LESSONS FROM LIVING

Now Ruth and I had a proclamation. Guess what it is? The last four verses from Psalm 92. And we're going to do some verses from Psalm 71.

But I will hope continually,
And will praise You yet more and more.
My mouth shall tell or Your righteousness
And Your salvation all the day,
For I do not know their limits.
I will go in the strength of the Lord God;
I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only.
O God, You have taught me from my youth;
And to this day I declare Your wondrous works.
Now also even if I become old and grayheaded,
O God, do not forsake me,
Until I declare Your strength to this generation,
Your power to everyone who is to come.

We changed the words—Ruth insisted on changing them because in the Psalm it says, *Now that I'm old and grayheaded.* And Ruth said, "You're not old and gray headed, so you can say, *If I become old and gray headed.*

I decided that it would be appropriate for me to speak this evening on the theme of *Lessons from Living.* So I'm going to try to share with you some of what I consider to be the most important lessons that I've learned in fifty-four years of being a Christian and fifty years of what they call full-time service.

I don't know whether I need to tell you, but not all the lessons we learn are pleasant or enjoyable. I think there's a feeling abroad today that all learning should be pleasant, and if it isn't pleasant you don't have to learn. That is a complete deception. A lot of real learning is hard work, it's dreary, it can be painful, but it's what you have to go through to learn. If you're not willing to go through that there's a lot of things you need to learn you will never learn.

Also I was for five years principal of a college for training teachers in East Africa and I always used to tell my prospective teachers, "Remember, if you don't maintain discipline you cannot teach." And what I've seen in the last twenty years in America has convinced me that what I was saying was true. I believe

that's true also in our relationship to the Lord. If we want to be taught by the Lord, we have to come under His discipline. If He doesn't discipline us, He can't teach us. So I'm going to share now just about five or six lessons that I believe are important and God taught me.

The first lesson is found in Proverbs 19 verse 14.

> Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers,
> But a prudent wife is from the Lord.

And God has given me, twice in succession, not simultaneously, two prudent wives, and I bless God for each of them. I can never express how much I owe to either of them and both of them. Also in Proverbs 31 it says about a virtuous or excellent wife:

> The heart of her husband safely trusts her;
> So he will have no lack of gain.
> She does him good and not evil
> All the days of her life.

And that has been completely true in each of my marriages. I have been married to a wife who was committed to do me good and not evil all the days of my life, and my heart has safely trusted in each of my wives. So I want to say to you, brothers, "If God has given you a wife like that, treasure her, be grateful for her, take care of her, show her how much you appreciate her, because it's a treasure that you couldn't buy."

One of the special benefits of marriage is that a husband and wife can claim the promise of Matthew 18 verse 19, Jesus said:

> …if two of you agree together [but the Greek says *symphonize together*] concerning anything that you ask it will be done for you…

And I find as I read the Bible that God initially committed the government of the world to a married couple whose names were Adam and Eve, and He told them to rule the earth. And I believe, potentially, there is always in a married couple the potential to rule, and it is to rule through prayer. And any husband

and wife that can agree, symphonize, harmonize together in their prayers will get what they pray for. I think that makes husband and wife, in a way, the most powerful factor in human relationships. But let me remind you that harmony isn't always easy to achieve. I don't think there's anything much more painful than people that are almost in harmony but not quite. And it's worthwhile investing a lot of your prayer and making sacrifices and humbling yourself in order to achieve real harmony with your wife.

I can say in regard to each of my marriages that I've had an absolute conviction that when my wife and I prayed together in harmony we would get precisely what we prayed for, nothing less. That is an incredible blessing. Don't treat it lightly. Don't trade it in for something less valuable. That's my first lesson.

Second one is God has made Jesus Head over all things to the church which is His body. The function of the Head is to take the initiative. The head makes the decisions, the body carries them out. That's how it should be in the church—the decisions should come from the head and be carried out by the body.

It is the privilege and the unique function of the head to make the decisions, and if Christ is head of a marriage or Christ is head of a church or Christ is head of a mission, it is His privilege and His unique privilege to make the decisions, and in my opinion only those decisions which are made by the head will ultimately bear permanent fruit. We can have all sorts of good ideas and plans and work hard and spend a lot of time and labor and money and accomplish nothing of permanent value, if the initiative has not come from Jesus. Jesus said in John 15 verse 16:

> You did not choose Me, but I chose you and ordained you that you should go and bear fruit, that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

That all proceeds out of the choice of Jesus. We did not choose Jesus. We didn't choose to get saved. Jesus chose us. We had to respond to His choice, but if He never made the choice we could never have been saved. And as far as I have been able to see, the only successful ministries and works are those that proceed out of the choices and decisions and plans of Jesus. And a great deal of time and money and energy is wasted in Christian work on all sorts of plans and projects which Christ never initiated, and

ultimately there will be no permanent fruit whatever from them. So it pays to take time to find out what God's plans are. We have never been asked to make our own plans. We have only been told to find and walk in the good works which God has before ordained that we should walk in them. We spend too much praying—maybe not enough but too much anyhow—and far too little time waiting on God. That is the key to success in ministry is time spent in the presence of God without a time limit, without a prayer list, without an agenda, saying, "God, what have You got for me, for us?"

I have always been impressed by Isaiah chapter 6, because that was the chapter that was preached the first time I ever went into a Pentecostal church. I didn't understand much of it, but when they came to the appeal at the end they said, "If you want this,"—and the only thing I could conclude what "this" was, was what happened to Isaiah—"put your hand up." I had no intention of putting my hand up. I'd never been in a church where anybody did anything so embarrassing as to ask you to put your hand up, and I just sat there in this stony silence. There was no background music in those days. It was just—that was it. And as I was sitting there two voices were speaking to me. One voice in my left ear: what it said was, "If you put your hand up in front of all these old ladies and you're a soldier in uniform, you're going to look very silly."

The other voice said simultaneously in the other ear, "If this is something good, why shouldn't you have it?" And I was paralyzed. I sat there. It must have been at least two minutes of this stony silence and then a miracle took place. My own right arm went up in the air and I knew I had not raised it.

Well, at that church they didn't have much of a follow-up program, so everybody heaved a sigh of relief and that was it. My arm had gone up. That was what they were waiting for, and if it had not been for a dear precious elderly couple that took me home and gave me supper and told me a lot more, I would never have gone any further.

Anyhow, in that chapter 6 of Isaiah we are introduced to the seraphim. *Seraph* in Hebrew means "a burning fiery creature." And these seraphim had six wings and I became very interested in what they did with their wings, because with two they covered their face, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And I'd been making for some years or so a study of worship, and I've studied every word in

the Bible that I could find that describes worship, and I've discovered every word for *worship* in the Bible, Old Testament or New, describes a posture of the body. Worship is not primarily speaking. It's certainly not a song service. It's getting into a certain relationship with God expressed by the posture of your body. And I don't want to go into this, because if I go into it I'll never get out of it. But I suggest it's worth studying, and I do have some tapes on it somewhere. I mean, it's revolutionized my idea of worship. I always said to myself, *Well, I know I'm not a worship leader. I can't sing. What can I do?* But since I discovered that I can worship God with my body it has become exciting, and it's become exciting for a lot of other people.

Anyhow, let's think about these seraphim. This is the pattern of worship in heaven. This is the way it ought to be done. Consider what they did with their wings. With two they covered their face—what's that?—worship, position of their wings. With two they covered their feet—what's that?—worship. What did they do with the remaining two? They flew. What's that?—service. So there is twice as much emphasis on worship as there is on service, and I believe that's the correct pattern for the church today. I believe we should give twice as much attention and emphasis to worship as we do to service. In fact, I believe all successful service proceeds out of worship.

In Acts 13 the first missionary journey—how did it start? There were five leaders ministering to the Lord. They didn't have a prayer meeting. They didn't have a business meeting. They came together to meet with the Lord, and out of that they got the Lord's direction:

Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I've called them.

That was a successful work. Why? Because it proceeded out of God's initiative. And I suggest to you if you don't want to waste your time and your strength, don't get launched into things that are not initiated by God, because ultimately there will be no permanent fruit whatever. And in a sense it is arrogance on our part to assume that we can offer God our good ideas and get Him to bless them. He's not interested in doing that. So that's the second lesson. This is not an Anglican service, incidentally.

Some of you don't understand that, but I grew up in the Anglican Church and I had to read the lessons

in King's College chapel for I think three years. It's the only time I went to chapel. I had to wear a white surplice. I stood in front of a big lectern, and there was a vast Bible open for me at the appropriate passage by the—what do you call him?—verger, I think so. Well I really thought I knew how to read the King James, and there was a prize of ten pounds for the person that read the lesson the best. I thought, *I'm going to go for that prize*. Well, I prepared this particular lesson very carefully and when I got up, to my surprise, the Bible was opened to the wrong place. So I flipped it to the place where I knew it should be opened and I read the lesson and it was something about the jewels in the New Jerusalem—a list of stones. One of them is called chrysoprase. Well, having learned both Latin and Greek I was really fully at home with those names. So I read them in an elegant tone of voice and thought *I'm sure for the prize*.

Well, it turned out I had read the wrong lesson. But nobody would have known if it hadn't been for the fact that the Dean, who trained the choir, had been a chaplain in World War I, and he'd had a horse called Chrysoprase, and so whenever that lesson was read, the choir boys were allowed to giggle. And because of my mistake they giggled two Sundays running. So that way my error was brought out into the light and I didn't get the ten pounds.

Leading on from that, this is the third lesson, which you don't have in the Anglican Church anyhow, very closely connected with it is this… I've said already if the initiative doesn't come from Jesus it's a waste of time. If the initiative does come from Jesus then we are totally dependent on Him to do the job. So this is the third lesson which has come to me very painfully. Believe me it has not been an easy lesson, that the only relationship which is appropriate between Christ and me is my total dependence upon Him. And before I preach now, almost invariably, I will take time to tell the Lord, "Lord, I fully acknowledge I'm totally dependent upon You for anything good that could ever come out of this message. If it doesn't come from Your heart through my heart to the heart of the people, it's not worth preaching." But it is not easy for any of us, certainly not for me, to become totally dependent upon God, because the essence of the fall of Adam's transgression was the desire to be independent of God for very good motives. He wanted to be like God. What's wrong with being like God? Nothing. The problem was he wanted to be like God independently of God, and that's where he fell. And every descendant of Adam from that day to this has

an inborn a desire for independence. Actually there is nothing in the universe that is independent of God. It's ridiculous to assume for a moment that it should be so. And man and the fallen angels are the only two creatures I know of that even contemplate being independent of God. The birds are not, the creatures are not, the clouds are not, the seas are not—they all are dependent on God. If we could only realize what our conduct is like in the sight of the universe, to say the least it's like a sore thumb. It's like something sticking out, painful, out of place, creatures of God that actually are ambitious to be independent of God. And I don't believe that God can ever fully have His way in our lives or in our ministries until we come to the fact that we are totally dependent on God. And that is not easy for anybody. There comes a certain moment when we think well, *If, I'm totally dependent upon God and God doesn't come through, what will I do?* I can't tell you what to do. I've often felt that. "Lord, if I get into this situation and You don't come through, what will happen?" But, you see, I want to tell you something. God is dependable. If you depend on Him, He will never fail you.

I would think it would be good of each of us and all of us were to say that once. **God is Dependable**. Shall we say that? **God is Dependable**. Let's say it again. **God is Dependable**. Let's say it once more. **God is Dependable**. You can depend on God. In fact, that is the only safe place is the place of dependence on God. But most of us have to go through a lot of experiences to come to that place, and much of what happens in your life—and some of it you object to, you strive against it, you pray against it—but the purpose of it is to bring you to a place of total dependence on God. And only when you come to that place can God really begin to release His blessing and His power through your life and through your ministry.

Then the fourth lesson—and all of these are kind of consecutive—is taken from 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 25, but it's in the old King James, which is much the closest to the original and it says:

> I give my opinion [and it's Paul speaking] as one who has received mercy from the Lord to be found faithful.

And some years back, quite a number of years back, I was gripped by that fact. Paul attributed the

fact that he was faithful to the fact that he had received mercy from the Lord. And I've come to this conclusion that only through the Lord's mercy will I be faithful. I cannot rely on anything else but His mercy to keep me faithful. I cannot rely on my experience, my knowledge, my contacts, my ministry, nothing. There's only one thing I can rely on to keep me faithful and that is the mercy of God. I am totally dependent on His mercy. I have lived long enough to see a lot of ministers that didn't make it to the end. In fact, I heard a statement by a Chinese pastor whose name is known to Ross. I think it's Wing Mung Dow—is that right? Well, there you are. He said a little while before he died, and he spent twenty years in prison for the Lord, he said, "I've seen a lot of people have good beginnings, but very few had good endings." Does that strike home? You've had a good beginning, are you going to have a good ending?

This will surprise you, but I've observed the tests that Christians go through, and I've come to the conclusion that much the hardest test, and the one that most people fail, is success. Charles Wesley wrote a little song that says:

> The man whom God delights to bless
> He never curses with success.

You think of the characters in the Bible who have success. You think of the kings of Israel. It's hard to find one that was faithful to the end. You see, when we become successful we become self-reliant. We think, "Well, I did it. I have the answers. I know how to do it." And that's when we fall. We have to remain in total dependence upon God. In total dependence on His mercy, and I say to God almost every day, "God, I fully acknowledge that if I am to remain faithful to the end it will only be through Your mercy. I have nothing else that I can rely on."

Then the next one is an unpopular one—actually most of my lessons are somewhat unpopular, but I think they're true, which is what matters. This is taken from Hebrews chapter 12. It's about chastening. Very few people want to hear about chastening. I think a lot of Christians have got the idea that when you've been a Christian long enough—say twenty years or thirty years—there's no more need for chastening. Let me tell you. I've been on fifty-four years and I still need chastening. And it's very

important to recognize that, because if you don't recognize it you'll respond wrongly to God's chastening. Look at these verses in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 5 and following.

> And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:
> "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord,
> Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;
> For whom the Lord loves He chastens,
> And scourges every son whom He receives."

Chastening is the evidence of God's love in your life.

> If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom the Father does not chasten?
> But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.
> Furthermore, we have had human fathers who have corrected us and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?
> For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

What a marvelous statement. Not our holiness, but His holiness. That's different as heaven is from earth. Our holiness will never get us to heaven. We have to be partakers of His holiness, and it comes through what?—chastening. That's right.

> Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained [or exercised] by it.

I want to share my own _____ of my own experience of God's chastening. Fairly recently—I've been a Christian about fifty years—a brother in the Lord who's opinion we respect, said to Ruth and me, "You need to take a sabbatical." He said it one morning; we separated from one another, went our way, and only met at lunchtime. But by lunchtime each of us had become convinced that what he said was from the Lord. We needed to take a sabbatical. We felt it had to be for at least six months, we sat down and looked at our calendar, and it was almost a year before we had six months clear.

So we decided to take a sabbatical and we owned at that time a little apartment in Kona in Hawaii, and we said, "That's where we'll go for our sabbatical." Well, how many of you have been to Hawaii?

Probably not many, but it was Loren Cunningham that said, "God made the world and He wasn't satisfied so then He made Hawaii." And Hawaii is really a good place to relax. At least some parts. Don't for ever so much go to Honolulu. It's almost as bad as Miami Beach, but there are other places.

So we had this picture. We're going to go. We're going to get away from it all, relax, read our Bibles, pray, have fellowship with some of the dear saints we know there and have a wonderful time. Well, it didn't work out that way at all. Not at all! I began to develop some kind of mysterious sickness, weakness. No one could diagnose it. Later on, a friend of ours that may be known to some of you, Lance Lambert, said to us, he said, "If you hadn't taken that sabbatical and been in a position where you could receive regular medical attention, you would have died." And I think that's true. Taking that sabbatical saved our lives, literally.

Well, I went on with all these tests and different types of medication and I wasn't getting any better, and I was getting strangely passive. I sort of folded my arms and really wasn't prepared to fight. One evening, or one night, about 2 A.M.—and that is the time that God occasionally rouses me and speaks to me—I was in prayer and I was talking to the Lord. I said, "Lord, I don't understand. I believe in divine healing; I've taught divine healing; I've prayed for many and they've been healed; I've been healed myself. Why am I not healed?"

And it was as if I had a personal interview with Jesus. I think perhaps it could be something like being before the judgment seat of Christ. And He never was condemnatory at any time, but He just pointed out things in my life that were displeasing to Him. And I want to tell you I was a very respectable Charismatic preacher, and I know whenever preachers talk about sin people think that it must have been immorality or drunkenness or misappropriation of funds. It wasn't any of those. Not at all.

So what the Lord showed me, very gently but very firmly, was that I had been extremely carnal. And then He gave me, in my mind, the Scripture:

Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated.

And Esau is *the* type of the carnal man. And Jesus conveyed to me in a way I can never express to

anybody how much, how intensely He hates carnality. He doesn't hate us, but if we are carnal, He hates our carnality. Now I have difficulty communicating to people what carnality is, but let me say it this way. Carnality, I believe, is at any time when you are not conscious of eternity. When you are living as if this life is all there is, you are totally carnal. You may go to church, you may read your Bible, sing the hymns. Paul said:

> If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most to be pitied.

That's a very powerful statement. So you can be a Christian, say all the right things, be active in the service of the Lord, and be totally carnal if you're not—if your perspective is only in this life. If that's all you see, that is carnality. I cannot convey it. I can only trust the Holy Spirit can make it real to some of you.

So Jesus gave me a sort of overview of certain scenes in my life. They were very respectable. I was usually with well-known preachers, and many of them were in restaurants. And Jesus showed me how carnal I was.

Somebody said to me a little while ago, "If you want to know the best restaurant in any town, ask the preacher." And there's a lot of truth in that statement. Well, that's all right to know the best restaurant; it just depends where it figures in your priorities. I'll say one other thing to try and describe it: God showed me that I had not been treating my body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. I think I'll need to read those words—1 Corinthians 6: 19 and 20:

> Or do you not know…

And do you know what I've observed? Paul probably says that about six or eight times—*do you not know*—and almost every time he says it Christians today don't know what he's talking about. He says:

> Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? [You do not own your body.]
> For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body…

How do you treat God's temple? Let's suppose it's a building. Do you give it reverence? Do you take as good care of it as you can? Do you not permit trash to be dumped in it? If the drains get blocked do you clean them out? If the roof leaks do you repair it? How much respect do you show for God's temple? Do you act as if you own your own body? You don't.

Well, at that point the very day after the night the Lord had spoken to me, I went into hospital and I was in hospital for seventeen days, and I was diagnosed as having something the doctors call SBE—I'll give you the full title but it won't mean much to you, most of you. subacute bacterial endocarditis, and it's an inflammation of the lining of the heart, an infection, and it is normally fatal. In fact, until antibiotics were developed, there was no cure for it. Ruth was talking to our dentist in Fort Lauderdale a few months ago, and she said, "My husband had that." And the dentist gasped and said, "Well, I knew a dental surgeon that had it and he died in three days."

As a result, I was on intravenous antibiotics for six weeks, with a shunt in my wrist. I thank God for doctors. I thank God for medicines. I know that isn't always acceptable for some Pentecostals. They say, "We don't need doctors. We don't need medicines." Well, there are not many that live that way. I'm grateful for the help I received from doctors. I thank God for doctors. I thank God he gave me a clever doctor, and he really invested time in trying to diagnose my problem, because it's very difficult to diagnose. And he probably diagnosed it about forty-eight hours before it would have been too late. And at that time, looking back, I feel I made a U-turn. I was going in one direction; I turned around and started going back the opposite direction. I think that I made my U-turn a few yards from the precipice. There may be some of you here tonight, dear brothers or sisters, you're not far from the precipice. If God shows you, make a U-turn. Don't go on.

Now I could stop there and I'd be a popular preacher, with some people anyhow, and I've never aimed to be popular with everybody. But I want, I believe God wants me, to go one step further. Some of you have heard a tape or something where I spoke about an experience I had in Auckland, New Zealand, last December. One of the crucial experiences in my life. About 2 A.M. and it's that time that God usually chooses to visit me. I had really a visitation from the Lord. I didn't see Him, but His presence was so real

I could not stay in bed, and it takes a lot to get me out of bed a 2 A.M. I had to get down and kneel at the bed and pray, and then I was so—I had such a sense of His activity I had to get up and walk about the room, and it lasted maybe a couple of hours. And I felt that Jesus said to me, "Will you ask Me to give you My heart for America?" And my response was, "Lord, I don't think I could stand it. If I understand it, Your heart is broken for America. You have blessed that nation spiritually and materially as You have never blessed any other nation in history, and they have turned their back on You and shown contempt for You. And I don't believe I could bear what is on Your heart for America."

Well, the Lord didn't withdraw the question. I didn't make a commitment that night. Next morning Ruth and I talked it over and we felt pressed by God to say, "Lord, if it's Your will, we will accept Your heart for America." Now I had imagined that probably some tremendous burden of intercession was going to come upon me, but it didn't happen. I mean, we pray for America three times a day, every day, plus many other times. So I am concerned about America. I am also grateful for America because America received me, gave me citizenship, and have treated me extremely well, better than my own nation, Britain, treated me in those days. So I know I have a debt to the American people, especially American Christians.

Well, it didn't come. I mean, we continued to pray and I made that cassette that was referred to, I think by David Selby, *Facing God's Judgment*, under that anointing, which has impacted thousands of people across this nation. But still, I didn't, it didn't seem to me that was all. Well, recently, about a month or six weeks ago, I felt I had a revelation from Jesus about His heart for America.

Now I want you to test this. I'm not trying to convince you. I'm not interested in convincing you. I am convinced myself. But what I have to say is so far-reaching that you need to check it for yourself. But this is the impression that I got that Jesus showed me He was passionately concerned about the condition of His body in this nation. And I mean I got the impression not that He was angry, so much as He was, I have to say, passionately concerned. I couldn't conceive His being so concerned about anything. And what He was concerned about was the way that American Christians by and large are living. There are exceptions, but basically, to say it like it is, I believe He showed me that the great majority of American

Christians are very carnal. They are absorbed in themselves, they're absorbed in their own comfort, they're absorbed in their own convenience. I think there are two idols in America—comfort and convenience—and anything that infringes on those idols is frowned at. I got the verse in Hosea 4:6:

My people are destroyed through lack of knowledge…

Let me say it this way. I believe Jesus showed me that in His sight the majority of American Christians are not treating their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. I would say many Christians that I know give more intelligent care to their car than to their body. Many American housewives, Christian housewives, know more about how to operate their washing machine than they do about how to feed their family.

It comes down to food. A subject that very few preach about. I believe we are grossly self-indulgent, and I believe we are destroying ourselves by self-indulgence, and I believe Jesus is tremendously grieved. I didn't feel that He had any way to communicate the depth of His concern about this condition.

I think there are perhaps two main areas. The first is ignorance. Many, many American Christians—it's not only true of American Christians—we're talking about America, really do not know how to care for their bodies. I have learned, I believe I have learned right, it's taken me a long while. I could remember—Ruth could remember when she married me I couldn't eat a salad. It upset my stomach. I had a British stomach—meat, potatoes, and puddings.

I am not a dietician, nor am I a doctor, nor am I a psychiatrist, nor any of those things, but I do—I am able to read, and I have discovered certain statements made about our bodies. The World Health Organization, the American government, the British government and the medical profession basically have all concluded that we need to take at least four servings of fresh fruit and vegetables every day for health. This was publicized by Everett Koop, the previous Surgeon General; it's not a matter of dispute amongst doctors basically, even though they may not observe it themselves.

The other thing that almost all people involved in this field is for health you need a certain amount of physical exercise. Your body was made to function, and it doesn't do well not functioning. We read the

Bible about the people in those times and we take the statements about them, but we don't stop to think, What kind of life did they lead? They had no mechanized transport. They had no labor-saving devices. They had no cold storage. If they wanted clothes washed, they had to wash them. Generally speaking, they had to go down to the river to wash them. Whatever food they got usually had to be fresh, because they couldn't store it.

We were recently in western Turkey. The first time I'd been there. It's an arid, stony, hilly terrain, and I thought about Paul visiting those churches and then John later. I said, "How did they get here?" Well, they either walked or rode a donkey. There were no other options. They could have ridden a camel but that was improbable. Then I thought to myself, *How do we get to places?*

Recently Ruth and I got in an airplane in Tel Aviv and flew to New York, twelve hours—doing what? Sitting in one position. Anybody that's got a little sense would know you have to do something to counterbalance the effects of that, because it's as unhealthy as it's possible to be. Well you say, "That isn't the business of preaching." I think it's the business of all Christians.

Let me ask you: Do you seriously consider your body to be the temple of the Holy Spirit? Are you treating your body as God's temple? There are two opposites—self-indulgence and self-control, and where one begins the other ends. Where self-control ends, self-indulgence begins. And where self-indulgence ends, self-control begins. Now I've read countless articles about how to lose weight, and one thing hardly anybody ever talks about is self-control. Find a way to do that doesn't mean you've got to exercise self-control. I don't believe there is such a way. I believe those are delusions. Most of them are cheap moneymaking schemes. Self-control, let me remind you, is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. So if you do not exercise self-control, there's one of the branches of your fruit tree that is barren. And if you don't exercise self-control, you are practicing self-indulgence. It has to be one or the other.

Now what I believe the Lord showed me, and this is where I'm inviting you to be critical. I believe the Lord showed me that Satan has cast a veil over the minds of Christians so that they cannot see things the way that they really are. They're deluded. How many times we have said to people, Ruth and I, "You need to take exercise." And the answer we usually get is, "I don't have time." So you say to the same

person, “Listen, your left rear tire is losing air. You need to get it fixed.” They don’t say I don’t have time, because they know full well what will be the result. The result is just as sure in the other sphere but they don’t see it, because there is a veil over the minds of Christians of this generation and this nation.

If you read the literature of Christians in the previous century one thing that was almost always emphasized was self-denial. You can read almost all literature produced in this century without finding one mention of self-denial. Another thing I commented to Ross. Up to the end of the last century, about fifty percent of Christian hymns had a verse about death. Jesus has conquered death, when I die I’ll go to be with Him, etc. etc. Wonderful verses. You hardly ever meet a hymn with a verse about death in this century. Why? Because we have been deceived into believing that somehow death isn’t going to happen. It isn’t a reality, or we don’t need to pay attention to it, or we don’t need to prepare for it. That is a deception. I tell you, when I lost my first wife I saw something—death is ugly and death is cruel and it’s real. And sooner or later, unless the Lord comes, all of us are going to die.

Ruth and I have a friend who was a former colonel in the British Army named Ord Doby, he’s with the Lord. Sometime back a few years ago the doctors told him he had six months to live. And he said, “Well, I’m glad the Lord showed me I had six months to get ready, because” he said, “if I were going to meet the queen I would take time to get ready. I would make sure my hair was brushed and my tie was adjusted. How much more when I’m going to meet the Lord? I need time to get ready.” Some years back I said to Ruth, I said, “You know I don’t believe I’m really ready to meet the Lord. I need to pay more attention to getting myself ready.”

Now I want to take a passage from Genesis. This is the application. I’m warning you in advance so that you don’t fall asleep or don’t miss what I’m saying, because I don’t want you to agree with me if you don’t agree. But if you do agree, you’re going to have to do something about it. Now this is a passage in Genesis 13 about Abram and Lot. Abram was told to leave his father’s house and his family and move to the land of promise. He was not fully obedient, because he took with him his nephew, Lot, which was contrary to God’s program. Now in Hebrew the word *Lot* means *a veil or vail* however you pronounce it. So Abram had a veil with him, so this is the passage in Genesis 13 verse 5 and following:

> Lot also, who went with Abram, had flocks and herds and tents.
> Now the land was not able to support them, that they might dwell together, for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together.
> And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. The Canaanites and the Perizzites then dwelt in the land.

Notice the purpose of that is. Their enemies were very close. They couldn't afford to quarrel.

> So Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren.
> Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right then I will go to the left."
> And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar.
> Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other.

And this was a crucial decision for both of them,

> Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan.
> Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom.

It's very interesting because in this chapter he lived in a tent. The next chapter he lived in a house in Sodom. Abram never moved out of a tent into a house.

> But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord.
> And the Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from Him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward;
> "for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever."

You see, when the veil was taken away for the first time Abram could see what his inheritance was to be. He could not see while he had Lot with him, because Lot was a veil over his eyes—a veil of carnality. And I believe Jesus showed me there is a veil over the eyes of American Christians. They cannot see the inheritance that God has for them.

I thank God for the many missionaries and ministers and missions that originated in the United States,

but I would have to say that if American Christians did not have the veil over their eyes they could accomplish at least a hundred times more than they are doing. What prevents it? The veil. What is the veil? Carnality. What is the form of carnality? Self-indulgence.

An issue of *Time* or *Newsweek* a few months ago came out with this cover issue—"Sixty Percent of Americans Are Overweight." There are no Christians among them I'm sure, or is that so? Now I believe Jesus showed me that He wanted prayer to strip off the veil and enable His believing people to be realistic, to see things as they really are, to face facts and above all to see the potential of what the American church could do in the world today if it were released from self-indulgence.

In 2 Timothy chapter 3 when the apostle Paul lists the moral and ethical blemishes of the end time, he starts with this:

Men shall be lovers of themselves…

Self-love. And I believe all the other seventeen blemishes proceed out of self-love, making self the center of my life, letting my life revolve around what I want, what I think, what I feel, what's good for me… I have observed in marriages that the guarantee of a miserable marriage is when two partners approach with the attitude, "What's in this for me? What do I get out of it?" And the key to a successful marriage is "What can I give." Not what can I get, but "What can I give."

So I'm inviting you to consider for a moment or two what I've been saying. If I could have said it more plainly I would, but I didn't have any words to say it more plainly. And then I believe it would be pleasing to God if we would pray and ask the Lord to remove the veil from the eyes of His people, and that would mean a change in our lifestyle and our priorities. Jesus said:

Seek first the kingdom of God…

He has never permitted us to place it anywhere in the list but first. I don't want to boast. I'm a very weak and fallible person, but I have to say, on behalf of Ruth and myself, to the best of our ability and our understanding we are seeking first the kingdom of God. We are not martyrs. We're not outstandingly

holy, but we have that commitment. I allow Jesus to discipline me. If I had not made a U-turn when I described it, I would be dead by now. I am convinced of that. There may be some of you dear precious brothers and sisters who are not far from the precipice. I beseech you; make the U-turn while you can.

Ruth, would you come down. Scott, do you mind my telling the people what you and Nedra decided when you got married? [No sir] I think it's a rather good decision. They decided that they would check on each other, and any time they saw the other putting on weight they comment about it. Isn't that rather a practical way to approach marriage?

Hallelujah! Now if you want to join with us in prayer for this renunciation of self-indulgence and a plea to God to remove the veil, I would like you to stand. But don't stand unless you're in earnest.

Lord Jesus, we acknowledge you this evening as Head over all things to the church which is Your body, and, Lord, I have shared with Your people to best of my ability what I believe You showed me, that You are passionately concerned about the condition of Your body, that You want us to do something about it. And, Lord, tonight I cry out to you for your intervention. We open our hearts and our lives and our lifestyles to You and we ask You to strip away the veil of carnality that puts self at the center, that seeks self-indulgence rather than self-control, that brings disaster upon Your people. Lord, I've seen that Satan is a murderer. He will murder some with starvation and others with surfeiting, and it makes no difference to him how he murders. Lord, we take our stand in Your name, Jesus, against that thief and that murderer, Satan, and we say, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan. The Lord intervene against you." The Lord come to the help of His people, and do what only You can do, Lord Jesus. Strip away the veil from the hearts and the minds of Your people. Help us to face the facts, to look the Bible in the face and to seek first the kingdom of God. Let every Lot in our lives be separated from us. In Jesus' name we pray. And all God's people that were standing said, Amen, Amen and Amen. Amen. Hallelujah!