

How Far Would God Go? (from the *Guest Speakers* series)
Psalms 103: 1-12
Ken Arnold, Guest Speaker
Sunday, November 17, 2019

Ken Arnold:

Well, good morning. The first thing I want to offer you this morning is this little fashion tip, okay? So, this is, you can take this to heart: they say that stripes that run down make you seem slim. May I just say that's not true. [Crowd laughing.] It's just not true.

I have missed you desperately. Where have you been? Where have you been? Our pastor's going to be so happy that you showed up. I bring you greetings from Lifeline Fellowship. We are spreading the gospel throughout the southern part of Chesterfield County, and I'm very excited to be a part of that fellowship. Pray for us as we reach out to our community; it is challenging, and no more challenging than what we have here. Our goal is to be like you. You guys are so loving and so caring. I have a good friend who's going to join me here in just a moment. He's going to give his personal testimony, and one of the things I said to him about Bethany Place, and I say to everyone that I talk to you about Bethany Place, is if you show up, *you will be loved*. Isn't that true? Can I get an amen? [Crowd saying, *Amen!*]

Listen, pastor's been telling me that since I left this seat right here that there's not as many amins. Now, I don't want that to be the case today, alright? I want to hear from you. This is an interactive thing here. I'm going to preach and teach, and you're going to respond.

One of the first things I'm going to show you is on your bulletin. It says, "notes," and it says, "Romans 103:1-16." Romans doesn't have a hundred and three chapters. [Crowd laughing.] We're not using that Bible. Kat pointed that out to me. I brought mine but apparently nobody else did, so we are in *Psalms* 103 today. So, if you'll turn with me there.

Now one of the things that we're going to discover in Psalms is the message of the gospel is the same in the Old Testament as it is in the New. Isn't that exciting? Because a lot of people think that the God of the Old Testament is vengeful, and he's just full of wrath, and that the New Testament Jesus is just some hippie from Ashbury-Haight in San Francisco. You know, he's got the long floppy jeans; they're kind of worn out in the back. And he smells a little bit—the long hair; the whole deal like I was in the 70s. Can you imagine me in the 70s with hair down to here?

[inaudible] My good friend Cornelius Johnson to come forward, and we're going to get him a microphone. Cornelius is a gentleman that I met at work, and we got to talking. Imagine this—me talking to somebody about Jesus, okay. So, this man has very, very powerful witness, and I asked him to come here today along with his lovely family. Lydia, would you stand up please so that we can acknowledge you. [Crowd clapping.] Thank you, darling. Thank you. And the family—stand up; we have two grandchildren and two sons. [Crowd clapping.] We are just so excited to have you with us, but I'm especially excited for you to share your witness with these wonderful people I've got. So, lead on, brother.

Cornelius Johnson:

Praise God, man. Can you all hear me okay? [Crowd saying, *Amen!*]

Man, following behind him—you know, since I met him, I enjoyed listening to his stories, man. So, it's like, coming up here behind you,

Ken Arnold:

None of them are true. [Ken laughing]

Cornelius Johnson:

It's like I got to really be on my A game.

So, yeah, just to kind of piggyback off what he said about the love that— I'm kind of overwhelmed because you guys have shown so much love to me and my family since we came today. So, that's true. So, you passed the love test. So, congratulations on that. I think that's very important, especially in the church, right?

Ken Arnold:

Amen.

Cornelius Johnson:

So, I guess without further ado, man. I know I don't have much time. So much that I want to say, but I want to be obedient, and I want to get out the way so we can hear the Word.

So, you know, I grew up in foster care. You know, I was a foster child. I was in four different foster homes, and I lived in a group home for five years. So, now, by the time I got to that group home, I had a little attitude. I was angry. My mom was telling me every year I'm coming home for Christmas and it never happened. So, by the time I got—like I said, by the time I got to that group home, I was angry. I wasn't a *bad* child, but I had an attitude. You know, I was kind of rebellious. You know, and I think I kind of had a little bit of right to be that way.

So, you know, growing up I didn't have no confidence. When people used to ask me, *well, why do you believe in God?* I said, *well, you know, I just can feel him in my heart.* I didn't know what it was at the time, but I knew that it was something. And I was like six, and I can remember just feeling his presence, you know, in my life at a young age. But I didn't understand what God's plan was for me, you know. Again, growing up in those foster homes, and not all foster homes are bad, but unfortunately, I guess I got the bad ones, man. But, you know, all things work to the good, you know. I'm not going to say they were the worst of the worst, but I had some experiences in those foster homes that weren't great.

So, when I got to that group home—me and my brother. So, my brother and I, we went through foster care together. And I think that was very critical. It was a good thing because I wasn't by myself. Now, my brother had went to foster care three months prior, and I thank God that my mother, when she decided to put me in foster care, she made sure that me and my brother were together.

So, the day that I left home I honestly thought that I was going to spend the night and I was coming back home. That didn't happen. So, when I got to the home, I remember my case worker coming in the house and I'm running around and I'm all excited. I'm like man—one: I was going to be with my brother. So, I had not seen my brother for, like, three months, and me and my brother were really close. So, I was excited because I was going to see my brother, so that day—I remember it. I'm running around. Happy, smiling, and like, *okay, I'm going to see my brother*. But I'm thinking I'm coming back home, right. So, as we ride to the neighborhood and I see my brother running down the street, I'm smiling. I get out the car, and you know, I greet my brother with a hug, and I go inside the room, and, you know, the foster mom at that time, she wasn't that friendly. When, like, I came in the door, I remember her just pointing like, *there's your room over there*. I'm like, *dang. Okay, how are you doing today?* But when I got to the room, that's when it hit me. So, I put my put my suitcase down and I just started balling, man. Uncontrollably crying. And my brother came over to me. And my brother's only a year older than me, but that's my big brother. So, he came over to me, and he said, *you know what? It's going to be okay*. And he comforted me in that moment, and so, we were together the whole time. And I think that was very helpful to me because I understand in some situations, you know, siblings are separated, and they never see each other. So, I thought that was awesome that my brother and I were together for the majority of the time.

So, growing up, again, I had no confidence. You know, didn't know what God's plan was for me. So, to kind of fast-forward to 2008 I was going to see a pastor friend of mine's down in Orange County, down 64. And that year—2008—the theme at our church—we go to Mt. Gilead Full Gospel right down the street. And my bishop was preaching about the year of the open door. So, that year, my desire was to get closer to God because I believe that if you got God, you got everything else, right?

Ken Arnold:

Amen.

Cornelius Johnson:

So, that was my that was my heart's desire—to get close to him. So, as I was going down to Orangeburg to see this friend of mine, the Lord spoke these words to me, and what he spoke to me was: *are you ready to labor so others can reap?* I said, *what?* Are you ready to labor so others can reap? So, if you don't know me, I have a giving heart. I love people. I've always been like that even through all the abuse that I've been through. I didn't really get a bitter heart like some people. You go through physical abuse, you become mean. I wasn't like that, you know.

[inaudible] Oldest, the tall [inaudible]. And a girl, my baby sister. I'm the second oldest. The tallest, but the second oldest. So, I didn't become bitter, and I didn't become angry in a sense that I was mean. I was like, you know what, when I have my kids, I would never treat my kids like that. And the Lord blessed me to meet my wife, and we have six children and seven grandkids. Oomph. [Ken laughing]. Yeah, I know. I know.

But, I'm like, God, you kind of put me in the same situation that I grew up in. It was six of us, and I have six kids. And I never—my wife had three kids when I married her, so I married a package deal. I'll always love kids and I'm not sure where exactly I got that from. I think I got it from me not getting love from my father, you know. I didn't grow up with my dad. I grew up without my dad, but glory to God I met my dad when I was twenty-four, so I was able to spend eleven years with my father. And I was able, when he passed away in 2009—I remember having a conversation with my wife. I was like, I don't know how I'm going to really respond. But I'll say this: I didn't cry. I didn't get so overwhelmed because *I forgave my dad*, you know.

Ken Arnold:

Amen.

Cornelius Johnson:

At the age of thirteen, I remember having a conversation with my father. I said, *well, look, Dad. What has happened has happened. Let's just go forward from this point.* And I was able to forgive my dad. And I think that was very critical that, you know, I got hold of that Scripture that talked about honor thy mother and thy father.¹ When I got the revelation for that Scripture, I was able to forgive my dad and my mom. So, when he passed, yeah it was my dad, but, you know, I didn't have any unforgiveness toward him, so I was able to... not *enjoy* it. That doesn't sound right—*enjoy* a funeral. But I wasn't mad. I wasn't angry. I was happy that I didn't have that weight, that I had a relationship with my dad even though I didn't meet him until I was, like, twenty-four.

So, in 2008, like I said, when he spoke those words to me—*are you ready to labor so others can reap?*—is really what opened my eyes up to what God's plan was for me. And so, that's almost ten years ago now, eleven years ago when God spoke that to me, and it's almost like I've been on a spiritual cleansing ever since then. It's been a process, you know, because I still deal with some things from my past, but now that I have a better understanding that God has a plan for me, that he always had a plan for me, that he was always *with* me. You know, I used to joke with people and say, *you know what, when I hear stories of people's conversion and how they got brought to the Lord*, I'm like, *I didn't have a conversion like that.* I'm like, *am I really saved?* because mine's wasn't all dramatic. It's just that God was with me from the very beginning.

And it kind of reminds me of the story of Moses—when Moses was put in the basket, and he was given away, but his mother followed him to make sure he was alright. And I was like, God was

¹ Exodus 20:12 (HCSB): Honor your father and your mother so that you may have a long life in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”

like, *I was with you the whole time. And so, that's why you're able to endure what you've been through.*

Ken Arnold:

Amen.

Cornelius Johnson:

Again, I'm going to get out of the way, man. I just really appreciate this opportunity to come and fellowship with you all, man. And I tell you, the worship service was great—the presence of God. The love that you guys have given me and my family has been outstanding. I look forward to hearing the Word from Pastor Ken what God is going to say.

And so, I close with this—whatever your situation is, I don't care. Well, I *do* care... Whatever you've been through, it doesn't matter because God has a plan for you, and you just have to really give your whole situation to God and let him work it out. And I don't care—so I don't care, I guess [crowd laughing]—I don't care what you've been through. Because we've all been through things, but we have an awesome father—God—that, you know, he can work out any and everything because I'm bearing witness. Because I didn't think I'd have six kids. I didn't think I'd be a dad because I was afraid—like, *well how am I going to be a dad if I don't really know how.* You know what I mean? Because I didn't hear words like *you can do it, great job.* I think that's very critical coming from a father.

Ken Arnold:

Amen.

Cornelius Johnson:

Moms, you can say it too, but when you hear your father say, *great job, son! You can do it!* I felt like I would have had more confidence growing up. You know what I mean? So, with my sons, I always encourage them and say, *hey, you can do it.* Because I didn't hear those type of words, you know.

So, God bless you all. Thank you all, you know, for hearing part of my story. I really appreciate it. Hopefully I can come back and maybe, you know, share more at another time. God bless you.

Ken Arnold:

[crowd applauding]

Amen. God bless you. I love you, brother.

Cornelius Johnson:

Appreciate you.

Ken Arnold:

Thank you.

I have said it often. My day's about over. It's your turn. It's his turn to bring the gospel according to the word of God.

And that's what we're going to do today. We're going to look at who God is in the Old Testament, and we're going to look at a guy who was, listen, he wasn't a very good citizen. He was a conspirator to murder. He commanded a general to kill one of his rivals because he wanted his wife. He was an adulterer. We know him as King David. But even with all of those things—I want you to think about this for a second—even with all of those things against him, you know what God said about him? *A man after my own heart.*² Wouldn't you like for the Lord to say that about you? Isn't that amazing that you can fail that much—you may be like Cornelius and I; you may be from a broken home—but God can do powerful things through you.

And here's a promise that God made to him because he was a man after his own heart: he said, *the scepter will never fall from your hand. It will be eternal.* And we know that it is through Jesus Christ.

Let's read Psalms 103. We're going to do actually just the first twelve verses today. I figured if I did all that I had intended, that I talked to Kim about, we'd be here until probably next week. So, let's read this together: “My soul, praise Yahweh...” Now, I'm reading from the Holman Christian Standard Bible. We commonly refer to that at Southeastern as the hardcore southern Baptist Bible. So, I'm reading from that today, not the ESV.

“My soul, praise Yahweh,/ and all that is within me, praise His holy name./ My soul, praise the Lord,/ and do not forget [all] His benefits.// He forgives all of your sin./ He heals all of your diseases./ He redeems your life from the Pit;/ He crowns you with faithful love and compassion./ He satisfies you with goodness;/ your youth is renewed like the eagle.//The Lord executes acts of righteousness/ and justice for all of the oppressed./ He revealed His ways to Moses,/ His deeds to the people of Israel./ The Lord is compassionate and gracious,/ slow to anger and rich in faithful love./ He will not always accuse us/ or be angry forever./ He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve/ or repaid us according to our offenses.// For as high as the heavens are above the earth,/ so great is His faithful love/ toward those who fear Him./ As far as the east is from the west,/ so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

May God bless the public reading of his word. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, in these moments, moments that you ordained for us to be here, before the foundation of the world, you knew us, knew this moment would be here. God, within the sound

² Acts 13:22 (ESV): “And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’”

of my voice are your people. And within the sound of my voice are people who do not know you. God, today is the day of salvation. Today is the day that needs to be recognized as the day that changes lives. God, let your spirit deal with those who are outside your covenant relationship, that don't know you in the way that those of who know the blood-bought cross that was paid for our sin. That, Lord God, we will give you the praise and glory and the honor. In the name that is above all names, the name of Jesus, Amen.

This is a wonderful passage. It's an amazing passage. And many believe that David had just recovered from, perhaps, a great sickness when he wrote this. And, you know, today you may not be in the greatest place. You may not have the job that you wanted. Your health may not be great, but there's one thing that you can do that the psalmist teaches us through David, through the Holy Spirit. He says: "My soul, praise Yahweh..." Yahweh is the God of the Old Testament. He is the one God. And notice what he says in verse one. He says: "...and all that is within me..." Did you know that you're created to be an intelligent human being? That you're supposed to ask questions, and as you ask those questions, it is the God of the heavens who will answer those questions.

We have a thing called the Shemah in Judaism, and here's what it says. It says: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."³ So, let's talk about that for a quick second— "...with all of your heart..." So, what does that mean? That means your emotional center. Each and every one of us are created as human beings to be emotional. That's why we seek out love in our lives, and that love is never going to be fulfilled. You may find that woman, you may find that man that may help you get through life, but your love will never be complete until you come to Christ and make him the center of that relationship that you have.

He says: *Love me with all of your heart, with all of your soul...* In other words, with all of your being. Who are you? You see, you have to figure that out at some point as to who you are. And you'll never know who you are completely until you know the God of the universe, and the only way to know him is through Christ. So, you must know that God wants all of you—he wants your wants your emotional center; he wants all that is within you and that's what the psalmist says. He says: "...all that is within me, praise His holy name."

So, I want you to look at that word "holy" for a quick second, and I want you to know that that word is speaking of the reputation and the character of God. It's not speaking of you. God said in the Old Testament, *you be holy as I am holy.*⁴ Well, can you do that? Does the law allow for you to do that? No, the law was given as a tutor to show you how short you fall of the glory of God. The book of Romans says that we all—you, me—we all fall short of the glory of God, and because we fall short, we need a savior.⁵

³ Deuteronomy 6:5 (HCSB)

⁴ Leviticus 11:44 (HCSB): "For I am Yahweh your God, so you must consecrate yourselves and be holy because I am holy. You must not defile yourselves by any swarming creature that crawls on the ground."

⁵ Romans 3:23 (HCSB): "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

I listened to Bobby's testimony when he was baptized, and I was just blown away by that. He recognized *he needed a savior*. At one moment in my life, I recognized that I needed a savior. Have you done that today? Do you know that moment? Do you know that time? You may not know the day. I'm a little bit nuts when it comes to that kind of stuff. I have to record stuff. I have to know it in my mind. August the 9th Joaquín Andújar was pitching for the Oakland Athletics. Mike Witt was pitching for the California Angels. I love pitching and defense in baseball, so I remember those two things. I can tell you the starting lineups for both teams. I remember that. Do you? Because it is that moment, just like the moment on the cross at Calvary that will change all of history when Christ said: "It is finished!"⁶—that that moment that you might remember today will change your life for all of your history. You see, eternity is based on not your goodness. Oh man, if it was based on my goodness, just ask that one sitting right there [motions to his wife], I wouldn't get very far. I don't get very far with her, but it's not based on my goodness; it's based on *his*. And he lived a perfect life, and he gave his life on Calvary for us so that we can praise his holy name, so that we can see his attributes and his character and his love and the way that he reaches down to us.

Now, notice verse two. He says: "My soul, praise the Lord, and [do not] forget all His benefits." Did you know that this is a benefit of God? Check this out [breathes deeply]. Without him, I couldn't do that. Just a simple act of breathing! I want you to think about—do you ever think about, you sit there and go, *yeah, I'm going to breathe now*. You don't have to do that, do you? Because he built that within you—to breathe, to sustain life. He made that a part of you, a part of your anatomy, a part of your DNA, a part of the functions of your brain and your diaphragm. He made all that so that you didn't have to remember to breathe. That's one of the benefits.

But, let's look at what the psalmist says are the benefits. Notice he says in verse three—look at the first benefit: "He forgives all of your sin."

My brother Cornelius was talking about enjoying the funeral. Can I admit to you the most fun I've ever had in a pulpit was my dad's funeral? It was awesome. And the reason it was, I can see him, I can visualize him at the feet of Christ because his whole life was about one thing—it was about Jesus. Funerals are not a bad thing; it's just a separation period. Before my dad left, he said, *I'll see you again*. I said, *I hope it's not too soon*. He laughed, and a few hours later he would be in Glory.

"He forgives all of our sin." And let me just give you an example in the Old Testament of how he forgives our sin. Listen to Isaiah 43. He says this, he says: "It is I who sweep away your transgressions..." Now, notice this. Don't miss this is all throughout the Bible: "...for My own sake."⁷ For *his* sake. He sweeps away our sin. Why? Because he's a God of mercy, and he's a God of grace, and he wants to have fellowship with you, his creation. Stop worshipping things that are not of God. You know, I found myself for many, many years chasing dollars. My wife is a first-hand testimony; I'm not chasing dollars anymore. I started my own business if that tells you anything. Stop chasing stuff that is not eternal, folks. Stop. Let me tell you, I'm a lot happier. I'm a lot happier. I had a lot more money back then, but I'm a lot happier now.

⁶ John 19:30 (HCSB)

⁷ Isaiah 43:25 (HCSB)

Now, notice how he finishes this in Isaiah. He says: “It is I who sweep away your transgressions for my own sake and remember your sins no more.” Isn’t that powerful? Isn’t that powerful? It’s amazing—God’s word. Now, listen in Matthew, verse 18, chapter 28. It says: “Then Jesus came here to them and said, ‘All authority has been given in heaven and on Earth to me to forgive sin.’” All authority has been given to Christ, and he went to the cross for your sins. Some people have asked me, *well, you know, how do I know Jesus died for my sins?* It’s because Paul said in II Corinthians chapter 5, verse 21—he said, *Christ became sin for us*. He *became* sin. That doesn’t mean that his nature changed; it just means that he took the wrath of God upon himself. He took what you deserve. You deserve hell this morning. If you’re counting on your righteousness, if I’m counting on my righteousness to get me into Glory, I am going to be very, very short. And as a short guy, I know what short is, okay? But I’m going to fall very short because it is only through the blood of Christ that we can know a holy God. That’s it. There’s no other way. Jesus said, *no one comes to the father but by—finish it—me.*⁸ *No one.*

We are in an exclusive relationship. Listen, there are those who will say, *well, you know, Ken, that’s offensive*. Well, praise God, because here’s what the Bible says about the gospel: it is an offense! Stop worrying about offending people. I want each of you to walk out this door today and be offended because I want to be found faithful to present the gospel of Christ. That’s all I want. I want to be faithful.

And here’s what else Jesus said, *no one comes to me except the father—finish it—draws him.*⁹ You see, even the act of salvation is a gracious work of God. Can I tell you something? It ain’t about *you*. It is about *him*—his graciousness and his mercy and his blood on a cross and an empty tomb, because without that empty tomb, none of it would have mattered. And can I tell you the good news? He’s coming again. He’s coming for a pure pride.

I was sharing Wednesday night that as a dude it’s a little bit difficult for me to think of myself as a bride, okay? I am *really* in touch with myself as a male, okay? You know, if you’re offended by that, just be offended, alright? In these days you never know. But it’s really difficult for me to say, *well, hey, you know, I’m the bride of Christ*. It’s not as difficult for women, you know? You know what it is to be a bride. I think you guys have an advantage over us. I think that’s kind of a thing—that God wants to break down that barrier. He wants to say, *listen, there are places, Ken, that you need to be uncomfortable*. Can I admit I’m comfortable with that? Is that okay with you? I am, but yet I know that he is the one who is coming back for me and that I am betrothed to him.

Here’s what Paul said. He said, and I used this Wednesday night—by the way, if you’re not here on Wednesday night, shame on you, okay? Shame on you. [Ken laughing.]

Paul said we are a paragon. That’s an engagement ring. It’s a promise. We are a paragon, and we are sealed with the Holy Spirit when we come to Christ. You see, he’s coming back for a pure bride, and he forgives all my sins.

⁸ John 14:6: “Jesus told him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

⁹ John 6:44: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Now, notice in verse three as well: “He heals all [of] your diseases.” Well, what does that mean? Does that mean that I can just name it, claim it? *I’ve got cancer. Lord, I don’t want to have cancer.* No—that’s not what it means. Will Christ heal your diseases? What *are* your diseases? Your diseases are everything that affects your life. Those are part of the diseases, but the diseases spoken of here has to do with sin. Now, let me explain this. Look at verse four: “He redeems your life from the Pit.” You deserve hell. I deserve hell. But the good God, who this is written about, is going to redeem my life from the pit. Now, notice this: “He crowns you with faithful love...” That love—let me explain that love. That is a really cool Hebrew word. It’s the Hebrew word *hesed*. It’s used all throughout the Psalms especially and all throughout the Old Testament. And here’s what it means it means: it is a covenantal love. What is a covenantal love? It is a covenantal love that deals only through God Almighty himself. Now, who is responsible for that covenant? God Almighty, not you. *No one comes to the father except by me. No one comes to me unless the Father draws him.* Does that sound the same to you? It does to me. The gospel is the same in the Old and the New Testament. He crowns you with that faithful love.

Now, check this out. And you might want to make a note of this one— on compassion. This is amazing work: “He crowns you with faithful love and compassion.” It means simply this—it means tender mercy. It is the equivalent of the New Testament word for grace. Now, listen to this, in Lamentations: “Because of the Lord’s faithful love...”—same word *hesed*—“...we do not perish, for his mercies never end.” You’re going to love this part because this is something that I say most mornings: “Because his mercies are new every morning, great is thy faithfulness.”¹⁰ Are you faithful? You may be. Are you completely faithful? Possibly. But God, just within his character, can help be nothing but faithful. And, it is his faithfulness that we must depend on.

Now, notice also verse five: “He satisfies you with goodness.” Again, this refers directly to God Almighty, and it means simply this to you and I—it means that we are favored, that we are accepted, that we are valuable to him. Well how can we be favored? How can we be acceptable? How can we be valuable to God? Only through the blood of Christ.

“He satisfies you with goodness; your youth is renewed like the eagle.” The eagle is always seen in the Old Testament as powerful and fast. Now, I’m a little, short fat guy. I’m not very powerful and not very fast, okay? But I can get it done. But here’s what it’s talking about, it’s talking about endurance. Endurance. Does anybody know how long eagles can loft on the winds? It’s unknown. They can just keep going for hours and hours and hours, catching different winds. It’s talking about the endurance, that he is the one who gives us the endurance and that we will be like the young. In other words, when we come to faith in Christ that that faith can continue because of his mercy, because of his grace. That’s why it can continue.

Look at verse six with me: “The Lord executes acts of righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.” Now, if you notice in this verse, it’s the Lord himself who performs these acts. It doesn’t have anything to do with you. They have very distinct purposes. They have a very distinct obligation, and, by the way, an *obligator*—the Lord God himself. It means simply this:

¹⁰ Lamentations 3:22-23 (HCSB)

that he caresses you as a believer with a protective, kind, and compassionate love, as a husband would for his wife.

Look at verse seven with me: “He reveal[ed] His ways to Moses, His deeds to the people of Israel. The Lord is compassionate and gracious. He’s slow to anger and rich in faithful love.” Do you realize that this is how God revealed his attributes to Moses? He said, *I am a God of compassion. I am a God of mercy. I am slow to anger.* That’s how he described himself in Exodus 34:6. That is the God that we serve.

Now, here’s the exciting part. Check this out. Look at verse nine with me: “He will not always accuse us or be angry forever.” You know what the verse says? Judgement’s coming. There is a day appointed where you, or I, will be judged. And we won’t be judged on our righteousness. We’ll be judged according to God’s righteousness, which is perfect. You may say to yourself today, *well, I can’t possibly stand up to that, so I might as well eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow I die.* But, you can. You can, but only through the righteousness of Jesus. That is the only way.

Drop down with me to verse eleven: “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His faithful love toward those who fear Him.” What is the beginning of wisdom? Fear of the Lord—that’s the beginning of wisdom. And what this is speaking of here—this fear is reverential awe. Why does God care about you? I don’t bring anything to the table. I mean, I got nothing, man. But I get to communicate with him. I get to hear from him. I get to talk to him. He talks to me through his word. He speaks to me. He tells me how much he loves me. He tells me what he has done for me. He has shown me what he has done for me on the cross at Calvary.

“[A]s high as the heavens...” How high are the heavens? Unknown—they’re just infinite. If we just go straight up and just keep going, it’s just infinite. You can just keep going. Paul said that there are three heavens. He said he knew a man who went to the third heaven. He was speaking of his own self, but he didn’t want to brag about it. He said there were things that are there that are just indescribable, and he didn’t want to speak of it because he would have pride in himself. But as high as the heavens are, as high as they are so is the love of God. And—check this out—so far has he removed our transgressions from us. Oh, God! You’ve forgiven my sins, and you’ve removed them so far, I can never reach them again. How powerful is that? How joyous is that? How encouraging is that today to know that you can be forgiven? You can know the God of all creation.

Now, look at verse twelve: “As far as the east is from the west...” “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” I was talking to Kim this week and she said, *you know, if you start walking east and you just keep walking, you can just keep walking east. It’s infinite.* Now, that’s not so with walking north and south because at some point you’re going to go south, right? By the way, Kim, wherever you are, that was very perceptive.

But, here’s the thing, he has removed our transgressions from us. Here’s an encouragement for you. Listen to this: “For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life...” Listen, I don’t care how successful your life is right now. If you don’t have Christ, you are living an empty life. This is according to the Apostle Peter: “...your empty way of life inherited from

your fathers, but not with perishable things like gold or silver, but with the precious blood of Jesus.”¹¹ You see, that’s all that really matters, folks—“the precious blood of Jesus.”

Now, if you have your Bible with you, I do want you to turn to one verse with me—to Mark 15:36. You may be sitting here today, and you may be like me before I surrendered my life to Christ. You may be thinking, *listen, I hear you. I hear you, and I’m going to clean it up. I promise. Look, I’m going to get it all together, and then I’m going to come to Christ, okay? I’m going to wipe up all that, and then I’m going to come to Jesus.* You may be thinking, *I’ve done so much. He can’t forgive me. I can’t be forgiven. I mean, do you know me? Do you know what I’ve done?* Listen, I have hope for you, both of you, all of you.

Look at Mark chapter 15, verse 36. Christ is on the cross. They’ve just given him the sour wine. He has just called out: “It is finished!” And in verse 36: “Someone ran and filled a sponge of sour wine, fixed it on a reed, offered Him a drink and said, ‘Let’s see if Elijah comes to take Him down.’” Down to verse 39: “When the centurion, who was standing opposite of Jesus, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, ‘This man really was the Son of God.’” That testimony coming from a man who got paid to kill people in the most gruesome way imaginable. That’s what he got paid for. And, yet, as he stood there at the foot of that cross, he saw the Son of God die, and he realized at that moment that he was who he claimed to be.

I read an article this week that said, if being a Christian were a capital offense—which, by the way, folks, we may come to a day where it is—could you be convicted? I want to be convicted. I want to do nothing but share Christ. That young man’s testimony today about how God’s changed his life—he can, and he will change yours, but the first step to the cross must be a confession just as this man confessed, *he is the Son of God.*

Let’s pray together.

Father, we open this time to you, Lord God, as this band comes forward to lead us in our invitation. We just pray, heavenly Father, that your word has been spoken true, that it has been spoken clear, and that only you have received glory and honor from this time that we’ve spent together. Lord God, these folks have been patient and been kind. And I ask brother Ben to come forward, and today, Lord, there may be a decision that needs to be made. That decision may be just a reigniting of one’s faith, a rededication that says, *I just want to share Christ. There’s a lost and dying world out there, and I just want to share Jesus.*

There may be some of those, Lord, that within the sound of my voice that have never made a commitment to you. Lord, they know that if they walk out the door today, that it’s not guaranteed and that they may walk off into eternity without knowing you. And, God, that crushes me. May today be that day of decision, where they can know for sure that you died for them, that their sins are forgiven, and that they can spend eternity with you.

Father, there may even be someone here who needs to join this church. They need to get involved in the ministry of this church. They need to be a part of this body because together we are strong. And, Lord God, I just thank you for this ministry here and for my pastor. Lord God,

¹¹ 1 Peter 1:18-19 (HCSB)

I'm so grateful that today he's off to a foreign land, and he's gone to share the gospel. Thank you for his lovely family, Lord, and for the support that they give him. God bless him and those that are with him with a powerful ministry, that many will come to know you in a personal way as we close this service. Again, we just desire that you and your love be glorified. In the name above all names we ask it, the name of Jesus, Amen.