

OB Elbert - Closing Discourse

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We've entitled Today's Discourse Closing Discourse.

And I was moved by the performance of hymn 23 in the opening of this session. If I'm not mistaken, that was a version recorded at the General Convention, and I think that I and several of you who are online today got to take part in that. But the sentiments of the hymn are just so special, and especially reflecting on the various chat sessions that we've had during the convention and various distillations of what the values of the Bible students are all about throughout all the services here at the convention. It's powerfully meaningful to me, and I'm moved by it. I see that even though we meet electronically, there is a profound love, a profound kinship, a profound fellowship that pervades our conversations, sometimes on the very highest levels of spirituality and scriptural exchange, and other times on the mundane.

But I think we need to share in both worlds. Our mundane concerns are the mundane concerns of our brethren, and we take them as our own. Often for them flows the sympathizing tear. I love this fellowship, and I sense that you do as well.

For a concluding discourse or closing discourse, the Lord put on our heart the very last scripture in the book of Ecclesiastes. We're all very familiar with the trials and tribulations of King Solomon. At the institution of his office, the Lord said, I will grant you whatever you wish, and Solomon said, I wish for wisdom, and the Lord said, I will indeed give you wisdom.

And because you asked for wisdom, I will add all the earthly material wealth that I can to you.

And sadly, it was to Solomon's detriment. Taking many wives and many concubines from the nations of the earth, they turned his heart from its pure worship of the Lord toward idolatry.

But I think in the book of Ecclesiastes, he reflects on the lessons that he had learned, and the first one was the opening verse is vanity of vanities, saith the preacher. Vanity of vanities. What profit has a man of all his labor under the sun? And we ask ourselves that question.

I ask it of myself and I ask it of you. What profit do you have of all your labor under the sun? Well, some of us have houses and some of us have automobiles, and some of us have prized possessions, and hopefully we have enough food to eat.

But what is of real value to us? What is something that we can look at and say, this is not vain? Well, I think certainly family. Family is such a gift of God, whether it be family that we were born into or family that we were Adopted by, you know, they say friends are the family you choose, and certainly many of us have chosen deep and lasting friendships in this movement.

Things that are not veined. Certainly one of the things that is not vain is to serve the Lord God. Sister Janet and I enjoy in the mornings reading psalms together, and recently we read through Psalm 119. That's very long, but it's very profitable to read.

One of the overriding themes is how the psalmist loves to walk each day in obedience to the Lord. Loves to walk in the commandments of the Lord, because the Lord's commandments make the simple person wise and they make life far better than it would be otherwise.

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Reflect on days, perhaps when some of us were walked in darkness, not really knowing the Lord, or days before we were in full realization of the essential importance of committing our way completely to the Lord.

Walking in the footsteps of the Lord is such a blessing, and so Solomon concludes the book of Ecclesiastes with these words. I'm reading from chapter 12, verses 13 and 14.

Now all has been heard. Here's the conclusion of the matter.

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind, because God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Here's the conclusion of the matter. Here's the closing discourse for Solomon's life and thoughts for us at the close of this convention. The conclusion of the matter, dear friends, is to fear God and keep his commandments. Now doesn't that seem like an oppressive command for our lives that we have to keep his commandments and we have to fear him then? I think no, I think actually the opposite.

You know, when they make an automobile, they specify that it needs a certain type of fuel, and a high end automobile might require the full strength gasoline, the super, and the more expensive because that's the specifications needed to make that vehicle run properly, and when God created man, I think he put into man the innate desire, or maybe I should say the innate need to worship and obey God. Our bodies, our lives, our minds, our emotions, our health, our are all improved by obeying the commands of God.

So all has been heard. Here's the conclusion of the matter. Fear God and keep his commandments.

God will bring every deed into judgment and every hidden thing, whether it's good or evil, and that's the great cleansing process of the kingdom. We certainly look forward to that. As they say, everyone has skeletons in their closets or dirty laundry that they don't want to expose, and rightfully so.

We like to maintain a good, healthy environment in our spiritual and social interactions. But God will bring every hidden thing into view, whether it be evil, and we tend to usually think of that because we want to keep those things hidden, or if it be good let's read Jesus words on this matter. I'm reading From Matthew, chapter 10, verses 24, 27 A disciple is not above his master, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they malign those of his household?

So have no fear of them. For nothing is covered that will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark? Say in the light what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. Nothing that is covered will not be revealed or hidden that will not be known.

And as the apostle said, God is not unrighteous to forget your service and sacrifice for the saints. No small deed that has gone unknown to mankind has gone unknown by the Father, and he will bring those things to light. What a wonderful prospect to have him do that. How loving on his part. To not take for granted the service that we may render him, to not take for granted our love and obedience for him.

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He could take it for granted. He could say, what else would I expect? I made these creatures for that very purpose. But no, no, he enjoys our love and obedience.

Paul comments on these hidden things as well. I'm reading from First Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 5.

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness, and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

We who have chosen to walk in the paths of righteousness have a great advantage over those who have not. Our work of being reconciled to God is in the present time, so we have a good head start. We realize his blessings toward us and as the blessed children of God, I believe that we have protection, and I do want to talk about protection just a bit with you. I remember some wonderful fellowship I was having with Brother Bob and Sister Ginny Wilson, and of course both have finished their course.

And I was speaking to Sister Ginny about the memorial season and how I noticed Satan is after me very much this year, and she said, don't speak like that. We're the children of the king and he protects us. I was taken aback because I had always perceived it to be the way I originally stated it, that we are kind of at the mercy of the adversary, and so I started looking at other Scriptures, and gradually the Lord showed me one here and one there, that strengthened my confidence in divine protection on my behalf.

And as we conclude this convention, I would like to share a few of those Scriptures with you. We'll start with a point that might seem contrary to what I just said, and that point is in First Corinthians 15:30. You're very well aware of this Scripture. The apostle says, why stand we in jeopardy every hour? Now, we could read that several different ways, but I think the way that I had commonly understood it and others that I'd had fellowship with seem to understand it the same way.

That we stand in jeopardy every hour as though some weapon were aimed at our heads, ready to go off and finish us off at any moment. Why stand we in jeopardy that having given our lives to the Lord and entered into the Christian way, our lives are even more at risk, more endangered than they were prior. But I would like for you to consider a few other scriptures along this line, and we're going to read the context. First Corinthians 15:30. We'll start with verse 29 and read through verse 34.

Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead? If the dead rise not at all, why are they then baptized for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord. I die daily.

If after the manner of men, I have fought beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die. Be not deceived. Evil communications corrupt good morals, awake to righteousness and sin not, for some have not the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame, the apostle said, why stand we in jeopardy every hour?

And two verses later says, if after the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage does it have for me? Well, Paul had already alluded to this concept, this thought earlier in the book of first Corinthians, and we find that thought in chapter four, verse nine.

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There, speaking to the Corinthian brethren, he says, I think that God hath set us forth the apostles last, as it were appointed to death. For we are made a spectacle unto the world and to angels and to men.

What did Paul mean by, I think that God has set forth us the apostles last. But within the context of that verse, he says, we're made a spectacle, a Theater. That's what the word means in the Greek, and in the Greek mind at this time, to speak of the theater was the big amphitheater where they would have the Roman games, gladiator fights, and people fighting with wild animals. The beasts at Ephesus that Paul mentioned in chapter 15.

At the end of the presentation, they would take the condemned criminals and line them up in front of everyone so that the breath, the people could look at these condemned ones, these condemned prisoners, and know to their lasting shame that they had been condemned to death. They were appointed to death, and they were about to die, either at the hand of man or beast.

And in so doing, the apostles were made a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.

Why did Paul stand in jeopardy every hour? Well, I think one reason is Paul's introduction to his ministry. You recall back in Acts chapter 9 that after Jesus had revealed himself to Saul that he was taken to one Annas, who was to nurse him back to health, and the Lord told Annas that he was going to use Paul, and Annas needed to introduce Paul to the brethren in his community.

But he was afraid to do it because he said, this man essentially is a murderer, and he's done evil things to your saints in Jerusalem. But the Lord said to him, and I'm reading now from Acts 9. Go. For he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel, for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.

This is Paul's introduction to his apostleship. Oh, he would do wonderful things. He would carry the name of Jesus before Gentiles, kings and the nation of Israel. But along the way he would suffer many things.

He recorded those things for us in the second epistle to the Corinthians. We read from chapter 11, verses 24 through 28.

From the Jews, five times I received 40 stripes, minus one.

By the way, they felt that 40 stripes was enough to kill a man, and so they withheld one so that it would be close to capital punishment. Five times he was beaten like that.

Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A day and a night have I been in the deep in journeys often in. In perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness, often in hunger and thirst, in fastings, often in cold and nakedness.

Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily, my deep concern for all the churches.

The word perils that he uses over and over, perils of waters, perils of robbers, perils in the city, perils in the wilderness is nearly the same Greek word that was used back in Acts, chapter sorry, back in First Corinthians, chapter 15, verse 30. Why stand we in perils every hour? Or if we read Second Corinthians with the word jeopardy in journeys often in jeopardy in waters, jeopardy in

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robbers, jeopardy by my own countrymen, and so on. So we think that when Paul is speaking of why stand we in jeopardy every hour? And then versus the next two verses down, he's speaking of if I have fought with peace, if I have done these things, what good is it if the dead rise?

Not so. I think Paul is the one who stood in jeopardy every hour, and it is not us standing in jeopardy every hour, hanging by a thread, ready to have our eternal judgment pronounced at the moment of a slip up. No, I don't think so, and I don't think the adversary has much power over us.

On one condition, and we'll get to that in just a moment. But I'd like to read from First John. First John, the Epistle of John, chapter 5, verse 18. Now, as I read this, I think that you'll be able to detect resonance from the Gospel of John, chapter 17. That last night that John was together with our Lord Jesus and the great prayer that Jesus offered up at that time.

And I'll read from there shortly. But this resonates so deeply in 1st John 5, 18. I'm reading from the new international version. It says, we know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin. The one who was born of God keeps them safe and the evil One cannot harm them.

The one capital one O N E. The one who was born of God. That's a reference to our Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus keeps us safe and as such the devil cannot harm us on one precondition, which we'll get to shortly.

And so that resonates from that night when John was there in that room and heard those remarkable words of our Lord Jesus, when Jesus said, my prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. So he's invoking divine protection for his disciples from the evil one.

The power of the Christian mind, aided by the Holy Spirit of God, is a match or probably more so, for the powers that the adversary exerts. Peter hints at this in 1st Peter 5, 8, 10, he tells us, be sober minded. Be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brethren throughout the world.

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ will himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

Resist him. We have the power to resist him.

How do we do that? Jesus did it by just a few words. Get thee hence, Satan. Get thee hence. We put up resistance.

We put up a fight. I've in the past recommended two words to use, and I recommend it because it helps me greatly, and the two words are when temptation thoughts come in my mind to say, absolutely not.

And the power of positiveness of mind amplified, aided, abetted by God's Holy Spirit is powerful indeed. Absolutely not. Get thee hence. Now the apostle James amplifies this concept, and I would like to read from that. This is in James, chapter 4, verses 5 through 10.

Do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says he yearns jealously over the Spirit that He has made to dwell in us? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, God opposes the proud,

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but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

That's powerful. That is very powerful.

What does it mean in verse five when James asks the rhetorical question, do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says he yearns jealously over the Spirit that He has made to dwell in us?

Here's how I understand that.

God, with deliberateness, begets each one of his children with His Holy Spirit. It is a very deliberate act.

And as such, what does he want on his return on investment, his roi? What does he want? What is he looking for? Well, herein is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit.

God jealously yearns for the yielding of the fruitage. Within His Spirit begotten children until they are successful, until they are born on the next plane of life, until they are united with him and they see him face to face. He's jealous over us. He's not going to let the adversary, a liar and a murderer from the beginning, have his way with us. Absolutely not.

He jealously watches over the fruitage that will be yielded by His Spirit within us.

So therefore, as James observed, submit yourselves to God, Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

These things being so, I can't help but think that the Heavenly Father has granted us the grace, the permission to claim the promises that we have found in the Psalms. They applied to the Jewish people. True, but how much more so to God's spiritual family? And as I mentioned this, you know, I spoke earlier of Sister Janet and I reading Psalms together in the morning.

The Psalms of ascent are very precious to us, and if we may, and I think we may, we can claim the promises, the assurances of Psalm 121. It's only eight verses, but it's so sweet and pure and comforting.

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved.

He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil. He will keep your life.

The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.

These are powerful promises and powerful assurances. Greater is he that is on our part than all they that be gathered against us. Greater is our Lord Jesus than any adversary who might try to put himself in our way.

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A closing discourse I think these are strengthening and useful thoughts for us as Christians.

And as we close this convention, we will sing yet again. God be with you.

God be with you was written in the mid-1800s. The words were written by a pastor, I believe, in the Chicago area, and the music was put together by. Well, he actually had a competition. He had a professional composer write music for it, and then he had another fellow who was musically accomplished, but by no means a professional.

And it was the earnest melody of the lesser of the two musicians that rooted and took hold with the author of the hymn, and this hymn has been used not just in the Bible student movement, but in many Christian denominations. Many Christians are very familiar with this, and I like that idea. I like it. I don't own the copyright to this hymn.

I don't own the sentiments of the hymn. I don't own the full right to claim that these promises from God or mine alone. I rejoice to see everyone grasping to some elements of Christianity in their lives. I remember one day when I was still working before I retired, I was walking down the hill from the hospital to the parking garage for the employees, and there were many of us walking down toward the garage.

And a young lady about three or four persons up from me said, I feel like we should be singing God be with you, and I started singing the first few notes of it, and she looked around and it was like, oh, that was kind of a special little connection.

And not only is it sung around the world, but it's been sung so many times among our fellowship, I don't take it for granted. It becomes more meaningful to me as time goes by, and many of you that I see on the Zoom meeting today, I remember standing in a circle or standing in a convention with you and all of us singing our hearts out. God be with you until we meet again.

I'm going to read those verses in the closing moments of today's lesson, just because sometimes when you read the verses, things pop out that you don't normally hear when you're singing it. So if I may read this to you.

God be with you till we meet again by his counsels guide uphold you with his sheep securely fold you
God be with you till we meet again God be with you till we meet again Neath his wings securely
hide you Daily manna still provide you God be with you till we meet again God be with you till we
meet again when life's perils thick confound you Put his arms unfailing round you God be with you
till we meet again God be with you till we meet again Keep love's banner floating o' er you Smite
death's threatening wave before you God be with you till we meet again Till we meet Till we meet
Till we meet at Jesus feet Till we meet Till we meet God be with you till we meet again.