

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

DATE

September 3, 2017

SPEAKER

CB

SERIES

Stand Alone

PART

N/A

TITLE

With God In The Dark

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 50:4-11



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Providence, it is good to be with you, again. We have been here since May and have been so encouraged. Once, by your example, just how you love Christ, how you encourage one another, how you want to exalt Him in Raleigh, and beyond that, but also just by your presence, by your encouragement to us, by inviting us over for dinner, by supplying the house that we stayed at this summer. There's just so many ways that you, as a body, served us so well, even investing in our kids through EBS and Life Class. Our kids don't get the chance to hear the gospel often from people outside their mom and dad, so thank you. Thank you for serving so faithfully. We're so thankful.

My eight-year old said, he said, "Every time, ..." He told me this week. He said, "Dad, every time it seems like we come back to Raleigh, Providence is just a little bit better." I said, "Amen." Praise God. So, let's pray. We're going to be in Isaiah, chapter 50 this morning, if you want to make your way there. It's on page 611 in the Bibles in front of you, if you're new to the Bible. Father, we praise you for your Word, and praise you how you have refreshed us through this church, and how you are working in this church, among this people, and I praise you that you are kind to us. We are rebellious, weak, sinners, and you give us redemption, and you lavish upon us your grace, and you keep it coming, and I pray that the same grace that has sustained Brian and the preaching team through this summer that we've been here, have been so refreshed by your Word. We just once again bless this people through your Word. Change us, we pray, and plan our wills to your testimonies, God. We pray in Jesus name, amen.

As I said, we came back in May pretty drained from an emotionally charged season. It was a hard season of enduring where we live in Central Asia. The work is slow, painfully so, and I think the other four families that you have sent out that still live over there, we all feel the same. It's been a hard season. It's tested our resolve to stay. The author of Hebrews says, "We have need of endurance." He's not talking about people who live overseas, or those in ministry. He's talking about every Christian has need of endurance. The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint, and it tests our stamina the further we go. That's why I want to look at Isaiah, chapter 50 this morning. It's a text particularly focused on overcoming two hurdles to our endurance, one is our worries, and the other is our weariness, so fear and fatigue threaten to keep us short of the prize to which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus. We need courage to address our fears and confidence to keep going in this race, and this is what Isaiah 50 is out to help us have.

Isaiah, if you're new to the Bible, is a book written hundreds of years before Jesus Christ lived on the Earth. It talks about why He came, and His life, and His ministry, and this chapter, Isaiah, chapter 50, that I'm going to explain and, hopefully, explore with you today, you'll see Jesus under the name The Servant. Isaiah 50 takes us, though, to a point of decision, all of us. It presses us in to this issue of just how far are we willing to go with this thing called obedience to this God? I think if we're honest with ourselves, we prefer a pretty manageable, and confined, Christian life. When we feel like obedience would cost too much, we retreat into what we have defined as our comfort zone, this far and no further, God. I'm okay. We have just enough of Jesus to feel safe but not enough that we are completely surrendered to Him and His calls in the world.

We adhere to these kind of pre-defined boundaries of obedience, and we're not really willing for Him, for God, to step in and explode those boundaries and stretch us further than we think we can go.

My son, my eight-year old son, I have three sons, we were playing tackle football yesterday, which is something we don't get to do often, because we live in a city of four-ish million, and there's a lot of concrete, so tackle football would hurt where we live. So, they're playing in the grass, which is a blessing, yesterday. My youngest son is about four years short of my oldest son, and about 30 pounds lighter, so he gets the ball. My middle son is blocking for him, trying to keep my oldest son away from him. My youngest son just wants to stay behind the blocker the whole way, because he's afraid if he gets out he's going to get racked by his big brother. It was such an image to me. We like to kind of stay where we feel comfortable. We don't like stretching out and reaching the prize if God calls us that way. We're not inclined to just jump out into risk-taking obedience.

A.W. Tozer wrote that the faith of Christ cannot reach any man who is secretly keeping an escape route open in case things get too tough for him. "For true faith, ..." he wrote, "... it is God or total collapse. For each of us the time is surely coming when we shall have nothing but God. Health, and wealth, and friends, and hiding places will all be swept away, and we shall have only God. To the man of pseudo-faith or fake faith that is a terrifying thought to have only God, but to real faith it is one of the most comforting thoughts the heart can entertain." That presents a question for us. It's the same question Isaiah 50 is going to force us to ask of our hearts, "Are we secretly keeping an escape route open just in case God asks too much of us?" Are we completely surrendered to Him and His calls?

Today, with the help of Isaiah 50, I want, by God's grace, to see us all close that door on that earthly escape route. Verse 10 and 11 of Isaiah 50 pressed this issue upon us through the image of darkness, this issue of how far are we willing to go in trusting and obeying this God? Look at verse 10 and verse 11, "Who among you fears the Lord and listens to His Servant? Who among you walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord. Let him lean on his God. Look, all you who kindle a fire, who encircle yourselves with torches, walk in the light of your fire, and of the torches you have lit. This is what you'll get from my hand. You will lie down in a place of torment."

You will notice in verse 10, the one who fears the Lord listens to His Servant, that's Jesus, and he pursues obedience, and that obedient path leads into deeper darkness, the place where there is no light. Look at that in verse 10, "Who among you walks in darkness and has no light?" This is darkness in pursuit of obedience. I can remember hitting this wall last year when there was an event in our country, and the airport started closing down, so all of the earthly escape routes that I knew about, other than through boat, and through running, were closing down. What are you going to do with four kids sleeping at midnight when the earthly escape routes are closing down? What are you going to do when God calls you to forgive that person that's hurt you so deeply? What are you going to do when He says, "Love that person who acts like your enemy?" That's darkness we have to face in the path of obedience.

There are two ways of finding comfort in this darkness, and they are outlined at the end of verse 10, and the beginning of verse 11. Verse 10, “Let him trust in the name of the Lord. Let him lean on his God.” This is the way of faith, the path of faith. This man of faith leans on his God, relies on his God, and he closes the door on any escape route that’s of Earthly origin. He doesn’t bypass the darkness, because he’s so sold on obedience out of faith. He presses forward with God through the darkness. It is God or total collapse for the man of faith.

The other path in the darkness is outlined in verse 11 in the first part, it’s taking the worldly escape route of avoiding or bypassing darkness, or suppressing it, through some Earthly means. What do they do? They build a village, they kindle a fire, they encircle together, they grab their torches, and they suppress the darkness. They push it away. They find some man-made means of enduring darkness. It got too dark, and too dangerous, so they said, “enough,” and they didn’t endure. The fear of having no light trumps the fear of God in their heart, and they make their own light with their own resources. They did not trust God to be sufficient for them in the dark.

Now, we may not light torches in our modern day, but we know how to address our fears, do we not, through earthly comfort? We’ve become professional wood choppers according to this text, I think, storing up wood for our torches, in case the path of discipleship gets too hard, or too dark. What do we do? We run to the fridge. We have a whole category of food in the South called Comfort Food. Think of that. I mean, my parents are bringing seven packages of bacon to me this morning, precooked bacon, so we can take it overseas this week. We know our food. We like our bacon. We might put in order our finances. That might be a way for us to kind of make sure the darkness remains manageable. We might think of politics in this light. We might think of sensual pleasures that can provide temporary relief so the darkness doesn’t feel as dark, so we pursue them.

God interrupts the prophet and these man-made paths don’t end well. The second part of verse 11, the prophet is interrupted there. God says, “This is what you will get from my hand. You will lie down in a place of torment.” Where our hopes rest is where we will rest. We will lie down where our hope is anchored down. Our future is tied to the anchor of our hope. If it is on Earth, we will lie down on Earth. If it’s in Heaven we will be with God in Heaven through Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters, we’ve heard it since childhood, it’s not safe to play with what? Fire. I think this text is urging us that it’s not safe to play with man-made means of comfort. We spend so much time chopping wood to keep our torches lit, to make sure we have enough resources when the lights go out, but only one path in this book, and only one path in the book of Isaiah leads from Earthly discomfort to eternal comfort, and it’s the path of leaning on God and trusting in His servant, Jesus.

There's one escape routine, one exodus, in the whole Bible, and it's through His Servant, through Jesus, the one whom He provided for us, even when the lights go out. This doesn't mean life will get easy, it means that life might get harder, it might get darker. He might lead you into places where there is no light, but there is no alternate route for the people of God. These options are laid out before us, after we hear the testimony of one who endured the darkness for us. Our decision about our darkness is pressed upon us in verse 10 and 11 after verses 4-9, where we hear the story of one who relied on his God and leaned on his God and came out victorious.

We see in here, the other passages in Isaiah that talk about the Servant of the Lord that would come and save His people and bring in God's Kingdom. Those passages talk about the effects of His endurance, but this chapter goes into the inner dynamics of how He endured. I want us to see that together this morning. Let's read His story. How did He keep running the race when the running got hard? Let's listen to His story in verses 4-9. "The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who were instructed to know how to sustain the weary one with the Word. He awakens me each morning, He awakens my ear to listen, like those being instructed. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious. I did not turn back. I gave my back to those who beat me, and my cheeks to those who tore out my beard. I did not hide my face from scorn and spitting. The Lord God will help me; therefore, I have not been humiliated. Therefore, I have set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame."

Near is the first word in the original. "Near is the one who vindicates me. Who will contend with me? Let us confront each other. Who has a case against me? Let him come near me in truth, or behold the Lord God will help me. Who will condemn me? Indeed, all of them will wear out like a garment. A moth will devour them." Then, we are pressed upon our decision in light of His endurance. "Who among you fears the Lord and listens to his servant, obeys the voice of His servant? Who among you walks in darkness and has no light, let him trust in the name of the Lord. Let him rely on his God."

So, this is His endurance according to His eyes. Verse 5 tells us that the Lord God gave Him ears to hear and not just once but morning by morning. The Lord God raised him up, because everyone else had fallen away, and gave Him an enduring faith by His grace. The different parts of His body he mentions in this text show the totality of His obedience. His whole body is inclined to the will of God, His tongue, His ears, His face, His back, His cheeks. He mentions all of that to show us how complete His obedience is.

Last week we heard from Psalm 32 that we can become like a mule. Can we not? Defiant toward God, stubbornly defiant toward God and His will, but not so with this man, not so with The Servant, not so with Jesus. Not one limb of His body turned against His God, and those who know their own corruption in this room, we know how miraculous that statement at the end of verse 5 is. "I did not turn back." We have all turned our backs against God, and He did not turn His back. It's even more miraculous to see His endurance when you see how much obedience cost Him. He didn't turn back even when His path evoked such violent opposition.

Verse 6 shows a man completely volunteering for this hard path, this path that led to complete humiliation for Him, He chose. Look what it says, verse 6. They didn't take His back. They didn't force His back. They didn't force His will, He inclined his will. "I gave my back to those who beat me, and my cheeks to those who tore out my beard. I did not hide my face from scorn, and spitting." Notice, He gives His cheeks to them tearing out His beard, a humiliating act. He gives His back to their torture. He leaned in so they could spit on Him. Do you see the fullness of His submission.

This is how inclined Jesus is to save sinners. Sometimes we think Jesus was half-hearted about His work. He's not. He desperately came and He resolved, He set His face like flint to finish the mission so He could save you and me from the wrath of God. Jesus' enemies wanted Him dead, because His message, and His presence threatened them. Honestly, it threatens all sinners at some level. Jesus said, "You're not the Authority, you're not God, so you're not independent." He also said, "You can't fix yourself. You don't have the ability to fix yourself," and that's a threatening message to a sinner, and all sinners who want their own way and don't want to pay the consequences, and then we try and fix it or clean it up through religion. In essence, sin and religion have a similar heart. Sin says, "I don't want you alive, Jesus. Don't speak into this area. I'd rather prefer you to be dead. I don't want to hear your voice." Religion says, "I can clean up my own act, Jesus. It's okay, I don't need you."

That's behind the whole scheme of why His ministry evoked such staunch opposition, such hostility. We don't like it. We feel threatened by it, and I encourage you, if you feel threatened by Jesus ... I talk to people in Central Asia all the time that don't want to open this book because they're threatened by having some questions in their already-established beliefs. I encourage you, this man came to save sinners, not to condemn them. I encourage you to open this book. It does threaten to turn your world upside down, I agree. It's turned mine upside down. Once you experience His love you will see that He only turned your world right-side up. He is a good King who lays down His life for sinners.

How did Jesus endure this hard road? He daily learned and daily leaned, daily learned and daily leaned. His ear was attentive to what God said. He inclined His will, and He trusted in His God. Verse 7 and verse 9 both repeat this idea of, "The Lord God will help me." He banked on His God, who learning daily, leaning daily. This was His path. His eye did not set His expectation. His circumstances was not the measure of His faith. He set His ear to hear from God, and He relied on God for His tomorrow, for His future. He refused to go chop wood. For Him it was God or total collapse. God's helping presence enabled Him to endure hostility, particularly enabled him to see two facets of his enemies that are helpful for us to consider, one is it enabled Him to be beyond the reach of His enemies, and secondly, it enabled Him to resize His enemies.

Look at the end of verse 6, “He did not hide His face from disgrace.” Verse 7, “The Lord God would help me; therefore, I have not been ...” What? “... disgraced.” So, which is it, Jesus, are you disgraced or not? He gives Himself to being disgraced on Earth, but His soul is not disgraced at all. He feels no shame, even though they are hurling insults at Him. His soul is above their reach. They can’t touch Him. They could beat Him but they could not shake Him, because His faith lifted Him above His circumstances. He was out of their reach.

Hebrews 12 says, “He even despised their insults, not giving it one ounce of power, or sway over His will that would derail Him from the mission of God, and a fear that threatens our endurance is the fear of the approval of man, of losing man’s approval. When it comes to speaking up for Jesus in hostile environments, or even identifying with Jesus, saying you’re a Christian in hostile environments, that’s when insecurity shows up, does it not. That insecurity must be overcome if we’re going to accomplish the vision that your leadership is laying out before you of every man leading people to Christ, woman engaged in the mission, children engaged in the mission.

Let us be free from just being nice people for Jesus. We’ve got to share the prickly points of the gospel that sting at times to a world that’s sinfully bent on its own way. It’s going to hurt. The gospel, bringing it into the light is going to hurt at times, but if we’re addicted to their approval we will not open our mouths. Their disgrace is no disgrace if they disown us for Jesus’ sake. Actually Matthew 5, Jesus says it’s actually a reason to rejoice and be glad. Jesus’ refusal to be derailed by man is captured so vividly in verse 7, “And, therefore, I have set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.”

I feel so flimsy. Our hearts are so wishy-washy. We’re going back overseas this week, and we’re struggling with that decision. We want God to prove Himself faithful, so we’re going in faith that He will, but it’s hard. We feel so wishy-washy, but not Jesus. Resolved to finish the task, setting His face on God, forsaking the God who would never forsake Him was unthinkable to Jesus. I saw a boldness like this evident from a brand-new believer that we were able to interact with this past year. She became a believer on Christmas night of last year. Actually, she was making fun of her sister who had become a believer just six months earlier, she was making fun of her, and then six months later she wants in, because she sees the grace of God and it draws her in. When she was a teenager she had a scary event happen to her that actually wound up leaving her in the hospital for a few days, and she went to a mosque in our area and asked for an Imam, an Islamic teacher, to pray over her to keep this evil spirit away from her.

This Imam prayed over her and gave her a little trinket, a little charm, a black thing she would wear around her neck to keep this evil spirit away. On Christmas night when she confessed Christ, she handed that little black trinket to our pastor, and he threw it on the ground and he crushed it with his feet as a symbol that fear is gone. She told us that night was the first night she can remember being fearless. Then, the darkness came. Her husband started noticing that she was different.



She was going to church and she was just a different woman in the home. He threatened to leave her if she had become a believer. For her that's losing all earthly security, his employment, his finances, her four-year old daughter, their possessions, all of that was up in the air if he left her.

We met together one night and the first question on her mind was, "Can I leave him? He's verbally abusive, he's unhealthy. I'm ready to go, I'm ready to divorce. What are the biblical grounds for divorce?" I wanted to kind of back up the truck a little bit and help show her what it looks like to have this hope in this gospel, and so we read 1 Peter together, big chunks of it. We sat around that table and we encouraged her that this hope enables her and emboldens her to stay even when it's hard, and you could see her posture started to change. She left that table that night thinking, "Yes, I'm with a man who doesn't believe, who could ultimately verbally hurt me, but he can't touch my soul. I'm above his reach. The gospel has put me on a different plane. I have a living hope, no matter how much he wants to crush it." Emboldened by that hope, she stayed, and she's still with him. You can pray for her to endure.

Unbelief crumbles under the weight of contrary circumstances. Unbelief looks to the evidence, looks to the eyes to see how God is for us and not against us. The Servant and the sister look to the ear as the organ of faith that drove their endurance. I encourage us to be just like the Servant who daily learned and daily leaned. Church, daily learned from this book and daily leaned on the God revealed here, and there will be grace for your trials. Worry is just that nagging false prophet in your life that says grace will not be there tomorrow. Don't turn your ear to your worries. Speak to your worries from this book. Don't go chop wood through earthly escape routes. Rely on this God and He will prove Himself faithful.

The second thing that God's grace enabled Him to see is how small His enemies were. He resized His enemies. What does He see as they're beating Him? He sees a moth. He says, "They will wear out like a garment." He sees how insignificant they are. He hears a clock, "Tick-tock, tick-tock." In light of the Eternal One whom He fears, fearing the non-eternal beings who are beating him, that's a game changer. There's no comparison. If the Creator was for Him, the Eternal One, what could earthly man do to Him? Who is there to harm us if we prove zealous for what is good? 1 Peter 3 tells us. This is hard. To keep banking on help from Heaven is hard. We are in a season where it's risky to go back, but we want to do it out of faith that He will be there to help us.

For a while there I thought emails from the Embassy were like the next marketing scheme from Kohl's, or something like that, just coming into our inbox, showing us all the threats that were around us. Thankfully, it's calmed down a little bit, but this mindset's hard to maintain. We've had to fight to keep our resolve to lean into obedience, even if it means seeking more darkness. That's why I love verse 4. Jesus knows our weariness, and why was He given the tongue of a disciple, or those who are instructed to know how to sustain the weary one with a word. I love that. Jesus knows our weariness, He endured the path. He's been down the weary road and knows how to speak into yours. So, weary parent, weary disciple, you are one word away from strength from Jesus, just one word, and it flows so easily from His tongue.



I asked my wife how she was different after six years of serving overseas, and she said, "I have learned to take God at His Word, because there's no other options." That's it. This Word sustains the weary, so don't chop wood, open the book. Notice the posture of which the Servant approaches His opposition in verses 8 and 9. Listen to him, He's getting beaten, He's weakening, He's like Rocky Balboa in round 12 or 13, His face is getting pummeled, but He's in a different realm spiritually. Where is He? Look at verse 8. "The one who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us confront each other. Who has a case against me? Let him come near me. In truth, the Lord God will help me. Who will condemn me?" Notice all the verbs, contending, confronting, a case against him, condemning. Where are those? He's in a boxing ring in a sense physically, but spiritually He's in a courtroom, because He sees two things really clearly. He keeps clear His real threat, and He keeps clear His real enemy, because He banked on God.

Now, what's His real threat? His real threat is to give his foe any credibility to build a case against Him through disobedience. What's his real threat? It's not the darkness, it's not the suffering, it's sinning in the suffering. If He sins, it give His accuser a case to be built against Him for His condemnation and for His utter humiliation in the end. So, He keeps His focus on sinning not suffering.

I heard a brother who lives overseas with us, still there, 19 years, and during faithfully battled a brain tumor overseas, and I heard him talk about enduring, and he didn't talk about cancer, he talked about the threat of the pride in his physical health that he never saw until he endured cancer. I think if we want to be a people released from fear, if we're going to finish the great commission, go, make disciples of all nations ... I love the vision of the leadership here that we've all got to get a passport and go, but one thing we've got to be released from is trusting in that passport to get us home. Where's our home? Our 8 year old and 9 year old were debating the other day in the car whether it's safer to live where we live or it's safer to live in America, and I'm thankful it's a debate. We, as Westerners, we are entitled to insecurity, earthly forms of it. We've got to be careful.

Darkness is scary because it's close, is it not? At night time ... I was talking to my son this summer, he got really hot at night, he couldn't sleep. He told me, "I can't sleep, it's too hot, I'm sweating." I said, "Just get on top of the covers, sleep on top of the covers." He said, "Dad, I can't do that." Why? "Because comfort comes from blankets. They feel closer than the darkness." Jesus here sees His vindicator as closer than the darkness, and closer than the enemy. That enabled Him to endure. His defense was near, nearer than the darkness, nearer than the enemy ever could be.

Now, He also keeps His enemy very clear. He doesn't talk about the circumstances around Him that threatens Him, He talks about a who, "Let him build a case against me." He talks about one adversary that's against Him in the courtroom of Heaven that wants to accuse Him of wrong doing. Who is that all through the Bible? That is Satan, the enemy of God, the enemy of your soul. We've got to be careful. We've got to keep the enemy in mind. Brothers and sisters, we have an enemy who wants to bring accusation and accusation against us. Don't mistake your true enemy.

Jesus stares him down and says, “Bring it. Let him come near, and let him have a case against me.” Why? Why was He so confident in the face of such strong accusations, because near was His vindicator, and complete was His obedience. His record was blameless, and that’s our only hope in the world. The righteous for the unrighteous, he gave His life. He walked into that courtroom feeling no threat from the enemy, because there was no case to be built against Him. You might say, “We can’t have that kind of confidence, Chip.” Turn to Romans 8 with me, page 944 in the pew Bibles in front of you. They’re not pews but seats, you know what I’m saying. Romans, chapter 8, Romans 8.

You might say, “Chip, we can’t walk in that confidence into that courtroom. We have done wrong. We are sinners. We are not blameless like Jesus,” and you would be right, and you would be wrong. We are righteous in Jesus, if we have believed in Him by faith. Can we stand in the spirit of Jesus in that courtroom, toe-to-toe with our enemy? Listen to the similarities in Romans 8, verse 31 with Jesus’ posture in Isaiah 50. “What then are we to say about these things, If God is for us, who is against us? He did not even spare His own Son but offered Him up for us all. How will He not also with Him grant us everything. Who can bring an accusation against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies. The answer is no one. Who is the one who condemns?

Christ Jesus is He who died, but even more has He been raised. He also is at the right-hand of God and intercedes for us. He’s in the courtroom with us. His blamelessness counts in our side. He’s for us. Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or sword?” Verse 37, “No. In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” We have the confidence to walk into that courtroom, not because we are inherently righteous, but because Christ is inherently righteous and has imparted His righteousness to us by grace through faith. We suffer not as victims thinking of how deep the darkness is, and how bad the circumstances are, but we suffer as victors through Him who loved us by His grace. God is the one who justifies. Let the devil mount his case against you, believer. It will not stick. Be free from your fear of the darkness.

Complete is your righteousness in Christ, and near is your victory. You have no need for an earthly blanket, or an earthly escape route. You have all you need in Him who loves you and died for you. So, weary believer, I just encourage you, turn to this book. You don’t work tomorrow, maybe. Open this book. Let Him refresh you with one word. He knows your language. He knows your frame. I encourage you if you’re a worried believer, and you want to keep that obedience confined to what you are comfortable with, fear not what the darkness of obedience might bring into your life, because near is your defender, complete is your righteousness.

I encourage us, church, if you're not a believer, where we will go in the darkness? Where else can we go but to Him who endured it for us? Let's pray. Father, we praise you for Jesus. There's no threat, ultimately, because of Him. Thank you, thank you for the confidence and the courage that you impart to us through His endurance. I pray you will give us a backbone as a people that we would endure the race set before us. I pray for weary souls that you would refresh them, and worried souls that you would release them from fear because of what we learned this morning. Thank you for Jesus, in His name we pray, amen.



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