

The Crisis Among Us-Our Need

By Dallas Willard

Announcer:

-Spirit of receptivity that we welcome Dallas Willard.

Dallas Willard:

Thank you for those overly kind words. It's a real pleasure to be here. I've had a feeling that something was building at Biola as the days have gone by. And those wonderful words from that hymn inspire us to believe that it may be that God is about to bring something new forth here. We need a new emphasis. We need a new direction. We need a renewal of Christ in our midst. And perhaps this will be the time for that. Now I've been asked to speak on the topic of the crisis among us and our need if you will look at a few words from the 11 from the seventh chapter of Luke with me. We'll use these as a basis for thinking. Now let me just say this that my aim is not to harangue you and cajole you and scold you and I hope that as we read these words of Jesus we will remove any sense of that from our minds. Too often I believe we think of Jesus standing and shaking his finger at us reading as the riot act and so forth. And I think you really begin to get the impact of Jesus's teachings when you begin to understand that he really doesn't indulge in that sort of stuff. Usually. There were a few people in the Gospels that he found worthy of it but by and large he comes to us to help us understand to teach and to explain. And that is true of the verses which I want to read to you this evening. My aim is to illuminate. I want this message to be one of great hope for you.

I want to tell you without any qualification that all of your aspirations for Christ likeness and for power in God's kingdom can be realized. I want to say that to every one of you there is a way. It is not obscure. It is not easy. But then life isn't easy period. It's a lot easier than any other way. And as we look at these words of Jesus now let's see if we can't get the key to what he's telling us. I'll be reading from the forty third through the forty ninth verses of Luke 7. There is no good tree which produces bad fruit. There is no good tree that produces bad fruit. Nor on the other hand a bad tree which produces good fruit. For Each tree is known by its own fruit. Men do not gather figs from thorns nor do they pick grapes from a briar Bush. The good person out of the good treasure of their heart brings forth what is good and the evil person out of the evil treasure in their heart brings forth what is evil. For the mouth speaks from what fills the heart. In other words what comes out of the mouth and indeed out of the body is an expression of what there is a lot of in the heart. And why do you call me Lord and do not what I say. Everyone who comes to me and here's my words and acts upon them I will show you whom he is like he is like a man building a house who dug deep and laid the foundation upon the rock. And when a flood arose the torrent burst against the house and could not shake it because it had been well built. We've learned a little bit about that in Southern California in the last months but the one who has heard and not acted accordingly is like a person who built a house up on the ground without any foundation and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed and the ruin of that house was great.

Is there indeed a crisis among us? I think the answer that we have to give to that is a solid yes. There is a crisis among us as Christians and beyond that as Americans and beyond that as human beings in a sense it's not a new crisis but because of the movement of history it has new dimensions. We don't have time this evening to talk about the larger picture. We want to simply

look at the difficulty as it emerges among committed Christians. It was a turning point in my own life as a pastor when I stopped blaming people for not growing. Because of their evil intentions and started to assume the responsibility as a teacher and preacher for enabling them to do it. What is striking and has been striking for a long while and comes to the fore constantly with us today is that committed Christians are not able to find their way into the promises of the Gospel. Jesus said, He who comes to me shall not hunger. And he who believes on me shall not thirst. And yet we have serious Christians who have not been able to find their way into that they have been committed and long term committed. Sometimes they are on the mission field. Sometimes they are teaching in seminaries. Certainly in our Christian schools and in our secular schools and yet they have not found the secret of peace and holiness and power for the things that their heart rises to as their service for God. Jesus said in John seven the one who believes on me from his belly shall flow rivers of living water and yet in all frankness that's a rare thing to find. Wouldn't you agree? Among those who profess belief in Jesus Christ. We can sum up the crisis very simply by saying that it is one of failure to produce what is promised. It is failure to produce what is promised. We speak of the wonderful fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5, love joy peace longsuffering gentleness goodness kindness meekness self-control faithfulness. And yet how shallow that particular river runs among us as I go from place to place and sometimes consoled even with Christian organizations.

I find that they have management problems that are doing nothing doing nothing more than the immaturity of longstanding Christians and many of their management problems would be totally solved if their personnel who professed Christ and perhaps are even working at a job out of commitment for less money than they could make if they were to go into another line of work. And yet they cannot handle everyday life with one another. They are unable effectively to

love and to rejoice in one another and be at peace. Now see this is what I say. I had to stop blaming them for that. And I had to say at one point in my ministry years ago that's my fault. That's between me and the lawyer. Of course I recognize I could find a few other people to blame on me but when I'm the one doing the talking I'm the one who should have the blame. And I realized that there was something wrong with what I was presenting to these people in my efforts to help them be who their heart aspired to be. Now Jesus gives us the key to this failure in the passage that we've read. He says it's the inside. It's what's on the inside of the tree. In the final verse he attributed it to the fact that we don't build our lives well by obeying his word.

I don't have time to open this up fully this evening but the truth of the matter is if you try simply to obey his word in some overt sense you're going to have a miserable life and that is why many people when they read the teachings of Jesus look at them and say boy this would really ruin my life. You know if I were to do this give to him that I asketh of thee bless those who curse you. Love your enemies go the second mile and so on. So you see they misunderstand. Because Jesus is not telling us we're to do those things Jesus is telling us where to become the kind of person for whom that is the natural and easy outflow of the inside. You see. Will you remember that when you read his teachings? Jesus does not give us a new set of more horrible laws. He tells us what life can be like. When we by faith the vision of him that's our constant present constantly present redeemer. Begin to step into the reality of the Kingdom of God and begin to know the direction of God's heart in our life. So that for example we have peace. I don't know if you've devoted a lot of time to thinking about peace peace is the condition of nearly every form of righteousness that you can imagine. If you don't have peace you're going to be knocked off your perch by every breeze that comes along. You go down the freeway otherwise perfectly sane and healthy people indulge in some the strangest behavior imaginable and many of them are

Christians. Now why is that? Well that's because of what is in their heart. So our object must be we must take the key that Jesus gives us. We must understand that it is the renewal of the inside that he aims at and we must try to find our way toward spiritual transformation in that sense. I like to say it isn't that we're wrong but that we're wrung. Understand what I mean we're wrung. W-r-u-n-g. We're twisted inside the wires don't hook up right. And so the input comes in and the output. You have no idea where it comes from. Well you do. You know that there's something on the inside that Jesus was masterful in his teachings about this Mark 7 and elsewhere he talks about nothing that goes into the body can contaminate a person. It's what comes out of the person. The belly system is one system and the heart system is another system. And what we have to do is to have the renewal of the heart. Now there's a great deal of talk of spiritual and spirit around and will be in these hours we have together. We need to have some meaning for the term basically spirit is simply unbodily personal power unbodily personal power. That's what Spirit is. God is Spirit. He is unbodily personal power. There is a dimension of you, the essential dimension of you is also spiritual. You are not a material being Madonna may be a material girl. That also comes out of her heart. That is not a metaphysical truth about Madonna.

It's a choice. We are spiritual beings. We are here at God's behest. We're never going to stop being worried about dying. Don't don't give it any more thought. Jesus said He that believeth on me shall never taste death. So if you're looking forward to that just forget it. You'll never taste it. You ought to be thinking about what you're going to be doing 400 years from now. You know it's always best to look ahead. You're a spiritual being. And what we need to do is to understand that when that spiritual part of us is put right, then the natural outflow will be the works of Christ. So important to say that folks because if you get tied into the legalism of obeying Christ it'll take you years to get out and you may never get out. You have to understand.

That Jesus is talking about the kind of person you can become you can become the kind of person that Abraham was too many crowd too many sheep too many lots in him had too much prosperity. Then you remember that wonderful story they got together and Abraham said to lot take whichever one you want. Now what was Abraham looking at. He wasn't looking at sheep. He wasn't looking at grasslands and wells. He was looking at God looking at God. He had that fixed before him. The wonderful verse in Psalms 16:8. I think it is, I have set the Lord always before me. He is at my right hand. I shall not be moved. You see. See that that's inner the inner structure of the self. That is the spiritual reality out of which we live. When people criticize us and work on us with our ministries and all that we all need a little of that and I'm sure every one of us gets it. But we can just say thank you and go on if we can learn from it. That's fine if not it's between the Lord and us. And so in peace and enjoy it we go. And yet of course criticism is a constant bonfire among Christians isn't it? The bad things that someone said about me and so forth. See that's the inside.

Now just very quickly structurally our problem is that we have developed a situation where we have faith over here and obedience over here and no way to get from here to here. Faith over here obedience over here and no way to get from here to here. That's the deepest problem we have to face when we're trying to deal with this crisis and our need is to find a way of understanding faith and obedience which will allow us to bring them together. If you just look at that contrast faith here and obedience here you recognize that what is missing is the bridge of discipleship. Because you learn how to obey and if you forget everything else I say this evening, remember that phrase. You learn how to be. You do not obey by trying though you must try. You learn to obey. That learning may involve a lot of help from others but you must learn to obey and that process of learning to obey is the process of discipleship. As a disciple of Jesus Christ I'm

learning to live my life as he would live my life if he were me. But you see we've had a version of the Gospel that has not laid a foundation for discipleship. And this is the deepest theological point that we have to understand for a conference on spiritual transformation is that we have a gospel that is fundamentally a theory of the atonement and we are told that if we believe a certain theory of the atonement that Jesus Christ died for your sins. Then when you die your sins are all paid for and that is the gospel. Ok now folks, that's very important but that's not the gospel. A theory of atonement is not the Gospel a theory of justification is not a theory of regeneration. The gospel is new life by faith in Christ in His kingdom. You are saved by trusting Jesus Christ not by trusting something he did but by trusting him.

Now to trust him is to believe that everything he said and did was right. And good. And that he will make it available to me if I will but trust him. To trust him as to rely on him. And through our faith in Christ faith in everything he did and everything he was we began to step into the reality of which allows us to produce the works of Christ because that transforms the inside but we have to have a gospel. And we have to have it clear that allows us to understand that salvation is for life not just for death. Recently I was talking with a man who very fine man. I've known him for many years. He's a lovely Christian man and he had been a middle level executive with IBM and as you know a lot of those are no more. He had lost his position at IBM and he was looking for work and he and his wife were experiencing it rather rather rough and he said to me you know if I if I received word that I were I had fatal cancer or that I was about to die I feel that I would be confident in the face death but I I don't know how to handle this now knowing his background I pointed out to him very simply the reason for that is because you have been setting under the ministry that teaches you how to die for 25 years but you have not been setting under a ministry that teaches you how to live.

It is of such fundamental importance that we understand that the good news is for now and because it is for now it is for eternity. When I go up to the gate if you wish I don't expect them to check the computer. I expect them to say here's one of us. Not what you expect? If they have to go look at the computer then we might as well just head the other way see Jesus Christ brings many sons and daughters to salvation. He's our big brother in this project. We trust him. We bear the family resemblance because of our faith in Jesus Christ. We are transformed. We become new people with a new life that is in us. So we have got to have a gospel of life. And if we have a gospel of life then we have a gospel of discipleship. Jesus is master not because he is bigger than I am. Jesus is master because he is Maestro you understand what I mean. He's master. Because he really is Lord he really does know he really is in position. That wonderful saying with which he ends his ministry here in the Gospel of Matthew where he says in effect all power really and what is all say. I've been given say over everything in heaven and earth. That's the basis of his lordship.

He is master because he is Maestro. And when he says it is better to love our enemies when he calls us to go out to cast out demons to heal to do all of the things that he himself did. He's calling us into what is best for us. Then what he knows to be best for us. That is a gospel of life and Christian discipleship and our first need when we think about transforming that tree when we think about becoming the kind of person from whom the deeds of Christ naturally flow is to have the gospel that Jesus Christ himself preached. The availability of life from above the availability of life in his kingdom. Now. Through faith in him I believe in Jesus Christ. That is a wonderful confession to me. And what that means to me is he is absolutely in charge of everything. I have no reason not to live in love and peace and all of the things which I see in him and which we sing and talk about because you see I know his adequacy and I trust him for it.

Now I have to learn how to do that see my body has taken a long while to catch up with my knowledge. Our bodies have in them the tendency is to sin that before we can think about it will carry us into sin. Then of course the next thing is we always wind up justifying it. What I know in my heart has to be translated into my flesh. The members of my body which have been servants of said unto unrighteousness now have to become servants of righteousness.

So we need not only a vision of the Gospel, the one which Jesus himself brought to us. The one which is the basis for the kind of confidence the incredible confidence that Jesus himself had in the face of life. Doesn't that just blow you over sometimes when you're reading the Gospels to see that? Incredible confidence. Oh he said nobody takes my life for me. I lay my life down I take it up again. Then he did it. Don't worry about what you're going to eat what you're going to drink. Where and so forth. He said I'll be taken care of. You see his key was very simple. Seek to know the rule of God and His kind of rightness and you will be in a kingdom where everything else will be taken care of. You understand what that means? Seek ye first the kingdom of God means to see to know the rule of God throughout your life. Make that the primary thing you see. Now see this is the basis for discipleship. Because that's what we learn how to do. You learned it all wrong before you got here. So you had to relearn it. You know the reason you can't teach old dogs new tricks is they already got too many tricks. We have all that stuff inside. That's why Peter would say I'm not going to betray you but he did. That's because that was that old dog had those tricks in him.

So now we have to learn to seek the rule of God and His Kind of rightness. Righteousness that word is in Greek thought in Plato's Republic uses Dikaiosune and I try to help the students get the point of it by saying really OK what is it about God that makes him really okay. You see that's what we're seeking. Now we know that because we look at Christ we hear

his words we see his teaching but we need a plan of discipleship that will allow us to enter into that. And as we do that then there is an inner transformation that we have a part in ok. Because you see the transformation is not going to happen automatically. We were talking at an earlier meeting today about whether or not the church should be the spiritual formation agent or the university. Well you know the church can't do much in the way of spiritual formation for a very simple reason. It doesn't have you for a long enough time. It's true. You can't get spiritual formation out of that.

Now we Americans out of an evangelical revivalist tradition tend to believe that if you go down to the church house one day lightning just might hit you. It has happened hasn't it? But you can't count on it. So you got to find a plan that will allow you now to put your whole life at the disposal of Christ for his teaching. And that will involve a lot of things preaching. We've got to have the right gospel as I've said teaching. It has to be taught and explained. Therapy is often appropriate and necessary even Deliverance Ministries. But folks we have to finally come to grips with the fact that it is we who must take off the old person and put on the new. No no. I know you won't do it by yourself. That's fine. You won't do it by yourself. It will be an act of grace but I'm telling you if you don't do something it will not happen. And that's why Paul tells us Colossians three and elsewhere put off the old person put on the new person. How do you do that? You do that by submitting yourself to a life in which there are planned activities that will change that inner person.

And chief among these are what we call spiritual disciplines. Solitude and silence. You know I rarely find anyone who has really had a life transforming experience of Christ who somewhere in there you'll hear them tell a story about how they disappeared in their bedroom for two weeks and did nothing but read the Bible and pray. Sometimes [gap in recording] Jesus went

into solitude. Maybe that's a suggestion for us. What do you think? We need to look at Jesus and see what his practices were. We need to understand what he was doing when he was not performing is relevant to what he did when he was performing. If you will allow me to say so he cultivated the presence of his father and then he could say but I'm not alone because my father is always with me. One of the things I many of the things I find most illuminating about the gospels is that in all three of them all four of them we have a statement that at the baptism of Jesus the heavens were opened. We don't have any indication that it ever closed for him.

You see the heavens are full of God. Rightly, Matthew speaks of the Kingdom of the heavens. And we learn by our choices of action how to enter in to the fullness of our life with God. Silence study service worship of course. Community submission confession. All of these things are ways that we as disciples of Jesus can learn how to read to the inner self. To rewire by the grace of God. By his cooperative endeavor the connecting links of input and output. So that what comes out no matter what the input is the expression of the person of Christ? Then we can intend to obey Christ. Very rarely today will you find anyone who simply intends to obey Christ. If you read the first chapter of William Law's wonderful little book a serious call to a devout holy life you will see him discussing why is it that so few people bring into their whole life the kind of concentration they bring into their prayers. Why is it that by and large their lives are lived outside? Of the dominion of God and His answer is lack of intention. But you see if you don't have a vision of God in the gospel of Christ in the Gospel and if you don't have a plan and an understanding of how it actually works you cannot seriously intend to do the deeds of Christ. And that's why by and large I find that the teachings of Christ serve the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere really are are just not found to be relevant by people generally. It's because they

don't see them as a part of the Gospel and they don't understand the practicalities of entering into them.

See once we do enter into them then our life begins to pick up on the reality of the kingdom. It is by obeying Jesus Christ that we mesh our lives with the reality of the kingdom Jesus said in John 14 23. If anyone loves me he will keep my word and my father will love him and we will come to him and make our abode with him. When that happens you'll understand the reality. He that cometh unto me shall never hunger and he that believeth on me shall never thirst because you see that's when God with us becomes the reality of our lives. That's when we begin to have an eternal kind of life in everything that we do. That's when the holiness of God shines over us and sets us free to walk into the righteousness and power of his kingdom.

Thank you very much.

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