

Big Mess, Bigger Grace

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- [0 : 0 0] Father, you know those of us who have been victims of violence. You know those of us who have been abused and oppressed.
- And you know, Father, how hard it can be for them in a country like Canada to suffer alone when it seems like nobody else has those problems. And we confess before you, Father, that our Christian community isn't always maybe very good at helping people.
- So, Father, your word today, Father, came as a shock probably to many of us. And it seems odd that it would be in your word. But we know that you are the good God, that you are the loving God, and that even your hard words are said in mercy to bring us to yourself.
- So we ask, Father, that in your kindness and in your grace, the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon us with might and power and deep conviction, that your word would come home to us in a deep way, and that we would be gripped by the wonder and beauty and power and grace of the gospel, and so live free and whole to bring you glory.
- And this we ask in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So it must have come as a bit of a shock to some of you when you heard Ken read that text of Scripture.
- [1 : 3 2] We, in fact, are going to look today at one of the most horrible passages in the Bible, just to be very, very frank. It is, and it not only is one of the most horrible stories in the Bible, it touches on many of the deepest fears people in our culture have about the Christian faith, in particular in religion in general, that a man would be filled with the Holy Spirit and make a vow to the Lord and then would proceed to, let's be blunt, murder his daughter.
- Murder his daughter as a sacrifice to the Lord. And it is a horrible story, and as I said, it touches on many of the deepest cultural fears that people in Canada have about the Bible.
- And I guess for some of you, as you might have noticed in my prayer, it might touch on some of your own particular fears in terms of if you've suffered violence from a hand of a father or a mother.
- So what we do here at Church of the Messiah is we, you know, the Bible was written as a series of books. And so what we do is we preach through books, and that means we look at those things which are sort of easy.
- I have some Sundays, some Mondays, I look at the text I'm going to preach on and think, oh, this is going to be fun. And I have other Sundays, other Mondays like this past one when I look at 60 verses, and I think, well, this is going to be a bit of an interesting week trying to understand the text.
- [3 : 0 6] And so we're going to look at the story. Once again, if you don't have a Bible, there is Bibles up at the front. Just feel free to just come and walk up to the front while I'm speaking. That will be fine. I can't read all of the text, all 60 verses.
- The part that Ken read was just a little bit of the whole story of Jephthah. And so parts of the text we will read, and parts of it I'll just tell you in a bit of a summary form.

If you have your own Bibles, you can check. I haven't, I've made sure that the awkward parts are in. So I'm not trying to dodge anything in terms of what the text is saying.

So if you're just a bit of a, you know, a refresher, this is a long, the book of Judges is a series of many, many, many stories. It takes place roughly between the time that Israel enters into the promised land and the coming of the first, the naming of the very first king.

It's several hundred years, and it shows these different 12 tribes and the different ways they depart from the Lord. And one of the things you have to understand when we're reading this, because some of us, if we're very Canadian, will wonder why it is a bad thing that we're, that the text talks about you shouldn't worship Baal or Ashtar.

[4 : 25] You shouldn't worship the gods of other nations. And for many Canadians, it sounds very, very narrow-minded. And I'm not going to argue about it today. I just want to let you know that this is one of the things that Christians believe is very, very, very, very, very un-Canadian.

Like, I believe that the triune God actually really exists. And that talking about religion and spirituality isn't like talking about things that make you peaceful or things that give you meaning or anything like that.

I believe that the triune God, revealed by Jesus, who lived in history and died upon the cross and rose again, that he really did die, he really did rise from the dead, he really will come again, and he really reveals a real being that really does exist.

And given that he really exists, it means that to believe that God is somehow different than that is to not know the real God. And it's very un-Canadian.

But that's at the heart of this whole text, by the way. All the way through it. There is this particular God that really does exist, and other gods don't exist, at least not in the way that they portray themselves to their followers.

[5 : 48] So let's look at the story. If you turn in the book of Judges to chapter 10, and we begin the story of Jephthah at verse 6, and it begins like this.

The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines.

And they forsook, they left behind, they completely abandoned, they turned their back on the Lord. And did not serve him. You can also translate that as worship him. So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the Ammonites.

And they crushed and oppressed, that is the Ammonites, they crushed and oppressed the people of Israel that year. For 18 years, they oppressed all the people of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Ammonites, which is in Gilead.

And the Ammonites crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed.

[7 : 02] Now just sort of pause there. What we see here is the people of Israel are listed that they now serve seven different pantheons of gods.

So it's not just seven different gods, but seven pantheons of gods, seven whole families of gods. And they not only worship these other apparent gods that were native to the land of Canaan, but even from those beyond, because the Philistines aren't native to Canaan.

And many of these other people or nations that they mention are people who have come into the land and defeated Israel. And then Israel ends up starting to worship their gods as well.

And when it says here that the Lord, as I've talked about in other weeks, the Lord sells Israel into the hand of the Ammonites. It's not like when, if I was to sell you a car, you'd really have to be desperate to buy a car that I would sell you, because it's just half a step ahead of the scrap heap.

But if I was to sell you a car, once I've sold you the car, it's your car. I can't tell you how, you know, when you should put oil in it or how you should drive it. It's your car. You could tell me, get lost. It's my car now.

[8 : 16] That's not the language here. It's a very literal translation. But as I've shared other weeks, what the Lord says is that you have chosen idols. And in a sense, the punishment for choosing idols is for the Lord to allow you to have a greater idolatry and have the idol have a greater role in your life.

An example would be this. There are many, a simple one, but many, many people in our culture make an idol out of money. We don't think of worshipping money.

Like, you don't really think that there's like a multi-billionaire. It's not just rich people who worship money, by the way. It can be many of us. It's not as if they put a, you know, a hundred dollar bill down on a table and bow down and worship it.

But for many people, they serve money. They get their meaning from money. They get their pleasure from money. They get their hope from money. They, they, they justify themselves and their behaviors and their actions from money.

And in a sense, what happens is that God might at some point in time, he, he restrains that a little bit with you. It's called common grace. So that you don't really just completely and utterly give your life totally to money.

[9 : 27] Because if you do that, it will almost always ruin your relationships. It will ruin your wife or your husband or your marriage. If you're married, it'll ruin your kids. If you just completely and utterly devote yourself to money, it'll twist how you view the world.

And this description of the Lord selling you is just saying, if in a sense for you to, to understand what you're doing, I'm going to withdraw my common grace and let you pursue what you want.

In the hope that by pursuing what you want, you say to yourself, what am I doing? Why am I putting everything into money? And it's ruined my marriage.

It's ruined my relationships with my kids. It's poisoned my relationships with my coworkers and my neighbors. And that's the hope behind it. And so what has happened is they've worshipped the pantheons of seven different nations, the seven different pantheons, and God has allowed that to happen.

Well, what happens next? And if you're familiar with the other stories, you now realize that they come to that point where they start to cry out to the Lord. And this next bit is a very shocking part of the Bible.

[10 : 33] Just listen to what it is. Continue reading at verse 10. And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, we have sinned against you because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals, the Baals.

And the Lord said to the people of Israel, did I not save you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines, the Sidonians also, and the Amalekites and the Amalekites oppressed you and you cried out to me, and I saved you out of their hand.

Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods. Listen to this. Therefore, I will save you no more. Go and cry out to the gods from whom you have chosen.

Let them save you in the time of your distress. Just using the analogy of an idol of money, money shows you no mercy. Does it?

Money never shows you grace. Never. They worship these other gods.

[11 : 42] God says this very, very, very shocking thing. There have been seven pantheons of God. Clever little thing is there are seven different deliverances which are made. made. Now, this is one of the important things in the Bible.

Often when people get troubled by certain parts of the Bible, and this is still a very troubling thing, you need to keep reading and look at the whole story often, sometimes the whole book, to see how that actually really plays out.

And in this particular case, what happens is that the people of Israel, despite what is said, throw themselves on God's mercy. They abandon themselves to God's mercy.

And they really abandon themselves. Look what happens next. Verses 15 and 16. And the people of Israel said to the Lord, we have sinned.

Do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day. So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord.

[12 : 39] And he became impatient over the misery of Israel. In other words, his heart was moved over the misery of Israel. And you know that he's going to do something about it.

Now, just very, very briefly, I don't want to spend much time on it, but I just wanted to point out, if you want to go on later on and read this text and meditate upon it, it's a very, very interesting thing about what true repentance is.

Truly saying you're sorry. If you could put up the first point, in true and wise repentance, you are sorry for the wrong that you have done, not the personal consequences of wrongdoing.

See, many of us, so let's say it's a matter that you get caught telling lies. And what people are sorry about is that they got caught, not the lies. You know, you're dating, you know, a couple are dating, and you find out that, you know, you find out that your boyfriend had been going on with dates with another girl, and you get mad at him, and you drop him, and he's sorry that you dropped him, not what he did.

Right? And so what we see here in this story is that they realize that they've been doing something wrong. It's not just the consequences that they're sad about, the personal ones, they're sorry over what they've done wrong.

[13 : 57] And the second thing, if you could put up the next point, is in true and wise repentance, you put away the sin and replace it with the good. In true and wise repentance, you put away the sin and replace it with the good.

The last time I did a counseling session with a couple about this particular issue, not the last time I did something with a couple, but there was this couple, and as I'm talking to them, I started to have a suspicion that there was, that he was punching her and hitting her.

And so I asked the direct question, and there's this very, very pause, this shocked silence. And then she said, yes, he's hitting me. And I said to him, I'm not going to do any marriage counseling until you stop hitting your wife.

And I said to her, you either kick him out or you leave. And when you're in a place of safety, then we can continue the counseling. Like, that's what real repentance is.

You stop doing the bad thing, and it can be hard, but you start to do the right thing. So it's actually, if you look at that text, it's a very simple little thing within the text that I wanted to point out to you.

[15 : 08] But the text continues. And what happens next, right after this, just to sort of move the story along, is war starts to be, you're on the edge of war.

The Ammonites are preparing for a major battle. They've been oppressing, severely oppressing Israel for 18 years. They're mobilizing their forces. They're on the brink of war. It's late August 1939, and so to speak, and they can see that the war is going to be coming.

And then what happens is the people of Israel realize that they have lots of different troops, but they have no leader. There's nobody over them, and there's nobody who's really a warrior. It's as if they have lots of bureaucrats, not putting down bureaucrats.

They have lots of bureaucrats, but not somebody who can actually lead somebody into battle. And so you get a bit of a backstory about Jephthah, and Jephthah is the son. There's a married man who has kids, and he goes and sleeps with a prostitute and makes the prostitute pregnant, and the baby is Jephthah.

And as Jephthah gets to be a certain age, the brothers and sisters of the dad start oppressing Jephthah and eventually kick him out of the whole region, and he has to go and flee and live somewhere else because his brothers and sisters are so against him.

[16 : 25] And when he goes to this other place, he ends up becoming basically like a... He becomes a raider. He becomes a robber. He gathers a whole pile of criminals around him, so he's a natural leader.

Only the thing is, he's a leader in stealing. But he's able to mobilize a large group of men, and they go and successfully steal and raid in lots of places. And so the elders of Israel, they go and they headhunt him.

And they said, you're very successful at fighting, and you're very successful at mobilizing people. Will you come and be the commander of the army? And he says, I'm only going to come and be the commander of the army if I'm also, in a sense, the king, the ruler of the whole place.

And they have a bit of a negotiation. And at the end of it, the people of Israel agree. And then if you look here at verse 11, chapter 11, verse 11, you see this very interesting thing. So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, that's sort of the particular area of Israel that they're in, and the people made him head and leader over them.

And Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord at Mizpah. And it's sort of a very interesting thing, is that despite that he's living in a pagan land, and he's a robber, he's a raider, he has this connection to the Lord.

[17 : 36] And everything that's gone on, all that they've asked him to do, he brings before the Lord. It's a holy moment, so to speak. Even though they've been serving the pantheons of seven other nations, seven pantheons, he doesn't go and speak to any of the pantheons.

He brings the whole matter, everything. What they're asking him to do, the battle, the oppression, everything, he pours it out to the Lord. And that's what happens. So what happens next?

Well, if you go back and you read from verses 12 to 28, you see that the first thing that Jephthah does is he actually tries to negotiate with the Ammonites. And what you see there is how he says, you know, what's the issue here?

Is there a way we can solve it by negotiation? You can go and read it if you want. And at the end of the day, Jephthah says, here's the different issues that I see them.

But the Ammonites just reject them all. They're not interested in negotiation at all. They're not interested in dialogue at all. It's their way or death.

[18 : 36] And their way will be death. And so the battle is about to begin. But this brings us to the part that Ken read.

It brings us to the horror of the text. If you turn with me to chapter 11, verse 29. And notice here, the Bible doesn't pull any punches.

Then the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah. Now you just pause and you think, okay, the Holy Spirit's on Jephthah. Things are going to be holy and good.

I mean, he's been a pretty good leader. He's poured out his heart to the Lord. He's tried to negotiate. I mean, that's the right thing to do. Things are going to be good now because the Holy Spirit has come upon Jephthah. Continuing on in verse 29, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh and passed on to Mishpah of Gilead.

And from Mishpah of Gilead, he passed on to the Ammonites. In other words, he's mobilizing his forces for the battle. And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, if you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever, and in Hebrew it can either be whatever or whoever, comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's.

[20 : 02] And I will offer him or her or it up for a burnt offering. It's just a terrific text.

How is it that he has this affinity for the Lord and he's open, he's saying to God, listen, here's the deal, God. Here's the deal, Lord. You help me win and I will make the biggest sacrifice imaginable.

I'll sacrifice a human being for you if you let me win. Now we're going to spend some more time on some other issues in this text, but if you could, Andrew, put up this next thing.

I just want to say a couple of things very, very briefly before we go any further. Doing what is evil is never acceptable worship in the eyes of the triune God.

Doing what is evil is never acceptable worship in the eyes of the triune God. I have an atheist friend. He's since moved to a different Starbucks, so I don't see him very often, but one of the things which he loved to do was show me the most recent picture of a Russian Orthodox priest blessing war planes that were going to Syria.

[21 : 23] And for him, it was just a classic defeater. He would just go, religion? Christianity? Drop the mic. What the Bible is saying is this.

Adding a prayer before you go to kill somebody doesn't make it right. Adding a prayer before you commit adultery doesn't make it right. Adding a prayer while you deny you're a slum landlord and you deny the rights of your tenants, but you go to church doesn't make it right.

And I use the word evil because it's very strong, but it's anything which is wrong. Doing something wrong is never something that pleases God. It's not something you can consider to be worship.

Whatever else is going on in this story here, it's not meant to teach us that it's all right. And this is very important because it touches on deep cultural issues. It's a very big cultural fear and it's a big cultural fear because sometimes, I mean, how can we deny that there have been many priests and pastors and ministers who abused their power to abuse boys?

We can't deny that. And how many Baptist deacons and elders have also been, and Anglicans have been guilty of horrendous things using religion to cover it up.

[22 : 39] We cannot deny that. But what we can say is this text is definitely not saying that it is right. If you could put up the next point, Andrew. Here's the other thing is the Lord is going to deliver Israel, but the Lord delivers Israel despite Jephthah's vow, not because of his vow.

The Lord's going to deliver Israel because the Lord delivers, not because of what Jephthah says. It is because it is of the very nature of the Lord that he saves and delivers.

And so despite the evil of Jephthah's vow, the Lord will deliver. And that's what happens very next. Just very briefly, they win.

Immediately after this, they win. The people who had been severely oppressing them for 18 years are beaten in battle. And now we turn to verse 34 of chapter 11.

Then Jephthah, after the victory, then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah, and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child.

[23 : 52] Beside her, he had neither son nor daughter. And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, Alas, my daughter, you have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble for me.

For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow. And she said to him, my father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord. Do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies on the Ammonites.

Just pause before we read the next bit. If you make an evil vow, the Lord wants you to recant and repent of it. So this is wrong.

But the other thing is a very, very telling thing. This goes back to the whole thing about repentance. from the story, he would not have been upset if one of his servants came up first.

He would have sacrificed them. He's upset because it's his daughter. And then the story goes, if you continue on with it in verse 37.

[25 : 09] So she said to her father, let this thing be done for me. Leave me alone two months that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity. She's prepuccasant. Just on the edge of being old enough to be married.

I and my companions. And so he said, go. Then he sent her away for two months and she departed. She and her companions and wept for her virginity on the mountains. And at the end of the two months she returned to her father who did with her according to his vow that he had made.

She had never known a man and it became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gilead, Gileadite, four days in the year.

It's an oral custom. It's not something which is still practiced. And the fact that they memorialize this isn't a good sign about the spiritual health of Israel by the way. It's not a good sign.

They're not romanticizing it. Right? Because the lesson should have been that there is a yearly remembrance that you never make a vow to commit human sacrifice which is clearly condemned throughout the entire five books of the Bible which Jephthah would have had access to at that time in his life.

[26 : 23] It's consistently condemned in the Bible. And then just to wrap up the story if you read the last eight verses you'll find that one of the things that ends up happening and by the way in many many religions and it's often viewed as a positive thing today you know you look at the lion king and the circle of life but the fact of the matter is is that people who live amongst a story that is a circle it's despairing because you're trapped.

You're trapped in circles. In the Bible the book of Judges I haven't talked about this very much but in each of the twelve judges that mark the book of Judges it looks like a cycle but it's not a cycle it's a spiral and you see that's often how life works and I'm just just as a bit of an aside the spiral can go downwards because as the spiral goes downwards and that's what's happening in the book of Judges as you go from the very first judge to by the time you come to the very end you see that there's this apparent going around in circle but every time it goes around they get lower and lower and lower and they get more and more evil and more and more debased and by the end of it you have massive killing and breaking of promises and raping of a woman and severing her into twelve pieces you see this and in a sense what we know about our holiness is also a cycle because it isn't that you just always do what is right you do what is wrong and you repent but in a sense in a godly way there's a spiral that goes up or at least goes up and then down and then up and then down and it's mainly up but that's what you see going on here in this text is this cycle of there's just civil war

Israel fighting Israel at the end there's a type of peace but not rest now what do we want to say about all of this story the sermon series is called Messy People Faithful God and by God I mean the Triune God and this story seems to be very very confusing like for many people it doesn't make any sense that this isn't a Bible it seems to talk about making vows to the Lord it seems talks about making your opening your heart to the Lord and pouring out your heart to him it shows being trusting the Lord to go and fight in a battle but it also makes vows which are evil but somehow or another even after the Holy Spirit comes upon him they make this this vow and still it's all successful and what on earth is going on like what on earth is going on well all I can say is this if we have and I could have called the sermon series

Faithless People Faithful God Sinful People Faithful God you know Rebellious People Faithful God Messy People Faithful God but if God has to get through to messy people he needs to mess with their heads if God wants to deal with messy people he needs to mess with their heads and that's what the book of Judges does time and time and time again if you could put up the next point Andrew when I say a fallen mind as a Christian what I believe is that God originally made human beings to be completely good and perfect we human beings in Genesis 3 it describes a fall we desire to be like God and to be the center and to be over God and to be over each other we think we can be gods together but you can't really be gods together because there really is the very heart of the desire to be gods together is I'm going to be more of a god than you sorry but that's my desire and you want to be more of a god than me and human beings are fallen and what I would like to suggest is that there are two things that the fallen mind believes it's especially prevalent in Canada today the first is that this is how religion or spirituality works first you be good then once you start to be good then God will hear you the universe will hear you and then after you're still being good and you're starting to be heard you're able to talk to God whatever that is then eventually if that all works out you'll be one with God and I would suggest this characterizes most versions of personally put together spirituality

I'm not denigrating it by saying that but that's how many people approach it they take the best and what they would view as the best of different things and put them together to be their own spiritual path that they're walking on and they seek to be good within those terms and as they're good they can use their rituals and whatever it is their meditation or their yoga or their prayers to connect with God and eventually if they do that they'll be one with God or recognize that they're one with God and it characterizes all religious and spiritual endeavors and the second thing that goes along with it is that and you hear this constantly in our culture is that to the fallen mind the world is divided between the good people and bad people I read about one novel a week and they're all secular novels I don't read Christian literature unless it's C.S. Lewis or J.R. Tolkien or something like that which is very old and it's a constant thing you're a good person you hear it you go to Tim Hortons you can go to Starbucks you can go to the Happy Goat you can go to Bridgehead you're a good person he's not a good person she's not a good person they're bad the world is divided between good and bad and of course it's very easy because if the world is divided between good and bad and you're a good person it means you're already in terms of the spiritual journey you've already got step one nailed now it's just a matter of actually deciding you want to start talking to God so you can be one with God and that's just how our fallen mind just understands the world and it's all part of that by the way is why at a very very deep level it just seems completely and utterly obvious to us that good things should happen to good people and bad things should happen to bad people and that any bad thing that happens to a good person shows that there's something wrong with the moral order of the universe and in fact whatever God that should exist and that would include whatever Christians say

[32 : 43] God is or they think he is or she is or it is that that God should rectify these matters because there are good people and there are bad people and I'm a good person and a bad thing shouldn't be happening to me because I'm a good person haven't you heard me why on earth is it worth it to be one with you if bad things are happening for many many people that we know and I know people who completely and utterly rejected religion they say religion is a complete and utter waste of time it makes me angry to even talk about it what they've given up is point A what they've completely rejected is 5A that you first be good then be heard then be one and people who've given up on religion and spirituality that's what they've given up on but the fact of the matter is is that even if they make jokes about how they're going to go to the bad place how them and all their friends will be in the bad place they say that in a way that it's good to be bad because they still accept the structure of that worldview and so here's what happens and there's Christian versions of this by the way and so what happens if you have the view okay first you be good then you be heard then you be one and if there's a world between good people and bad people where on earth do you put Jephthah?

like what? like he's heard because he's one and he sort of does this good stuff but he does this work like where do you put Jephthah?

where do you put this story? where do you put judges if that's how everybody knows the world works or should work how on earth does this make any sense?

well the answer is it doesn't but here's the thing here's the problem with the way our minds work if I got up my wife's not in church she's downstairs looking after the kids if I got up and spent the next 10 minutes talking about how good a dad I am I am the best dad I am the best husband we're going to be married 39 years in October it has been 39 years of bliss and happiness and if I was to say that my wife would be gagging none of you would believe it and all it would show was that I was very good especially if I convince you is that I'm really good at BS and I'm really good at self-congratulation and self-flattery and here's the problem with this world view the world is divided between good and bad people the fact of the matter is is that bad people think they're good don't they?

like let's be honest if you're thinking who some of the bad people are however you want to think about that my guess is that if you hung around them you want to know how you really know that there's no bad people in the world go to a funeral doesn't matter how big a crook they are there will be somebody who gets up and praises how good a person they are guarantee it nobody in a funeral will say this was a despicable person I'm only doing this service because they paid me 500 bucks if it ever happens it would go viral if it was taped and so how does this work if you in fact aren't really good but you believe you're good and doesn't make you gag when you meet somebody who says how good they are and you know they're not good but why is it that you give yourself a pass and we all know that bad things in quotes happen to good people in quotes that that isn't the way the world is yet that's how we think the world is or should be just to wrap it up only Christianity explains our sense and our hypocrisy and our trap and our dilemma if you could put up the next point Andrew that would be very helpful here's what the Bible says about every human being every human being every human being you will meet today if you go wandering around the market and you meet some unbelievably broken street people if you walk around the market today and you see Justin Trudeau or Andrew Scheer or you see the owner of Shopify it doesn't matter

[37 : 31] I mean one level it matters but it doesn't matter because at the end of the day you only every human being you meet is a bent treasure who wears a crown that's what the Bible says every human being is made in the image of God every human being is made so that they would have stewardship over the created order you read Psalm 8 and it says that every human being in a sense is crowned by God but the line between good and evil is not between me and some other person the line between good and evil goes right down me it goes right down my thoughts it goes through my will it goes through my dreams of the future my imagination my hopes my remembrances of the past the line between good and evil is right through me and so it is that I am bent I am out of whack I am not straight but even though I am that God does not remove my humanity from me so I am still made as a treasure bearing the image of God and wearing a crown and every human being is like that but if this is the case that I am bent and if the line between good and evil goes right down me then how is it possible for me to divide the world between good people and bad people and how is it possible for me whether it is Islam or Judaism or religious forms of Christianity or spirituality or Buddhism or Hinduism to think that the way that I can be one with God is that first

I am going to be good and then I am going to be heard and then I am going to be one and how can I do that if the line between good and evil goes right down through me it can never ever ever work and that is why religion and spirituality so sickens many people because it is filled with hypocrisy I was too loud and I made a baby cry I am sorry and it and so here I just want to tell you this is why this story is preparing us for something far more glorious Andrew if you could put it up religion does not work but there is a power from the triune God that is pure grace and is offered to the undeserving as a gift and when received by faith in Jesus God makes the dead to come alive the blind to have light the shameful to have honor the slave to be free the condemned to be acquitted the lost to be saved the poor to be rich the alone to be adopted the impure to be pure the sinful to be righteous the doomed to possess a sure hope the far off to be brought near the hostile to be reconciled the guilty to be forgiven the demonized to be filled with the Holy Spirit the loveless to be loved the dweller in the domain of darkness to be transferred to dwell as a citizen in the kingdom of the beloved son and if God does all of that for us the undeserving as a gift for each bent treasure for whom the line for good and evil goes right down the center of whom they are but they are still a treasure who wears a crown if God does that for us and we receive it by Jesus these stories are trying to break our mind from how the fallen mind works to be like

Israel and throw ourselves upon the mercy of God and then the way we live is out of gratitude and security for what God has done for us and it is out of that that we begin to pray to our father in heaven in a new and different way and it is out of that that we begin to live in our father's world in a new and different way I invite you to stand just bow our heads in prayer if there's any here who have never yet crossed that line and come to that point where they call out upon God for mercy or who have thought all their life that they are trying to be good to be heard so they can someday be one and now realize that entire journey is completely impossible and the

Holy Spirit is convicting you to die to that and die to your self-conception as good and your fear that you are bad and the Holy Spirit is knocking on the door Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart that you would cast yourself upon his mercy and call out to him there is no better time than right now to stop listening to what I say and just say Jesus be my savior and be my Lord all that list that George just read that's all from the Bible I need that I want that and I surrender to that and there's no better time than now to use your own words to so say it and for the rest of us who all have fallen minds as well who we leave church on a Sunday and very quickly we fall back into thinking of ourselves as good worried that we're bad seeing others as the other and somehow a threat rather than someone to be loved and served and prayed for who quickly fall into those religious habits of thinking

Father this is our time to just come before the Lord and say Lord thank you for the gospel thank you I can be with your people and hear it I really need it I want my life in light of the gospel to be a spiral that ends in heaven Father we thank you for your word we thank you that you mess with our heads we thank you that you mess with our heads so that we will be open to the gospel and be gripped by it we ask Father that the Holy Spirit would move in a mighty and powerful way within us to grip us by the gospel and with the gospel with its truth with its beauty with its power with its certainty with its reality with its unending nature Father grip us with the gospel so that we will begin to live free in your world with you as our father for the good of people for the sharing of the gospel and for your great glory not our own all these things we ask in the name of

[45 : 04] Jesus and God's people said Amen