

"I love you to death, and thank you so much, Brother Eddie.

We're going to talk about the unchanging God here this morning.

How many people are thankful that God is unchanging? Amen.

All right, half of you.

Okay. Hopefully by the end of this, we'll get the other half on board, okay? But I'm thankful that He is the unchanging God.

It says in verse 6 there of Malachi chapter 3. It says, For I am the Lord, I think not. Therefore, you sons of Jacob are not consumed, are not destroyed.

And so the first thing I want to talk about is that very thing that how He is the unchanging God that you and I are able to serve on a daily basis, the one that brings us new life, who saves us of our sins, who forgives us whenever we make mistakes and we fail at life. Does anybody fail occasionally? Okay, good.

I'm glad I wasn't the only one.

All right. But we do fail. But it says there in verse number six, when we look at this verse, it's a great verse."

"And it says, for I am the Lord. This is God telling Malachi to tell these Israelites, these Jews, that He is the Lord. That word there in the King James is capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D, which means Jehovah or the God who saves.

And He's telling these people here that it is the Lord who He is that is able to save.

Aren't you glad that we serve not just an unchanging God, but a saving God this morning?

He saved us. He is able to save us to the uttermost. And so, we could end the sermon right there with just saying that He is the Lord, but we're not going to.

Okay, we're going to go on.

It says that He is the Lord. I change not. He does not change.

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He's always been good. He's good now.

He forever will be good. He does not change. And because He does not change, it says there in the latter part of that, you are not consumed."

"Amen. We are not destroyed. The reason that we are still here this morning and able to worship Him and praise Him and give glory to Him and serve Him and to come to Him with our burdens and our cares is because we serve that God that is the same, that is unchanging, and that loves us.

Amen. Aren't you glad that our God is a loving God? I'm glad that He's God.

I'm glad that He is the Lord God, and I'm glad that He changes not. We live in a world that's ever changing. Do we not?

I mean, it's changing all the time. It seems like the older I get, I just turned 45, and the older I get, the faster it is changing. I mean, the world is not the same as it was when I was growing up."

"It's not going to be the same tomorrow as it is today, because life changes. And because of life changes, and because the world is changing in such a rapid pace, I am thankful that I have a God that does not change. He is that tree planted by the rivers of water with roots running deep, that is unwavering.

In the midst of a wavering world, we serve a God that is unwavering. And so, whenever I am going through something in my life that is changing, I can go to the unchanging God and get grounded. Again, come back to the reality to him, because he is that unchanging God.

And the thing about that is that he is, again, the unchanging God from the very beginning of the book, right? The very beginning of the Bible. And so, whenever we see God forming Adam in the ground and breathing life into him and giving him a soul and taking one of his ribs and making Eve in the garden and whenever he would walk with Eve and Adam and talk with them in the cool of the day, that is still the same God that you and I serve.

"That God that walked with Adam and Eve. That the God that found Noah and how Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord and how God instructed Noah to build an ark when the world had gone nuts and the world had gone crazy and the world had completely turned their back on God. God found Noah, Noah saw God, and they were able to save humanity.

But that God that was with Noah when Noah was going through all, just imagine all the ridicule that Noah endured for following God.

What in the world are you building a boat for? Well, first of all, what's a boat? Why are you building a boat?

Why are you building it in the middle of the land? I mean, are you gone crazy, Noah? And Noah said, I'm just following the Lord.

I'm just doing what God tells me to do. Well, me and your God must be crazy because God would not tell you to build a boat out here in the middle of nowhere, right? And well, he's told me it's going to rain, it's going to flood."

"But what in the world's rain? You've gone off your rocker, Noah, and Noah kept going on with God. And because he was faithful to God, God was faithful to him and his family, and that's still the faithful God that you and I serve today.

The God that was with David whenever David went out with no armor and no sword or no spear and no helmet and no protection. All he had was a sling and a stone. He knew that his God was the God of the armies of all of heaven, and he knew that if he was faithful to his God, his God would be faithful to him.

He goes out and tackles this giant Goliath, and God, the one who guided the stone to Goliath's forehead and knocked Goliath's head cold. That's still the same God that helps us defeat our giants today.

Remember those three Hebrew children that were told by Nebuchadnezzar to bow down to the statue that they had made of him when the music played and they didn't bow down, and they go to Nebuchadnezzar, you know, and Nebuchadnezzar is furious."

“He's angry. He's just so furious that way with them because they would not bow down because he liked them, that he'd given them jobs in his government. And he was like, why are you doing this?

Well, we bow our knee to no one but our Heavenly Father.

Amen.

And he got mad, and he had the furnace heated up seven times hotter than it's ever been. And he threw them into the furnace, and the furnace was so hot that even the guards died. The one in Nebuchadnezzar did, he looked in to see how fast they burned up.

But guess what? Those boys weren't burned up. They were walking around, and he says, hey, how many people did we throw in that fire?

And they said, well, King, I think we threw three in. It was three Hebrew boys, we threw them in. He's like, well, man, I count four people in the fourth.”

“They're not getting burned up. They pull them out, and sure enough, there's three Hebrew children, not a hair on their bodies was cinched, their clothes didn't even smell like fire or smoke, and he dips on his knees and never canes it is. Listen, that God that was with those three Hebrew children, that gave them the courage and the strength to stand up for Almighty God, is still the same God that you and I serve today.

He's still the same God that set the lion's mouths when Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. He is still the same God that healed the way, that gave sight back to the blind, that made the deaf to hear. That is the same God that you and I serve today.

He's still the same God that was with Paul and Silas in the prison whenever they were throwing a pity party, right, about getting beat up and thrown in the prison.

No, they weren't throwing a pity party, were they?

No, they weren't throwing a pity party at all. In fact, they started saying praises unto God, and they sang praises unto Him and worshiped Him. You know, so “many of us would have been like, man, this is a bad deal, you know?

This servant Jesus thing isn't what it's all cracked up to be.

It's not going like I thought it would. I think maybe we need to go back to Jerusalem and find something else better to do.

That's so what these boys did. These boys said, yes, thank you, Lord, that we were able to witness for you and serve you. And Lord, would you continue to use this?

And about midnight, it says that the cage there started to rattle and the prison doors opened up. And because of that, the jailers got to say, listen, the God that was with Paul in Silas in the darkest time is still the God that's with us in our darkest time. Why?

Because he's the unchanging God.

He's still the same God that helps me preach. You're like, man, he needs to help you out a little bit more. He's that same God that helps me preach.

He's the same God that's with me when I'm up on the mountain and everything is going good. That same God that's with me there is with me when "down in the valley.

And it seems like everything is going against me.

He's that same God. He's the same God that's with me during the daylight. And I'm able to do the things for him.

And he's also that same God with me when I'm sleeping at night.

I had one of my jobs I used to have.

I had a preacher friend there.

And we would have chapel every Tuesday morning before we would go out to work and do things.

And this preacher told me, he prayed one time for us.

He says, and he says this in his prayer, he said, Thank you, God, for protecting me in my weakest moment. And what he was talking about when he was sleeping.

He was thanking God that God protected him. And that same God that's worked with us during the daylight is the same God that's worked with us in the night.

He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. He's the unchanging God. He's still the same God that we learn about in Genesis 1.1, where it says, In the beginning, God."
"That's still the same God that you and I serve. It's the God that Jesus said in St. John 3.16, For God so loved the world. Right?

You can take that word, world out, put your name there, and be like, For God so loved Curtis, that he gave his only begotten son. Right? That's the same God.

He's still the same God that David talked about in Psalm 23, where it says, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. In verse number 4, yay! Do I walk through the valley of the shadow of death?

Thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

He's also the same God that the psalmist talks about in Psalm 24, in verse number 10, when he says, Who is this king of glory?

The Lord of hosts! He is the king of glory.

That is the unchanging God that you and I serve today.

Amen?

But there's more to this unchanging God than just that. Let's go back to verse number 2. Not only is he the unchanging God, he is also a refining God.

Let's look at verse number 2."

“It says, But who may abide the day of his coming? Who is going to be able to stand when the Lord comes? Right?

And who shall stand when he appears? For he, God, is like a refiner's fire.

What is God doing in our lives today? He is refining us.

As I grow as a Christian, I should be different today than I was when I first got saved.

I should be better now.

I should be different, but God should see more of himself in me. Well, how does God see more of himself in me the more I grow? Well, it's because he is refining us.

He is making us more and more like Jesus every single day.

Or at least, at least we should be more and more like Jesus as the days go on.

Let's look at a master gold refiner. That's what he is referencing here in Malachi. He is referencing a gold refiner.”

“You know, a gold refiner, he would go and he would make jewelry out of gold. The thing about it is, is that whenever he would go and dig up the ore, the ore does not look like the gold jewelry that you put on. It's dirty, it's grimy, it's dull looking.

And so what this refiner would do, he would take that gold ore and he will put it in a crucible and he will put light of fire under that crucible. And the harder that gold ore gets, the more of those impurities will rise to the top. So all the dirt, the grime, the rocks, and all of that stuff that will make the gold not work very much will rise to the top and that refiner will scrape off what they call the slag off of that gold ore.

He will scrape it off and after he scrapes it off the first time, he will heat the fire up even more. So he doesn't leave it at the same temperature. He will heat it up some more and the more he heats it up, the more impurities will come to the top.”

“And he will repeat this process. He will heat it up, scrape off the slag. Heat it up, scrape off the slag.

Heat it up, scrape off the slag. And he will do this over and over and over until this refiner can see his reflection in the gold ore.

And that's what God does to you and I.

He refines this day after day after day. And sometimes it's with him heating up.

Now, I'm not talking about the temperature outside.

That's really hot.

I'm talking about the things that we go through, the trials and tribulations and circumstances that we endure. God uses those things to heat us up so that we can get rid of all of the ugly stuff, all of the sin, all of the failures, all of our faults, so that God will see more of himself in us. And so I'm glad that he is a refining God.

I'm glad that God is still working on me. I'm glad I'm different today than I used to be.

Brother Eddie said that when he first met me, I was young and handsome and full of energy. That was the words I heard."

"And then he said, and then he met Emily, and I thought he was going to say, and he turned gray. Logan said, great, right?

So Logan got some brownie points.

But we're different. I'm different today than I used to be.

Now my life has not been a better roses since I first got saved.

In fact, it's been anything but. But the more that I go through in life, the more I can see God using those circumstances to refine me more into the servant that He desires me to be. Why is that?

God doesn't give up on us because one of these days, we're going to see Him face to face in heaven, hopefully, right? And so I'm thankful. Listen, it took Him just a week to make the moon and the stars, the sun and the earth, Jupiter and Mars.

How loving and patient He must be. He's still working on me. And praise God, He's still working on me."

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This material may be protected by copyright "I'm thankful that He's working on me. If God is not working on you, you need to make sure you are doing something to get right with God. Because if God is not working on you, you need to be careful with your relationship with Almighty God.

Because when you get right with God, God will continue to do a mighty work in you, refining you into who He wants you to be.

Not into who you want to be. Brother Curtis is not today what he thought he was going to be in high school. But I'm so thankful that I am now who God wants me to be, instead of what I wanted to be when I was in high school.

You see, you may give up on me.

My family may give up on me from time to time. My church may give up on me. But listen, my refining God never, ever gives up on me.

And why is that? Because He is a refining God.

He is also a restoring God.

Let's look at verse number three, excuse me, verse number two, chapter three again, verse number two."

"It says, but who may abide the day of His coming? And who shall stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap.

Now, the King James must spell soap, S-O-P-E, but it's still soap, S-O-A-P, OK? It's just a little different spelling. So what in the world is a fuller?

A fuller in those days was someone that you would take your laundry to and have your laundry washed, OK? So if you got a stain on your tunic or on your robe or whatever the case, you would take it down to the fuller, and the fuller would clean it for you.

And so what he's saying here is that God is like fuller's soap. And so what the fuller would do is that he would go down by the sea, and by the sea there was a plant.

Can you bring up that next slide?

This is the plant.

It has a big Latin word that I'm not even going to try to pronounce because I would butcher it.

We call it wild sweet williams.

That's what the English term for it is."

"In other words, it's also called common soapweed. Historically, it was used to clean delicate and unique fabrics, especially wool. And so what the fuller would do is he would go out, he would cut this plant down, and he would get a bunch of this plant, he would bring it to a rock, he would place it on the rock and allow the sun to dry it out.

And after this weed would dry out, he would then take a mallet and he would beat this plant to a pulp. He would literally beat it to death, okay? He would beat it and it would just crumble into these fine granules.

And so if I had a garment that had a really bad stain in it, right? Let's say it's dirt, it's grime, oil, whatever the case may be. I mean, I've been out, I've been wallering, you know, with the animals, and I've been wrestling with my kids, and my brand new tunic that my wife bought me for Passover is dirty."

"I have nothing to wear to synagogue, so I'm going to take my new tunic down there to the fuller and let him clean it. So he would take that tunic, he would lay it on a rock, he would get some water and wet it, and then he would take those granules from that fuller soap, put on that stain, and with his fingers, he would work those granules down into the fabric of that, of whatever fabric it was. Those granules would go down into the fabric, and listen, this is so important, these granules would actually get between the wool fibers and whatever the stain was, and lift that stain completely up off of the wool.

It was a fantastic method of cleaning wool.

Well, what do you mean by Brother Curtis?

What if my wife bought me a really pretty tunic, you know, and it wasn't just white? She went and bought me one that was dyed, you know, and maybe it was dyed black, you know? What would happen if I took that black tunic that had a stain on it, which, you can't really see the stain."

"But anyway, if you took it there, and you took it to the fuller, what would happen?

Well, the same process.

Not only would those granules get between the stain and the fibers of the wool, it would actually get between the dye and the wool, it would lift the dye off. And so if he continued to work that fuller soap in long enough, that what the end result would be would be wool that is white as snow. An amazing thing.

Malachi is telling the Israelites that the God that you serve, this unchanging God, this refining God is also able to restore you back to what you were supposed to be in the beginning, children of Almighty God. Well, how does he do that? Well, God sent his son Jesus to live on this earth as a perfect example of how you and I are to live our lives.

He lived a sinless life. Was he tempted? Yes.

Did he give in the sin?

No.”

“And because it was God's plan, they beat him to a pulp. They took him out and they hung him on a cross in front of everybody in the entire world. And he gave his lifeblood for you and for me so that I, when I would come to my senses, I could get to the rock, the rock of my salvation and his blood, the blood of the only begotten of the Father, the Lamb's blood, the Lamb of God's blood, would reach them into my heart deeper than any sin that I had ever committed, any sin that had ever stained my life.

And it will reach them and will lift that sin up off of my account and my slate will be cleaned before Almighty God and I will be a restored child of God because my God restores.

I was not going to talk about this, but Greg had to sing a song.

I am glad that my God restores.

I'm glad that he chases rebels down.

First time I was ever in church, I was four days old.

My mom had me on a Wednesday.

I was in church on Sunday.”

“My grandpa, Jimmy Hicks, was pastoring the Harmony Church right up the road here.

And my grandpa was a great pastor. I was about ten months old whenever he resigned Harmony.

He moved around a lot.

He got sick whenever I was about five or six years old. He got lung cancer, and the lung cancer went to his bone.

He died whenever I was seven years old. But we were always in church.

You know, I had a drug problem when I was a kid.

My mom dragged me to church every time. And the church doors was open.

You know, we never missed church, you know. If we were there Sunday school, Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, my grandmother got remarried to a deacon of the Old Grove Church. And so we left our home church at Waltonville and went to Old Grove for a few years.

And then after Albie died, we went back.

But whenever I turned 18, so anyways, I was in church all my life.

Okay, I know the ins and outs. I know how church goes. I know how people are.”

“Okay, it's not always people in holler and shout in glory.

You know, there's things that happen in people's lives. So when I was 18, we attended a small church. You know, there wasn't, I don't know, there was probably 100 people going to the church at that time.

But in my youth group, there wasn't that many of me and my cousin and a couple other people.

But out of that youth group, a lot of great things happened.

There was three pastors, two deacons, and a couple of trustees all came out of that Sunday school class that youth group that we were part of.

But there wasn't any girls there.

Okay, I'm 18.

As Brother Ralph Brandon says, I was a hurricane of hormones. Okay, and so I got out of church, you know, chasing the wrong things, getting into the wrong crowd.

This is 18.

Started dating the wrong girl.

When I was 22, I took my first drink of alcohol.

You know, I thought, man, I'm never going to touch that stuff.”

“Well, 22 come along, and here I am, you know, going to the bars, running with the wrong crowd, doing the wrong thing. I went, I started, I switched shifts. I was working at Walgreens Distribution Center.

I switched from midnight shifts to weekend shifts, right, so that I would only have to work four days. We worked Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and we would have Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday off. Well, Tuesday night and Wednesday night was our night to party.

Tuesday night was Dollar Beer Night down at the Crossing. It was a bar in Mount Vernon. That's where we went every Tuesday night.

We went there, and we did crazy, stupid things that young men do in their 20s. And I had girlfriends and different things in and out, doing stupid stuff that I shouldn't be doing, not in church. The only time I'd ever go to church was that my grandpa's brother, Clifford, was also a preacher.

And he was a retired preacher, but every once in a while he would fill in at Waltonville, and my mom would guilt trip me. Hey, you know, Uncle Clifford's preaching tonight.

You know, maybe you ought to come down”

“And I was listening to Uncle Clifford, you know, he's getting older.

And I was like, okay.

And so I would go down, you know, and I'd enter the room, and as soon as I'd get there, I'd start getting convicted. Well, who likes to be convicted, right?

I mean, nobody.

Nobody?

Okay, no one.

Raise your hand.

No one likes to be convicted.

You like to be convicted, brother Eddie? No one likes to be that.

And so I'd get convicted. I'm like, I'm not coming back here.

And I'd go right back into my weekly routine. You know, we'd go work Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday. We'd go Tuesday night out.

We would hang out with our friends on Wednesday. We would sober up on Thursday, so we could go back to work on Friday. I mean, we did that for four or five years.

We would do that. Again, I got totally in the wrong crowd.

I had paid no attention to God. I could care less about God and what God was doing with anything.

And I really didn't care if he ever did this, you know, tend to me.”

“But here's where at least my being brought up in church would happen.

I would go to the bar.

Listen to me.

This is how stupid I was.

Okay.

I would go to the bar and I would drink, you know, till the bar closed. I would get in my car. I had an 87 Trans-Am there, and I lived seven miles outside of Mount Vernon.

I would drive home, and the whole way home, I would pray that God would protect me. I mean, how, you know, what in the world, you know?

I mean, looking back at that, I mean, He did, praise the Lord, He did, right? I'm thankful. They protected me.

I never got pulled over for that, okay? I've gotten pulled over plenty of times, trust me, that I've never gotten pulled over for drinking and driving, you know, or anything like that. Whenever I was 29, I was in the middle of a relationship that was going nowhere quick.

It was going south very quickly, and we broke up. It was a crazy time for me. I was emotionally broken, mentally broken, almost physically broken because of the things that I was going.

"But I was definitely spiritually broken at this time. And I don't tell many people this story because people say, yeah, whatever, you know, sure you did, you know.

But if I'm lying, I'm dying, okay?

I mean, this is God's honest truth. One Sunday morning, it was the last week of September 2009. On a Sunday afternoon, I'd worked all day.

We got off at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, got in my car, and I drove home. I do not remember the drive home from Walgreens to my house in Opdyke, Illinois at the time. I don't remember the drive.

I don't remember stopping at stoplights.

Hopefully, I stopped at stoplights.

I don't remember any of that, but I do remember the conversation I had in that car.

Nobody was in that car with me, but I heard that still small voice that Elijah talks about. And he was like, Hey, I've done all of this for you.

What are you doing for me?

I've given you a house.

I've given you a car.

I've given you a job.

I've given you what a lot of people would say is a good life."

"What have you been doing for me?

And I remember opening my car door. I remember that part, opening my car door, looking up in the heaven and say, God, I'm not worth anything.

I am a disaster.

I have been going down the wrong path for so many years.

There's no way that I am in any good. There's no good in me. I've done a lot of bad, evil, disgusting things.

There's no good here. There's no good at all here. And I remember looking up and being like, and God, I can't go back to church.

I work weekends.

And I like, God, if you get me on day fifth, I'll go back to church. This is Sunday.

I mean, you can't make this stuff up.

I mean, I go into work on Monday.

I go over to the Bulletin Board, because that's what everybody does, because they always put the new job bids on Monday morning. We went in Monday morning, and there was a full-case stock bid for Walgreens, which was a great job. I mean, it was a phenomenal job, you know."

"I didn't have the greatest seniority at the time, and I'm like, wow, that's a day shift job. I do not remember my conversation, okay, on Sunday. Don't remember it at all.

I'm like, oh, wow, that's awesome, day shift job.

I mean, I have zero chance of getting this job, but I'm going to sign it anyway, if I sign it. This is on Monday. I work Monday, go home.

I do my regular routine. Went to the bar Tuesday night. Hung out with my buddies Wednesday night.

Got sober Thursday night.

I have to go back to work on Friday.

I come in to work on Friday, and as soon as I get there, my supervisor says, hey, they want to see you in the office.

And I'm like, what in the world did I do?

I haven't been here for three days, you know? What in the world did they want me for?

Because I'm thinking there's no way that I'm going to get this job.

I go into HR's office and they say, hey, you got that day shift bid, you know?

And I was like, what?

They're like, yeah, you got the bid, you don't"

"The bid for full case stocks?

You got that bid? I'm like, no, you got the wrong Curtis Smith.

Which, by the way, there was two other Curtis Smiths that worked in the plant. Okay, and I was like, you got the wrong Curtis Smith. Those other two had more seniority than me.

I'm like, you must have the wrong one. He's like, no, it's your seniority number 1180. And I said, yes, my seniority number is 1180.

And they said, but you've got the bid.

Work today, go home.

And this is Friday.

He says, go home, work today, go home.

Take Saturday, Sunday off and come back Monday.

I'm like, okay, cool.

Again, not thinking about my conversation I had that previous Sunday.

And so I go home Friday, and as soon as I opened my car door in my driveway, I'm reminded about that conversation I had with God the previous Sunday.

And I was like, uh-oh.

I go in, because I didn't have a cell phone at the time. It's a pre-cell phone era, you know.

And so I go in and call mom.

"I'm like, hey, mama, where's Uncle Clifford going to church at right now? She's like, well, he's actually going to rescue church.

I was like, okay. She's like, why?

I was like, I don't worry about it.

I just want to hung up. And mom didn't attend rescue, but Uncle Clifford did. And so I come in October 3rd, 2009.

I go into the old rescue church. They sent me to go in. I know exactly where I sit.

They had two rows of pews. I sat the third row back.

Piano was on the other side like that.

This is third row back. I have no idea what Brother Bryant Harris preached that day.

I know the text, because I have it written down in my grandma's Bible. I took my grandma's Bible with me, and it was something about out of Hebrews chapter 3.

And that's only because I put Bryant Harris, October 3, 2009, at rescue church.

I have no idea what he said, but man, the whole time."

"I didn't go to the altar during the altar call because I didn't have to, because in that third few back at the Old Rescue Church, I didn't have the heart to move forward.

I'm like, Lord, I don't know.

I don't know why, why you're speaking to me right now, because I've done a lot of bad things, a lot of ungodly things, a lot of things that...

because I knew, right?

I had that upbringing.

I knew what I was doing was wrong.

But Lord, I said, Lord, if you will forgive me of my sins, Lord, I'll turn my life over to you.

Like that, the Holy Spirit just...

I like to think back to that time, as a pastor, as a servant of God, sometimes we go through low passages.

Sometimes things get discouraged.

Sometimes it gets depressing.

Sometimes we need to be reminded of what it was like when we first got saved."

"That feeling of love, not just conditional love, but unconditional love, unconditional mercy, unconditional grace that was poured out on me, a wretched sinner who had rejected God, who was not living for God, who was doing everything ungodly he could possibly do in his life. But God loved me enough to restore me into who He wanted me to be.

And if I could trace, man, the rest of the story goes really quick. That was October 3rd. I knew in January, I knew that God wanted me to do something.

So I remember going to the altar. This is just for your own benefit.

Okay, don't do what I did, okay?

So I go to the altar in January of 2010. I knew that God was wanting me to do something. I had no idea what it was.

And I go to the altar and I say, God, I will do anything you want me to do.

I'll be a deacon.

I'll be a trustee. I'll be a Sunday school teacher.

I'll be a...

I can't sing, but I'll be a song leader. I'll mow the grass. I'll fix the potholes.

I'll clean the church."

"I will do anything but preach. For the next five months, I couldn't eat, I couldn't drink, I couldn't work, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't do anything because I had this feeling that God was wanting me to preach His Word. Now go back about three years.

I was in my mid-twenties, I was 25, 26.

Some people have midlife crisis when they're in their 40s or 50s.

I had one in my mid-20s. I was like, hey, I'm gonna go back to school. Right?

I'm gonna go back to college. So I enrolled at SIU, and I was gonna be a history teacher. And so I go in, and the lady's like, well, you have to take speech class.

I was like, all right, I'll take speech class.

Had speech class, and I had a graduate assistant that was teaching the class. Evidently, she did not like me. It was all on her, right?

Because I failed miserably.

I mean, like, I failed speech class. And I don't know how you failed speech class, but I was able to fail speech class.

And you're probably like, I see how you failed it."

"But anyways, I failed speech class.

And so I go back to my counselor, the guidance counselor person, you know, the whatever.

I don't know what they call them in college. But anyways, I didn't make it that far.

And I go in, and the lady's like, hey, you really have to pass speech. You have to get it going on. And I was like, all right, well, I'll try it again.

So I go round number two, had a different teacher, and guess why? I failed miserably. And so God, I'm feeling this, that God wants me to preach.

And I go back to the altar at Redskin.

I'm pouring my heart out to God.

I'm like, God, I know you're calling me to be a preacher. But God, I have failed speech twice. Not once, but twice.

I have failed speech class. And here's what God said.

You just do what I want you to do, and I'll do the talking for you. It's a lot easier to preach when I don't have to worry about what's coming out. Now, I've done that before, and guess what?

It's like I'm failing speech class.

Right?"

"I tried it on my own accord, thinking I'm smarter than what God is, and it fails miserably. But when you start doing what God wants you to do, God, this unchanging God, will start refining you into who He wants you to be because He has restored you into who He wants you to be. I love history.

I want to be a history teacher. And I love history. And I love the Napoleonic era.

I love the early 1800s to the mid-1800s. I used to be a Civil War reenactor 20-some years ago.

I don't do that anymore, but I used to do that with my cousins.

But Napoleon was this guy who wanted to conquer the world, right? He wanted to conquer Europe and the whole known world. And so he was going through all this, and he was wanting to conquer everything.

And so he gets defeated, they exile him, and he comes back to France. They crown him emperor again, and he goes out on this conquest."

"The British and the Prussians form an alliance to come against Napoleon at a town called Waterloo. And if you know anything about Waterloo, Waterloo did not go good for Napoleon.

Okay?

Let's just put it this way. He was holding his own against the British, and then off on the eastern side, he's flanked, on the right flank of his line, he sees the Black Coats of the Prussian Army coming, and they give him a wallet.

Okay?

I mean, they defeat him pretty good.

Napoleon, back at his headquarters, at a farmhouse, has a tent set up, his headquarters tent, and it was on an elevation where he could survey the most of the battlefield. The battlefield was so big that he couldn't really see all of it, so that he would have runners telling him what was going on at different places. He could survey most of it.

Whatever he saw, that he was defeated.

The last ditch effort of Napoleon was he had his old guard, the ones that had been with him from the beginning. He sent them into the British, and the British put up these infantry squares and repulsed the old guard, Calvary"

"They repulsed the Calvary.

He calls his top lieutenant, his top marshal in, and he has a map of Waterloo up there on the side of the tent, and he gets a big old red glob, or gob of red eagle, and he puts it right over Waterloo, this big old red glob. And he looks at his top lieutenant, and he points at that red glob and says, if it wasn't for that red glob right there, I would have conquered the world.

I have a pretty big imagination.

On Mount Calvary 2,000 years ago, they took Jesus out from being tried. They had pulled his beard out.

They had taken a crown of thorns.

It's not like rose bush thorns."

"I mean, this is like thorn tree thorns, big old long thorns that penetrated his brow, and he's bleeding from the brow. They had taken a cat of nine tails, and had whipped him, scourged him so badly that he was draining and losing blood at a rapid pace. They take him out, and they lay him on the cross, and one soldier puts a leather strap around one arm and pulls it, and the other soldier grabs his other arm, a leather strap around his arm and pulls it out.

Another soldier takes a spike and a hammer, and nails that hand to the cross.

They go over here, pull his arm caught, put another nail in. They grab a piece of wood down here, they measure it out because they want it to be just right to provide the most excruciating pain to a person. So they get it just measured out perfectly, put the block there, nail the block to the tree, put his feet on it, and put another nail through his feet."

"Then they raise up the cross onto this hill, Calumet Calvary, and he's there hanging to die, and he's bleeding for Cusci. He looks at the crowd around, and he says, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Now, these were the most wicked people in the entire world at the time the Romans were.

I mean, they were they were hideous, right?

And they had developed this torture device.

And he looks at them and says, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And about that time, he takes a breath, and he says, into your hands, I commend my spirit.

It is finished.

He gives up the ghost, and he dies.

They take his body down, Joseph of Amasia, Nicodemus, and Joseph goes to Pilate, begs for his body, because they don't want his body hanging up during the Passover. And so they take his body off the cross hastily, and they put it in a tomb. They roll a stone in front of it and seal it."

"The Romans put guards in front of it to make sure nothing happens to it. The Jewish people there, his mother, John, the other followers that hadn't run off, right, they go back and they wait till Sunday morning after the Sabbath to go and finish really preparing Jesus because they hastily had to put him in the tomb.

Now again, I have a big imagination.

I might say, you know, my imagination runs, I'm sure Satan was having a part.

Whoo! Guys, guess what? We did it!

We got Jesus on the cross! Remember that son of God? He thought he was so cool.

He thought he was so powerful. He thought he was so omnipotent, all powerful. Look at him!

He's dead! He's in the grave! Whoo!

We have won!

And pretty soon, Jess comes up and is like, hey, Satan, we've had this party for a couple of days. It's Sunday morning, and guess what?

We've had reports.

We've had reports that there's something going on in that grave.”

“What are you talking about?

There ain't nothing going on in that grave.

We have just killed the son of God.

We've shown God that we are just as powerful as him.

I don't know, Satan. I don't know, Master. But I'm pretty sure that our reports say that Jesus is breathing.

Now, there ain't no way that Jesus is breathing. Ain't no way at all.

You go send somebody, make sure that Jesus isn't breathing. Because I know that we, I saw him with my own two eyes say, into your hands, I commend my spirit. I saw him, I heard him say, it's finished.

I saw him take that last breath, and I saw him pain like this.

It was the best day of my life.

You go make sure those reports are true. Death comes back again.

I'm telling you, he's breathing. I saw his eyes open.

You did not.

I'm telling you, he did. Will you go back and fix it? The thing, death goes back.

Goes back in there, and sure enough, Jesus is holding a napkin, putting it down.

Pretty soon that stone starts rolling away.

Right?”

“And here comes Jesus out victorious. Death is running scared.

Death runs back. Runs back to Satan, says, Hey, Satan, I was right. I'm not lying to you.

I know you're the father of lies. You want us to lie, but I'm not lying now. Jesus really did come back to life, and he's not just come back to life in the grave.

He has conquered the grave. He has come out of the grave. I'm telling you, he is alive.

Praise the Lord.

I can almost see Satan saying, if it wasn't for that red blob on that Mount Calvary ship, I would have conquered the world. But I'm thankful that my God is a God that shed his blood so that I could be restored.

Last point, really quick, verse number 16. If you were here back in May, Emily and I came on a Sunday night, and you guys were meeting all in the back room, and Brother Eddie had me come up and say a couple of words, and I mentioned this verse."

"It says this, Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord harkened and heard it, and listen, a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that sought upon this name.

Let me read that again.

Then they that feared the Lord, those who respect God, those who honor God, those who glorify God, those who worship God, those who have given their life over to God, who have spake often one to another.

And the Lord did what? Listen and heard it. And because of that, a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His name.

I think I've told this story here before, but it fits right in perfectly.

I had an aunt.

One of my grandma's sisters had Alzheimer's. And my uncle Charlie put my aunt Nita in a nursing home because she got too difficult to take care of on his own. And so he put her in a nursing home."

"Five or six years ago, there was like a two or three year stretch. My grandma had 11 brothers and sisters, and it seemed like everybody was dying.

And so I got called to Waltonville.

It seemed like I was running up there all the time, doing funerals for all these family members of mine.

And we were there for somebody's funeral.

I don't remember which one of the aunt's or uncle's that passed away. But we were there, and me and my cousins were standing at the back of the funeral home. And my uncle Charlie came in.

We were asking each other, I wonder how Aunt Meade is doing, you know, and everything. And so he came through, he went through the procession, he came through the receiving line, and he came back there to where we was. And one of my cousins looked at him, you know, and we started carrying on conversation.

And I looked at Uncle Charlie, and I said, how's Aunt Meade doing?

He's like, well, she ain't doing good, you know. He's like, I go every day to fix her lunch, and bring her lunch, and have lunch with her."

“But she don't remember me anymore. She don't remember me at all.

And my cousin that was standing next to me looked at my Uncle Charlie and said, well, Uncle Charlie, why didn't you even go and have lunch with her if she doesn't remember who you are? And my Uncle Charlie looked at my cousin straight in the face and said, she doesn't remember me, but I remember her.

I remember her. And we're a preacher boy. I started bawling, started crying.

Because that's the way God is with us. Sometimes we get out in the world. See, we all come here this morning, and we get our praise on.

I saw y'all raising your hand and everything. That's awesome.

I saw some of you singing to the songs. That's amazing.

All right?

But what are you going to do when you leave these four walls? See, it's easy to act like a Christian when you're here. It's a little more difficult to be Christian all the time when you're out there.

And sometimes we forget.

Sometimes we fail. Sometimes we make mistakes. But I am glad that I serve an unchanging God.”

“He was lovey and merciful and gracious. He loved me enough to not only save me, but to refine me to be more like him every single day of my life. Every day I should grow spiritually to be more like him.

And that's because he has restored me into who I need to be a child of God. And because of that, he remembers me. Even whenever I'm out there in the world and I don't remember him, he remembers me.

And I'm thankful he remembers me, because one of these days, when I draw my last breath here, and I draw my last breath there, he will open up what John the Revelator calls the Book of Life, what Malachi calls the Book of Remembrance. And he will go down through there and it's like, oh yes, October 3rd, 2009, at Rescue Free Will Baptist Church in Whittington, Illinois, Curtis M.

Smith gave his life over to me.

I remember that.

Come in, thou good and faithful servant, future and true joy.”

“I wonder this morning, how many of us here truly have our names written down in the Book of Remembrance. If you don't, friend, don't be like me. Don't waste your life doing ungodly things.

I look at these young people that are in here.

Don't be like Brother Curtis and waste ten years of your life out in the world.

Get it right with the Lord now.

Reserve him continually all throughout your life. Stand with me.