

Temptations In The City

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[0 : 00] The thing I have to talk about today is compromise. I thought I might start by saying that, you know, this poem, which goes that two plus two equals four, you know, that thinks that two and two make four, and neither five nor three, the heart of man has long been sore, and long is like to be.

And we live in a world where if you're selling it, two and two make five. If you're buying it, two and two make three. And it's very hard to get our world to agree on the fact that two and two, in fact, make four.

And that's what keeps commerce going, I suppose, that trying to compare those arithmetic. But there are things that can't be compromised, and I suspect this is one of them.

Now, I want to tell you a little story about compromise, and in order to do that, I want to just draw another picture, just so you get it.

But this is, and I've done this before, but that's the Holy Land.

[1 : 29] As you can see, this is the Sea of Galilee, and this is the Dead Sea, and this is the Mediterranean, and this is the Nile River. So if you want to put in the Suez Canal, it's about there.

Now, in the beginning, Abraham came from over here when he was told, the first one to be told, go west, young man, go west.

And he went west, and he arrived up somewhere here with his nephew Lot, and Lot had developed great holdings by then, and he had developed great holdings.

And Lot was told, if you go to the left, Abraham said, I'll go to the right. If you go to the right, I'll go to the left. We've got to divide. We can't go on together like this.

And so Lot looked down, and he saw the valley of the Jordan, and he decided he would go here.

And when he went there, he had chosen the land which contained the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, famous throughout history for their immorality.

[2 : 35] Anyway, Lot went down here, and this whole country became Moab. That was the name it went by. The reason it went by that name was Lot lost his wife along the way.

I won't go into the story, but you could check it out. He lost his wife. He was left living in a cave with two daughters. The two daughters, if I could quote a contemporary phrase, they saw that their biological clock was running down.

And what are we going to do? So what they did was they got their old man drunk, and each of them slept with him, and each of them produced a child on the basis of that incestuous relationship.

And the child of the oldest one was Moab. And Moab grew and developed, and this whole country became his descendants, and they owned this whole land.

Well, that meant that they were really first cousins of the children of Israel, who in the meantime went down into Egypt. And they stayed there for a long time.

[3 : 48] And finally, when they came out across the Red Sea and wandered and wandered and wandered for 40 years in the wilderness, then they started to go up towards the promised land.

And when they got up partway, they came to the Amorites who stood in their way and said, we want to go through your land, we won't eat your food, we won't drink your water, we won't go off the road, we'll go right through.

And the Amorites said, oh no, you won't. And so the children of Israel went through and wiped them out because they tried to resist them. And then when they had finished with the Amorites, they came along to Og, king of Bashan, and he treated them the same way.

And they just wiped them out. And then the next place they came to was Moab, and they camped here on their way through to their land, which was over here.

They tried to strike the same deal, but there was a king of Moab at the time, whose name was Balak. And Balak saw the power of these people coming out of the, and what they had done to the Amorites, and what they had done to the Og, king of Bashan, and so they decided they were going to try a different tact.

[5 : 06] And they knew that way up in this country lived a man named Balaam. And Balaam was a kind of soothsayer, fortune teller.

He knew what was happening, and he considered himself to be in some measure a servant of God. He had that reputation. So Balak sent out his courtiers and princes to bring Balaam down to see if he could stop the Israelites by putting a curse on them.

And they came to Balaam, and Balaam said to them, you know, I mean, when you were visited by a delegation of fairly well-off looking people, you can't help but wonder if this isn't an opportunity which God has sent to you.

But he was honest, and he said to them, if your master was to take his house and fill it with silver and gold and give it to me, I still can't do anything but what the Lord tells me to do.

I can't say anything but what he says. So they persuaded him anyway. I guess the idea of the house filled with silver and gold, the possibility that that might happen, Balaam started off to go with the princes of Balak to try and help him stop the children of Israel.

[6 : 25] Well, you know that Balaam had an ass, and this is the famous story of the ass that spoke like a man and the man that behaved like an ass.

It's a great text for some morning when things are not going well. And he leads to all sorts of meditative thoughts.

But he wasn't stopped nevertheless. And the angel of the Lord said, well, you can go if you want, but you can't tell him anything that I don't tell you.

And so Balaam made his way down to where Balak was, and Balak got him set up, and Balaam suggested that they build seven altars, and they take seven bulls and seven rams and have seven sacrifices, and by that time God might be ready to listen.

And so they had the seven altars and the seven rams and the seven bulls. And after they'd sacrificed him, Balaam went off into the bush to see what God was going to say, and basically this is what God said after the first try.

[7 : 42] He said, how can I curse whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce whom the Lord has not denounced? Balak had gone to all his trouble, and that's what he got for it.

And he was indignant. So he said, I want to give you another view of these people, and he took them to another place where they looked down on the hordes of Israel stretched below them who were moving into the land.

And Balaam said, seven more altars, seven more bulls, seven more rams, and we'll try again. So they went through that process again. A lot of people think that's how religion works, I might say. And having gone through the process again, Balaam went off to consult God, and God spoke to him, and Balaam came back to tell Balak the king, God is not a man that he should lie or a son of man that he should repent.

So what he said, he said, and that's what he's going to do. And so Balak was getting fairly upset by this point, and he took them to one more place to look at Israel.

[8 : 54] He thought if he didn't see them all at the same time, he might feel that it was possible to put a curse on them. So he took them to another vantage point where he could look down on the children of Israel, and Balaam said, seven more altars, seven more bulls, seven more rams, and they sacrificed them.

And the Lord spoke to Balaam, and Balaam came and said, blessed be everyone who blesses you. That's what he said to the children of Israel.

And cursed be everyone who curses you. And so the whole thing backfired. And Balak understood at that point that God could not be compromised, that God is an uncompromising God.

Now, we should know that, you know, when Jesus was taken up onto the mountain and was told, all the kingdoms of the earth are yours if you will but worship me, that was a perfect compromise because almost every objective that Jesus had was given to him on a platter, only there was just a little bit of compromise involved, and Jesus turned it down.

You know that at another time when Jesus was talking, and he said that, I have not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.

[10:21] Now, if you take the law to be that, you know, very straight up and down, Jesus then went and showed how in the popular mind, the law had been bent over to here, you see, so as to accommodate some of the compromises that man wanted to come to with the law of God.

So thou shalt not kill, got bent a little, and thou shalt not commit adultery, got bent a little, and thou shalt not bear false witness, it got bent a little, and an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, it got bent a little, and all the things got bent.

And Jesus said, no, it's got to be this. He said, you've got to be perfect, even as my heavenly Father is perfect. And that's what's so irritating about Christianity, is this uncompromising nature of God's demands that he places on us.

And it's totally unreasonable in our minds, and we don't know what to do with it. Well, Balaam figured out something that could happen.

And so what he did, and this is where we come to the passage that you have in front of you. You may wonder where we're getting to this. Well, there it is. Verse 14 of chapter 2 of Revelation.

[11:43] I have a few things to say unto you. There are those who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel that they might eat food, sacrifice to idols, and practice immorality.

So that though Balaam could not curse the people of God, Balaam taught Balak how to undermine them. And so the women of Moab seduced the men of Israel, involved them in immoral sexual behavior.

And that went on to joining in the festivals of Moab and finally taking part in the sacrifices of Moab and turning away from God.

So Balaam taught Balak how to compromise the people when he couldn't compromise God. And so that's that's what happened.

And this is this I think is essentially the point about compromise. What happens?

[13:02] Now this I think is where in the whole realm of of Christian faith this is why morality is very important. and I think it's because we shape our theology to fit our morality.

We think that we shape our morality to fit our theology but in fact in experience the other thing is true. Once you start committing adultery you begin to wonder whether the Ten Commandments are true.

You don't think you're wrong. You think they're wrong. Once you start to steal on a regular basis you don't you shape your theology to accommodate your own righteousness.

I mean Paul Tournier talks about this in that classic book called Guilt and Grace. He said none of us come to the point where we recognize that we are guilty. I used to have a Bible study in Kingston Penitentiary which I may have told you about and we had about 10 or 12 convicts came to it every week and they stayed for two or three hours because they had no place to go.

And it was a very and there was one fellow who sat there and week after week he told us that he was in there on a bum charge.

[14:30] Nobody in the group believed him but he had persuaded and convinced himself that though the police the court and most of his fellow convicts honestly believed that he had in fact buried his wife in their backyard where she was found after having had her head caved in that he hadn't done it somebody else had.

So it was I mean it was laughable only in that all the evidence was in the facts were there but he couldn't face it. And that's what I mean when I when I say to you that morality shapes our theology you know he was busy studying the Bible with us without being able to recognize that he was a living contradiction to everything he was talking about you know in that he couldn't face that fact. Now time is almost up and I want to just make this point to you. I am in the religion business and people in the religion business I'm not going to admit that I do this because I pray God I don't but people in the religion business are constantly in the position of being rewarded for working out a compromise for people with God with a God who doesn't compromise you know in the same business you see that Balaam was in that he tried to work out a compromise and everybody wants to work out a compromise compromise I mean you know as I do that politics is the art of compromise that's how it works but it's very dangerous when we move that principle over into our relationship to God one of the famous prime ministers of

Queen Victoria is quoted in the Manchester Guardian last week of saying something to the effect that there has never been anything really foolish that's been done except on the basis of principle

demonstrating that in the world of politics you can't cope with principles you've got to get around them and that was to lead into the illustration that Lithuania who considers itself to be a free country and Mr.

Gorbachev who considers himself to be the president of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics there's the dynamic of that larger community and the independence of the little community and this writer in the Manchester Guardian is saying I hope that neither of them act from principle they've got to work out a compromise but you see with God you don't work out a compromise you can't do it and that's why you know the political takeover of religion is so dangerous and the religious takeover of politics is so dangerous and Charles Colson has written a book to describe it called Kingdoms in Conflict but just to bring this to just let me make this point and this is from John Stott's book on the cross Jesus Christ was crucified under

[18:06] Pontius Pilate Pontius Pilate knew that this man was innocent Pontius Pilate knew that the people of Jerusalem demanded his death and he was caught and he was a politician and he had to work out a compromise and so he sent him to Herod thinking that that would do it he offered to offer Barabbas instead of Jesus thinking that that would do it he scourged Jesus thinking that might satisfy the people and finally he washed his hands to try and dissociate himself from the decision he had to make but ultimately he was forced to compromise even when he turned to Jesus and said I can crucify you and I can let you go and Jesus said no you can't you know you don't have that kind of power well you see what happens is that when we're dealing with God we're dealing with someone with whom there is no compromise now what is the alternative to compromise it's repentance you know people don't last very long in politics if they repent they never say they're sorry you can get that from the cabinet of

British Columbia if you want but in politics you never do in relationship to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ there is no other way because this God will not compromise and so you know Pilate represents a really good picture for us because I think that as Pilate sat in judgment on Jesus Christ in the same way all of us do you know Jesus Christ judges us by appearing before us and asking us to pass sentence on and our tendency is to say you know is to compromise instead of doing what we have to do and say no in fact you are the judge and I am under judgment and I need your mercy

I need to be forgiven we need to come to a place of repentance Chuck Colson in his book says that one of the judgments passed by William O Douglas in regard to a decision that was made by the Supreme Court religion is devoid of any inherent meaning which he interprets to mean that in our world compromise compromise is the only thing there is no uncompromising reality which we face the gospel of Jesus Christ contradicts this by saying that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is prepared to forgive but he's not prepared to compromise and religion is not working out a compromise with God religion is finding a place of repentance and the forgiveness with which God responds to that let me pray our God because we are constantly and always and in every situation involved in compromise grant that we may be given each of us such a faith in Jesus Christ and that we may come to terms with him knowing that he is not going to compromise but that he is going to forgive we ask this in his name Amen