've decided that he had a wedding in mind.

Now, I've been hesitant, it took me years to get to the place where I'd get up the courage to really preach it the way I believe it now. But one day I noticed that in Genesis, history doesn't begin with a church service, it begins with a wedding. It doesn't begin with City Hall, it begins with a wedding.

It doesn't begin with Washington, it begins with a wedding. And God is the one who's performing the ceremony, in fact, he created the bride and the groom. He started everything with a wedding.

I noticed, I don't know how old I was before I noticed human history, I think I was in my forties before I noticed, it's amazing how little I see in the Bible when I read. I think I was in my forties before I saw that the book of Revelation says human history ends with a wedding. When I got that anchor down, I thought, for heaven's sake, one is the real thing, you know, flesh and blood, that's the real thing, and the other's symbolical.

That's how pagan I was. Then I had to get turned around 180 degrees, because you see, what Elsie and I have will pass, but what the church has with Jesus Christ is eternal, because he's the lamb slain from the foundation of the world, before the foundations of the world. So history moves from wedding to wedding.

For the first time in my life it made sense for Jesus to begin his ministry at Cana, because I was 40 before I could preach on that passage. What's a prohibitionist methodist going to do with the first miracle of Jesus? So man, I stayed as far away from that as I could stay. And then slowly I thought, why did he begin here? Why didn't he begin with the resurrection of Lazarus, something big, dramatic, Cecil B. DeMille, extravaganza kind, get the show on the road, you know? He did it in an out-of-the-way place with some nameless people, and for what would appear to be the most trivial of all human reasons, to provide refreshments after they'd run out at a social affair.

That's the way the redemption of the world began. Why? Because he's interested in weddings, because he's getting ready for a big one. Now, then I found and saw for the first time, because I'd read it, I don't know how many times, but I never saw it.

They came to John the Baptist and said, that guy you baptized down at the Jordan, he's stolen your crowd. How do you feel about him upstaging you like that? And you know, John said, he must increase and I must decrease. That sounded pious to me, so I liked that.

But then, you know, I never had the vaguest notion to do what to do with the rest of what he said. You remember what he said? He said, at a wedding announcement party, you don't expect the best man to get the center of the stage, do you? At a wedding announcement party, the bride and the bridegroom get the center of the stage. I'm just a friend of the bridegroom, and this is a wedding announcement party.

I thought, for heaven's sakes, John the Baptist had a little different philosophy of history from the professor of philosophy of history at the University of Kentucky. And maybe at Asbury College, you know. If I'd been teaching it, it surely wouldn't have been biblical until that point.

Then, for the first time, I could see those passages where Jesus said, and it's in all three synoptics. Mark, you don't get past the second chapter before they came to him and said, John's disciples had good religion. They fasted when they prayed.

Your disciples don't fast. And Jesus said, no, it's inappropriate at a wedding announcement party for the friends of the bridegroom to fast. They feast.

Today's the day for feasting. The day will come when my disciples will fast, and that's when the bridegroom is taken from them. Do you know what it takes to be a bridegroom or a bride? You've got to be male or female.

And the interesting thing is, I've never met anybody who didn't have a mother and a father, and I've never met anybody who wasn't either one or the other. Now, we may get mixed up on which role to play, but the biology is normally rather clear. And the two most serious battles in our society are in terms of the family and in terms of human sexuality.

I now am convinced that hell has its own plan as to how to destroy us, that the two greatest educational devices that God put in our world and the two greatest schools that he put us in, hell has decided to destroy. So that instead of teaching what God intended them to teach, they will teach the exact. Now, yesterday when we said sex is not biology, just it's theology.

And you will never get the biology straight if you don't have the theology straight. And if you rule out the biology, you'll get mixed up on both the families so that today the Census Bureau doesn't know what a family is. We have to come to 1992 before the U.S. government gets to the place where it doesn't know what a family is, but it doesn't.

And it's interesting we have to get to 1992 when we don't know what a male and a female are, and we're mixed up on. Now, what is it that can be learned in the family, in marriage, that cannot be learned anywhere else? I'm convinced that it is a pedagogical tool God intended. One of them is that I'm not complete in me.

It's interesting if you get a space probe from outer space, and they picked up one of us and carried us back, and all they had was one of us, they'd never have the vaguest notion what makes us tick. You've got to have two to explain one of us. Not one of us is self-explanatory, and not one of us is self-originating.

Now, a person in this crowd decided to live. Somebody else made the choices that determine your existence. Human sexuality is an incredible tool, but it also is that magnificent tool to let us know that our fulfillment is not in ourselves.

I heard Elsie testify in a prayer meeting across the street when we were sophomores, and I thought, that's very interesting. I like what I see. So, the next day, when chapel was over, I found myself parked against a radiator in front of the mailboxes, because after chapel, everybody came to get the mail.

I leaned against it as if I were part of the furniture and waited. I can still remember, she came through the doorway in front of me. I was spaced where I could see both door entrances.

She came through the doorway and walked straight to me, and I looked as if I didn't have the vaguest interest. And as soon as she turned and walked past me, I turned and got a good look. She walked over to her mailbox, bent over, opened the mailbox, took her mail out, walked down the corridor, around the corner, and I can tell you what she was wearing when she walked around the corner.

I can tell you now, and I've been chasing her ever since. That was not a volitional decision. Now, later, the volition entered into it.

But isn't it incredible the attraction that God has put there? Now, you know, as I, you know, found man, I thought if I could have her, I'd be satisfied. Then I got her. And I remember the day came when I realized there were dimensions in me she couldn't satisfy.

That shook me up a bit. After I'd chased her all those years, I thought this ought to be it. And then I got the shock of my life.

I found there were dimensions in her that I couldn't satisfy. And the Lord said, you're catching on. What you got's the symbol.

And between us is the reality. But what a beautiful, precious symbol it is. What a beautiful, precious symbol it is.

Now, there's some astounding things in the Scripture on this score. Did you notice that in Genesis, there are two miracles in Genesis 1 and 2 from my point of view. One of them is that the verb used with God in the first verse is in the singular.

In the beginning, God created. And it's one God. You got monotheism.

Because that whole world was polytheistic. Everybody around, the guy who wrote that, believed in multiple gods. Where'd he get the notion of one God? You show it to me in one line of literature anywhere else in the ancient world, and I'll be shocked.

Because that world explained everything on multiple origins. And he comes along and says, in the beginning, God created singular. But you know what is as significant to me? That's one of the reasons I believe in the Bible is inspired.

That's one of the reasons I commit myself to biblical inerrancy. I believe that biblical text has a divine stamp on it. I don't think you can explain it naturally.

But the other thing is, when God said, made them male and female, and he made one woman for one man and one man for one woman, because the custom in that day was polygamy just as much as it was polytheism. Now, you don't get past the fourth chapter before you've got polygamy. But when God started it, it was one man for one woman.

I got an assignment once to do a commentary in a biblical commentary series on the Song of Songs. Over about 10 or 15 years, I found myself, I was asked to do it in another commentary later. So, you know, I read that, never really looked at it carefully before and began to look at it.

It's an incredible document. There's so many shocks in it that you don't expect. One of them is, you read it and it's not religious.

You have trouble finding the name of God in it. So there are some scholars who say it's a pagan love piece that was brought into Israel, and the Jews liked it, and so they put it in scripture. I don't believe that for a minute.

I don't think you have to justify God's symbols with intricate theology. They stand on their own feet. And so whoever wrote that and gave it to us didn't figure it was necessary to say, this is a divinely originated relationship.

But there's another thing that's interesting in the Song of Songs, and that is that there's no reference to children. Now, when you read the book of Psalms, there's a sense in which the family is justified by the production of children. And so we're told about how, blessed is a man whose quiver is full, a woman whose quiver is full.

More children, the more blessed you are. There's not a reference to children in the Song of Songs. Now, that puzzled me at first, and sort of bothered me.

I now see that's divine. That's revelational truth. You see, the love of Christ for his church stands on its own feet, and his love for me stands on its own feet.

And you don't have to have children to justify the love of a man and a woman, because it's an analogy of a man's relationship to Christ, a woman's relationship to Christ. Now, there's something else in the Song of Songs that fascinated me. This, it took me a while to see.

I lived with it a good while before I saw it. You know, you have the passages where she speaks about him and she gets ecstatic about him, and he speaks about her and gets ecstatic about her. The longest and the most detailed and the most ecstatic passages are not her describing him, but him describing her.

And I said, that's wrong. Because, you see, if this is a type literature, then this is she, the church, describing the eternal Christ. What ecstasy ought to be in those speeches? But why should he be ecstatic over you and me? But I want to tell you, the longest and the most detailed and the most ecstatic speeches in the Song of Songs are where he speaks about her.

Slowly, I got my thinking turned around another 180 degrees. You and I are temporal and we're creatures. And there is a temporal or there is a creaturely capacity on our ability to enjoy anything.

The eternal Christ is not limited by creaturely limitations. He is the eternal one. He has dimensions in him because he's God that you and I don't have.

Are you going to tell me that God can't enjoy his pleasures or less than our pleasures? No. His pleasure in you is infinitely greater than your pleasure in him. At that point, I wanted to get out on my face.

I wanted to get out on my face and say, impossible. But true. Impossible.

The ecstasy that God has in that newborn babe in Christ, who's now part of his bride, all the flaws, all the immaturity, all the naivete, all the ignorance, all the rest of it, the ecstasy has an eternal character about it. Now, where are you going to learn that? You're not going to learn that in the classroom. You're not going to learn it in the state.

That kind of thing can only be learned in the kind of relationship that is in the family and in the husband and wife relationship. Now, it's almost time for lunch, but I can't let you go until... I now am convinced that the same way parents are God's intended means to get us ready to live with his law and his redemption, that marriage, human sexuality is his way to get us ready to learn what love is and to learn that the greatest blessing is not in what somebody else can give to you, but what you can give to somebody else. Because, you see, when I told Elsie in the beginning, I love you, will you marry me? What I meant was, when I'm with you, I'm happy.

You make me very happy when you pay attention to me, and I like to be happy. Would you just pay attention to me forever? So I can be happy, pure, self-centered, self-interest. And then after I'd been married a while, you know, I'd find sometimes she wasn't happy.

And the greatest misery I'd ever known was when I found she wasn't happy. And I found there was far more joy in making her happy than there was in her making me happy. Sex, absolutely reversed.

Now, I'm convinced that there's a parable there of the way we come to Christ. Every person I've ever met that I found that I had a chance to really examine came to Christ for purely selfish reasons. And then you

got that process of getting turned inside out.

How are you going to do that? The greatest example we've got is in this relationship, where you find that the greatest joy is in what you can give and do for someone else, not what they do for you. And then you begin to find that the ultimate joy is when you begin to live that way for him. So you see, the greatest basis in the creation for the doctrine of perfect love, Christian holiness to me, is human sexuality.

Sometimes our fathers sort of thought they were in conflict with each other. I think, no, the creation is made to support the gospel. Now, I don't know whether you've ever read Dante's Divine Comedy.

You know, it took me a long time to understand why they called it a comedy. It takes them through hell, then through purgatory, and then to paradise. But the reason it's called a comedy is because it turns out right.

And in the historic meaning of comedy, that's what it meant. I want to say, human history is going to turn out right. And how's it going to turn out? It's going to turn out with a wedding and an eternal relationship between the body of Christ and his people.

And we're going to be the fourth member of the Trinity, if you'll let me use bad language. Because the son, the second person of the Trinity, is going to have a bride. And we're going to be that.

And so the end is going to be family in the full sense of the term. There is a line in Dante's In the Paradiso, or about three lines. It's done very cryptically.

But if I understand it, it's one of the most significant insights I've ever gotten, most significant illustrations of what this thing is all about. You'll remember Virgil, which is human reason, takes him through hell. And then Beatrice comes on the scene.

And they go through purgatory and up into the Empyrean to God. And as they begin to get closer to God, as they zoom through space, moving toward God, because it's in spatial categories, old Virgil, I mean, Dante knows enough, he never takes his eyes off Beatrice. She is the one who's leading him to God.

So he never takes his eyes off until they get close enough to God that he's aware there's a glory about. And he takes his eyes away from her. And there's sort of a simultaneous, if I understand the passage, double experience.

One of them is instant guilt, because he's taken his eyes off the one who's brought him so far. And he thinks that's being unfaithful to Beatrice. And then the second experience is he hears a tinkling laughter.

And he turns to see the source of the laughter. And it's Beatrice laughing at him because of his guilt. Because the greatest fulfillment that any human being can ever know is to be a pointer beyond ourselves.

Our way is not in us. And he has had that incredible, she has had that incredible privilege of bringing a person close enough that the person has looked beyond her to God, and she has total fulfillment. Now, that is the greatest piece of literature that appeared out of the Middle Ages by common consent, as best I can gather, from all of the literary critics.

It's interesting how many professors teach that who don't believe in Christ. It'll be interesting when they meet him, won't they? And when they meet him, he'll say, how'd you miss it? You didn't need the Bible, you had Dante. You didn't even have to do it on your own time.

You were paid to read this. How'd you miss it? And there's not going to be anybody in that day that has an excuse. Now, let me say there are two things there I want to finish with.

My secretary, Helen Pelemire, heard me discuss this one day, and she came to me and said, what about me? I'm not married. I said, that's beautiful. God gave me an answer.

I hadn't thought about it before. Always be grateful. I looked at her and said, you don't have to fiddle with the symbol.

You can go straight to the reality. But you know, there are a lot of us that have the symbol that never get to the reality. So I want to know, if those of you that are married, do you know the reality of knowing him in that way? Because that's what he wants to be in my life.

And then, the more I know about him, the more grateful I am for Elsie. And the more grateful I am for the way he made us. So we're not complete in ourselves.

And we know that our fulfillment is beyond us. And it's in him. Now, you're going back into a pagan world.

And you're going to be dealing with people that don't understand the ways of Christ. I'd like to think that somewhere in every situation, there's a witness. That God's already put there of one kind or another.

And if you'll just talk long enough, there'll be a point of contact. There'll be the beginning of a bridge. And you can build that bridge and let some people know the eternal one.

That's what I wanted to share today. Now, if that's true, I just wonder how much more there is I've never seen. I hate to be as old as I am.

And I wish I had nothing to do but read the Bible. Because the more I see, the more beautiful it gets. The richer my own inner life gets.

As I get to see him more perfectly and more completely.

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