

Global Ministries Conference 2024
Making the Most of Every Opportunity
“Jesus, Stooping to our Need
Isaiah 52:13-15
Dr. Neil Stewart

Well, thank you, Brian. What a joy to be back again at Briarwood. It really does feel like I'm coming home and I can't think of another church I say that to when I preach somewhere else, I always feel a little bit weird being out of one's home pulpit and being somewhere else. But that's not the case here. This church means so very much to me and many of your pastors are some of my close personal friends. So thankful for Pastor Stallings and Pastor Wintersteen and Pastor Rob Looper and their wives as well have been great friends to my wife over the years, and I thank God for them.

And of course, Dr. Reeder has been not only a mentor to me, but a dear friend since I moved to Greensborough many years ago. And thank the Lord for his mercy in raising up Dr. Reeder. I feel like a pygmy standing on his shoulders this morning as I preach in his pulpit. I always remember Dr. Reeder as one of the great examples to me of a man who preached a felt Christ. The last thing you felt was nothing. His preaching the love of God, you felt your heart expand to bursting. His preaching on the wrath of God you'd feel the hair stand up on the back of your neck. It was palpable, the theology he preached, and I thank God for him and his memory. I don't think I ever stand in a pulpit to preach without thinking of Dr. Rieder and his remarkable turn of phrase and just power to bring God's Word home and it is a delight to be here this morning.

Well, if you would, please join with me in your copy of the Word of God to the book of Isaiah, the Gospel according to Isaiah, you might say, Isaiah 52:13. What are we looking at this last climactic servant song in his eyes, prophecy. I love your catchphrase for the whole conference! “Making the most of every opportunity.” And of course, that puts the stress on what you must do as a congregation. And so you might expect me to come and be talking about the things you can do for gospel ministry. But I always find that we do our work best not when we focus on what we must do, but when we focus upon what Christ has done. It's like singing. You sing from your throat, but you really support it from your gut, your diaphragm. And likewise, when you're living the Christian life, what we do and what we say, our work has to be supported and undergirded, and that's done by Christ and his work for us. And so my hope this week, as we look at this chapter together, the Lord will use these thoughts to encourage you, to inspire you to lay aside every weight and to run with endurance looking unto Jesus, the author and the finish of our faith.

So the Scriptures open before us. Let's pray. This morning, Father in Heaven, we thank you for your Word and the way it sets before us the glory of your son. He is the image of the invisible God. He's the firstborn above all, creation for by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things came into being through him and all things have their existence for him. And we pray this morning, Lord, we turn to your word that you will speak to us with that voice that wakes the dead, your grant, your servant, a clarity of mind and energy of soul and eloquence of tongue that I might proclaim the beauty, the glory, the majesty, the sufficiency of our Savior, Jesus Christ. In His name, we pray. Amen.

This is the Word of God. Please take heed how you hear it.

¹³ Behold, my servant shall act wisely;^[a]
he shall be high and lifted up,
and shall be exalted.

¹⁴ As many were astonished at you—
his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—

¹⁵ so shall he sprinkle^[b] many nations.
Kings shall shut their mouths because of him,
for that which has not been told them they see,
and that which they have not heard they understand.

Amen. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but the Word of God endures forever.

Well, in the West, in general and in America in particular, we face a number of challenges at the moment, don't we? You might say we have a crisis of leadership. The country is very polarized between the two main political candidates. We face also a crisis internationally with Russia invading Ukraine and their efforts to design space missiles to knock out our satellites China beating the war drums regarding Taiwan, the whole Israeli Hamas war. The leadership crisis and international crisis.

There's also a financial crisis, rising inflation, rising interest rates rising housing prices, the specter of a of an economic downturn, even a recession. The fortunes of doom tell us it's just around the next corner and we're worried. And then there's a religious crisis as we see the West in general, but America also in particular, turning away from the faith of her father's and increasingly embracing the title of no religious affiliation whatsoever. And we're discouraged. We see these crises looming large.

In many ways, there are remarkable parallels between Isaiah's Day and ours. As Isaiah was ministering in 740 B.C. and afterwards, the eighth century B.C., he too, in his land, there was a crisis of leadership. Uzziah died the year Isaiah began preaching the throne on the earth is empty.

In the year that Uzziah died, his son Jotham took over the reins. He only reigned for four years. And then after that, Ahaz came to the throne. He lasted longer, but he wasn't a good king. He led Israel off into idolatry and the bondage of false religion. So there was a leadership crisis internationally, too. Israel was up against it.

There was a resurgent Assyria up north, Assyria, which is like modern day Iraq and Iran all put together. They'd been divided for some years, but now they've united. They've put down the internal divisions and they are ready to move down in size traditions to take Israel and Egypt and modern-day Turkey and expand their empire. And people are frightened. Their hearts, as

Isaiah said in chapter seven, "they were shaking like the trees in the wind." So, there's a leadership crisis and there's an international crisis.

There's also a financial crisis with Israel coming to the end of 50 years of boom time prosperity. But several bad draughts brought this to an end, then Assyria's ascendancy was putting the kibosh on kind of local and international trade. There was a rising prices, inflation and people were frightened. They felt as we've begun to feel, that the next generation wouldn't be as well off as they were. And that's a hard pill to stomach.

And then on the religious front, things were foreboding as well. The rise of idolatry. But also, even the Orthodox in Israel had this nagging suspense that while they were putting on a great performance in church, God wasn't paying much attention. You might remember in Isaiah 58, Isaiah quotes God saying, You delight to seek my face and yet you also seek iniquity. So in assembly and iniquity and Isaiah and Israel are saying, why are we fasting Lord and you don't hear Israel are fasting? They're trying to get God's attention, but God doesn't seem to be responding well.

Are you like that this morning? You see, you're trying to get God's attention and he's not responding. And of course, Isaiah launches into his message in 740 B.C. and everyone wanted to know what's he going to have to say about Assyria in the North, the financial crisis, all these things, and he doesn't even mention them until chapter seven is the first time Assyria makes an appearance in Isaiah. He begins by saying

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth;
for the LORD has spoken:
"Children^a have I reared and brought up,
but they have rebelled against me.
³The ox knows its owner,
and the donkey its master's crib,
but Israel does not know,
my people do not understand."

There are people living with iniquity. They have forsaken the Lord. They have despised the Holy One of Israel. As Isaiah gets off to a flying start in his sermons.

And the problem is Israel have turned away from God. Their problem isn't international. The problem isn't financial. It's not even what they're doing in church on earth. And the rights and rituals and rubrics of their religion, their problem is vertical. There are estranged from God, and that's often the last place we look when things are going south in our lives. We often are thinking down here in earthly sense. And as I was calling off to look up and I says, I preach preachers, his book kind of falls into two unequal halves. The first 39 chapters are pretty bleak – he's promising judgment. Israel will be taken off into Assyria and exiled by Assyria and Babylon would be take it will come down and take Judah off into exile later and they'll be there 70 years. In the second half of the book through beginning in chapter 40, Isaiah's message changes to one

of comfort. He is speaking to the exiles that been in Babylon for a long time and they want to come home. But it's an awful long journey and they're worried about it. And he begins to speak of this great servant who will come. And he has these four servant songs. And the fourth one is when we're looking out this morning. But in these servant songs, he starts to tell of this great redeemer who's going to come - a great hero is going to burst on to the world scene. And yes, he's fixer exile, but even more he'll fix what's sinner's broken. He'll fix the hearts of God's people, and he'll bring them home not just to the promised land, but he'll bring them back home to God again. And this figure is mysterious. He's connected to Israel. He's called my servant, Israel. It's almost like those Russian dolls when you break them apart and there's a smaller doll inside the bigger doll and all the way down to the baby doll at the bottom. It's almost as if all of Israel are in this servant and he is in them almost a foretaste of Paul's doctrine of Union with Christ that he is them. And they are. He is. They and they are he as it were. He has identified with Israel as Israel. But he's also identified with God asking God. He comes to shepherd his flock like a shepherd, to gather the lambs in his arms, to carry them in his bosom, to gently lead those who are with young and then Isaiah tells us he's the one who measure the waters in the palm of his hand. He's stretched out the heavens with a span who enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure who weighed the mountains in scales on the hills in the measure. So he's just small as a baby, but is as big as God. Who is the servant? What's he going to do? He's going to come, Isaiah says, and he's going to bring judgment against God's enemies. But in a strange paradox, he's going to be judged as one of God's enemies. He comes to relieve suffering and to set the prisoner free. But he himself will experience enormous suffering as the Lord crushes him in the wine press of his fury. That's perhaps the biggest paradox of all. The Messiah comes to tread the wine press of God's fury, but He also comes to be trodden in it and squashed beneath it. Who could this man be?

And this morning in our text, Isaiah is beginning to begin to introduce you to Christ In the clearest of the four servant songs, and the father comes through Isaiah. It's a bit like when you meet new people. I'm know pastoring a new church down in Columbia and everywhere everybody wants to see pictures of my family. I have six kids. I have pictures but you know like I-photos is a huge, gargantuan storage for pictures and you have photographs of everything i.e. what you had for breakfast three years ago, a book you read. I mean, there's just all these pictures...your plane tickets, everything's there and it's a nightmare trying to find pictures of your children. Instead of having to scroll forever I set up a little mobile folder called *The Stewart Clan*, and I put there all the great photographs of the kids in one handy dandy spot.

And in a sense, God, in this passage, is wanting to show you pictures of his son. He wants you to see, Behold my servant, God says. And the pictures fall into three groups. God wants you to see Jesus. That's really the great need of the hour. He wants us to see Jesus. He wants to see His glory after he suffered it. He wants you to see his pain he suffered and he wants to just see what he achieved through his sufferings. Let's look at those together.

First of all, God wants you to behold his son. I want you to see His glory after he suffered. And you'll see that there in verse 13. Notice the verbs of future. Behold, my servant shall act wisely. The word wisely in Hebrew, this particular word, means someone who's shrewd, who knows the right thing to do, the best thing at the best time, and the best way to achieve the best result. Here's a man who's wise, and my servant will have that kind of wisdom, God says, as he describes here, the limitless righteousness and decency and godliness of his son.

But he says he shall be high and lifted up and shall be exalted. Well, if you've heard R.C. Sproul's lectures on Isaiah six. You'll remember Dr. Spruill says, when the Hebrews want to put their emphasis, their emphasis in on a thing, they'll often repeat it once or twice, or even three times. And in the Hebrew language, the three fold repetition of a thing is the highest emphasis a Jew can put on something.

So it's holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come. And here, do you notice there's a threefold exaltation. This servant of mine, God says, shall be high and lifted up and shall be literally greatly exalted. Now those three words high, lifted up and exalted, are only ever used in Isaiah to describe the exaltation of God - His glory.

In a moment, Isaiah will take you and me down to the depths of hell. He'll show you Messiah on the cross last and as darkness is crushed being made into sin in the darkness of Golgotha and crushed by the wrath of God. But before we go there, He wants to take you up to the glory Christ will have after His resurrection. This human servant of God who's divine as well, shall be wise, and He shall be high and lifted up and great exalted. Now, those words yourself, you know your book of Isaiah, you'll recognize them. Isaiah 6:1-7, it was the year the King Isaiah died.

6 In the year that ^sKing Uzziah died I ^tsaw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train¹ of his robe filled the temple. **2** Above him stood the seraphim. Each had ^usix wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. **3** And one called to another and said:

^u“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;

^vthe whole earth is full of his glory!”²

4 And ^wthe foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and ^xthe house was filled with smoke. **5** And I said: “Woe is me! ^yFor I am lost; ^zfor I am a man of unclean lips,

and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the ^aKing, the LORD of hosts!"

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. **7** And he ^btouched my mouth and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

As you might say, when Paul wants to say, there is none righteous, No, not one. Where does he go?

"None is righteous, no, not one;

11 no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;
no one does good,
not even one."

13 "Their throat is an open grave;
they use their tongues to deceive."

"The venom of asps is under their lips."

14 "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."

15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood;

16 in their paths are ruin and misery,

17 and the way of peace they have not known."

18 "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Here he sees the glory. He'd been quite happy before, quite content to be in the holy place of the temple. But now he sees God and he sees himself anew. He realized that he's a sinner and he says, Lord, woe is me. I am undone. I'm disintegrating at a sub cellular level. I can't live in the sight of God. And that's one of the great signs that we know God --when we see God right, we begin to see ourselves right. Has that happened to you? Have you ever come to see yourself as a sinner because you've seen God and His Holiness? And then in Isaiah 57 it says for thus says the one who is high and lifted up same words, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy. I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him, who of a humble and contrite heart. When Isaiah 53 God says, Behold my servant shall act wisely, he shall be high and lifted up and shall be greatly exalted --- threefold exaltation, high, highest Christ, exaltation so high you cannot just you can't get over it. You can't even get to it at all!

God exists on a completely different plain from people like you and me. You often think you begin with like microbes, and then you go through mollusks and mice, and eventually you get to mammals and man, and you keep on going for a very long time. And you get to Angels and the Seraphim and the cherubim

and the archangels, and then you think of a keep on going I'll get to God. You know, when you get to the archangel there's a complete and absolute stop, you reach the end of created existence and then a gulf begins, a gulf that is infinite and eternal and unchangeable, that even if you were to fly across that gulf with the wings of the dawn at 186,000 miles a second, the speed of light -- and you flew forever and a day, the gap wouldn't close an inch. God exists on a completely different level. He's high, lifted up and greatly exalted. And as Isaiah says, that's exactly where Jesus will go because of his life of wisdom as he's raised from the dead and the sense he goes to a place that only God could possibly occupy. And Isaiah begins, they're out of chronological order. Because if you begin with Christ the man, you'll always underestimate him. You've got to begin with Christ – where John began -- in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and God was the word. And all things came into being through him. And apart from him, nothing has come into being that has come into being. He is the beginning of everything that ever had a beginning. You begin there in the glory if you're ever to make sense of Golgotha, who he was and where he went and why he went there to rescue you and me from our sins. That's the first thing. Then I want you to see him. God says after he suffered his glory.

Secondly, Isaiah says, I want you to see him as he suffers. That's the next verse, as many were astonished at you. Israel is the idea. What's he saying? Well, the word astonished in Hebrew, is also translated appalled as used to describe how you feel when you see something horrific. Like maybe you saw some of the photographs of October 7th in Israel and a woman is lying dead at a kibbutz music festival having been horribly abused. And we're seeing a picture of another bombing carried by a Muslim terrorist in Europe. And the bomb went off in an airport and there's a picture of a two year old child sitting alive, weeping on the body of its mother. And you look at that and you feel horrified. It takes your breath away. The pictures from the concentration camps that we've seen, all those pictures and the Hebrew word is appalled or astonished. It's actually used in the prophetic literature to describe how the pagan nations felt in their gut as they watched Israel being led off under God judgment to exile.

The woman stripped naked -- big hooks through their upper lip and being dragged off with their hands tied behind their back. And the nations were astonished. They were appalled. And now get Isaiah's sense here, as many were astonished at you Israel as many as were astonished at you. Israel, his appearance was so marred beyond human semblance and his form beyond that of mankind. What he's saying here is that in exactly the same way as Israel, under the judgment of God, looked appalling. So when they see Christ under the judgment of God, he will look similarly appalling. And the Hebrew is very graphic. Literally, it says his appearance was a disfigurement from the human and his form from that of the sons of Adam.

What Isaiah is saying is look at Christ in glory and you see someone who was the exact size and shape of God himself. Paul says he was in the form of God. The Greek word *morphé* is the word from which we get morphology. If you're a medical student here this morning, you know, morphology is the study of the size and shape of things. And the Greek word *morphé*, literally means the size and shape. A thing must have to be that thing. So the *morphé*, of a circle, it's not enough to be round - ovals are kind of round. My tummy is rounder than my wife would like after Christmas. I'm still trying to lose 20 pounds and you can be round. You can be a blob that doesn't make you a circle. To be a circle, you've got to be a two dimensional spherical shape whose radius is the same all the way round at the circumference. That's the *morphé*, of a circle. And Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that Christ is, the *morphé*, of God. He's the exact size and shape that God is. So see him in glory. You see one who looks just like God, but see him on the

cross after he became flesh and after he became sin and after he became crushed, he barely even looked human anymore.

The terrible story from Vietnam where the East Green Berets are going through a Vietnamese village that had been napalmed. And on the way into the village, they found three life forms by the path whimpering, and they were literally burned beyond recognition so badly they weren't even sure whether they were human beings or animals. On the cross Isaiah says the Son of God, the one Isaiah saw in Isaiah six, the one about whom the Seraphim said, Holy, holy, Holy, wasn't that he had hidden his divine glory. His humanity too was crushed and defaced, and the pressure of the fury of his father. And that's one of the dangers of watching movies about Jesus, movies about Jesus will only show you his body that only show you his physical pain. Donald MacLeod says but remember the deepest stroke that touched him was the one that Justice gave. Ultimately, it says on the cross, Christ received death in its most aggravated form, not merely because the cross involved indescribable physical pain, but because in his case it was the occasion, the instrument and the symbol of the curse of God against sin. Due to sin, he experienced death unmitigated and unqualified - death with the sting, a death without light, comfort or encouragement. The long, long journey from Caesarea Philippi to Calvary was a journey into a black hole involving not only physical and emotional pain, but a spiritual desertion beyond imagining in his agony, he would cry out, but he would not be heard. He would lose all sense of his divine sonship. He would lose all sense of his father's love into that tiny space his body outside Jerusalem and into that fraction of time. The ninth hour on Good Friday, God gathered the sin of the world and there. And then in the flash of his own son, he condemned it. And on that cross, at its darkest point, the son knew himself only as sin. And his father only as its avenger. You hear MacLeod saying on the cross, Christ no longer saw himself a son. He only saw himself as sin He didn't just bear it - He became, at least as Luther said, on the cross Christ became the greatest sinner the world has ever seen as 10 billion lifetimes of human wickedness coalesced into him, and he became it in the presence of God, and he was no longer able to cry out My father, my father until it was finished. But he cried out instead. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And that's sin. That's what sin is. That's what sin does. We often underestimate sin -- like ourselves -- we look especially, men, you know, we pull our tummy, then we stand in the mirror. I'm looking pretty good, you know. Haven't quite got a six pack, but it's not too far off. You know, it's amazing what you can do when you suck it all in, man. And then you'll see a photograph that your wife takes from behind at the beach and you think, Oh No! That's reality, right? And likewise, we often think our sin, where we justify it's really somebody else's fault. It was my wife who made me angry, or the children. It's not really me. The politician says, that's not who I am. As he stands at the front and talks about his affair, that's not who I am. Well, who are you then? No, that is who you are. It's like golf. We often think that our one shot in a thousand that goes down the middle of the fairway is *the real me*. All the slices and hooks and shanks - that's somebody else. Example - Lee Trevino was one of the great golfers who was around when I played golf. He was playing at a pro-am with these rich oil barons from Texas and their teams. One of them was Shanking in the ball left and right or chunking it right and hooking it left. And it was a mess and the man was cursing it. Finally on the seventh hole the man hauls off and throws his golf clubs into the trees and just starts to unleash profanity. Lee Trevino says to him, You know, sir, you are not nearly good enough at this game to be that angry. What to put down. But that's us. Our sin is who we are, and we don't ever get a true picture of it until we go to the cross and see what your sin and your sin and your sin

and your sin and you all in the balcony, your sin and me in the pulpit, what our sin did to Jesus, God's Son. That's where we estimate its guilt correctly.

So where did he go after he suffered? Picture number one

What he became as he suffered. Picture number two.

And then thirdly, what he achieved through his suffering.

We'll pick up the speed here a little bit but look at the last verse literally in so doing, right to the marring of his human visage, the crushing of his human nature and the wine press of the wrath of God. In so doing, shall you sprinkle many nations? He'll sprinkle dirty man clean. That's what he's going to achieve. Sprinkle is that is the word used of the priest dipping the hyssop branch into the blood of the lamb and the day of atonement and sprinkling it on the altar. Cleansing is the word you used when David was thinking about his sin. His soul black as night after taking Bathsheba, murdering his faithful servant, her husband, Uriah, and David goes to God and says, Lord, against you, Do you only have a sin and done what is evil in your sight? Sprinkle me with hyssop, purify me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and make me whiter than the snow.

And what Christ did upon the cross. Isaiah says, won't just clean David. It'll clean the nations like Americans and even Irishmen will be cleansed. The goyim, the untouchable ones, will feel the touch of Christ's blood like the lepers hand upon his head, and it will cleanse us and qualify us. Colossians 1 that we give thanks to the father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light we don't qualify ourselves. How could we? All we bring to the table are more and more reasons for disqualification. But as the father who qualifies you, he has qualified us by himself for himself to share in the inheritance of the saint's light. And the first step of that is coming to Christ as a sinner and saying, Lord, wash me or I die. Sprinkle me, Lord Jesus, and we bring nothing but sin and He brings everything else to cleanse us. All that he has done is more than enough to cleanse away all of the sins that we have committed. In so doing, he will sprinkle dirty nations clean and then also he will shut big man up. And so doing shall he sprinkle many nations king shall shut their minds because of him for that which has not been told them they see and that which have not heard they understand right? Kings right the bit like our politicians their blue heart they never know when to shut up. It's like their motto is everything has been said but not everyone has said it. And this is my moment to shine. That's like a big presbytery meeting. And they just stand for it. And they always want to be the man of the last word. And they just never, ever shut up.

There's a wonderful story back from the 1750s, Gilbert Tennent is one of the great preachers for the second Great Awakening and Samuel DAVIES, who Lloyd-Jones said was the greatest preacher that America ever produced. They went across to England for a preaching tour, and it was very successful. And King George II invited Gilbert Tenant to come and preach at the King's Chapel in Westminster. While he's preaching, he notices the King is talking up in the balcony. And that's pretty rude even for a king. And Tennant looks at him and glares at him, but the king just glares back, and it doesn't make any difference. And this goes on back and forth a second time. A third time. But the King keeps on talking loudly. Gilbert Tennent says he stops and pauses and says -- **when the lion roars, the beasts of the field tremble before him. When King Jesus speaks, the petty princes of the earth will be silent before him.** Now in those days you wouldn't dare the King to take your head for a good reason, a bad reason or any

reason - even the five federally prohibited reasons. And so everyone looked at the King to see what would he do. And the King just put his head down and shut up. And the sermon went on.

Well, that's exactly what's going to happen. Isaiah says when these kings here are the message of the Gospel, Kings shall shut their mouths because of him. Why? For that which has not been told them they see and that which they have not heard, they understand that they're going to hear this message that the King of Heaven laid aside his glory without ceasing to be what he'd always been. He became something he had never been before. He exchanged the form, the outward form of God. He didn't lose that, and he emptied himself not by losing his glory, but by taking the form of a bond servant. He emptied himself not by subtraction, but by addition. He didn't cease to be God, but he added the form of a bond servant, a lowest slave, and came to be obedient to the point of death.

And we're going to hear about this great savior. How it's one step down after another from eternity into time, into the Virgin's womb. A little zygote tumbling, dying, the fallopian tube of the virgin. He's the maker of all things, but he becomes a creature. And then he's born not in a sterile bougee hospital ward, but he's born into Bethlehem's stable with the awkward stench of the urine of cows and donkeys to greet them. And from there you've got to flee to his life to Egypt. And then he's got to go up and live in obscurity for 30 years in Nazareth as a carpenter son. And then he'll come to his own, but his own will not receive him. He'll be rejected. And you keep on stepping down till he gets to the Via Dolorosa, and he'll be abandoned by his people and be walking outside Jerusalem to the dirty place where the wicked damned are crucified and they'll strip him naked. There was no loincloth, and they'll hang him on a cross, kneeling him there for all to see. And women will walk by and warn their children. That's what happens, son, if you live a wicked life and become a wicked man like him, crucified between two thieves as if they're chief and ruler and representative. And kings will hear that and they'll see the message about him being taken down further and further until there's no more dying left to go.

And then, beyond the bottom of finite misery, his father will crush him, and they'll ask, Why would he do that? And Paul will tell them because he loved me and gave himself up for me. That's incredible. I can believe in a Jesus who loves all the church together, but that's not the way Jesus loved and that's not the way Jesus suffered.

He didn't just die for you all. He did, of course, But he died for me. And he gave himself up for you and all the individuality of your particularity. He loved you, Christian, and he would have given himself for you if you were the only sinner in all the world needing saving. And he did that. Isaiah says, the great men of this world will hang their head in grateful adoration, and I'll shut their mouths because they finally understand the way to heaven. It's not what we do, it's what he has done.

And I wonder this morning as I bring the sermon to a close. Do you all know that? Have you trusted Jesus? Are you leaning upon him? Are you looking to Him? Have you come as a helpless sinner to say, Lord, I can bring nothing to the table but sin and you bring everything and I need you to save me.

For you are the way and apart from you the best I can be is lost. You are the truth and apart from you the best I can be is deceived. You are life and apart from you the best I can be is dead – dead now and dead forever.

But if I have you, Lord Jesus, the worst I can be is saved! If I lose everything -- my family, my friends, my business, all my money, all the support matrices of life; if I lose my health with cancer or Alzheimer's

disease and I'm left a blithering idiot in some nursing home and some godforsaken part of the world. If I have nothing else but you, the worst I can be is saved.

I think about that if you're here this morning and you don't yet share our faith... Without Christ, the best you can be is lost. With Christ the worst you can be saved. Which eternity would you rather have? Jesus says to you, come to me, your sins are red like scarlet, but they will be as white as snow. They're red as crimson but they'll be as wool if you're willing and obedient and come and confess them at the feet of Jesus, your sins are washed away now and forever. Praise his name!

Father, we thank you for your Word. The word of the cross. It's our mission. It's our message. It's our ministry. We have no other word to give and no other Christ to preach.

We're not just about doing a social gospel. As if the worst a person could get in this world is to receive the injustice of man or the poverty of the world. We preach the real gospel, the blood gospel, because the real threat is not human injustice but divine justice, we thank you. A gospel. It's big enough and good enough to save us from God and to save us by God and to save us for God.

We pray as this gospel is preached this week, it'll work in the hearts of those who believe, calling many out of darkness into your marvelous light. In Jesus' name, Amen.