

I'm very anxious to get into this, but I know that the mornings that you spend with the Lord are going to take care of themselves, and they will press us along in our experience of the Lord this week. And so tonight, I'm going to kind of interrupt what I planned on doing, and I'm going to speak on something that I feel like I should. It just so happens that it's right here where I was going to start, except I was going to skip this passage and go to the next one, but I keep on not being able to do that. I just have the feeling that I have to do this, and I'm assuming on the basis of that that there's a need out there that has to be met.

Alright, I'm going to just tell you a story tonight. That's all I'm going to do. Then we're going to have an altar call. If you think I give very many altar calls, I think you ought to ask the brothers and sisters who know me very well how often they've seen me give an altar call. Tom, you've been about...you hold the record probably...how many altar calls have you seen me give?

If you are in *The Life of Christ in Stereo* (Johnston M. Cheney), I'm on page 72. If you are in your own book of the Bible, try Matthew 14:1-13. And this is where the conference begins. Now, I want you to take your finger and stick there on page 72, would you? And then I want you to flip back to 65. Lance, come read this for me, would you? I'd like for you to read, starting right here. I'll tell you what, just read this passage right here, okay? And then we'll get over here. I'll handle that if you do this. Save me a little bit.

Audience: (Matthew 11 and Luke 7) And now the disciples of John brought him word in prison of all these works of the Messiah. Then John, summoning a certain two of his disciples, sent them to Jesus, saying, "Are you to have One who is coming or are we to look for another?" So, the men, when they had come to Him, said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, 'Are You that one who is coming, or are we to look for another?'" When that came out, He healed many from their diseases, afflictions, and evil spirits. And to many who were blind, He granted sight. So, Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John the things you have seen and heard. The blind are receiving sight, the crippled are walking, the lepers are being cleansed, and the deaf are hearing. The dead are being raised, and the lowly are being called the glad news. And blessed is he who does not stumble because of Me." Then, when John's messengers had left, he began to address the multitude concerning John.

Let's turn over now to page 72. Let me look at this. Now, at that time, King Herod heard of all the things being done by Jesus and for His name, for His name was becoming famous. And Herod was perplexed and said, "John, whom I beheaded, is this the one of whom I am hearing such things?" For by some, it was being said that John the Baptizer had been raised from the dead, others saying that Elijah had appeared, and others also that a prophet like the old prophets had arisen. But on hearing it, Herod said to his servants, "This is John the Baptist whom I beheaded, who has risen from the dead. And we'll take that passage as our passage.

If you take these two together, they tell the story of John in prison, his doubting, and the word that comes to the Lord Jesus: John is, in fact, dead. I'm going to tell you this story, and I'm going to tell it from the viewpoint of an indwelling God inside Jesus Christ. We will hear it from

that view. We will listen to the way this happened from the viewpoint of other realms and from the viewpoint of a Father who indwells the Son. We're going to see it through the eyes of Jesus Christ, who has a long history on earth, who knows all the past human history, and has a very ancient history with God the Father. I want to pray.

Father, you know, at some time or other, every one of us does what John the Baptist did. And every one of us has to face a God we do not understand. Yesterday, some of us needed some reconciliation with You, and tomorrow, others of us will, but tonight, there are those who need that reconciliation right now. I simply ask You to be who You are in all our hearts and speak and reveal and heal. Amen.

I want you to see a God in eternity past. A verse instantly comes to mind, and that verse says, "My ways are not your ways. My thoughts are not your thoughts." My ways are not your ways. My thoughts are not your thoughts. He is keenly aware that He is God and those who are to come are not. He is aware of a barrier that will be in existence between two realms, and a gap that exists between God, the highest life form, and man, the third-highest life form.

The distance between One who can see and visit the end and at the same moment visit the beginning and at will, can break in anywhere He chooses, hard for me to grasp, but that right now, even though this is the now moment of time where the clock is ticking, if God so chooses, He can step out of this element of time and return to the Dead Sea, the Red Sea, and see again His work in parting the Red Sea. He is free of boundaries, chains, and limitations. He can see years from now, and He can see centuries from now. He can see things in their completion. He can see things that, at this moment, utterly mystify both you and me.

I don't know why I'm going to tell this story because I don't think I ever have; if I have, you'll forgive me. It's very personal. When I was 3 years old, I got pneumonia from scarlet fever, and I was dying. You know, I never was strong. Even at three, I was puny. The doctor told my mother and daddy I was dying. Now, my folks were not all that Christian. Dad spent the whole day in Houston trying to find a hospital that would take a child with scarlet fever, and he couldn't. Finally found some Catholic nuns who would. He came home, got just this side of Conroe, and stopped his car. The roads weren't paved in those days, and got out beside the car in the sand, and told the Lord, "If You let me live, I'd give my life to God." And He also said, "I'll quit drinking and smoking. He had already quit bootlegging by that time. At home, my mother, who had also caught scarlet fever but was well now, was still weak, got down beside my bed and told the Lord that if He let me live, they'd give me to the Lord, she would give me to the Lord.

Sometimes I have resented that when I have been in so much pain, and I just thought you should have been a stillborn, and you ought to have died at the latest at three, and now your mom and daddy got in here and got everything messed up, and they are still alive. I don't understand the sovereign ways of God. I really don't. And back there in eternity, He knew that you and I would be captured in time, locked into it, with no knowledge of tomorrow, and very little correct interpretation of yesterday, and totally no understanding of today. And He knew that he would be

making decisions based on things that might not find their effect for hundreds of years. And that you and I are often caught on a wave of His sovereign dealings, which began hundreds of years ago when He dealt with someone we don't even know, whose life was marked in ways that we will never hear the story thereof, but which affected our birth and childhood and our adulthood and our salvation.

Probably the only reason in the world I'm a Christian is because this illiterate French Cajun fell in love with a little Protestant girl. She said, "I'm not going to marry you." And he said, "I'm in love with you. Marry me." She said, "No, you're not a Baptist and you're not a Christian. I'm not going to marry you." So, he went out and became a Baptist, and he became a Christian. He really did. And that put into effect things that had to do with my life long after she was dead. She didn't know she'd have a grandson who was a Baptist preacher. She died in her mid-20s. I'm grateful that she was bullheaded about this, because I don't know where that man would have ended up, and I don't know what I'd be today, but I'm grateful for that incident that occurred long before I was born.

Good things and evil things abound in realms seen and realms unseen, of which we know nothing, that are utterly inexplicable and will remain that way. And it will remain that way throughout all your life.

I see a God who, before He creates, understands more clearly than I do everything I've just said and has recognized the fact that if He creates a creature called man, there's going to be forever a gap between His ways and our capacity to understand. He knows He's about to create a temporal being locked in time, captured in space, confined to the visible, having to do business with a God he cannot see, a God he cannot hear, and a God who has chosen to not even make himself evident in this universe.

Now I want you to listen to me. There is no evidence for the existence of God. Now I'm a Christian saying this. There's no evidence for the existence of God. Don't care what you quote, all those books you read about the verification of God's creation, you just consider it: there is no evidence for the existence of God. Now, let's just say He does exist for a minute. Isn't that an incredible thing for Him to do, to create a universe and walk off from it, with absolutely no trace of whether He does or does not exist. It's like He left His calling card and said, "This is the way it's going to be."

And I'm fascinated with you Pentecostals. You meet God under every bush and in every tree and every leaf that blows. God told me today; I saw God say this. I had a vision of God that was revealed to me, and the Lord spoke to me as I drove along. And then the Lord said to me, and boy, you know, you just look around, and you've got God everywhere. He's just jumping out of everywhere. He is just all around you. And you know something, the Lord has probably spoken to me no more than three or four times in my whole life. And you got an inside track to this God of yours. He's just telling you five or ten times a day what to do. I worry about your God. Your God is a lot more evident than mine is. I sometimes wonder if you may be just following your emotions

or the inclinations of your personal disposition. Is it okay if I doubt a little bit? Because the God who deliberately withdrew all evidence of His existence. He left his calling guard and said, "That's the way it's going to be, and that's the relationship you're going to have with Me. You're going to know Me by faith, or you'll know Me not at all. And I mean not by faith that he exists, but I mean by faith in Him and whatever He chooses to do. You're going to know Him by faith. Some of you know too many gods. I mean a God who's just popping up all over the place.

Your God is rather shy. He does not make Himself evident. I've often asked myself why, and it's really clear to me. You want to hear the Edwardian theory? What if He had a habit of manifesting Himself every once in a while, turning on the TV set tomorrow morning? The news is on. The TV set goes blank. You hear a voice that says, "And now a word from God." All the TV sets on Earth turn on. All the radios turn on. This is God. Well, He would manifest Himself, right, miraculously, and everybody would hear Him. And how many people would grumble and gripe at what? No matter what He said, how many would grumble and gripe? How many would? Almost everybody. And He would be cussed and sworn at and reviled for what He is. He would be brought down so low by manifestations. Listen, He's already cussed and reviled enough when there's not a scrap of evidence for His existence. And that's the way He chose to relate to you because He knew the enormous gap between you and Him.

I often see this God who's about to indwell Jesus Christ. I see this God in Spirit walking the streets of Pharaoh's city, going down each road and hearing the soft murmurs and the quiet tears of His people enslaved. And He hears the sounds of their prayers to the harmony of rustling chains, and He walks away, and He doesn't answer a single prayer. And they live and they weep, and they cry out, and they suffer and they look to heaven, and it is turned to brass and they die. And their children grow up, and they are fettered with the same worn chains. And He walks down those same smelly, filthy streets, and the children are now grown and old, and they are praying prayers of deliverance. God delivered us from Pharaoh. God deliver us from this man who knows not Joseph. God takes us back to our homeland. And He hears and He walks away, and He does not answer, and He leaves them to live and to die without understanding. Do you think that doesn't affect Him? I wonder sometimes when He walked away if He didn't regret for His own sake having created us just from the agony He must have known and the choice of neglect He made based on His knowledge of what had to be and what would be.

He left them there, and they grew old and died, and their prayers were never answered, and their children grew and fell down beside those same beds, cots, mats, and pallets with chains on their wrists and cried out to God, and they were not answered. And God walked past them, and for almost four hundred years, God was not known nor heard from by His children who cried out to Him night and day.

And you know what the wonder is? That there were still believers to be praying down in Egypt's foul land. That after 400 years, nearly 12 generations of prayers prayed night and day that were never heard, and somebody was still believing in this God of Abraham. 400 years without

one single prayer answered, and the heart of God broke as He wished to explain. A mother looks up into the face of God by faith and cries out, "Why, oh God, if you are there, do you not answer? My beautiful children will be taken tomorrow away from this house, to build bricks beside the Nile River, for all the rest of their life. My God, why?"

And in His immutable wisdom, free of time and free of space, He wisely knows not to explain. And Israel is confronted with one simple fact. They've got a God they don't understand, and you follow the same God, and you don't understand Him. I have a word to say to you. Those of you who see God out of every bush, and you can just tell us every day where He is and what He's doing and why He's doing it. I think it's just marvelous. I love you for it. I envy you. I wish I could swap my God for your God. My God won't tell me anything. Every once in a while, get a little bitty peak, and that's about it. And the rest of it is by faith. Not about what He's doing, not His ways, not His here and now dealings. No, sir, I do not understand my God.

Those of you who have all the verses, and you can tell us everything about God, and you got Him in an Aristotelian outline, and you know this God, I tell you what God is doing. This is what God is doing. God is moving today. God is moving, and my wife and I are getting in the car, and we're moving to such and such, and we know God's going to be faithful, and we're going to borrow \$500,000, and we're going to start this hospital retreat ground, ranch, farm, boat, because God has told us to.

You're going around the corner one of these days, and you know what you're going to face? You're going to meet a God who will not live up to your expectations. I'm going to repeat that. Every brother and sister whom I'm looking at right now, you've got a rendezvous. You have a rendezvous with a God who does not match your expectations of what God is. You're going to meet a God who does not live up to your expectations. Do you understand that? One of these days, you're going to meet a God who's not going to be what you think God is. One of these days, it's coming, if it has not already come, you're going to face a God who did not live up to your expectations. And on that day, the angels are going to find out whether or not you're a Christian.

Do you know that? You know what a Christian is? It's really simple. He's a believer. You know what a believer is? He's somebody who believes. I watched a lot of people meet the God that they did not understand and the God that was not living up to their expectations, and they just simply said, "God, let me down. I'm really glad God let you down because it's high time you find out whether or not you're following Him because you think He's Santa Claus or because you follow Him because He's God. And no man has ever understood His ways nor known His mind, and you'll never guess what He's really up to nor what He's totally like. And that hurts you, doesn't it? Say amen. Do you know something else? It hurts Him, too. He's not without pain in this matter. He knows that when He stands there, saying nothing to you when you're in such desperate need of an explanation, when absolutely nothing you thought would be is, and everything you thought would not be has become reality. And you ache and cry out, and you say what I've heard so many

Christians say, "I could bear it. If only I understood." Yes, sister. Yes, brother. If you could understand, it'd cease to be a cross. The secret of the power of the cross is in its inexplicability.

I see Him standing with the armies of Nebuchadnezzar surrounding Jerusalem and the very city of God being destroyed, and the people of God crying out, "God, why?" And He does not answer. I see the day when in Egypt, He finally answers their prayers after nearly 400 long years of crying out to them generation after generation. And as soon as He begins to answer their prayers, a whole generation of mothers lose their oldest child. All except one, who hid her son in a basket and let it float in the river. And they looked into His face and cried out, "Why?" And He did not tell them that it was part of their deliverance from Pharaoh. And they lived and died without an oldest child, wondering why. They were not there when God took vengeance on the death of those children in Pharaoh's own house; they died without knowing. They died not knowing. They met a God they didn't understand.

And the heartache grows in Him. You only live 70 years with this heartache, and you die. But the Lord has to live in this state, this state that is a gap between His creation and Himself, generation after generation, and hear the cries of His people; one and ten and a hundred and a thousand and a million and tens of millions. And never can He give an answer to any of them. And then one day, it has to get even closer to home. He has wanted so often to tell; He has wanted so often to explain. But He made a covenant with Himself. My ways are not your ways. My thoughts are not your thoughts. And as the heavens are above the earth, so are my ways above yours. He made a covenant with Himself that He would remain silent in the greatest hour of need.

A good man sat on top of a pile of dung and cried out to God, argued with God, pleaded with God, and finally, finally, after so much crying and weeping and bawling, God appeared to Him in a whirlwind. And Job looked up and said, "Well, at last, I'm going to get something out of this God who won't talk. He's going to explain to me why this has happened." Job is caught in time and space; he doesn't know what happened in the heavens. God knows what happened in the heavens. Satan knew what happened in the heavens. Something happened in the heavens that affected Job, but He died never knowing. When the whirlwind came, when God finally appeared to this dear brother, and He was miles ahead of us, at least God came by. And Job said, "All right, report in and explain." God said, "I've got a question to ask you, Job. When I made the crocodile, when I created the crocodile, did I come to consult you?" Lord, not that I recall, and He disappeared.

Job sitting there trying to contemplate a crocodile with festers and sores, and a family destroyed, pestilence, and three friends that nobody ought to be cursed with. And Job lived and Job died, and he never knew why He lost his family. You think, "Yeah, but he got restored in the end." No, he didn't. God didn't raise kids from the dead. He lived knowing his children had died for reasons he could not understand. A new child does not take the place of one that has been lost.

It's a heavy-hearted God who's had to live in the state of silence before you and me, before those who've come before us, and all ages past. It's a heavy-hearted God who does not like this

role He plays, who is now born of a woman. And He's got to come down here where we are and live where we live. And boy, if He cared about that dear woman whose child was taken from her and put in slavery in Egypt, if He cared about Job, whom He knew and had dealt with Satan over, if He cared about Jeremiah, thrown in a pit where He left him without explanation, if He cared about God's people surrounded by the armies of Nebuchadnezzar when that town was destroyed, taken off into slavery and prayed to Him for 70 years with no deliverance, if He cared for Daniel who turned His face toward God three times a day, was it, three times at Jerusalem and prayed that He could go home and He never went home?

Now He's got to have this God that comes into time and space who has all this recollection of eternity past, and time past, is now in a place where He has to deal with the fact He's got a mother and He's got a brother and He's got sisters and He's got kin folks whom He loves, who are going to get caught up in this drama lived out by Him on this earth. People who have the same blood coursing through their veins that courses through His, and these innocent bystanders are going to get caught up in the drama of the Son of Man, God incarnated, come to earth, and are going to have to pay a penalty for having just been kin to Him. And He's going to want so much. He's grown now. He's grown now, and He can remember Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel, Job, and He remembers the covenant He made with Himself before He created time and space and before He created us. And He's got to stand there with all the knowledge and all the information and all the explanation at His fingertips and remain silent in the presence of the need of His own kin.

He remembers, when He has grown, something He did, was one of the most difficult things He ever required of a human being. Spoke to a young boy about 8, 10, or 12, said to that young boy, "You've been set apart by me as your mother has told you, and you're to never cut your hair. You're never to marry. You'll never know a woman. And now you're to leave and go out into that hot desert, where you'll live and spend your life fasting and praying. You are going to prepare the way for the one anointed." And a young boy hears the voice of God, and he says, "Yes, Lord." And that young boy walks out into a hot oven desert, a kid, and he begins an arduous life of prayer, long periods of fasting, time alone, hours, days, weeks. He eats the scraps of the desert. He clothed himself in the scraps of the desert. He probably lives with the Essenes, people who live a dour, strict life. The boy grows into manhood. His life is filled with prayer and fasting. He's lived in a desert with temperatures that often reach 140, 150, 160 degrees.

His skin is like leather. He's about 30 years old; he looks 60. His whole life has been lived utterly for God, and he is faithful as few men who have ever lived are faithful. Rarely, if ever, has any man lived a life more austere and free of any pleasures as did this young boy. Now a man, one day he begins to preach. He doesn't even get the privilege of preaching in the marketplaces where people can hear him and have the satisfaction of knowing that he's some prophet. He has to go and preach in the desert where no one is. And a caravan comes by, and he thunders at them, and they go into the villages and say there's a madman out there. Another caravan comes by, and he thunders at them, and they tell another village, "There's a madman out there." Another caravan comes by,

and he thunders at them, and one of them repents. He goes into the village and says, "There's a madman out there. You ought to go hear him." And the people in the villages go out and hear him. And there is a madman out there, and they hear him and repent. The other villages come, and if you come, if you're going to hear this man preach, he won't come to you. You have to come to him, and it's in a horrible place that you have to go. And now it's not villages, it's towns. And it's not towns, it's cities. And it's not cities, it's nations. And people are walking over a hundred miles to hear this half-crazed, leather-skinned, leather-lunged, wild-eyed, emaciated creature with hair down to his knees, living in camel skin, and he's eating unclean locusts, who won't give one inch in anything He says. And people terrified, repent by the hundreds, by the thousands, and by the tens of thousands. And he has a few disciples, and boy, they are just as austere and grave as he is. Serious unsmiling.

The young man knows on the very day because something of His Father within Him says, and He hears it. He hears His Father speak to that wild prophet out in the desert. If you're ever preaching and you see something white and bright hovering over someone in the audience, that's the Messiah. That's the Son of God. That's the lamb of God. That's the One for whom you have given up everything. And he's out there preaching one day in this blistering hot sun, and he can't tell if it was the sun or what it was he saw. Perhaps his eyes had played tricks on him, and he knows that he thought he saw something, and he stops and he moves, and there's someone moving through the crowd, and he sees that light again. He can't tell who it is, but everybody is watching him stare at someone back there. And everyone turns around, and a path opens. And he is astonished beyond words. It's his second cousin. And he thunders, "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

And by the next day, this young man, who has paid such a price, has lost half his disciples. Before the week is out, he's lost three-fourths of them. Before the months are out, he's lost 90% of them. Before the years came out, almost everybody stopped going to hear him. All he's got is 12 emaciated, faithful disciples following him around, wondering what in the world is going on. He's still thundering at caravans and little groups. He's still calling for repentance, but he is hearing about his cousin. And he just knew his cousin would be a certain kind of person. He had envisioned for 30 long years, maybe 20 years, he had envisioned what his Messiah would be like. He knew what the anointed One would be, and he had rejoiced at His coming, and he was waiting to see the kingdom brought in with power and glory, but he knew it was all going to be worth it.

One day, he raged against Herod. And he woke up the next day with his hands in chains. Now I want you to know where they took him. Out in the desert wastelands, there is a high hill that looks like it was once an active volcano. A crest here, and comes down like this, and then interestingly, it has a little cone inside of it that comes up like that. This is a gigantic mountain. Herod has honed that all flat and built one of the most beautiful palaces the world has ever known: Herod's summer home. And along the side of it are dungeons. Smelly, stinky, fungusy, slimy, wet, rat-infested dungeons. And John the Baptist finds himself in chains in the worst of all the dungeons.

I want you to know who's in the cell next to him. There's a man in the cell next to him who was very wealthy, and Herod had taken away his wealth by sleight of hand and now has him in a dungeon to rot and die, and you can hear him screaming rages and curses on Herod all day long. Next to him is another man, a thief who's been put in prison there and is awaiting death. And you can hear him. He's angry with God. And you can hear his blasphemies and curses and railings against God. One is blaming God for all of his problems, and the other is blaming man for all his problems. But in the third cell is the second cousin to the living God.

He finally gets permission to have his disciples come and visit him. And these seriously looking men come, and he says, "What's going on out there with my cousin?" They shake their heads and drop their eyes, and they say, "John, he's having a good time. He's not fasting and he's not praying." They said, "You were mad for your prayers and fasting. They're calling Him a drunk and a glutton because He never fasts, He never prays."

John has now met the God you must meet. He has met the God who does not live up to His expectations. The days pass, and John keeps hearing reports of multitudes hearing the gospel and being healed. His disciples bring him report after report after report, and about a Messiah who is just having one great time of it. By the way, isn't that encouraging to know that God came to earth and had fun? Think about it and say, "Praise the Lord." You want a God like John the Baptist? You want a God like Jesus Christ?

Now then, John gets word that things are very serious, that Herodias is after him and will do anything she can to kill him, and he senses his time is near. And he calls his disciples, and he says, "I don't understand. Where's the kingdom? Why is He out there eating and drinking? Where's the kingdom? He's healing and teaching. Nothing's happening. Where's the kingdom? Go ask my cousin. Was I right that He's the Messiah, or was I wrong? Is there another one coming?" And John is in prison, and he doesn't understand. Oh, John's not in prison; he's chained to a smelly, stinky, rat-infested dungeon wall.

And now God's going to have a crisis. And now God's going to have a crisis. God has been in pain. Probably before He created us, filled up with pain in Egypt, running over with pain. His people in Babylon, watching the thousands and tens of thousands of faithful ones who have looked into His face, in every century, in every generation, in every age, in fact, in every hour, and look up to Him and ask Him to explain, and He is not.

He is also the God of the future. The God who dwells inside this carpenter is the God free of time and space, and He sees the future. And He knows that one day He must face the martyrs who will stand in the Circus Maximus of Rome and die wondering why. He's going to have to stand beside all of those beheaded and those thrown in other dungeons and other lands at other times. He's going to have to stand beside mothers standing over cribs and hear them cry out for an explanation and know He can never give it. He dreads those hours, and there's pain in Him, but it never came as close to home as the day that He was standing out in the street with dozens, hundreds, and thousands of people pressing in from everywhere. And let's say the little town of

Bethany, okay? And they've been there since dawn, and it's now late in the evening, and He's exhausted, and He can see people far out into the crowd who cannot possibly get to Him tonight, and He knows that tomorrow morning, He must leave early and go to another village.

And Peter comes up beside Him, and Peter's face is ash and white, and he says, "Lord." The Lord Jesus looks up, and He sees the dread in Peter's eyes, and the Lord says, "Peter." Peter's reluctant to say a word. He says, "Lord, it's John. His disciples are here." And the Lord stands up, and He raises His hands, and He says to everybody, "Go home. I have to talk with someone now." And there's a groan from one end of the street in the marketplace to the other. As people gather up their sick and their afflicted and walk away. You can hear crying and tears.

Twelve sober-faced disciples come, and the Lord sits down, and they sit down with Him, and He looks in their faces, and He just doesn't want to hear what He's got to hear. Jesus? This is not Lord; this is just Jesus. Jesus, we've just come from Herod's palace. We've just come from a dungeon. We've just come from your cousin. He asked us to come here. There's no joy in their words. You can almost detect resentment. There's a long stare, and finally, John has this message for you. Are you the Messiah, Jesus, or is he, and are we, to look for somewhere else?

And the Lord wants to answer, and He ventures an answer. He is aching to tell His cousin. Let me tell you something, folks. If He's ever going to break a covenant with Himself and tell and explain, it's going to be right now. It's going to be right now. And He says, "Tell John that demons are cast out. Many demons are cast out, and many blind receive sight, and many deaf hear, and many lame walk, and many infirm are healed." And John's disciples just sit there and stare at Him blankly. And He knows that they know that John already knows that.

I want you to stop and consider something for a moment. Those of you, especially, who believe in a God who's really, really neat, who never will let you down, I want you to listen to those words again because there's a secret message hidden in them. This is the very living God speaking out of the Lord Jesus. He's got a message for John; He's got a message for you and for me. Many have demons cast out. Many are healed. Many blind see. Many deaf hear. Many lame walk. Many...but not all. Many, but not all.

That very night, when He dismissed that crowd to talk to those men out of the deep love He had for His cousin John, that night, a young mother bundled up a child with a withered hand and walked 50 miles home in the dark and watched that child go to manhood with that withered hand. And that child grew to be an adult, looked at that hand, and heard the story of when he was a little child. He got within 10 minutes of being healed by the Lord Jesus, when the Lord dismissed the crowd, and the next day He was gone and could not be found. Then his mother came home, and he looked at that hand till the day he died and never understood why he was not healed.

Many healed, but not all. That mother met a God that night who did not live up to her expectations. She got within 10 minutes of her expectations, and He dismissed the crowd to care for His cousin's needs. And dozens and hundreds went home that night unhealed. A woman was

there to plead for a feverish husband about to die. She got home; he was dead. And she raised five children, all the rest of her life, at great sacrifice, and never understood why Jesus Christ had not healed her husband. Many were healed, but not all.

Many, but those who weren't live and die without knowing. The question before the house is not this. The question is not why is He that way. The question before the house is, are you going to follow Him, even though you don't understand Him? And are you going to follow Him when He doesn't live up to your expectations? The question before the house, and it's before you, and one day you've got to answer it, and it's a divisive question, and that question is, are you going to follow Lord, who's going to let you down, who will not be what you expected Him to be? And frankly, I rejoice in the hour when you meet this God who's going to let you down and not live up to your expectations because then you're gonna find out whether or not you're a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's for better, but it's also for worse. It's for knowing, but it's also for not knowing.

Well, the Lord Jesus ventured a second answer. The kingdom of God is preached, and many rejoice in it. And the twelve disciples of John, with their stoic faces, don't blink. That doesn't mean a thing to them. And the heart of the Lord Jesus Christ is heavy. And He wants so much to explain. He wants to tell John what John's never going to know. He knows what's going to happen on pages 72 and 73. He knows that one of the most depraved men who ever lived is going to have John's head cut off.

Now you get clear on this, that John the Baptist is the greatest of all men who have ever lived. That he walked out into that desert never to know a woman, never to know pleasure, never to know marriage, never to know the joys of bearing children, who has lived his whole life for his God and for his God alone. He has been faithful. He has prayed; He has fasted. He has been the brunt of jokes. He has faithfully preached. He has been imprisoned, and now he is going to die without knowing one thing...that will explain all his sacrifice. He's going to die only knowing he gave and gave and gave again and nothing came out of it. And the Lord Jesus Christ makes His decision. No, John, not for you either. I'll not tell you about my death and about my resurrection and about my church and about my kingdom and about my glorification. You're going to die without knowing. You have met the God who did not live up to your expectations.

My dear cousin, whom I love, whom I've demanded more of than perhaps I've ever demanded of any other human being, John, you're not going to know. And the Lord only has one thing left. And He says, "The lame were healed. The kingdom is preached." And tell John, "*Blessed is he who is not offended with Me.*" Go peek over that dungeon, smell that yeasty smell. Look at those rats. Look down into that dungeon. Grab a hold of that wet slime. Stick your head through the bars and behold your master, John the Baptist, and just tell him, "blessed is not offended with Me and blessed is he who is not offended with Me," and that's the God of eternity. And that's the God of all past time. And that's the God of all the ages since then. And that's the God of this very hour. Heartbroken, desiring so much to breach that mystery that separates us in time and space

from eternity. The God who wants to explain but knows that He cannot in the onward going of time, the saga of time cannot be interrupted by His explanation of His ways. And He must not tell. "And blessed is he who is not offended with Me."

A mother has a child born still, and she does not understand, yet she has been so faithful to her Lord. "Blessed is he who is not offended with Me." A woman is faithful in reading her Bible and doing all the things that God ever wanted her to do and to be as a faithful wife, and yet she ends up in a broken marriage. "And blessed is he who is not offended with Me." The phone rings, news comes, and a wife is suddenly a widow in the most unexpected way. "And blessed is he who is not offended with Me." And the doctor brings news that no one wants to hear, that a member of the family must perish with the most dreadful disease, unexpected and inexplicable. "And blessed is he who is not offended with Me."

A young man is converted to Jesus Christ in the year 1600 out of a Catholic family. He goes to Switzerland. He studies the Bible there. He comes back to his native land of France, and he preaches the gospel. There are men who have successfully passed from Switzerland over into France to preach the gospel secretly and never be caught, and have been able to live and to die after 40 and 50 years of fruitful ministry. And this young man, who has a wife and a newborn baby, sneaks back into France, where the Protestant faith is outlawed. And on his first time to preach the Lord Jesus Christ out in the woods with gathered Christians, suddenly from all sides, the military came and arrested the family. The wife is imprisoned. The child is turned over to an orphanage, and the young man is led down to Marce, France. He's 23 years old. He's taken aboard a galley ship. His hands are put in irons and chains, and an ore is slipped into his hands. And he sits there knowing that he will never, as long as he lives, move 2 feet from that spot in that darkened hole in that galley ship. Having preached only half of one sermon, he will live and die in that hole under the service of Louis the 14th, whom he despises. And he will serve that ore until he grows old and dies, and they'll cut him loose from his chains only in death and throw his carcass to the sea, and he will never once have one word come to him from God that will explain why. "And blessed is he who is not offended with Me."

The rope is thrown into the cell. John grabbed the rope, and they pulled him up. The soldier looks at him, shakes his head, and says, "Your head has been purchased for the price of an obscene dance. "And blessed is he who is not offended with Me." John, walk up those steps to that gate. These are the last steps you'll ever take. You will not know your cousin is crucified and rises from the dead, nor will you know that you're remembered as one greater than all men or as great ever born of women, that the record of the chronicle of your saga will be told forever. You will not know that John and "blessed is he who is not offended with Me."

The door opens, and death is at his side. Kneel, John, in just a moment, everything is going to go blank, and you're going to die without your question answered. "And blessed are you, John, if you're not offended with Me." The blade rises, and a thud reverberates through the courtyard.

And blessed are you, John, if you were not offended with a God who is nothing like you thought He'd be."

The dungeon is empty. In one cell is a man still raging against Herod, swearing and cursing. Now you've killed a prophet, you fiend. In the other cell is still a man raging against God. I'll never call you my Lord again for what you've done to me. Of those two men, the one who rages against God has the more correct theology because his war is with the one he should be warring with. The man who is raging against a man is raging at the wrong person.

Now listen, some of you are not offended with God; you're offended by a human being. You are offended by the wrong person, because behind that man is the sovereign way of God. Your offense is not with man; your offense is with God. Your war is with your Lord. And others of you, you have been so deeply hurt and pained by God, you simply don't know what to do. You've been offended by a God who didn't live up to what you wanted Him to be to you.

Saints, the third cell is empty, and a prisoner is being led down the staircase right now, and the doors are opening. You know who that person is? You know whose name they're going to write on that cell? Well, it's your name. You either inhabit that dungeon, or you're going to. One man next to you rails against his God and will not come to terms with Him. The other man doesn't dare blame God; he blames a man. He's blaming the wrong person; it was God who put him in that dungeon. And my dear friend, when they put you down in that cell and lock that door, it's not a man who did it. It's a God whose ways you do not understand and a Lord who will not explain. "And blessed is he who can be put in that dungeon and not be offended."

And now it's time you made peace with your God. He's the only person, and there's nobody else. Do you think a lot of Christians did you wrong? That was God. God couldn't have done that. You underestimate your God. "Blessed is he who is not offended with Me."

This is the story of an indwelling God inside the Lord Jesus, and you know something, the Lord had to walk that same path. For there was even that brief moment when the Father left Him, and He was faced with a Father He did not fully understand. "And blessed is he because he was not offended." Your Christian life has come to a halt. It's going to stay there until the offense is laid to rest.