

# I'll Be Damned

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'm grateful that Lisa transposed into inclusive language as she read when she got to replacing her and God, though I thought it was a little...

You're kidding. How inclusive do you want to be there? I must confess to you that when I picked this brilliant title for today and wrote it down and it got immortalized on a card like this, that was a great moment, I'm sure, but I'd forgotten what I was thinking about.

And I can't figure it out, but I thought I will try and do a careful exegesis of it anyway, just so that you will understand, or I will at least justify the fact that it may have been the reason you came to find out what it means to say, I'll be damned.

You know. And it really was quite fruitful, I thought, because damnation is a word that doesn't appear as frequently in the New Testament as you might think it does.

It's very infrequent, but it translates...the words are translated in two other ways in the New Testament in terms of judgment and condemnation.

[ 1 : 32 ] So that to be...the more usual way of saying it in the New Testament is, I'll be condemned or I'll be judged and condemned. So, the fact of the matter is that I have made the great discovery that the average citizen finds it a whole lot easier...now this may not strike you this way, but he finds it a whole lot easier to come to terms with his condemnation than to come to terms with the possibility of salvage.

In other words, the process of growing up for most people is growing up to recognize that you'll be damned, you know. You haven't done what you ought to have done.

You have done what you ought not to have done. There is no really good thing in you down at the root. You've failed in this area. You've lied in this area. You've been immoral in this area.

You've deceived in this area. So that's the way it is. And that's the way life works. And the inevitable result of that is, I'll be damned.

You know, that that's...and we, I think, come to terms with that much more easily. We understand darkness more than light. We understand death more than we understand life.

[ 3 : 00 ] You know, we...because we don't spend our time thinking about what life means, but we sure spend a lot of time thinking what death means. And Paul says in the letter to the Romans that some of us spend the whole of our life wondering and fearful of the inevitable approach of death.

So we understand condemnation better than we understand salvation. And it comes as a surprise to us. It's...in a book I read recently by Walker Percy, who, as I told you, I'm always tempted to call him Percy Walker, but he's really Walker Percy.

And in this book, he talks about the voluptuousness of bad news. You know, that we are attracted by it, you know.

Did you know that so-and-so has censored? Yeah. And it's very bad. And in a sense, all our attention mechanisms perk up. And we want to hear the bad news.

We don't want to hear it in a way, and we're hurt by it, but it's still strangely attracted to us. And there's a strange drawing of it. We had an article in the paper yesterday morning about a man who's on death row in some California prison.

[ 4 : 24 ] And I admit that stories like that intrigue me no end. I...contemplating how somebody sits in a cell day after day, counting the 49 days before he goes into the electric chair or the gas chamber or what...

I find that very, very intriguing to contemplate how you do that. And photographs are very...they arouse my interest.

What do you look like when you know that you're going to die? You don't look any different than anybody else. But somehow it's very attractive to us. And we seem to be drawn towards the idea of

our condemnation.

It seems to be something that we...as we grow up, we take it for granted that that's what's going to happen to us. Ultimately, it'll catch up on us, and ultimately it will overtake us.

So that death becomes for us the kind of sacrament of despair. You know, we experience the despair inwardly and spiritually.

[ 5 : 42 ] And the outward and visible sign of that is death. So when people are talking about death most of the time, they're not talking about their glorious reception into the kingdom of heaven and leaving this world of sin and woe behind.

They're talking about the outward and visible sign of the pervasive despair that holds their heart all the time. So that when we come to the point of being big enough to swear, what we're doing in saying something like, I'll be damned, is recognizing the inevitability of our own personal condemnation.

Others we may be much more hesitant to condemn, but so often we have...it seems that we have within ourselves a sense of our own condemnation.

It's like this, I think, and I...you know, and I'm trying to think through what it means, but if you have someone here who's married to someone here and has an illicit relationship to someone here, that's...you have two things about this person here of whom I'm speaking.

You have that relationship in which he has...he or she has contracted a lifetime covenant and made the commitment that whatever my life means, it means...it means it in relationship to this person.

[ 7 : 35 ] So whatever my life is, this is...this is the truth about my life. And it's in this relationship here. But along comes something else or someone else who is powerfully attractive, powerfully entertaining, powerfully seductive.

And you enter into a relationship here, of which you may be profoundly sorry, but you're in that relationship.

And the difficulty that you have in this situation is that that relationship becomes for you the thing you're prepared to be damned for.

In other words, you're prepared to die for that. You don't care what the consequences are. This becomes the truth, which is a lie in some ways, around which you build your life.

And that's what happens. And this...and you see it happen to people, and experience it happening to yourself, I'm sure, all together too often.

[ 8 : 57 ] That you decide that that is going to be what I am prepared to accept as the truth of my life.

And I guess the reason I came across that, or sort of began thinking about it, was because of some people I know who are wealthy, healthy, three lovely children, a mature marriage, and a marriage into which they both entered in a state of maturity.

And the fact is that it's now being bust up. And why is it being bust up? Because there is a lie which has been made the truth, you know.

And the commitment to that lie is greater than the commitment to the truth. And so that, in a sense, the reason I'm telling you this is that I think human beings are prepared to accept the inevitable condemnation of living with that lie, rather than dealing with it, and acknowledging it for what it is.

So that the natural state of a human being is well expressed by the words, I'll be damned, you know.

[ 10 : 42 ] That that's the ultimate reality of my life to which I am basically committed. That that's going to happen. But life is short, and I'm prepared to accept that, and we go on with it.

Well, that's, that I think is, is very interesting in terms of our, in terms of our life, and how, how we do that.

How we make that kind of basic covenant with the sacrament of death, you know. That we accept the despair, and, as the inward reality of something which will ultimately overtake us.

So, there we are. Now, the interesting thing about this is, and I, is that the central point of the Christian gospel is the damned man.

That here he is. Ah, in my place condemned he stood. The man who is nailed to the tree.

[ 12 : 12 ] The one who has accepted the inevitability of death. And, ah, in my place. And, ah, so when you come to the passage that you're looking at today, and it starts with the words, ah, him we proclaim.

Who is it we're proclaiming? We're proclaiming the damned man. The man who accepted condemnation, and didn't deserve it.

He didn't accept it as inevitable. He accepted it by choice. So that when you're proclaiming this man, you are talking to people who are under condemnation. And telling them about Jesus Christ, who chose to be under condemnation in our place. And, ah, that's how the, ah, that's how the, ah, the passage goes. That him we proclaim. Now, who is it that we proclaim? And, ah, if you look in the car, the sheet that you had today, I extracted a, ah, a passage which comes from just ahead of the, the verse in the box.

[ 13 : 41 ] And that's reading from the 15th chapter, verse of 1 Colossians. And it describes who this man is. Ah, ah, now I want you, before you, I mean, you can look at it.

There it is. He is the image of the invisible God. But, remember, this is written within 20 or 30 years of the life story and history of Jesus of Nazareth.

The man whom I told you said, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The man who stood outside the grave of Lazarus and said, Lazarus, come forth.

The man who took the fish and the bread and broke them and gave them to the disciples, who gave them to above 5,000 people. And he fed them. The man who stood in the ship in a storm in the night and said, be still.

And they, that this was this man. And they knew these stories about them. And ever since that time, when people read those stories, they say, how can you still a storm?

[ 15 : 02 ] How can you raise the dead? How can you turn water into wine? How can you make a paralyzed man get up and walk?

How can you make someone who was born blind see? How can any of that happen? And our rational and scientific mind says, it can't happen.

Now, because we live in a rational, scientific, materialist kind of world, we want to know how that happened. How it happened that the water turned into wine.

And so maybe the chemists go to work on it and try and figure out how it could happen. Well, all those things we wonder about. But you see, the way the New Testament answers it, within the scope of one generation, was not that they understood how the miracles were done.

Because it's not, it doesn't give you a formula for going on, healing the sick and giving sight to the blind and making the lame walk and calling the dead from the grave.

[ 16 : 16 ] There's, you can read it over and over again and you won't figure out how to do it. Say that this was some kind of itinerant Jewish magician and this was how he did his trick.

You don't find that in the New Testament. They don't know how to explain the miracles any more than we do. But what they do know is who the man is that performed it.

And so what happens in the development of the New Testament then is that within 20 or 30 years, they say of him, what do you have here?

He is the image of the invisible God. And if he who is the image of the invisible God cannot command the dead back to life, then he isn't the image of the invisible God.

So it all, it all pivots on the person of Jesus Christ. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

[ 17 : 26 ] In him all things were created. And the all things includes heaven and earth, visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities, authorities. All things were created through him.

He was the agent of their creation and he was the object of their creation. They were created for him because he is Lord of lords and King of kings.

And the whole of creation exists for the purpose of Jesus Christ. Now you begin to see, I hope, how powerful a thing it is that Paul says in his letter to the Colossians, Him we declare.

We're telling you who he is. If you want to understand creation, see who this man is. If you want to understand what your life is all about, see who this man is.

If you want to understand that ultimately God's purpose is not your condemnation, and accepting and coming to terms with your condemnation is not the will and purpose of God for you, then consider this one whom we declare to you, that he is the image of the invisible God.

[ 18 : 51 ] There's an ad in the paper this morning which uses a slogan which is becoming familiar now, about think globally and act locally.

And that's on behalf of the Green Movement. Well, that's in fact what God did. God, thinking of the whole of creation and the whole of eternity and the whole of the universe, acted locally in the person of Jesus Christ.

And that's how we understand our faith. That's why we say that this is the universal God of everything and everyone who is acting locally in a particular time and place in the person of Jesus Christ.

And so he is the firstborn of creation. That is, he is what creation is all about. He is also the, he is, he makes sense of the creation in that he became incarnate and entered into it and died on the cross.

I mean, he goes, this, this image of the invisible God ends up on a cross.

[ 20 : 30 ] And it's so it says that he is, he is the beginning of creation. He, by his death and resurrection, is the beginning of the new creation. And he is the, he is the head of the church, which is the community within creation, which is to bear witness to the reality of the new creation.

That's, that's what the church is for. And I think I told you this, but it impressed me that there are three occasions in which Christ humbled himself. One is he humbled himself in becoming a human being, being born of the Virgin Mary.

You know, the, the, the, the, the carol that says, lo, he abhorred not the Virgin's womb. He humbled himself in becoming a human being.

He humbled himself in dying on a cross. And he humbled himself by identifying himself with the church.

Not the arrogant and powerful and wealthy and influential and politically meaningful church that we sometimes like to think of it as. But he identified himself with the community of believers who, in this world, bore witness to another world.

[ 21 : 54 ] So that this is, this is the him who we declare. And, uh, if you look at it, you see that, uh, it says that, uh, in the last verses of verse 19, Paul, in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

And, uh, this is, this is where Paul is really putting the, the knife edge on his argument with the Colossians.

Even as we need to confront the knife edge of who this person, Jesus Christ is. We can meld him into our world as a teacher and a lover of children.

We can meld him into our world as somebody who feeds the hungry and is concerned for the poor and wants the downtrodden to be lifted up. We can fit him into our world that way. We can't wait and say, well, he serves, he serves as a good prototype.

He serves as a good image for those things. But what it's all, what he's saying here is that he is, uh, in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

[ 23 : 10 ] So that people say, well, God, Jesus fits in here. And Jesus fits in there. And Jesus fits in there. And Jesus fits in there. And Jesus fits in there. The real issues are here. And we point to something else and someone else.

And Paul says, you can't do that. Because in him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. It's in him.

He is the central person. And then it goes on to say that it is not, not only is the fullness of God dwelling in him.

It says that through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And he says, you know, our world is a strange world.

And, uh, you, you and I must observe, uh, the fact that in, uh, Yugoslavia, in Afghanistan, in, uh, India, uh, in what used to be Burma, what used to be Ceylon, in all these countries, somewhere at some time, some time, blood was spilt.

[ 24 : 34 ] And blood revenge grips the hearts of people who are prepared to kill and to shoot and to destroy in endless revolution in order to, uh, in a sense, get revenge for the blood that has been shed.

Maybe a year ago, ten years ago, a hundred years ago, a thousand years ago. Nobody goes to the Middle East without realizing that many of the battles which are being fought there on the streets of Jerusalem today start from blood that was shed a thousand years ago.

And it's never been resolved. And it's never been resolved. So it's quite an amazing statement that this says that in Christ, that, uh, that, uh, that God, that through him reconciliation has been effected on earth and in heaven by the blood of his cross.

So that here is blood that is shed, which forms not, uh, uh, uh, the foundation of irreconcilability between two tribes, two ethnic groups, two nations, but this forms the basis of them coming

together.

There is reconciliation effected through Christ's death on the cross. The end of the war between heaven and earth. The end of the war between darkness and light. There is reconciliation effected through Christ's death on the cross.

[ 26 : 17 ] And that's, that's the one whom we declare. The one whom we proclaim. So that when you go on to the last two verses of this, you see, uh, that what, what Paul says is that, uh, our work is to teach and to warn in order that we may bring every man to maturity in Christ.

You see, that, that, that, uh, every person comes to that fullness of who they're meant to be as a person in Christ.

In him who, uh, who is the image of the invisible God. In him by whose death reconciliation was effected. And those things affect you and me.

That would be, that is, you see, like the way, but you see, we have already matured in our culture to the point where we are reconciled to the inevitability of our own damnation.

We have seen the cost and committed ourselves to it, and we're going to do the best we can until it overtakes us. That's the human condition. But that's not wisdom and maturity that belongs to us in Christ.

[ 27 : 48 ] In Christ, the basis of life is reconciliation. And that this involves wisdom, and this involves teaching, and this involves warning, in order that people may come to that understanding that that's who they are.

They are meant to live reconciled to one another. They are meant to live reconciled to God. And that's what the good news is about. And we can't affect it, because in our brave new world of the 1992s, you don't see any processes of reconciliation going on, do you?

It's tearing and tearing and tearing and tearing all the time everywhere between people. Where is reconciliation going to happen when people come to understand who they are, when people come to maturity in Christ?

And Paul says, for this I toil in agony, expending every ounce of energy I have in order to tell people the reality of who Christ is and what the significance of his life, death, and resurrection are in terms of the meaning of our human life.

And we have to come to terms with that. Well, let me just conclude by saying we experience God's power by undertaking God's work and discovering that in the labor and the agony and the striving hard work of it all, we see a power at work, which is the same power Paul identifies, the same source of power demonstrated among us, the same source of power that brought Jesus Christ from the dead.

[ 29 : 55 ] That power is at work. One little story to tell you, to conclude with. I was in a committee meeting the other day with three Englishmen and very admirable people, all of them, and they characterized Canadian and Canadian culture, at least church culture, as coming to the conclusion that nothing can be done.

That Canadians are those who have abandoned themselves to the sense that nothing can be done. And so, what do you do when you come to that commitment? You do nothing.

And what Canada needs, and I mean, I can get mad at them for being Englishmen and not understanding, but it came too close to the truth for me to argue with them at that moment anyway. But you see, what this is about is as we proclaim Christ, we're saying something has been done. And we need to respond to that because that's what it's all about.

Let me pray. Father, we thank you for Paul's persistence and perception in proclaiming Christ that he who persecuted Christians and that he who persecuted Christians ended up by laboring among them that they might come to understand Christ and give their whole lives to him.

[ 31 : 32 ] And Father, as we study this letter that he wrote, we ask that his labor in writing it might bear fruit in our lives as we, by God's grace, are given to understand Jesus Christ, whom he proclaimed.

Amen. Amen. Thank you.