

## Treasures in the Ark

by Bayless Conley

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If you brought a Bible with you, open it to Hebrews 9. We're going to begin in verse 3 and be reading about the tabernacle of Moses that was erected in the wilderness after the Israelites made their exodus from the land of Egypt. Hebrews 9:3–5a NKJV,

<sup>3</sup> And behind the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of All, <sup>4</sup> which had the golden censer and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were the golden pot that had the manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; <sup>5</sup> and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.

Now, they had made this tabernacle, but later on, it was incorporated into a temple in Jerusalem. In this tabernacle, they had the holy place where there were certain things. Then, behind a veil or huge curtain was the Ark of the Covenant. It was basically a box that was overlaid, inside and outside, with gold, four feet long, and two and a half feet high, two and a half feet wide. On top of it were two angels with their wings touching. The angels looked at the lid of this thing, which was made out of pure gold and called the mercy seat.

The high priests could only go in one time a year behind the curtain to offer a sacrifice. It was the blood of an animal to cover his sins and the sins of the people. One person, one time a year. It was significant because, above this mercy seat, which the two golden angels looked at, it was said that the glory of God overshadowed it. Literally, God's presence, in the Old Testament, His Shekinah glory rested above this Ark of the Covenant. This Ark was sort of the carrier of God's presence. Interestingly enough, when Christ died on the cross, there was a great earthquake, and the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom. It was 30 feet high and 4 inches wide. It was torn from top to bottom by invisible hands, symbolizing that God was no longer separated from people. Now, it wasn't just the high priest once a year, now everyone had access to God. The Ark will no longer be the carrier of His presence. What is to become the carrier of God's presence after the death and resurrection of Jesus? Well, the Scriptures are clear. First Corinthians 3:16 NKJV asked the question,

<sup>16</sup> Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

First Corinthians 6:19 NKJV,

<sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

Again in 2 Corinthians 6:16 NKJV,

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<sup>16</sup> And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

We are now His temple. We are now His Tabernacle. We are now the carriers of God's presence. Looking back on that Old Testament Tabernacle, there were three things inside of the Ark: the golden box that had the mercy seat on it, and the thing that carried God's presence. There were three things that God very specifically told Moses to put inside of it. It was a pot full of manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of stone. They had a copy of the Ten Commandments inscribed upon them, and they each point to truths that are extremely relevant to us.

There is a reason God had Moses put these three things inside of this thing that carries His presence. They are symbols. They are lessons that every generation needs to know. We're going to talk about them one by one. First of all, there was the manna. This jar or pot that had manna. We read about it in Exodus 16. By the way, in case you don't know what manna is, let me tell you. When Israel left the land of Egypt, they went through this desert wilderness. They have no food. There are no stores to buy food at, but God provided for them. Every morning, they would go out, and there would be bread. Something like bread on the ground, and they would gather up just enough for the day. They called it manna. It was God's supernatural supply that sustained them in the wilderness. In Exodus 16, we read about it. Beginning at verses 31–35 NKJV. Pay attention. It says,

<sup>31</sup> And the house of Israel called its name Manna. And it was like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. <sup>32</sup> Then Moses said, "This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: 'Fill an omer with it, (That's a jar of about two quarts.) to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.' " <sup>33</sup> And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before the Lord, to be kept for your generations." <sup>34</sup> As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept. <sup>35</sup> And the children of Israel ate manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

Notice God said, "When I brought you out, I fed you." When God guided, He provided. When they followed His lead, He would meet their need. They followed the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, which are both expressions of the Holy Spirit who now dwells within us. They followed, and they were fed. Leaving Egypt and passing through the Red Sea, according to the New Testament, those are types and shadows. Those are metaphors that point to salvation and baptism. They point forward to what Christ would do for us. God provided for His people. He provided for them then, and He wants every child of His today to know that He will provide for them now. He said, "Look, lay this up so every generation will know and have a reminder of how I took care of them when I guided them." Just like that pot of manna was tucked away in the heart of that golden box called the Ark, so tucked away in the heart of every child of God should be a deep inner knowing that their Father in Heaven will take care of them. He will provide for them, even if they're going through a wilderness time in their life.

Just as that pot of manna was to serve as a continual reminder, sometimes we need to be reminded as well. I've shared the story often, but I always think of it when I come to a point like this. A guy in church who I knew fairly well, came into the office one day in an absolute panic. He was a newlywed. He and his wife had maybe been married for about three months.

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He just lost his job, and he's having a meltdown. He's like, "Pastor, I don't know what to do! I'm not trained in any other industry. That's the only thing I know how to do, and I've lost my job! There are no more jobs available! What am I going to do? I just got married. My wife doesn't work. How am I going to pay the rent? How am I going to take care of my—." He's just going on and on.

I said, "Stop." He went like this. I said, "Look, stop." I said, "Has God ever helped you before?" He goes, "What do you mean?" I said, "Has He ever answered a prayer for you in the past or helped you through a rough patch?" He says, "Well, I guess so." I said, "Well, you got a story you can tell me?" He says, "Well, yes." He tells me a story, and it's actually quite interesting and pretty amazing how God came through. I just listened. I said, "Well." I said, "Has He ever helped you another time?" He said, "Yes," and launched into a second story that was even better than the first one. Then, without me even soliciting it, he launched into story number three and story number four. He just got on a roll. Then he suddenly jumps up, grabs my hand, and starts shaking my hand really vigorously, saying, "Thank you, Pastor! Thank you, Pastor! Thank you, Pastor!" And walked out of the office.

He was reminded about God's faithfulness, and how God had taken care of them in the past. You're here today, and you have clothes on, you might have slept in the park last night or slept in your car, but you got here, whether it was under your own power, by your two legs, or on the bus or whatever, but hey, He sustained you. You're here. You've got something to be thankful for. I think we need to be reminded of how God has helped us.

Here are some thoughts about this. As they traveled through the desert to the promised land, God sustained them supernaturally. There were no farms, no vineyards to work, no crops to harvest, no markets to work in or to buy from, and no stores to tend. God did the remarkable and the unusual, but as soon as they got to the border of the promised land, the supernatural supply of manna ceased. Once they entered into the promised land, they had to work farms, vineyards, and olive groves. They had to open markets, work in them, and tend shops. From that point, God began to bless the work of their hands, but they had to work. Everybody say, "Work." Work is God's idea. Work is not bad. Work is good. In the Garden of Eden, the first thing God gave man was a job, and then he gave him a wife. So, ladies, if you want to get married, make sure your man has a job first.

When I got saved, I was living in the state of Oregon, and I felt like God wanted me to come back to California. I knew I had ministry in me. After spending some time with God and His Word, I felt very distinctly God told me, "Go back to California, and I will bless you." I came back. I've been here for a couple of months, and I was a little hacked off at God. I realized He knows what I'm thinking anyway, so I may as well tell Him. That's what David did in the book of Psalms. If he was out of sorts with God, he just poured his heart out, but then he stayed and listened and got the answer. That's the key. You don't just complain; though David did pour out his complaint before God, he then hung around long enough to listen to what God had to say. I said, "Look, God, You told me if I came back, You'd bless me. You haven't blessed anything."

Just like that, the Holy Spirit spoke to me and said, "Son, you have given Me nothing to bless." I began to think of words that God will bless the work of your hands, and He'll prosper whatever you set your hand to. I prayed the shortest prayer. In fact, these are the words I said. "Okay, then, with Your permission, I'm going to get started." I didn't even pray anymore after that. I started a Bible study that week. I started a prayer meeting that week. I went to one of the local rest homes. It was a combination rest home/hospital. I went up to the desk, and I said, "Look, I know you've got a lot of elderly patients here who nobody visits; nobody comes to

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see them.” I said, “I can play guitar. I’d be happy to play guitar and sing them songs and read to them.” They said, “Absolutely.”

Two days a week, I’m going to the local rest homes and would spend the whole day going from room to room. I learned all the old hymns. I would play and sing them hymns. I’d hold their wrinkled hands, pray with them, and read them Bible stories. God began to grow that, and God began to bless that. Pretty soon, the Bible study was so big that we couldn’t fit everybody in the home. We’d have 50 people crammed into the house and have the doors open. People would have to sit and listen outside. Truly, Cottonwood Church today is what God grew out of that seed, but I had to give Him something to work with.

I remember a young guy who was with the church back in the early days, and he wouldn’t work. He was able-bodied. He was young, but he wouldn’t get a job. He was happy to take handouts from other people. Some of the folks who were supporting him came and complained to me. They said, “Look, this guy won’t work, but he wants us to work and then share what we have with him.” I went to him and said, “Man, you need to get a job.” He goes, “Well, God hasn’t opened any doors.” I said, “Well, tell me where you’ve applied.” He said, “I haven’t put any applications in.” I said, “Well, you need to get out and put in some applications.”

A couple of weeks later, he still hadn’t gotten a job. So, I asked him about it, and he said, “Well, no. God hasn’t opened any doors, pastor. You’ve been preaching God will meet my needs.” I said, “Yes, but you need to get out and do something.” I actually took the initiative and went and found several places that were near the church that were all hiring. The next time I saw him, I said, “Have you gotten a job yet?” “No, nothing’s opened up.” I said, “Well, look, what about this place? They’re hiring. It’s just right down the street from the church.” He said, “I don’t like that kind of work.” I told him about another place. He said, “I don’t like that kind of work.” I told him another. He said, “That’s too far.” I told him a fourth one. He said, “They won’t pay me enough.” I had a verse for him. Second Thessalonians 3:10b NKJV,

<sup>10</sup> If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

That means neither shall you feed them. It wasn’t a matter that he couldn’t work; it was that he wouldn’t work. Somebody says, “But didn’t Jesus say not to worry because your heavenly Father even feeds the birds?” Yes, Jesus said that, and it’s true. God feeds the birds, but He doesn’t throw seeds and worms into their nest. They still have to go out and work to obtain God’s provision. The pot of manna reminds us of God’s provision. He basically does it three ways: Through work, through our work, through wisdom, and through windows. He will bless our work. He will give us favor. He will prosper us through our work, and then He’ll give us wisdom. I like the old King James; God gives us knowledge of witty inventions. God can show you a million ways to create revenue streams and to bring blessing into your life. God’s not short of wisdom, my friend. Somebody, I think it was back in the 1940s, wanted to close down the patent offices. They said, “Everything that’s to be invented has already been invented.” Not hardly.

God will give you wisdom if you’ll seek Him. The book of James says, “If you lack wisdom, ask God, and He’ll give it to you liberally, and He won’t find fault.” Then windows. There are several references to windows in heaven that God pours blessing out of in the Scripture. By that, I mean God bringing provision through holy, supernatural means. He’ll do it through your work. He’ll do it through wisdom, and if He has to, He’ll do it through windows. I remember reading a story about this lady. She was a believer, and she often prayed loud and long in her apartment. The manager of the apartments was in the apartment below her. He was an atheist and didn’t like

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her at all. He wasn't just an atheist; he was a mean atheist. Whenever he'd see her in the hallway, he'd make some snide remark, some cutting remark about her Christianity, and she'd just always smile and be nice to him.

One day, he was in his apartment, and could hear her praying upstairs, "God, you know I have needs. I don't have any money for groceries. God, I just ask you to supply for me in Jesus's name." She's going on and on praying. He gets an idea. He wants to play a trick on her. When she goes out, he goes and buys a bunch of groceries. He lets himself into her apartment. He puts the groceries on the kitchen counter and then leaves, goes downstairs, and waits. He's listening. He can hear open her door. Then she shouts, "Praise the Lord Jesus! Thank you, Jesus! I don't know how You did it, but You supplied my needs."

He runs up and doesn't even knock. He lets himself in the apartment and says, "I got you. You're saying God met your need. He didn't meet your need." He says, "I'm the one who bought those groceries." She said, "God did meet my need even if He had to use the devil to do it." God wanted that manna, and He specifically said, "This is a representation. I want every generation to know that when I brought them out, I fed them." Even if, like those Israelites, you're in a wilderness area in your life today, you're going through a dry place, you need to remember that if you'll endeavor to follow God's lead, He will meet your need. When He brings you out, He feeds you.

The second thing that was in that golden chest, called the Ark upon which God's presence rested, was Aaron's rod, that budded. The story about that actually opens up in the Old Testament. There had been much rebellion in the camp. Some very influential men had been sowing seeds of discord and dissension about the leadership of Moses and Aaron. They accused them of being self-appointed and claimed that anyone had just as much ability to lead as they did. That anyone was just as qualified as they were. There were many accusations and complaints flying around the camp. At God's direction, Moses asked a leader from each tribe to present a rod or a staff to him and to have their name inscribed upon it. We pick the story up in Numbers 17:6–10 NKJV.

<sup>6</sup> So Moses spoke to the children of Israel, and each of their leaders gave him a rod apiece, for each leader according to their fathers' houses, twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron was among their rods. <sup>7</sup> And Moses placed the rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness. <sup>8</sup> Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses went into the tabernacle of witness, and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds.

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses brought out all the rods from before the Lord to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod. <sup>10</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, "Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die."

A rod represents authority. God does appoint spiritual leaders in His house. He does gift them and give them authority. God's heart today is just as it was then. He doesn't want people to murmur, complain, and dismiss those that He has ordained. To do so is to invite trouble. Did you notice God's motivation? He said, "Let this be a sign that will stop them from complaining lest they die. They'll bring trouble upon themselves." It's interesting that Aaron's rod blossomed and produced almonds. The almond was the first of the flowering plants to come to life after a long, cold winter. Its flower came first. It was the first one that would experience rain. The first one to feel the breeze on its petals. The first one to feel the warming sunshine. It came out



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before all the other flowering plants. They even had a name for it. They called it The Watcher because it came out first. That sends things ahead of time. Hebrews 13:17a NKJV says,

<sup>17</sup> Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls.

Everyone say, “watch.” They watch. God gives them insight. They watch for your souls. Paul had a group of pastors gathered together, and he’s admonishing them. This is Acts 20:28 NKJV. He says to them,

<sup>28</sup> Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Notice they didn’t appoint themselves. The Holy Spirit made them overseers to shepherd. That literally means not to dominate. It means to lead and to feed the flock of God, which Christ purchased with His blood. Verses 29–31,

<sup>29</sup> For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. <sup>30</sup> Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. <sup>31</sup> Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

A true shepherd has a nose for wolves. God’s appointed them to watch. I mentioned the Bible study that I had started. I was also attending a church about 45 minutes away at the time. I guess the pastoral staff got wind that I had a Bible study. One of the assistant pastors called and said, “Look, Bayless, I want to meet with you.” I said, “Okay.” I went over to the church to meet with him and sat in his office. He said, “I understand you’ve got a Bible study.” I said, “Yes, I do.” He said, “Are the people from the church coming to it?” I said, “Well, I think there’s about four or five from the church, but 90% of the people that come don’t go to church here.” He said, “Okay.” He said, “What are you teaching?” I gave him a smattering of different subjects I was teaching.

He said, “Okay, it’s good.” He said, “Carry on.” He says, “Just one thing I want to warn you about.” He said, “You’ve got so and so coming to the Bible study.” It was a guy that I knew, and I actually liked. I said, “Yes, he comes. He’s there all the time.” He said, “I just want to tell you, watch out. His motives are wrong.” He said, “I’m not going to tell you what to do.” He said, “I just want you to pray and be sensitive because I’m telling you his motives are wrong. If you’re not careful, it’s going to hurt you.” I just tucked it away, and honestly, I didn’t see it at all but I just tucked it away. Didn’t do anything about it. Sure enough, it wasn’t too long, and I noticed that he was manipulating and maneuvering people in certain ways and even, in some cases, sort of prophesying money out of somebody else’s pocket into his own pocket.

Anyway, time went on, and years later, I started getting phone calls from people. This same guy was now using my name as a reference, and people are calling from different states. His ways of manipulating people for his advantage had escalated. He had this whole program going on where he was using people for his own financial benefit. They’d call me and say, “Look, this guy says he knows you really well, and that makes him legit.” I said, “Listen, I haven’t seen the guy in years, and I’m not vouching for him.”

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My point in all this is, that pastor, I'm so thankful for him. He didn't tell me what to do, but he gave me a warning. He was watching out for me. He said, "I just want to tell you, you have somebody there who has wrong motives, and they're going to cause trouble." He was right. I'm not talking about some heavy-handed dictatorial type of leadership. Yet, there is the inescapable fact that God appoints leaders in His church. He gives them both insight and oversight for leading the flock. To oppose or to try and undermine those whom God appoints is harmful to others. The truth is, it's dangerous to those who are behind such things.

All right, question. How can you tell if someone is God appointed and empowered today? I think there is a real lesson in this rod of Aaron's. His rod didn't just blossom. It wasn't just pretty. It produced fruit. It produced ripe almonds. Christ-ordained leadership produces fruit. It brings forth life. Jesus said, "A tree is known by its fruit." In the city of Corinth, certain people were challenging Paul's apostleship, and his response to that was, "Are not you my work in the Lord? Are you not the seal of my apostleship?" Their changed lives were the fruit that bore witness to his appointment and his calling. They had been saved under his ministry. They'd been established in God. They were growing in grace. They were growing in love. They were growing in the things of God. He just pointed to the fruit. He said, "You want to know if I've been appointed by God or ordained by God? Look at the fruit." Friend, the truth is putting a label on a can does not put anything in the can. If you have to continually announce to people what you are, chances are you're not.

My advice, if you want to flourish and you're attending church, thank God for attending, but you need to go from attending church to being attached to church. You read in Ephesians 4, and it says God's appointed apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers for the perfecting of the saints and for the edifying of the body of Christ. Then he talks about the church being joined together, knit together, and every joint supplying something. It's one thing to attend. It's another thing to be attached.

When I was 16, I had a pretty serious sports injury that I reinjured and reinjured. It was my right knee. I went in expecting to just have a little bit of work done, but when I came out of surgery, it turned out they'd taken an entire ligament out. They'd removed it. The doctor said, "Look, it was so messed up that it was inoperable." One of the main ligaments in my right knee was removed. Now, that was a long time ago, probably about 50–51 years ago. I've done pretty well without that ligament, but it hasn't done so well without me.

The moment it was detached from the body, it was in trouble. You need to be attached. Then, I would say it's important to deeply consider the things that your leaders say. It will keep you safe and on track in the way of God. That's God's lesson; He said, "Look, put this there as a continued reminder against rebels." People who want to complain. Their complaints need to stop. I don't want it to go badly for them. I do appoint leadership, and there does come forth life and fruitfulness from it, and that is how you know.

Anyway, let's move on, for the sake of time, to our third item. In the Ark, in the golden chest, there were the stone tablets upon which were written the Ten Commandments. It represents God's Word. They were in the very heart of the golden chest called, The Ark, and God's Word needs to be in the heart of every believer if they're going to flourish in the things of God. We could say much about this, and it's actually one of my favorite subjects, but I'm going to limit it to three things. Paul summed it up very, very well. In 1 Timothy 1:5 NKJV, he said,

<sup>5</sup> Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.

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The purpose of the commandment, other translations say, the goal of my instruction, the purpose of my teaching you God's Word, and the purpose of the commandment is threefold. First, it's love from a pure heart. Secondly, a good conscience. Thirdly, sincere faith. God's Word, when it enters a person's heart, its ultimate goal is to affect them in three ways. It affects these three things in how I live them out. Number one, it affects my relationship with God. It affects how I see it and how I live that out. Number two, it affects my relationship with myself, how I see that, and how I live that out. Number three, it affects my relationship with others, how I see that, and how I live that out.

The purpose of the commandment, the purpose of God's teaching, first, he said, sincere faith. That deals with my relationship with God, how I see that, and how I live that out. The Bible says, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." Not hard, not difficult, it is impossible. We walk with God by faith. This is a faith relationship. Faith defines my relationship with my unseen Creator. It's not just about exercising some principle. It's about trusting in a person. Faith, there's a lot we could say about it, but let me just limit it to this. When God's Word abides in your heart, faith is unconscious. Faith will come to you unconsciously when the Word of God is abiding in your heart. Jesus said, "If you abide in Me and My Words abide in you, ask what you will, and it'll be done for you."

I had a friend call me, actually from Europe, maybe about a year ago. He said, "Pastor, look, I got these health issues. The doctors say that it can't be fixed. I've been trying to trust God, but I feel like a ping-pong ball getting bounced from one side of the table to the other." He asked, "How do I believe?" I said, "Listen, here's my advice to you. Stop trying to believe. Just feed on God's Word. Go through His Word and reflect on God's promises to meet your needs. Reflect on His promises of healing. Read through the stories of how Jesus dealt with the sick and had mercy on them throughout the Gospels. Then, realize He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. If you will just read those and feed upon those without trying to believe or trying to have faith, faith will come unconsciously. The Word will do its work." Psalm 107:20 NKJV says,

<sup>20</sup> He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.

When He sends His Word, He sends it in seed form always. Jesus taught about it in the parable of the sower. When that seed falls on the soil of a person's heart, if they will attend to it, and if they will watch over it and guard it, it will spring and grow up. It will produce a harvest in their lives. You don't have to try and believe. You just need to get the Word abiding in your heart. It literally defines your relationship with God. It works its way out in the way that you live out in your life.

The second thing it does is it helps me understand my relationship with myself and how I live that out. This has to do with having a good conscience. That is the purpose of the commandment. The purpose of teaching God's Word deals with my relationship with God and helps me understand my relationship with myself. Conscience is the voice of your spirit. Once your spirit is born again and reinforced with the Word of God, your conscience is a safe guide. Once the truth of God's Word enters my heart, I have clear guidelines to live by, and as long as I stay within those guidelines, my conscience is clear. I'm talking about stuff that I used to do repeatedly and publicly. Never thought twice about it. I can't do those things now. Why? It's a matter of conscience. It's a matter of God's Word abiding in my heart. It's affected my relationship with myself.



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I remember I was reading about a couple of guys. They were both from a gang background, and somebody shared the gospel with them. They were considering this life of faith pretty seriously. Their girlfriends were quite alarmed by the changes beginning in them. They said, "We're going to this gospel meeting to hear this preacher." The girls remonstrated and said, "We don't want you to go," but they said, "We're going." These two guys are best friends. The girls stay outside in the parking lot. They won't go in. These guys go into the meeting, hear the gospel, and they both get gloriously saved. They are so happy. They walk outside, and their girlfriends are waiting in the parking lot. Both of the girls, on cue, lifted up their shirts, bare-chested, and said, "If you keep going on with this Jesus thing, you can say goodbye to these." To their credit, the guys said, "We've been changed. We're not leaving Jesus."

As the story progressed, I think one of the girls ended up giving her life to Christ as well. I remember my friends, when I came to Christ, I'd be at somebody's house, and they'd be in there cutting up a kilo of hashish that they're going to distribute and sell. They're passing a pipe around the living room. They'd pass the pipe to me. I go, "No thanks." They said, "You don't want any?" I said, "No, I don't smoke anymore." I remember a guy going, "Are you judging us?" I said, "No, I'm not judging you, man." I said, "I just can't do that and keep my conscience clean. The truth is, the more I read the Bible, God's Book, the more that's reinforced in me. I'm not judging you. Go ahead, smoke the whole kilo if you want to. I just can't do that anymore." The Apostle Paul, in Acts 23:1b NKJV said,

<sup>1</sup> "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

Acts 24:16b NKJV,

<sup>16</sup> "I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men."

Then, the third purpose, the third result of God's Word being preached, is the commandment abiding in our heart. It helps me understand and express my relationship with others, which is love from a pure heart. Love, when it's expressed, usually comes out in two ways: forgiving and giving. You can subcategorize that a thousand times, obviously, but just use those two as headings. When God's love through us is expressed toward others, love from a pure heart generally comes under the category of forgiveness or giving.

When things are given to me that I don't want by others, like injury, insult, and unkindness, God's love in me compels me to respond with forgiveness. As well as, when things that I don't want are given to me, love compels me to give others things that I do want, like my preferred seat, compliments, encouragement, favors, and material resources. God's love compels us when we're given things we don't want, to respond with forgiveness, to give away things that we do want, and to even give away those things sacrificially. Why? Because God's Word causes me to see others as valuable and precious.

That love in us, when it's reinforced by God's Word, will cause us to give even sacrificially so others might be blessed. I have a friend who made quite a career in the music industry. He became very famous. He came to Christ, and I was with him one day. I asked him, "How exactly did you get saved?" He said, "Well, the truth is my wife got saved and got into God's Word. She loved me into the kingdom of God." He said, "I was the same ornery, selfish person I'd always been, and she began loving me with an extravagant, sacrificial love." He said, "I knew Jesus had to be real because she was never that way before." He said, "She literally loved me into God's kingdom. Before long, I got saved, and I was reading the Bible too."

## Treasures in the Ark

In the Old Testament tabernacle, in the covenant box over which the presence of God dwelt, are those three things. Manna reminds us that our Father will continually provide for us. No matter what kind of a season you're in, no matter what stage of life you're in, God will take care of His children. The second thing that was in there was the rod that budded. God does ordain leadership, and it always produces life. It always produces fruitfulness. The third thing that was in there were the tablets of stone, the Ten Commandments. His Word needs to abide within our hearts. If we're going to flourish as believers and be effective as we carry God's presence to a lost and dying world, we need to have the Word abiding in our hearts.

I've shared a little bit here and there throughout today's message of my testimony. I do this by contrast sometimes. I married my wife, Janet 41 years ago. She's sitting here on the front row. It'll be 42 years in January. She's on the opposite end of the spectrum of someone like me. She's a farm girl from the Midwest. One of 10 kids and lived in a very rural community. She was always the teacher's pet. I don't think you've ever smoked a cigarette in your life. She's never even smoked a cigarette. You get the idea. Opposite end of the spectrum from somebody like me who would show up at school in 7th grade so drunk, I couldn't walk in the morning. I'd get up in the morning and drink a half gallon of wine before I'd go to school in 7th grade. Very, very different.

A 12-year-old boy came up to me in a park one day and told me about Jesus. I had major league problems with substance abuse, et cetera, et cetera. One day, Ms. Goody two shoes here, realized that she needed a Savior just as much as somebody like me. It wasn't through her good works or her kindness or any of those things that she merited salvation. The Bible says the whole world stands guilty before God. Everyone, we all need a Savior. We all need help. The truth is, you're a joke without Jesus. You need Him, and if you come to Him, He will not turn you away.

Why don't you bow your heads and close your eyes? I just want to give you a simple invitation today. I know there's people from all walks of life with all sorts of different life experiences, and I just feel led to say this right now. I know there's a person or two in here, and you've been really hurt in church. When I talked about Aaron's rod that budded, it kind of made you cringe a little bit because you are very reticent to trust due to your experience in the past.

Listen, there are no leaders in God's house who are perfect. We're all flawed. We've all got feet of clay. There truly is God ordained leadership, and if you're looking for a perfect church, you won't find one. There's not one. If you're looking for perfect leaders, you won't find one, but there are good men. There are good women right across the world who are doing their best to serve Jesus and to serve His people. I think God wants to reintegrate you into His family for your blessing. Yes, you can go as slow as you need to go, but you need to point yourself in that direction. God is calling you. He's talking to you.

There are others in the house today, who may be listening to me or out on the plaza, wherever you might be, you've lived a wild and wooly life. You may think, "Would God take in someone like me?" Yes, He will. Jesus died for your sins upon the cross. The price has already been paid. When Jesus died on the cross, He had you in mind. He paid the price for your sins. You can come into a relationship with God.

To the person who maybe can relate to my wife's story, you've always tried to be a good citizen, a good man, or a good woman and do what's right, but again, we don't earn salvation. It's not by works. It's a gift of God's grace that's received by faith. He's here for you today, my friend. If you're a backslider, if you're a prodigal son or a prodigal daughter, listen, I have news for you.

## Treasures in the Ark

God's not mad at you, but it's time for you to come home, prodigal son. It's time for you to come home, prodigal daughter. The Father's waiting for you. Time to stop living out on the perimeter. Time to stop living with one foot in the row rowboat and one foot on the dock. It's a miserable way to live.

Precious Holy Spirit, I ask You to touch the hearts of those who are listening right now and do what only You can do. Thank You, Lord.

I'm going to lead you in a simple prayer. It'll include all those things I mentioned. If you'll tie your heart around the words, be sincere, and speak them to God, I believe He'll hear you. That's what He looks for, is a sincere heart. If you would right now, tie your heart to these words. Let your heart go up to God as you speak them out loud to Him. Just say,

Oh, God, I come to You. I believe that You see me right now. I believe Jesus Christ is Your Son. I believe You sent Him to die for the sins of the world. I believe He died for my sins. Thank You, Jesus, for taking my place and for paying the penalty that was coming my way. I believe You were raised from the dead. I ask You now to come into my life. I submit everything to You, Jesus. All I am and all I have, I put it in Your hands. It's in Your precious name, I pray. Amen. Amen. Hallelujah.

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