



**HILL COUNTRY**  
BIBLE CHURCH | AUSTIN



## **The Torn Veil**

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Well good morning. Why don't you grab a Bible and turn to Matthew 27. We're going to dive head first in this morning. We've got a lot of ground to cover and there's some really good stuff here.

We've been in a sermon series, started last week called the 3 Hours That Changed the World, and leading up to Easter we're looking at the three hours that Jesus was on the cross, the last three hours. He was on the cross six hours,

but in the last three hours some significant things happened. In fact, there's actually five miracles that occurred during those last three hours and then immediately following. And we're looking at those miracles, taking them one by one. So last week we looked at darkness; this week we're going to look at the veil or the curtain of the temple being torn. Next week we'll look at the earthquake and the significance of the earthquake. The fifth sign was literally people coming out of the graves - that's going to be interesting. And then the last one is the centurion who watched the whole event, comes to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and is converted. And we'll do that the Sunday right before Easter, and then we'll go into our Easter celebration.

So picking up where we left off last week, we notice that in Jesus' suffering on the cross he was crucified at 9:00 a.m., and the first three hours were in the daylight. So from 9:00 to noon lots of activity, lots of things taking place. We have the soldiers gambling over his garments at the foot of the cross. We have the two robbers that are crucified beside him, they're talking to him. The crowd is talking to him, bantering back and forth. He's offering words of forgiveness, words of pardon to one of the two robbers, and then he looks at his mom and he explains to his mom that she now belongs to John. It's John's responsibility to take care of her. So in the midst of all of the pain and the agony there's also a lot of activity that's taking place in those first three hours. But at noon, it says in scripture that at noon everything went black. The sun was darkened, I mean literally pitch black everywhere around the cross which created this incredible somber moment. So the last three hours Jesus suffered in quietness, suffered alone, suffered by himself. And picking up in Chapter 27 of Matthew in verse 45 it says:

*"From the sixth hour," that's twelve o'clock by our reckoning, "from the sixth hour until the ninth hour," at three in the afternoon, "darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour," so close to the end of that time, "Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" - which means, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?""*

So he cries that out implying that the very fabric of the Trinity is in this mysterious breach as the Father and the Spirit turn their back on the Son as he takes on the sins of the whole world and actually becomes sin on our behalf, suffers. So in the middle of this pain and Jesus' is crying out to him right towards the end, we find out that this is very close to the moment of his death. In fact, dropping down to verse 50 it says:

*"And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice he gave up his spirit."*

Now the other gospel writers inform us that he said two more things. So crying out in a loud voice he says two more things. The first one he says is *tetelis thai*, which is the Greek word which means “It is finished.” And then the final thing he says is “into thy hands I commit my spirit.” In other words, Jesus didn’t die from his wounds; he gave up his life. And said “I’m coming to you God.” Into your hands I commit my spirit. Now when he says, “It is finished” *tetelis thai*, it’s complete, it’s done, what is he saying? He’s saying this, he’s saying that sin has been atoned for. The evil that mankind has done, the punishment for that evil, the justice required has been met in me. So atonement has been made. He’s also saying Satan has been defeated. Satan the tempter of the world, the one who tries to embroil us in the sin that destroys us and destroys our world, Satan has ultimately been defeated. He’s not going to win. And finally he’s saying that God’s wrath, his just, righteous wrath against the evil of his creation has now been satisfied. And then he says “Into thy hands I commit my spirit,” and immediately the lights come back on, the shroud of the sun is gone, and in that scene everybody can see now and they look up and Jesus’ body is hanging on the cross and Jesus is dead.

Now in verse 51 it reads:

*“At that moment,”* so the moment when he’s crying out into thy hands I commit my spirit, *“at that moment, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”*

The second major miracle. So you might wonder like what in the world is the curtain of the temple. Well the curtain of the temple was the barrier that separated the Holy of Holies, the place where God’s glory dwelt from the rest of the temple and from the rest of the world. It was literally a barrier. And when Jesus is dying on the cross paying for sin, he’s removing that barrier. So the first thing that we have to note today, as we understand what happened on the cross is, that **sin itself actually is the barrier that separates us from a Holy God.** It’s human sin, human unrighteousness, our unwillingness to follow God’s plan and his design, that’s what creates a barrier to separate us from God.

So the original temple that was the place where humanity and God met, the original temple - some of you might not even think this way, but the original temple is the Garden of Eden. Think about that. It’s the Garden of Eden. **In the original temple in the Garden of Eden, man had access unrestricted, unlimited access to God.** There in the Garden of Eden we have Adam and Eve and we have God, and they’re talking to each other. They’re hanging out with each other. God’s interacting with them, he’s present with them. In fact, in Chapter 3 it says that Adam and Eve are - God’s walking in the garden in the

cool of the day looking for them, interacting with them, unrestricted, complete unlimited access to God in the Garden of Eden.

When Adam and Eve sinned and ate from the tree, what did God do? It says in Chapter 3 that God put them out of the garden and then he stationed a guard in front of the garden, blocking the entrance to keep them from coming in. It was a cherub. In fact it was multiple cherubs. The word *cherubim* is the Hebrew, plural, so it's cherubs more than one, *cherubim* were actually stationed in front of the entrance to the garden with flaming swords. And God said I'm not going to let them back into my presence, back to the Tree of Life, back to the source of life. They've been banned from coming into my presence. And so the first block that took place, that first barrier took place there on the first temple, the Garden of Eden.

Later on God asked Moses to set up a tabernacle which became later Solomon's temple, which then later after that was destroyed became the temple of Herod, which is the one Jesus is experiencing, he's seeing on the temple mount. And that tabernacle temple was designed to give people limited access to God. Remember sin is the barrier to God. Before sin, man had unrestricted access to God. Now **the temple or tabernacle allows us to have limited access to God.** In other words, people who are sinful can get close to God, but in order to get close to God there has to be a process of cleansing. There has to be a sacrifice. And so the tabernacle and the temple represented that.

I want to show you some artist renditions of these so you can kind of get a picture of what they looked like. Here's an artists rendition of the tabernacle.



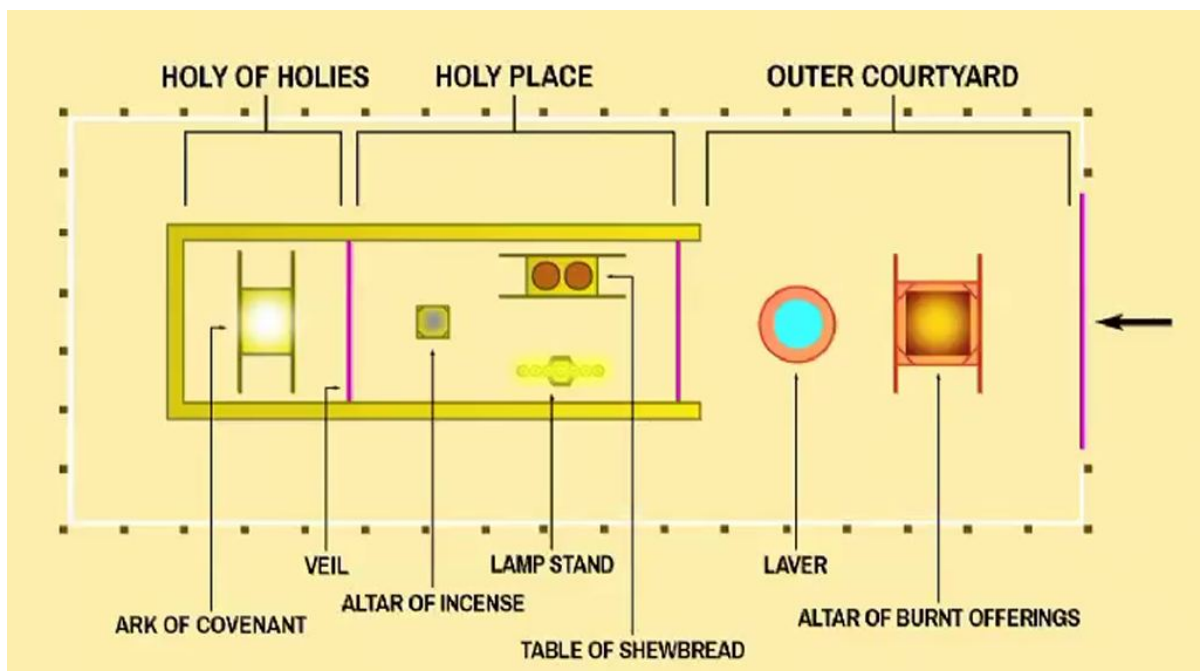
As you look at the tabernacle you see that there's a fence that separates it from the rest of the commonness of the people. That fence, all the way around is creating the inner courtyard. And then within that you can see that there's an altar there where the people are coming, there's a big basin of water, that's the laver that's there. And then inside of that you see another tent, and inside of that tent are two compartments or two chambers. The Holy Place and then the last one is the Holy of Holies, and both of those are separated by curtains or veils that are the barriers to keep people from getting inside. You'll notice in the artists rendition, you'll see at the very back of it over the Holy of Holies is that cloud. God manifests himself there at the tabernacle in a cloud called the Shekinah Glory. And this was this glorious, brilliant, beautiful light that God put there so that people could see that that's where God is. That's the presence of God dwelling there above the cherubim in the tabernacle. Okay? Solomon, when he came along he built his replica of this and it looks like this.



So here you've got stone and you've got gold, but you can see the basic structure is still the same. The outer courtyard with the big altar, you see the big thing of water, the laver there for cleansing. Then as you work your way inside you see all the other pieces on the inside. I want you to notice, if you look very carefully the decorations in the gold on the walls of the interior. Can you make that out, what that is? Those are palm trees, right? The walls are decorated to look like the Garden of Eden. They are decorated to look like the Garden of Eden.

We're not going to have time today, but if we took the time there are many Bible scholars that actually believe that the Garden of Eden and the tabernacle and the temple are actually manmade replicas of the very Throne Room in heaven. That God is actually giving us a place on earth to kind of look at, it looks very much like the Throne Room. So for those of you guys who love to study, get Revelation Chapter 4 and start reading the descriptions in there and you may come to the same conclusion. So you can see that there. You'll notice that there's a barrier getting into the temple and then in the place where those steps go up, where it's cut away, that's where the veil or the curtain of the temple was right there to block access into the back part where the Ark of the Covenant and the cherubim, picture those two big winged things. The cherubim are inside of that. And so that's the Solomonic Temple. The Herodian Temple is actually even bigger than this one, but built on the same design.

Now in order for you to understand what God had the worshiper going through in order to approach him, to get close to him, I want us to walk through Old Testament worship, and I'm going to show you the diagram of how the temple is all laid out, tabernacle and temple, and we'll kind of walk through this together. Let me put the diagram back up.



Okay, you can see the outer court and then the inside place where you've got the Holy Place and then you have the Holy of Holies. And there are things in each one of those. So for the worshiper, if you were an Israelite you would have to first of all make a decision that you wanted to approach God and enter into

the court. So if you wanted to get close to God, you wanted to talk to him, you wanted to commune with him you'd make the decision to enter the court. The first thing you did after you entered the court was you approached the Altar of Burnt Offerings, and you had to bring an animal sacrifice to pay for your sins. In other words, the animal was the substitute, your life tainted by sin is now transferred to the animal as you put your hands on the animal, the animal is killed, the animal is offered up in the form of a sacrifice symbolizing the fact that you know you're guilty, you know that atonement needs to be made for you, and that animal is taking your place. It's temporarily, symbolically taking your place. Once you've made atonement for your sin, the next step is to cleanse yourself from defilement, and that's where the laver or the big basin of water was there to literally wash the blood off of your hands and to wash yourself clean from the defilement of the world.

Now as you are an average person in Old Testament worship, that's as close as you can get. You don't get into the Holy of Holies. The only people that get into the Holy of Holies are the people whose lives are totally dedicated to the worship of God, and that would be the priests. Now the priests after going through that process could actually go into the Holy of Holies. And when they get inside the Holy of Holies they begin to experience fellowship in the presence of God. You have the lampstand there, the Menorah, that shines to enliven the inside that looks like the Garden of Eden that you're now in there and God's presence is there. You have the light of his truth. That symbolizes that you now can kind of see what God sees and experience what God experiences. You have the Table of the Shewbread, and on the shewbread were 12 loaves of bread baked one for each of the tribes of Israel. And the shewbread was there to show that God is your bread. He feeds you, he gives you life, you fellowship with him, you share a meal with him.

The final article in there is the Altar of Incense, which sat right in front of the curtain or the veil. And the Altar of Incense represented the prayers of intercession. You could come and offer incense on the altar praying and communing and talking to God, and that represented the prayers going up to God in a sweet aroma. God loves to hear his people talk to him. And so if you were a priest, you could come in there, but you could go no further.

The next curtain restricted and blocked access because behind that curtain was the very presence of God. Now today, through modern technology and because we're New Testament saints we're going to actually go behind the curtain. Okay. So if you guys will follow me in a figurative sense, I'm going to literally walk back here. So back behind the curtain there was one article that existed and that was the Ark of the Covenant.



Now let me explain the Ark of the Covenant real quickly so you get an understanding of it. The Ark was actually a wooden box that was overlaid with gold. You could lift the top, we're not going to do that. We saw what happened to that in Raiders of the Lost Ark (congregation laughs), so we're not going to do that. You could lift the top and inside of the Ark there was a jar of manna from the wilderness, Aaron's rod that budded, but more than that, the most important article was the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. In other words, those represented the law of God. And in this physical box there was this representation that the foundation under which God connected with earth was the pure morality of his law, his purity under which the whole earth was created to operate correctly. Human relationships would work, people would get along, business and commerce would work, health would work. Everything that God intended in his law is now laid there as the foundation from which God will interact with humans.

On top of the Ark, symbolic of the protection of God's holiness, like in the Garden of Eden, were the cherubim. These two cherubs with their wings



covering the center, and the Old Testament literally says that God dwells above the cherubim. In other words from here going up would be the Shekinah Glory, the Glory of God dwelling right above these two protectors of his holiness.

Now the next part of this is very significant. This flat surface here was called the Mercy Seat. It was the place where God would demonstrate his mercy by making contact with sinful humanity. And yet God would not make contact directly. So every year on the Day of Atonement, one time of year out of 364 days, only one, on the 365<sup>th</sup> day on the Day of the Atonement, only one man, the high priest would walk into this room. And he would be carrying the blood of the sacrifice, and he would take and dip his thing in here and begin to sprinkle the blood on the Mercy Seat until he covered the Mercy Seat with blood. That was symbolic of the fact that justice had to be paid, a life had to be given, a sacrifice had to be present so that God's perfect holiness would not touch sinful humanity, would not touch earth without a blood covering or a sacrifice that was given to pay for sin. So this curtain blocked everybody from the presence of God with the exception of the high priest one time a year coming in to cover the top with blood so that God's presence would touch humanity. So that's the Ark of the Covenant and that's the role of the veil of the temple.

So as we're looking at this we recognize that when Jesus Christ dies on the cross literally what's taken place here is Jesus Christ's death is removing the barrier for sin. He's removing the barrier so when the veil of the temple is torn from the top to the bottom and the temple now is open where people can actually see the Ark, see into the presence of God, **Jesus Christ is the one who comes in and destroys the barrier that keeps us from direct access to God, giving us unrestricted access to approach God**, to come into his presence, to see him and to know him personally.

Now the text says that when Jesus died the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom. The veil is 60 feet tall, 30 feet wide, and get this, 4 inches thick. It's fabric woven together 4 inches thick. Estimated to weigh somewhere in the neighborhood of 4 tons. It took 300 men to move it into place to be able to hang it there in the sanctuary. So when it begins to tear, tearing from the top to the bottom, this is not something that any ol' person with a scout knife could pull apart. This was a divine, supernatural act that was clearly a work of God. On the front embroidered into the fabric were pictures of the cherubs, the cherubim blocking the presence of the people and God creating that barrier. So God's the one who tears the veil.

Now I want us to just try to get our mind around what happened, okay? So it's getting close to the evening offering, which means the priests would have been in the Holy Place getting it ready for the evening offering. There would have

been priests in there scurrying around replacing the bread on the table and getting it all set up in the right way. They would have been filling the lamps on the Menorah, the lampstand making sure all the oil was full again. They would be tidying up and cleaning up and stoking the coals on the Altar of Incense to keep the altar burning and preparing the incense to put on the Altar of Incense. All of this is going on while Jesus Christ is suffering in darkness and dying outside the city. When the three o'clock bell comes these guys are all in there doing their deal and Jesus Christ is hanging on the cross. And the text says Jesus Christ cried out with a loud voice and said "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." (the worship center goes black, there is thunder, and you hear the tearing of the veil).

Can you imagine the awe? These men who had dedicated their lives to the worship of God are now looking at the object that in the past, to look upon it they could literally lose their lives. Some of these men, 60 and 70 years old had never looked behind the curtain, had never seen the Ark of the Covenant. Only a few people in history had actually even seen it, and now they're standing in a room where the dust from the ripping of the veil is still filtering in the air and they're looking directly into the Holy of Holies. Is it any wonder that after the resurrection of Jesus the books of Acts records that many priests came to faith. Can you imagine the conversation among the priests - "Come, come look - look, look what happened." It's undeniable that this is a miracle. In fact, there's not even literature that I've ever come across in Jewish literature that tried to figure out a way to discount this miracle. Here it stands, wide open. What do you do with that?



Well as dramatic as that is on the human level, I want you to know that something else is happening on the divine level that is even more profound. What happened to Jesus when he said “Into your hands I commit my spirit,” and he leaves his body - what happens to Jesus, what does he do then? Never thought about that, have you? The Bible tells us. Flip over to Hebrews Chapter 9. You’ve got to see this. This is phenomenal. It gives us a description of exactly what Jesus did at that moment with the renting of the veil of the temple on earth, what Jesus is doing in heaven. Look at what it says starting in verse 24:

*“For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one;”*

In other words, Jesus Christ didn’t leave the cross and come into the temple carrying his offering to the Holy of Holies to place it on a man-made altar. That’s not what he did. Even though all of this was going on on earth that’s not what Jesus did. Look at what it says he did. It says he didn’t do a man-made - it says,

*“He entered heaven itself, now to appear,” for who? “For us in God’s presence.”*

So Jesus walks into the heavenly sanctuary to appear in God’s presence for who? That’s mindboggling isn’t it? He’s appearing for us. It goes on to say,

*“Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own.”*

In other words, the high priest goes every year with blood that’s just not good enough because it’s not even his own blood. It’s the animal blood, it’s not satisfactory. Whose blood is Jesus carrying into the presence of God? He’s carrying his own that he spilt, his own life that he sacrificed for us when he died on the cross. It says, verse 26:

*“Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin,” how? By the sacrifice of himself.”*

Notice it doesn’t say by the sacrifice that you have earned through your good works. It doesn’t say that, right? It’s not your works. It’s by the sacrifice of himself.

*“Just as man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”*

At one time by one sacrifice Jesus Christ entered into the presence of God and made atonement for the sins of the world. The sins were paid for. It is finished, it is done. That’s his work. That’s why he goes on in Chapter 10, he says in verse 11,

*“Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect,” for how long? “He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”*

By one sacrifice Jesus Christ makes perfect forever those who are being made holy, that is for those who are coming to faith in him. Those who are trusting in him, those who are being set apart by the spirit. It’s not what you do, it’s not what I do, it’s what he did. Verse 18 says,

*“And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.”*

Sin has been paid for. I don’t know about you, but that blows me away. The death of Jesus Christ blows me away. His suffering on my behalf blows me away, but the fact that then he went into heaven into the presence of the Father to offer his blood as the atoning sacrifice for me and for you to ensure my forever perfection. That is just mind blowing. That’s mind blowing. What do we do with that? What do we do with that? How do we respond to that? The writer of Hebrews tells us; look what he say, in verse 19 he says:

*“Therefore,” like this is what we do okay? Therefore since Jesus did this for us, he says “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,”*

Now let’s stop for a second. Think about that. When the high priest one day a year on the Day of Atonement, went into the Holy of Holies, passed through the curtain with blood in a bowl that came from an animal, with the intent that he would sprinkle that on the Mercy Seat and for one more year God would accept a substitute rather than hold the nation accountable with their lives for their sin. The high priest went in with trembling and fear. In fact, they put bells on

the bottom of his robe and tied a rope to his foot because nobody could go back there to retrieve the body if God was not happy with that sacrifice. And so every high priest walked into the presence of the Shekinah Glory with that blood and that bowl hoping, trembling, not with confidence in the Holy Place, but in fear, hoping because he knew that what he had in his hand was an inferior, temporary fix for the sins of the people. And he was in the presence of a permanent, infinitely holy God. But Jesus Christ went in with his blood, and so he says to us, we have confidence to go in too. We've got confidence to go right into the very presence of God because Jesus Christ has paid the penalty. He goes on to say,

*"by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain,"* through the veil, *"that is, his body."*

Jesus, his very own body torn for us opens the way to God. He says,

*"and since we have a great high priest over the house of God,"*

I love that. These are the two things we have. He carried the blood in, once he made atonement he went over and sat down at the right hand of God and he's there. He's our priest. So when we stand in the presence of God, when we come into the presence of God and God looks down there and says, "Okay, so Jim, you just walked in here. You sinful man walked into my presence." And Jesus says "No, I represent Jim. I died for Jim. I paid for his sins. He's perfect. Okay Jim, come on in, come on in, come on in. You're welcome, come on in." Jesus paid for it and then he's the high priest who intercedes for us.

So what do we do? He makes it very clear. He says in verse 22,

*"let us draw near to God"*

Since the door's been open and the creator of the earth beckons us to come, let's come. Let's **draw near to God**. What's keeping you from drawing near to God today? Your busy schedule? It seems kind of puny, doesn't it? Your personal time invested in entertainment? What's keeping you from drawing near to God? You feel like you messed up yesterday and so you can't come, and so Jesus' blood isn't good enough for you? It's good enough for him, it's not good enough for you? Like what would keep you from drawing near to God? The door has been opened. For thousands of years people have longed to experience what you can experience in Jesus Christ. They wished that they could peek behind the curtain and see God, and God says, "I've opened the door, come on in." Let's draw near to God. He says:

*“let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”*

I mean we've had our bodies washed with pure water. We've had our hearts sprinkled. Our conscience has been cleaned. Why wouldn't we draw near? He says in verse 23,

*“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”*

Since God is faithful why would we ever live a hopeless day? I know your circumstances may not be great, but God's opened the door for a relationship with him. You should have hope every day because God will never leave you or forsake you, he's with you, he's cleansed you, he's going to take you home to heaven. He says that all things that happen to you will work together for good at some point, somewhere, some how. So let us draw near. Let us **be hopeful in all things**. And then he says this, verse 24,

*“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”*

Let's think about how we can help each other.

*“spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

He says listen, we need to **encourage each other to live lives of love and hope**. The word to spur one another on there or to stimulate, depending on your translation literally means to irritate, or in my terminology to bug the snot out of someone. That's what he's saying. He's saying listen, in light of what Jesus has done for us and we have access to the Father, we've got hope. We need to drive each other crazy if that's what it takes to keep one another on track in the categories of loving one another and using our time wisely for good deeds. In other words, what is it going to take for you to live a productive life? That's my job to think about that and to keep pestering you to do that because I have high aspirations for you because Jesus does. And you would do the same for me, right? Like we'd have aspirations for each other. I don't want to see any of you waste your life and hopefully you don't want that for me, and so we would spend some time getting together, talking, thinking about just challenging each other. Folks, we have been given not only the attention of the God of heaven, but the actual life blood and a wide open invitation to walk through the door

and experience that. Would we not commit ourselves to draw close to God, to live in hope, and then to push one another so that we live lives that are filled with love and doing good.

What else are we going to do? Live for a dollar? Chase a thrill? It's kind of silly, isn't it, when you think about it? The things that are bugging you right now are so worthless. The things that cause you to have your ulcers and your nervous breakdowns are just kind of stupid, aren't they? In light of eternity? You have the opportunity to stand face-to-face with God through Jesus Christ. It doesn't get any better than this. Let's act like it.

I want us to bow our heads and just take a moment to kind of let that sink in. What's holding you back? What could possibly be holding you back? In light of the open door, are you willing to walk through it today? Are you willing to embrace the love of God on your behalf and begin to live in that love? Are you willing to let go of your sin and your selfishness and your little sorry silly things and fully surrender? Today's a great day to make that decision.

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