

What You Need To Know About God

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[0 : 00] Thank you for the wonderful music we enjoyed this morning. I told them in the first service, it's just a joy to be here today and to preach at First Baptist Pickens.

You won't recall this, but I preached here about 120 years ago, it seems like. Fred had been your pastor for a short period of time and he asked me to come and preach revival and that was many, many, many gray hair ago.

So thank you for the opportunity to come and be with you again this morning. I love your pastor, not just because he's my friend, we've been friends for a long time. I say this with every ounce of honesty I can muster this morning.

I don't know a man with more integrity, impeccable character and a man of conviction, compassion than Fred Stone. You're just blessed here at First Baptist Pickens to have him as your pastor. If you have your Bibles, turn with me this morning to the book of Exodus chapter 34. I'm going to preach just three verses, verses 6, 7, and 8. And I want to talk this morning about what you need to know about God.

[1 : 10] What you need to know about God. Let me set the message up for the three verses we're going to read by just giving you a little bit of background. I know probably everyone in this room is pretty familiar with the book of Exodus.

You know, I'm sure how it began. They have gone in search of food because of a famine in the land of Canaan. They get there and they discover that Joseph is in charge.

And so he invites the entire family to come and to be house guests in Egypt. Their intention is to return to Canaan after the famine is over.

But they become very comfortable in the land of Goshen, an area there in Egypt. And Joseph dies. Another Pharaoh comes. And I'm confident that probably several Pharaohs came and went.

And suddenly the scripture tells us a Pharaoh arose who knew not Joseph. And when that happened, these people who had been house guests and privileged guests in Egypt suddenly become slaves.

[2 : 14] And slaves are badly, badly mistreated. If you're a parent, you can just imagine what it would be like to have your baby boy snatched from your arms and immediately taken to the river now and submerged there in the water.

And that's what happened. These people were living miserable lives as anyone does who's in slavery. And in chapter two of the book of Exodus, they cry out to God. They say, God, please remember the covenant you established with our father Abraham.

God hears their prayer, is moved with compassion, chapter two tells us. And he began to put into place a plan that 80 years later would deliver them from the hands of Pharaoh.

He raised up a baby boy who escaped death in the Nile by being raised in Pharaoh's own household. His daughter rescued him from the Nile River. At the age of 40, he killed an Egyptian and had to flee to Midian.

There God worked on his heart and character and developed him into the man who was ripe for the job of leading millions of Hebrews out of the land of Egypt. Well, you know the story, right?

[3 : 21] He comes and ten plagues later, Pharaoh is not only willing for them to leave, he's adamant. You've got to get out of here and do it tonight. And so they flee.

They get to the Red Sea. God parts the waters miraculously. Pharaoh has a change of mind and heart. The water is sweeping and crushing his army. And they're off to Mount Sinai. When they come to Mount Sinai, God speaks to Moses and said, Moses, I want to establish another covenant with my people.

And the covenant is pretty simple. I'll be their God. They'll be my people. I'll bless them and I'll prosper them, protect them, even as I have to this point in the journey.

All I ask is, they have no other gods but me. Moses goes to the people. They immediately agree. And it looks like they're set for smooth sailing.

But Moses goes up on Mount Sinai, gets the Ten Commandments, and just as he's ready to come down the mountain, God directs his attention to what's happening below.

[4 : 24] These people who should have been so grateful to God, who had seen God move in such a miraculous way, instead of following God in the 30 minutes, figuratively speaking, that Moses has been gone, they've already had a change of heart.

And they've taken their gold earrings, melted them. He's fashioned a God of gold in the likeness of a calf. And they're bowing and worshiping this God of gold. God strikes 3,000 dead, and others are severely stricken with a plague.

And sometime later, God speaks to Moses and says, Moses, I'm willing to forgive them. I'm willing to give them another chance. Come back up on the mountain. I'll re-give you the Ten Commandments.

But there's something you need to know about me. And that's going to be the focus of our attention this morning, that message that God delivered to Moses. It's a famous message.

In fact, you read these words in the Psalms, in the book of Jonah, and in other places in the scripture, stand with me as we read together. Exodus chapter 34, verse 6, 7, and 8.

[5 : 32] Then the Lord passed in front of him and proclaimed, Yahweh, Yahweh is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving wrongdoing, rebellion, and sin.

But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the father's wrongdoing on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.

Would you bow with me this morning as we go to God in prayer? Father, I pray today that these words we have just read would burn in our mind and heart.

I pray God that you'd etch them indelibly in our soul. Because Lord, we know that just as surely as Moses and the Hebrews needed to be aware of those things you revealed to Moses about yourself, today we likewise need to live every waking moment completely aware of who you are.

So show us this morning. Give us a clearer picture of yourself than maybe some of us have ever had before in our lives. It is our prayer in Jesus' name, and for his sake we pray.

[6 : 54] Amen. You may be seated. God, in this message to Moses, reveals eight things about himself that I want to draw your attention to this morning.

The first thing God says to Moses is, Moses, you and the Hebrew people need to know I am a God of compassion. I am a compassionate God.

I am guessing like myself, just about every day that you live, you will pick up a newspaper, a magazine, you will cut on the news in the evening, you will drive your car to work, and you will engage people all throughout the day.

And in the course of a day, most of us see not one, but a number of things that concern us. Things that sometimes break our heart. Have you ever gone into a restaurant or you're near a school and you see a child and the child's not clothed properly for weather conditions?

Have you ever seen that? You just know this is a neglected child. I know school officials tell us constantly, you hear it on television, that a large portion of children from Friday until Monday, they don't eat properly, they don't have valuable nutritional foods in their home.

[8 : 13] And you hear that, and it just bothers you because we don't see any child be without food. You cut on your television, you see war-torn areas and children who have been made orphans because of the deaths of their parents.

And that breaks your heart. You hear people at work and they tell you about their situation. I was on the phone with a person just two days ago and they were telling me about a sad, sad situation.

A mother who had lost her son and had lost her husband in the same week to COVID. And you hear that, just breaks your heart to hear those kinds of stories.

You've come to a traffic light at an intersection and there sits a man perhaps in a wheelchair or he's on crutches and he has a sign and he says, I'm homeless, I'm helpless, I'm a veteran of the service and I need help, I'm penniless.

And those kinds of things at times, while we know some are scam artists, we know a lot of those folk are just in a horrible, horrible situation and it breaks our heart. In fact, you know what I'm going to guess?

[9 : 19] Every person this morning in this room has seen something sometime in the last few weeks, in the last few months, that has perhaps even brought you to tears.

You've maybe even prayed about it. You said, God, intervene in these people's behalf and help them. And you've cried crocodile tears. But you know the difference in concern and compassion? You can be concerned and you can get emotionally involved and you can shed tears, but you don't have to do a thing. But compassion is different.

Harold Songer, who was a theologian at Southern Seminary, decades ago, wrote a book on Colossians and he picked that word compassion from chapter three in the book of Colossians and this is what he said about it.

I've never forgotten it. He said, compassion is impossible without involvement. You see, you can't have compassion and see that child or see that adult and say, boy, that's terrible and boy, something ought to be done about that, but do nothing.

[10 : 24] You can be concerned, but if you have compassion, you have to act in that person's behalf. And that's what God does. In Exodus chapter two, the Lord heard the cries of his people and the scripture says, God acted in compassion.

He raised up a man named Moses and through 10 plagues led them out of the land of Egypt. And that's what happened when God saw the sin and the plight of the world because of our sinfulness and sent his son Jesus into our world.

And so God is, first of all, a compassionate God. But I want you to notice the second thing about God, and I love this. He says, I am also gracious.

Now I want you to think for a minute. What does it mean to be gracious? And don't even think theologically about the word grace for a moment. That obviously is accurate. But just think about someone, a person you know, who is gracious.

In fact, if you think about it a minute, you know what I suspect? That most people in this room, you'll get an image of somebody who they're the epitome of graciousness, right?

[11 : 32] I think of a lady in my first church by the name of Mrs. Edna Poole. She was just the embodiment of sweetness. I mean, she was always kind. She was always making you feel good.

She always, nothing ever displeased her. You couldn't do anything wrong in Mrs. Poole's eyes. You know somebody like that? I bet every person in this room has had an experience where someone has shown you grace.

A spouse, a child, an employer, an employee, a teacher. My 11th grade teacher in El Paso, Texas who taught me chemistry, Dr. Crawford, he was a gracious, gracious Southern gentleman.

You know how I know that? He promised me the last day of class, he said, if you'll promise me you'll never touch chemicals, I'll give you a D plus in this class. I didn't earn that D plus.

He gave it to me. It was by his grace and his mercy I got out of chemistry class because I knew nothing about chemistry, but he was a gracious, loving man and knew I was doing the best that I could do under circumstances.

[12 : 41] Some of you are married to gracious spouses, right? You've lost your cool, you've lost your mind maybe and you've said some things that were just irritable and they were critical and they were mean spirited and you thought to yourself, she or he should never forgive me for what I just said.

But they do anyway, right? And that's a form of grace. God says, I am a gracious God. Here's a third thing I want you to see about God and boy, you ought to remember this as long as you live.

I am slow to anger, he says in verse six. I am slow to anger. You know, if we did a survey this morning what we'd find right here at First Baptist Pickens, there were some of you who were raised in moderate churches and the guy never raised his voice.

And some of you maybe were raised in liberal churches where the pastor said God is pretty tolerant and he gave you an image of God that wasn't accurate according to the scriptures. And some of you, like myself, were raised in fundamental very, very conservative churches.

And back in my day, and I'm nearly 70, back in my day, if you were conservative, most every preacher was pretty loud when he stood up in the pulpit to preach. In fact, my recollection as a child, it doesn't mean it was accurate.

[14:03] I'm sure those guys were gentle and kind-spirited. But you know how I remember guys in the 60s who preached in conservative fundamental churches? They always seemed to be mad about something. I mean, they would preach and preach so hard and it didn't matter what the subject matter.

They could preach on love but they could do it as though they were mad, right? They were angry. And so I developed an image of God if I'm honest with you and here's my image of God. I saw God as this Western gunslinger and he had two white pearl handled pistols and he had itchy trigger fingers.

Have you ever seen the old Westerns? They start doing that motion with their fingers. They're like, go ahead, make my day. Draw it, I'll shoot you dead. I remember the first time I ever used a word of profanity on the playground, I thought for sure a lightning bolt would come out of the heavens and hit me in the top of the head and just kill me right there down the spot.

Because I just thought, man, God is looking for me to mess up and the second I mess up, the hammer's gonna fall and I'm gonna be dead as three o'clock in the afternoon. Any of you ever had that kind of image of God?

You know what the Bible says? The Bible says, God is not quick to pull the trigger. God says of himself, I am slow to anger.

[15:19] I am long suffering. And you see it in the scriptures. The psalmist often cry out because they've been asking God to help him and he says, God, how long will you go without punishing these evil people, right?

We also know it from personal experience. You know I know it from experience because I know how I've lived and if God were quick on the trigger, I'd have been dead a long time ago.

And the truth of the matter is I suspect a lot of you in this audience wouldn't be here either, right? So God is slow to anger. Let me show you a fourth thing about God.

He says in verse six, the latter part of the verse, I am rich in faithful love. Let's talk about that for a minute. What does it mean to be rich?

I'm going to put you on the spot. How many in this room are rich? I mean, you're just filthy, just admit it, you are filthy rich. Anybody here filthy rich? I mean vulgar wealth.

[16:19] Any of you got that? I figured you wouldn't own up to it even if you did. I know one of you doesn't know. I'm just teasing. Let me just tell you though, most of us in this room would say if we were honest, I'm okay.

I'm paying my bills, got a little money in the bank, I'm doing all right. I got food on my table, roof over my head, clothes on my back, I'm all right. There would be some of you in here if you were honest, you would say, I'm a little bit in need.

I got a little bit more month than money. I think I'll make it but I don't really know how. Some of you are well off.

You not only have enough, you can take care of some of your wants as well as some of your needs. And even if you're retired, you see yourself making it to the end without a lot of trouble.

But do you have unlimited resources? No, we don't. Even those of us in here who are doing pretty well, we're probably not in that category. To be rich means this.

[17:26] It means you have not only enough, it means you're never going to run out. And you've got not just more than enough, you've got way more than enough. Something catastrophic can happen, you're still good to the end.

I doubt there's anyone here this morning in that category. Maybe so. But probably not. How many of you know the name J.K. Rowling? There you go.

These young people all do. A lot of you older ones. She's the author of the Harry Potter series. She published those books and went from being a poor person, lived in a small apartment with her daughter, had divorced, to a very, very wealthy woman.

In fact, after those books became movies, it may surprise you to know this, she is the first billionaire author who is female in the history of the world.

They had her on a show because she actually went from being very poor, couldn't pay her bills, to very, very, very wealthy, a billionaire. And they asked her, was it a difficult adjustment for you mentally to adjust from having very little to having a lot?

[18:35] And she said, yeah, it was. She said, in fact, I remember the day I turned the corner. I was in a super expensive department store in London and I was looking at purses.

This was an extravagant department store and she said, I was looking at purses, all of them, which were a couple thousand dollars and more. And she says, I'm looking at these two purses and I like this one and I like this one.

They're just about alike except the color is different and I can't make my mind up. Do I get this one? Do I get that one? And she said, all of a sudden it dawned on me, why are you in a frenzy? You can not only buy this pocketbook or that pocketbook, you can buy the store if you want to.

You can buy everything. You're never going to run out of money. That's what it is to be rich. God says, Moses, you need to understand I am rich in love.

I like that song that Brother Hester wrote this gentleman saying a moment ago, about God's love for us. God is rich in love, isn't he? It's never going to run out.

[19 : 41] Let me tell you something. If you've never come to understand this and you can put this in your mind and heart and really believe it, cling to it, it'll change how you live.

There is nothing you can do today, not one thing you can do today that will make God love you any more than he already does. And there's nothing you can do today that will make God love you any less than he already does.

The scripture says in Romans 5, 8, but God demonstrates his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, enemies of God, Christ died for us.

Isn't that an overwhelming statement to think about? We say that so often in church, I'm afraid it doesn't even ring in our minds what that really means. Let me illustrate it for you. Suppose I ask you right now to take out a sheet of paper and a pencil and I said, here's what I want you to do with nobody looking, move apart a little bit and with nobody looking, I want you to put the names on a sheet of paper of every person you know today for whom you would be willing to die if you had to. You know what I believe about you? I don't think there's a person in the room that probably wouldn't have at least one name on that sheet of paper. In fact, my guess is you'd surprise yourself.

[21 : 06] My guess is when you got to really thinking about it, you would be amazed about how many people you would be willing to give your life for today if you had to.

But let me ask you a second question. On that same sheet of paper now, flip it over and put the names of those people, you would be willing for your son or your daughter to die for.

And I'm going to also venture a guess. You can't think of a single name. There's not a person alive you would let your son or daughter, you'd die for plenty.

You wouldn't let your son or daughter die for any. My friend, Isaiah tells us in Isaiah 53, it pleased God to bruise his son for us.

One of the most mysterious verses in the Bible. I can't get my head around that. It pleased God to bruise his son in our stead. And then fifthly, he goes on to say, I am also rich in truth.

[22 : 14] I am also rich in truth. 1 John 1, 5 says, God is light and in him is no darkness. That's how it reads in the English text.

If you look it up in your Bible, you know how it reads in the Greek text? There's only one word difference. Here's what it says if you transliterate that. It says, God is light and in him is no, none, darkness at all.

Now you English teachers are having a fit right now, right? You can't say no, none. It's a double negative. But in Greek, it's acceptable and it's because it's used for emphasis.

In other words, what John is saying is this. Listen, I knew Jesus. I walked to Jesus. I touched Jesus. I fellowshiped with Jesus. And I'm telling you this, if you examine his character, every inch of his character, every inch of his being, there is not a trace of darkness in him anywhere.

Isn't that remarkable? How many times do you think you sin a day? You ever thought about that? I don't know about you, but I can get behind slow traffic and sin three times before I get to the office in the morning, right?

[23 : 28] God, in all of his existence, in all of eternity, has never had an evil thought, has never spoken an evil word, has never done anything of an evil nature.

He's perfect. He's so unlike us. He's perfect. So he says, Moses, you need to be aware. I am rich in truth. Now how's that going to play out?

It means he's going to be holy like you and I cannot imagine holiness. It means he's going to be just and we'll talk more about that in just a moment. And then there's a sixth thing he says.

He maintains faithful love to a thousand generations, verse seven. It's one thing to love somebody. It's another thing to maintain love for somebody.

Let's just be honest. I don't want to show a hand or shake a head. Have you ever met anybody that you loved them when you first met them but five minutes later, no, not so much. Some people, a little bit up go a long ways, right?

[24 : 36] And you can take them in small doses but not major chunks of time at a time, right? We like to love on a seasonal basis.

If you're good to me, you do what I say, you act in accordance with my will, then I like you. But you don't, man, you'll be the flavor of the month. Pastors have found that out a lot of times.

When I first started pastoring, I had an older pastor come to me and he just said, can I give you a tip on something, buddy? I was about 25 years of age, fresh out of seminary. I said, what's that? He said, be careful about the guy who helps move your furniture into the pastoring.

He'll be the first guy to help you move it out. In other words, people can turn on you pretty quick.

When I pastored in St. Central, North Carolina, there was a man who had served before me who had just had a heart of courage and great, great man of God.

When he was unpopular, he opened the doors of our church to all races. And boy, there were folks who got mad about this one lady in particular. She wrote him hate mail. She wrote editorials in the paper.

[25 : 42] She did everything she could to make his life miserable before she finally up and left the church. I came as the next pastor. All that was history now was all behind us.

Church had a good, healthy relationship to all the races and everything's found no longer issue.

This lady came back to our church. She sat there for a few weeks and then she came and said, I think I'd like to come and join the church.

One of the deacons overheard her. And he came to him and he said, Pastor, I'm not telling you not to let her join, but I want to tell you something. You better be careful about her. Says, you'll be the flavor of the month if you're not careful.

And he told me all that happened to the former pastor. So I was guarded with her. Well, she kept coming and guess what? Over a period of a couple months, she joined. She just loved me and my wife to death.

Every time she had a party at her house, we were the honored guests. I was going to be the next Billy Graham. I was the greatest thing since last spread. She hugged me and loved on me until one day, about a year and a half later, I came to the church and said, you know what?

[26 : 49] I think if the church is going to continue to grow, we need to relocate. I became the voice piece of Satan himself. She hated my guts, turned on me just like that.

The last Sunday she was at our church, she sat according to that building right here on the front row. She came in with a bag from a grocery store, didn't know what was in it, shoved it under the first pew, sat through the whole song service, participated when it got time for the message and I stood up to preach.

She reaches on the pew, pulls out the grocery bag, sits it up on the pew beside her, pulls out yarn and some sewing needles, and begins to yarn while I preach. Broke my heart, tore me up.

I had a hard time getting through that message. Thankfully, she left that day, never came back. But I want to tell you something. God says I'm not like that.

I don't love you when you're good. I love you all the time. 365 days a year, throughout all eternity, I maintain faithful love to a thousand generations.

[27 : 58] There's a seventh thing I want you to see, and boy, you're going to love this. He says, I forgive wrongdoing, rebellion, and sin, in verse 7b. I forgive wrongdoing, rebellion, and sin.

Now let's just be straight. I am going to ask you to raise your hand. We'll see how transparent you can be. Any of you here ever been guilty of wrongdoing? Raise your hand high.

Yeah. Yeah. I hope everybody in the room's got your hand up. You just did something else wrong. Anybody ever rebelled? Now you know what rebellion means, don't you?

Rebellion doesn't mean you made a mistake. That's what we, I made a mistake. No you didn't. You rebelled. Rebelling means I know what to do, I'm not going to do it.

I deliberately, willfully say, I'm going in this direction. You want me to go in that direction? I'm going in this direction. That's the difference in just messing up, isn't it? That's willfully, deliberately singing it against God.

[29 : 03] He says, I forgive wrongdoing, I forgive rebellion, I forgive sin. You know why that's good news for us? Because every one of us in this room are sinners.

For every one person that's ever been born save Jesus, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There's none righteous, no not one. Isaiah 53, 6 says, Oh, we like sheep have gone astray. Listen to this. We have each one turned to his own way. Remember that song Frank Sinatra made popular, I did it my way? That's the problem with sin. We want to do it our way instead of God's way.

But God says, Moses, understand this, let them know. They need to know about me. I am a God who forgives sin. I forgive wrongdoing.

I even forgive rebellion. When they shake their fist in my face and they just refuse to do it my way, I will still forgive that. Boy, what a great message from God.

[30 : 04] And then here's the last thing. I will not leave the guilty unpunished. He says at the conclusion of verse 7, I will not leave the guilty unpunished.

And what he's implying is this, I am just. I am just. He wanted to make sure, even though they understood all these good things, they understood that I am just, I will not leave the guilty unpunished.

I close this story, it's embarrassing, but it's the best way to illustrate the point I'm trying to make. So at my expense, I tell this story this morning. I'm about 38 years old at the time.

I'm pastoring Western Avenue Baptist Church in Statesville. It's 1987. And there in 1987, they came out with a new Camry.

They changed it from that little square Camry car, some of you will remember. They changed to a more rounded look. It had a seat belt that came across automatically and fashioned you. Man, it made you feel like you're a big shot, right?

[31 : 05] It's still just a Camry, but I loved it. I knew the one I wanted. I'd seen it on commercials. It was wide, had beautiful hubcaps, wheels, and it had a blue velour interior.

Doesn't sound like much now. Boy, it was a fancy thing then, right? That's the one I wanted. I went to the car lot, a truck had just pulled in, I saw it. I told the guy that sells me, I want the one right up there on the top of that truck, but it's on the top.

That's the one I wanted. Bought that car, was so proud of it. A few weeks later, we lost our minister of music. Our personnel committee heard about a guy in Gastonia, North Carolina, and we decided we'd go over there and hear him, meet him, take him that.

We went in two cars, there were about eight of us all together, one staff person, six committee members, and myself. So we'd get in two cars and we go over there. I'm in my 87 Camry. I'm so proud of that Camry, if you hadn't picked up on that yet.

And this other guy who was chairman of the committee, he had a mid-80s Olds Mobile 98, about as long as this middle row in the auditorium. I mean, you had to go to the airport to turn the thing around.

[32 : 10] Remember those? Get about 10 miles per gallon, just a big, big, big old car. So we finish our meeting, we're out in the parking lot, we're standing around chewing the fat.

You would think we're a couple 17, 18-year-old kids. I'm saying, man, I love my car. It's got a button you can push and it'll send extra gas to the carburetor and it's for power situation.

He says, that little runny foreign car? He says, I want you to know I could blow the doors off that thing. I said, no, you couldn't. Yes, I could. We argue like two little schoolboys, right?

So we get in the car. We're all laughing and having a good time. We get in the car, half of them in my car, half of them in his car. We head back to Statesville. 77 takes you all the way to Statesville. You get to Interstate 40.

You get on Interstate 40, you go about a mile and a half. You get off the exit and right there's our church, right? So we're coming back on 77 heading north and I turn to the people in my car, about four people in my car and we get up here to the cloverleaf connecting us from 77 40.

[33 : 15] I said, fasten your seatbelts because when we come off this cloverleaf, I'm going to blow his doors off. So we come off the cloverleaf and just, I'm not going to do it for long, but I just for a second, I stomp on the accelerator.

I mean, I push it through the floor board. We fly past this guy, right? We're waving to him as we go by. We just fly by him like he's standing still. I get to this bridge just maybe a quarter of a mile down the road where I'm beginning to slow up because my exit's coming up and as I do, I look down at my speedometer and it's 94 miles an hour.

Shame to say that, 94 miles an hour. I let off the gas and just as I do, I look in the left-hand lane of the oncoming traffic and there's a highway patrolman. Brake lights are everywhere.

But I figure, hey, I've only got to go a half a mile and I'm going to get off the interstate and I'm not going to run from him. I'm just going to conveniently disappear. I'm going to get down to the bottom of the stop sign and I'm going to go across to the service road and my church is right there and I'm in the clear.

So I just, I didn't violate the speed line. I just went down to the stop sign, crossed the road. He's got to come across a hundred yards of terrain, right?

[34 : 32] So I go up through the parking lot of this restaurant, get over the big hill and I'm home for, I'm about a quarter mile from my church, half mile from my church at most. Just as I'm several hundred yards past that hill, I look up and out of nowhere, this police car gets airborne and sets down a couple times hard, blue lights flashing and I'm just, I want to puke just to be honest with you, right?

No, that's a word you're not supposed to use when you preach but that's how I felt that moment. I pull off the side of the road, he comes flying up behind me, he starts getting out of the patrol car, I'm getting out of my car because I don't want the people inside to hear what I know he's going to say to me, right?

So I go walking back to the patrol car, he's getting out of the car, he's putting on his smokey the bear hat, he's walking toward me and he takes about a step and he looks up and when he does he says, put me pastor?

And I said, Carol, I know him, he's Carol Ward, he's been out of the patrol car and a member of our church. I just walk over to the passenger side of the patrol car and he says, what are you doing?

And I said, I'm getting in the car so you can write me that ticket. He says, what were you doing? I said, I was showing off, acting like an idiot, I'm sorry. And he says, looks me dead in the face.

[35 : 56] He says, your face tells me you are never going to do that again. Are you? And I said, no, sir, I'm not. And I haven't, I'll be honest, I haven't.

He says, go get in your car and go home and don't do that again. Yes, sir, thank you. I get in my car and everybody's laughing.

You going to jail? That was Carol Ward. He didn't, he didn't find me. He didn't find you. In the meantime, we've got to tell you this, while we're standing on the side of the road, that other car with the other four people in it, they come by and they're going, I'm standing on the side of the road with Carol at the time.

I get back, man, they're razzing me. I get back home, my wife gets on me. She plays Holy Spirit for me. Any of you men ever have wives do that? You know, you could have lost your ministry.

You could have killed those people. And all of that, she was right. I just sat there and took it. Two days later, I get a letter from a state firm agent who, by the way, was in my back seat. He says, don't worry, I'm not raising your rates, but I just want you to see what they would have been had you gotten the ticket for what happened.

[37 : 12] It went up astronomically. Now, I want to tell you, I am so grateful to Carol Ward for his showing me leniency. But I want you to understand this perfectly clear.

That is not justice. Any teenager in this room who had gotten stopped driving that crazy would have gone to jail. That was not justice.

I was shown favoritism because I was his pastor. Because he knew me. At best, because he thought, this is not characteristic of this guy I know.

But it's still not justice. And I want to warn you because I think there are a lot of folk out there who think because I grew up in church, I hung out at church. My name's on the roll, First Baptist Pickens.

I showed up there a whole lot. They think when they stand before God, God's going to look at them and say, oh yeah, I remember you. Yeah, you were there all the time.

[38 : 15] Come on in. It's okay. I'm going to give you a pass. The Bible says he can't sweep our sin on the carpet. You know why? Because he is rich in truth.

Because he is holy and he is just. He is not a doting grandfather. He is going to find us guilty of sin. You say, well how can he forgive us?

Because while he finds us guilty of sin, he pays the penalty for us. He does the unthinkable. He steps from behind the judge's seat and comes in the form of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and

sheds his blood on the cross that you and I can have eternal life.

The Bible puts it this way. All we like sheep have gone astray. We've each one turned to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He takes my sin and transfers it to his son. I close by telling you this. This book I hold in my hand is my copy of the scripture.

[39 : 20] But what if it weren't? What if this book were the history book on the life of Ralph Carter? You could turn to page one and you could read on page one where I was born on December the 18th, 1951 to Ralph and Doris Carter.

You'd read within a few pages. I have a brother and a sister, Teresa and Ricky. You'd read about my childhood, attended 13 schools in 12 years because my dad was in the military.

You'd read some things that fascinate you, some that would bore you to tears. You'd read some things that say, well, you know, he's an okay guy. He's a guy I'd like to hang out with. And then you'd read some things where you'd say, well, man, that was a good thing he did.

But I want to tell you, you'd read a lot of places that you'd go, what? You'd read some of those pages that we try to keep closed where you'd say, why did Fred Stone have that guy come preach? My goodness, he's not a guy who should be standing in the pulpit preaching. Why did we get him? There's some things in this book, if they were open and you came and read them, I've got to be honest with you.

[40 : 34] I'd be humiliated to death. Things I just wouldn't want anybody in the world to know about. Thoughts I've had and actions I've taken and things I've said. I don't want nobody to know those things.

But if it was open in the presence of God and I was judged out of what is written in my life's book, in the presence of God, I wouldn't just be embarrassed. I would be eternally condemned.

And the only hope I have is that someone else has paid the penalty of my sin for me. And that one is the Lord Jesus Christ. And if he's never, ever pardoned you of your sin, I want to tell you something today.

I don't care what you've done, he will. All you need to do is ask him, Lord Jesus Christ, forgive me of my sin. I know I'm not worthy of sin.

I know I can't get there by attending church, by giving my tithe, by singing the choir, by being good, because I just can't be good enough. I've already messed up too much. So I plead for your mercy.

[41 : 36] I plead for your grace in my life. If you've never done that today, I'm going to ask you to consider doing that right now. To right now as we have music played, one of your staff will come and stand here at the front.

I'm going to ask you to slip out of your seat and just come to the front. You may need to talk to him. You may just want to come and kneel here at the altar. The one you really need to talk to is God. And just say, God, I just need you in my life.

I'm begging you for salvation today. Would you come? Let's stand. Let's have our music. Let's have our music.