

WALKING IN THE WAYS OF GOD
August 13, 2017 Morning Service
Psalm 81:11-16

I want to read to you from the June 14, 2017 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Phoenix, Arizona a resolution that we passed. A portion of that resolution was in response to what many of us have watched on television. I didn't even know what was going on in Charlottesville for the last two days. I've been in Memphis preaching and I hadn't even turned the television on. I flew up there all day, Atlanta and over. They picked me up and went to the hotel and had dinner and I hadn't seen a television. I preached Friday night and had a great experience Friday night.

I was coming down the elevator with big old burly guys with long hair and tattoos and beards and they tried to lead me to Christ. It had been awhile since anybody shared the gospel with me but I just kind of let them go, you know. I thought, practice will do us all good. They were in a biker ministry. They'd been up to South Dakota to deliver a Harley and were coming back through Memphis on the way to North Carolina. They'd just stopped for the night and they said, "Well if you ever need to start a biker church in Pensacola," and they gave me a card. I said, "I just need you guys to come help me." It was good.

Then Saturday I preached all morning and flew back. I didn't know really what was going on in Charlottesville. I was kind of late last night watching. Here's what we passed in Phoenix. Racism and white supremacy are sadly not extinct but present all over the world in various white supremacist movements sometimes known as white nationalism or alt-right. The messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention, this June 4, 2017, decry every form of racism including alt-right white supremacy is antithetical to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We denounce and repudiate white supremacy and every form of racial and ethnic hatred as a scheme of the devil intended to bring suffering and division to our society. Amen.

Old Jay Howard who's a tight end in the NFL tweeted this morning that the only place the division of color should be found is in the laundry room when you've got your whites and your colors. That big tight end said there it's okay but everywhere else we ought to be together as one people.

I didn't know much about that. I was preaching Friday night with a black preacher. He preached first and then I preached. Sammy Smith who is an all-everything running back at Florida state and then with the Miami Dolphins. Man, what a testimony. Then Saturday morning I was preaching and Travis Bly was the piano doing the music, a black brother from Syracuse, New York. I was preaching. I didn't know all this craziness was going on. I just thought maybe we'd moved past some of that and that the gospel might melt it away but we still live in a wicked, sin-cursed world. Have no fear. In this world you'll have tribulation. Get your head up. Be of good cheer. Jesus has overcome the world. Amen. All together we are to be one.

Well I want you to stand with me and we'll read the word of God in Psalm 81 this morning. Let's all rise. I'm going to begin reading in verse 11. I'll read verse 11 and 12. When we get to verse 13 I want all of you to read it out loud. Okay? If it works it'll be up on the screen, alright? So is it working? That's a yes. Alright, good. So we'll get there. I'll read 11 and 12. You read 13 and then I'll finish in verses 14, 15, 16. Then we'll go back to verse 13 and we'll all read it together two more times out loud in unison with gusto. The word of the Lord.

*"But My people did not listen to My voice,
And Israel did not obey Me.
"So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart,
To walk in their own devices.
"Oh that My people would listen to Me,
That Israel would walk in My ways! [Notice there's an exclamation point after that verse. When you come back and read it again read it like that.]
"I would quickly subdue their enemies
And turn My hand against their adversaries.
"Those who hate the Lord would pretend obedience to Him,
And their time of punishment would be forever.
"But I would feed you with the finest of the wheat,
And with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."¹*

Back to verse 13. Read aloud twice this verse and read it like you mean it. *"Oh that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways!"* One more time. *"Oh that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways!"* That's God's cry. "Oh that My people would listen and then do and walk in My ways. If they do," He said, "I'm going to feed them with the finest wheat. I'm going to give them honey from the rock." We preached about that last Sunday. "But My people," in verse 11, "didn't listen and they didn't obey."

Dear friend, if you don't obey God, He'll give you over to the stubbornness of your heart. You'll walk in your own devices and that will not be good. Oh that My people, Olive. Oh that My people, Baptists. Oh that My people, Christians, would listen to Me and walk in My ways. Oh that we'd do it. God would gather us up and speak and we'd say, "Yes, Lord, Your servant is listening." And when we hear we'd walk.

Last night as I was flying home I had a little delay and I was in the crown room in Atlanta and there was a mother and a daddy and it looked to me about a 13-year-old boy. The daddy was standing right in front of him and he was saying, "Give your mother your phone." He said, "But..." He said, "Do not negotiate with me. Give your mother your phone." He wouldn't do it. The kid was running the show. His daddy walked around and pouted and carried on. I thought to myself, in Jesus' name, I'd have got that phone, I'm telling you. Mr. Traylor, may God be merciful. I just stood over there in the

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corner and I prayed for them. I really did. I prayed, Dear God, help them. Finally that boy gave up his phone. Daddy slammed it down over there and I thought, whew, I'm glad I'm not going to their house tonight.

Let me tell you, friend, God's not negotiating with you. He's speaking a good word and He's saying, "Walk after me." If you don't, I'll let you go in your own stubbornness and your own devices but if you will walk with me I'll feed with the finest wheat and I will give you honey from the rock. Hallelujah. He's not looking for halfway partial obedience. He is looking for full surrender.

In just a few minutes I'm going to ask you to get out of your seat when we stand again, walk here, and kneel and say, "O God, I surrender all unto you."

Father, speak to us. Use these lips of clay and open this book that we might hear your voice and give us grace to do it, in Jesus' name. Amen.

In what is known as the greatest sermon ever preached in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, the Sermon on the Mount, in the conclusion of it, Jesus divides humanity lost and saved. He gives in his conclusion four illustrations. He says there is a broad road and it leads to hell and there is a narrow gate and a narrow road and it leads to eternal life. He then said there are two trees. One tree bears the fruit of righteousness and the other tree is dead and barren. Then He says that there are two professions. There are those that say, "Lord, Lord" but don't know God and then there are those that say, "Lord, Lord" and obey God. Then He says there are two builders, one that built upon the sand and when the storm came the house fell. The others that built on the rock and when the storms came they stood firm. He divides humanity, lost, saved, disobedient, obedient. He divides Olive. He divides this crowd in this room. He divides those watching on television and Internet and listening and radio. He divides all of us. He divides us. Narrow way, broad way. Heaven bound, hell bound. Which one are you?

Jesus loves you. God loves you enough His Son came and died for you. He paid the sin debt for your sins and if you would believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ you would be saved. That's what that biker was telling me in that elevator on Friday night. That's what we try to share with people going door to door and meeting our friends, that Jesus loves you. We're not here to condemn you. We're here to extend to you life, eternal life and if you would but believe He would save you.

I would hope and pray that the great majority of people listening to me today are on the right side of the division but, friend, if you're on the wrong side I challenge you in just a few minutes when we get done, leave this room and walk out there to one of these tables that we call next step tables and take the step through the narrow gate that leads to eternal life, even Jesus our Lord. Go out there and someone will pray with you. Walk down here and someone will pray with you. Come to Christ and He will save you.

He divides us. But now this morning, for those that are on the Lord's side, that text we read is for us. God's people, saved people, redeemed people must learn to

walk in God's ways. That's what He says in verse 13. "O that my people would listen and walk in My ways."

Many people in the church profess to know Christ, say they trust Christ, and say they love Him. But He seems to be more of a helper than a Lord. For you see, when they get in trouble they run to Him. When they sin, they ask His pardon. Yet day by day they live according to their own will and their own devices and their own ways. What God's trying to teach us is to hear Him and come to absolute, complete totalitarian surrender to His Lordship.

Now when you get saved, you've got to grow. One of our fine, young men in this church led his secretary to Christ this week. He sent me a text. He said, "Pastor, would you encourage her?" I did. I sent her a text because I'd prayed with her and told her I'd been praying for her. I'd met her before – asking God to move in her heart. I sent her a text. I said, "Proud of you. So glad you've trusted Christ and I'm praying that you would grow in faith." She sent me back a text. She said, "Thank you, pastor, for praying for me."

Friend, if you're saved today, you're somewhere along this journey. You've entered the gate. You're walking the narrow way and the farther you go the more God teaches you and you have to learn every step of the way. Every season is not the same. Liz and I have been walking through some seasons. It's hard for me to believe in 27 years just the season we've been here with you as pastor and wife. It's hard to believe.

I walked down through that preschool building and prayed all through it this morning. My wife's down there teaching. When we got here, we had a child down there in that. Now we've got grandkids down there in that. So we're walking through a season.

Liz's momma got sick. We brought her here. She stayed five years. Just this week, Monday of this week, we moved my mother-in-law back to Guntersville, Alabama to a nursing facility where her brother, Liz's brother, wanted to take care of his momma. So they worked that out and this week it's a new season of our life. I just try to encourage and stay out of that. Somebody asked me, they said, "How do you feel about that?" I said, "I didn't say a thing." Now I did go to my prayer closet and I spoke in tongues back in the back. I was rather elated, I'll just be honest with you. It's a new season for us. Can I get a witness? Amen. She's just flourishing. She's out of the bed up there and just doing great.

You learn when the hardships come, the difficulties and issues. You listen and you walk in His ways. Friend, let me tell you, if you're not in absolute surrender to God you will not walk in His ways. You'll walk in your own devices, your own ways. What God's calling us to this morning is absolute surrender. I want to give you three Bible illustrations of what He's calling us to in verse 13. I just want to show them to you in scripture and then call us to absolute surrender today. Let's look at them quickly as we

see in our Bible. Two Old Testament illustrations and one New Testament illustration of absolute surrender.

Number one. I want to show you from a worldly way of surrender how Ahab surrendered to Ben-hadad. Ahab surrendered to Ben-hadad. In I Kings chapter 20 and verse number 1 you'll see it there in the text on the screen, the Bible says: *Now Ben-hadad king of Aram gathered all his army, and there were thirty-two kings with him, and horses and chariots. And he went up and besieged Samaria and fought against it.* [Verse number 2.] *Then he sent messengers to the city to Ahab king of Israel and said to him, "Thus says Ben-hadad, 'Your silver and your gold are mine; your most beautiful wives and children are also mine.'" The king of Israel replied [and said], "It is according to your word, my lord, O king; I am yours, and all that I have."*

Now Ahab was bowing to a wicked, foreign king. And what Ahab was doing in defiance the spirit of it is what we should do in obedience not to this world but unto God himself. You must say to Jehovah. "It is according to your word, my lord, O king of the ages; I am yours, and all that I have is yours." That, my friend, is absolute surrender. You're not just looking for some little dab'll do ya in church policy that maybe hopefully when you die one day you might just barely squeak in the door to heaven. No. "Lord, I'm Yours and everything I've got. Anything that may have my name is Yours. It is at Your disposal." That, my friend, is absolute surrender. That's what God's calling us to today and nothing less will do. You will never understand the power of God or have honey from the rock until you come to the place of saying, "Lord, I'm Yours. Everything I've got is Yours. I've signed it over to You. Everything is Yours."

Are you there? Are you there? Your family, is it God's or yours? Your business, is it yours or is it God's? Your bank account. Is it yours or is it God's? Your future. Is it yours or God's? Friend, the safest place you can be is in the center of God's will. He calls us to absolute, radical surrender and obedience unto Him. Lord, I am His in all that I have. If Ahab would say that to a wicked king, how much more should we say it to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

So we see Ahab unto Ben-hadad. The second illustration is found from the New Testament but it's an Old Testament reference. In Acts 13 we see David making his commitment to God. In Acts 13:22 out of this sermon we hear the preacher saying: *After He had removed him, He raised up David to be their king, concerning whom He also testified and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse [here it is], a man after My heart.'* How do you know you're a man after God's own heart? It's the last line that we don't ever quote. We just say David was a man after God's own heart. How do you know? *Who will do all My will.*

How do you know David was a man after God's own heart? Because he would do all of God's will. Not part of it. Not 50%, not 75%, not just a little. Not almost all. David was a man after God's own heart because he would do all of God's will. You say, "Preacher, how in the world could David be a man after God's own heart? He was an adulterer and a murderer." He was. He committed adultery. You may be an adulterer

in here today. I'm telling you, if you'll surrender to God, He'll forgive your sin and raise you up to be a man after God's own heart. You say, "He's a murderer." I don't know who you are. You may have murdered. The word of God says if you've got anger in your heart you're just as guilty as if you murder. Yes, sir.

How do we know David was a man after God's own heart? Well the scripture says he would do all of the will of God. Let me just show you four things about David I want you to see very quickly. He was first of all a man of faith. We know the great story in the scriptures is Goliath and he walked down and picked up those five smooth stones, put them in his shepherd's pouch, and hit old Goliath right in the middle of the head. He fell. He was a man of faith. When nobody else would walk out, he was a man after God's own heart. This little boy going down with wine and cheeses to see his brothers. Here came this uncircumcised Philistine out. David said, "Nobody's going to deal with this?" They said, "No, not us." David said, "I'll deal with it." They put Saul's armor on him. It spun like a top.

My wife is teaching on David and Goliath this morning and David with the armor. She took some of my shoes to those little boys to put on down there. They walked around in Saul's armor. They said, "It's too big," and they cast that off. He took up the shield of God's righteousness. A man after God's own heart? Yes, sir. Why? Because he's a man of faith.

Secondly, not only is he a man of faith, he loved God's word. Psalm 119:47-48, if you want to be a man after God's own heart, you've got to love the word of God. David said, "I shall delight in your commandments which I love and I shall lift up my hands to your commandments which I love and I will meditate on your statutes." Let me tell you, friend, if you're not reading the word of God every day of your life, your heart is not only God's. You're not a man after God's own heart if you're not consistently in scripture. That's the book. That's the meat. Let me tell you, friend, that's the water for your soul. You ought to be reading the word of God every day. David was a man of faith. He loved God's word.

Number three. He was a thankful man. Oh he was full of gratitude. Let me tell you, a man after God's own heart is a grateful man. He is thankful, thankful, thankful. Psalms 26:6-7 where we find the word of God says: *I shall wash my hands in innocence, And I will go about Your altar, O Lord, That I may proclaim with the voice of thanksgiving And declare all Your wonders.*

I'm going to wash my hands. I'm going to be clean. I'm going around the altar and I'm going to lift up my voice. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. What's God done in your life? I'm telling you, a man after God's own heart is full of gratitude. He's thankful. You may be at your death's door but you're thankful.

Number four. Not only is he a man of faith, he loved God's word, he's thankful, he was a man of repentance. When sin had entered his life he cried out to God and

God forgave him. Psalm 51 is that great psalm of repentance after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba. He says: *Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin.* Notice David didn't say it was her fault and she ought not been out there. "Lord, if she'd have dressed right I wouldn't have fallen into temptation." It was David's fault. He knew it and it was sin and his iniquity, his transgression. He said, "O God, blot it out." Are you a man after God's own heart? You'll get honest about your own sin. You'll quit confessing mine and confess yours. You'll quit confessing your brothers and confess yours. You'll quit confessing your spouses and confess yours.

He was a man after God's own heart and he came clean before God and he received. Now listen to me. When you receive the forgiveness of God, quit going back and picking up all that mess. He casts it off and God forgets it so get rid of it. Let God skin that off of you and walk forward. You say, "Pastor, there's a residue." Yeah, it's in man's eyes but it doesn't have to be in God's eyes or yours. Stand with the glory of God. Be a man after God's own heart. "David was because he would do all of My will."

For some of you to do the will of God, to do all of the will of God, you're going to have to walk down this aisle and you're going to have to join this church because it's the will of God. Some of you are going to have to come be baptized because it's the will of God. Some of you are going to have to walk out of this church and forgive somebody because it's the will of God. Some of you are going to have to begin to give your money because it's the will of God.

God'll put in your heart what that is. He's looking for absolute surrender like Ahab gave to Ben-hadad. Like David gave to God. A man after God's own heart because he would do all of God's will. You know, it would be amazing if God raised up a thousand men in this church that would love nothing more than they loved God. Hate sin, and live in righteousness. Not worried about their own life. Oh my, Lord, just raise up an army. Normally He doesn't give you a thousand. He'll give you ten. It'll just take a little report. Oh what God can do with one person who is absolutely sold out. That's what D.L. Moody said. "The world is yet to see what God can do with one soul fully and totally committed to Jesus as Lord." Wow. Absolute surrender. Sold out like Ahab to Ben-hadad. Like David was to God.

Thirdly, the third illustration is found in Matthew's gospel chapter 8 and that is the Centurion sold out to Jesus. Look at the gospel of Matthew in chapter 8. I begin reading in verse 5 and read down through verse 10. Just listen to the story. You know the centurion. He's a Roman soldier in charge of a hundred men is where the word Centurion comes from.

And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion [that man in charge of 100] came to Him, imploring Him, and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and

my servant will be healed. For I [here's the key] also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel."

This Roman centurion, he knew what it was to be under authority because not only did he have a hundred men that were under his command, he was in bent authority to someone above him. He said, "Lord, I'm a man under authority just like you're a man under authority." What do we learn from this centurion? Number one. We learn Jesus was a man under authority. What did the little boy Jesus say when he was found? "I've got to be after My Father's will. I've come not to do My will but My Father's will. My meat to eat is to do all that He has given me to do."

You see, Jesus, when He was here in the flesh was a man under authority. The centurion came under authority. He said, "Lord, just like you're a man under authority, I know what it is and I bring my life. Lord, I'm not worthy for you to come enter my house. If you just speak the word that servant will be healed." He got under the authority. I'm telling you, Jesus said the centurion right there when he believed he came under the authority of the Lord Jesus.

You, my friend, must come under authority. Yes, sir. We had three of our deacons as always on Sunday that come pray over me. We had three in there this morning. One of those said, "Pray for my grandson." I said, "What's up with your grandson?" He said, "Tomorrow he reports to Army boot camp." You talk about a man under authority. There ain't nobody under him. He's under everybody. The first day showing up.

I love to fly into Pensacola late on Saturday night because that's the time that the Navy sends in all these boys and ladies. They come in on that late 10:20 flight and I'll see them. Sometimes there may be 30 or 40 of them. Two weeks ago Liz and I were coming in from our vacation time. There they were. They stacked up 30, 35 coming in. I told Liz, I said, "Look at them. Everything they've got on is white. There's not a stripe anywhere. They don't have anything. Unless they wrote on their pants, there's not a mark on them." They're white, white, white. They're at the bottom of the bottom of the bottom. They're under authority. Then there'll be one or two that'll be ranked a little bit and tell them what to do. Let me tell you, friend, when you come to Jesus, you come with not a stripe on you. You come enlisting and getting under the authority of the Lord Jesus.

That's what I'm going to ask you to do this morning. I'm going to ask you to come enlist. Get under the authority of the King of kings and Lord of lords. Let me tell you, if you don't do it today you will do it because everybody in this world will one day be under the authority of the Lord Jesus because every tongue's going to confess and every knee is going to bow that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. God's people need to learn and come to complete surrender.

Now take your Bible. Everybody take your Bible and go to the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 7. I want everybody to go there. Jeremiah chapter 7. If you've got a Bible open to Jeremiah chapter 7 we'll look at two verses. When we come to the conclusion in just a minute I'm going to ask you to get up and if you want to trust the Lord today, I want you to go out there to those next step tables or I want you to come right here to this altar. If you want to join this church, I want you to come right here. I want you to go to those next step tables. I want you to say yes to Christ. If you want to come for baptism, then be ready to do that.

Now here's my question to you. I started by saying that God divides this congregation and He does so I want to ask a question. If you were to die today, if you know beyond a shadow of a doubt in your heart of hearts that I could preach your funeral and tell everybody that would be there that you've gone to heaven, say Amen. Alright. If you said Amen, I've got a question for you. Are you backing up or are you going forward? I'm not talking about into heaven. I'm talking about in this world. Now you know you're going to heaven but are you backing up or are you going forward? Jeremiah 7, verse 23.

But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you.' [Verse 24.] *Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward.*

A lot of Sundays before he comes to see me he'll go – he doesn't kneel. He gets on the altar. He just gets on the altar. Several months ago he walked up to me and he said, "Brother Ted, Brother Ted." I said, "Yeah." He said, "God's talking to me. God's been talking to me. He told me He's going to make me a preacher just like you." I hugged him. When he walked, he started down that aisle.

I prayed in my heart. I said, "Lord, don't hurt that little boy." I said, "Lord, he's not going to be a preacher." You ever have the Holy Ghost clear His throat at you? I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Do you know David Ring?" I said, "Yes, sir. He's my personal friend." He said, "Well then you know that he has cerebral palsy and he's got them hands like this." He said, "You even had to put his cufflinks on him one time." I said, "Yes, sir. We were at a funeral and he couldn't put them on." He came across and knocked on my door across the hall. "Brother Ted, would you help me with my cuff links? I cannot put them in there." He's preached all over the world and people got saved. He said, "Preacher, let me tell you. I'll take care of that little boy." He said, "I used David Ring. I can use him." I said, "Okay, sir." He said, "I'm not finished with you yet." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "One time I used a jackass." He said, "Sometimes I use you." I said, "Yes, sir, Lord. I'm reporting for duty."

Often when I pray I think, dear God, I know that my mental capacity is different but, Lord, if I can ever come to surrender like that little boy, my Lord, there's no telling what God's liable to do if He could find a hundred men like that. Our stubbornness and

pride gets in the way. Well, you know, I'll just do it by myself. You will do it by yourself and you won't accomplish nothing but when God infuses you with power – I've said it to you a hundred times. God'll do more in a moment than we can do in a lifetime if He can just get us to say with Ahab to Ben-hadad. If we can get us to say like David, "I'm a man after God's heart because I'll do all His will." If we can ever come like a centurion and get under the authority, dear God, we won't be backing up. Forward. Forward.