

Special Messages of 2019

Strong Faith Strong Men Evidence for a strong faith

Edited Transcript

Pete Alwinson

Good morning, gentlemen. Good to see you. I don't say that loosely. Well, yeah, maybe a little bit, but I might be the only person today to call you a gentleman. It's good to see you. Glad you're here. Listen, the deal, you're stuck with me today because Brett Clemmer had to get up and see his dad in Michigan. Many of you know his dad's been going through tough times and might be close to the end, so pray for Bill Clemmer, a good friend of mine, a man I really highly admire. That's why Brett's not here and I am. I tell you what. Why don't we pray? By the way, this is a special weekend, isn't it? It's called what? Memorial Weekend. How many vets do we have? If you're a vet, would you stand up, please?

Let's give these guys a round of applause. Thank you. Thank you, guys. Thank you for your service. Hey, why don't we pray real quick for those families that have lost loved ones in the service of our country? Then, we'll get going here today. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your goodness. Thank you that we get to live in this country that we live in. We thank you, Lord. So many people criticize it but, Lord, we thank you for where we live and that we get to be a part of it. Lord, thank you for the vets that are here. Thank you for their service. We pray right now for those families that have lost loved ones. We have operations all over the world. We're still losing servicemen and women.

We pray for those families, that you would grant them peace, that you would use the pain that they feel right now and the loss of their loved ones to draw them to the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. We pray for them. Lord, may we remember those who have sacrificed for us. Mostly, we think of your sacrifice, Jesus, for us and how that's transformed us as men. We pray that you would speak to us today. Be with Brett Clemmer, particularly Pat on vacation in Yosemite, and Brett with his dad. Be with Bill Clemmer. We pray for healing, but we pray, Lord, that you would be very, very close to Bill. We pray these things now and ask that you would help the speaker use one who is finite to communicate your infinite truth. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, you guys are the spiritual ones in Maitland today. I love this venue right on the lake. I keep wanting to look out there. If I take my attention off of you guys, forgive me. Listen, what I want to do is share some of the things that I'm sharing at our ministry, FORGE, that I shared this week. I can't continue with your series Rock Solid Men because what we do on the road Rock Solid Men is different than what you guys have been doing here. They said, "Just share what you have." This is going to be duplicate for some of you who heard some of this this week. Forgive me because I didn't have time to prepare something new. They just called me the other day. I'm doing the best I can. I pray that you would forgive me. By the way, I told a story a couple of weeks ago about a guy who lived in Nova Scotia.

Maybe you've heard this story before, but he lived up in Nova Scotia, and he was a bagpiper. He was always asked to go and do funerals. One time he was asked at the last minute to go do this funeral out in the back country of Nova Scotia. He gets his bagpipes, but he doesn't ask for what? Directions. Doesn't

ask for directions. He gets out there. He gets lost. He shows up an hour late to the funeral. The funeral director's gone. The hearse is gone. Everybody's gone but the workers. All that's there is the open pit. He walks over to the open pit, and the casket's already been put in the concrete vault. I mean, there's nothing to do. He's a man. He was lost. He was late. He was thinking, "What do I do?"

What does he do? He gets his bagpipe out. He starts playing. The workers are over there eating their lunch. He gets really going. The spirit is moving. He gets into Amazing Grace. All of the workers get up, and they walk over to the side of the pit there. It's just absolutely amazing. He's crying. They're crying. Then, he finishes. He just walks over to his car, gets into his car. Solemn, heavy heart, but he feels good about what happened. He overhears one of the workers as he's getting into his car. He goes, "That was the most amazing thing I have ever seen. I've never been a part of anything like that, and I've been putting in septic tanks for 20 years." I like that story because it reveals how many of us have been lost before.

How many men do we know that are lost? How many of us don't ask for directions? How many of us think that we're strong when, in reality, we're very, very weak? That's just a reality. We guys tend to... What I want to talk to you about is strong faith because what we need is a stronger faith. We're lost. We're weak. We need Jesus Christ to make us strong because we think we're strong in and of ourselves. We're doing a series in John's gospel that we just started called Strong Faith, Strong Men. It is strong faith that makes us strong men. Isn't it? It's not our own selves making us strong. It's Jesus Christ that makes us strong. In this series, we're talking about this whole idea. This is our third talk that we've been doing. I want to look at evidence for strong faith in John chapter one. If you have your Bibles, turn to John one.

We're actually going to be looking at verses 19 through 30 or something like that. I want to give you an evidence for strong faith. Briefly, John's gospel's very clear, isn't it, as to why he wrote this book. I love John's gospel because when you go to the back, chapter 20 verses 30 through 31, you find out why he wrote it. He tells us. Here it is. By the way, how many of you have read John's gospel before? Yeah. Multiple times. Yeah. All right. Some of you haven't yet, but he goes right to the end of the book, and he tells us why he wrote it. "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you might have life in," where, "in his name." He tells us unashamedly that he's writing this gospel, gospel of John, to create belief, trust in Jesus Christ as the Savior and Lord.

That's why John's gospel is an evangelistic gospel. It's an evangelistic gospel. Now then, you go to chapter one, which we're not going to look at this today, this is called, John 1:1 through 18, is the prologue. The prologue means the first words or the introduction. You all know how this starts out, right? "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God." Who's he talking about? He's talking about Jesus. If you haven't read John, read the prologue today because in John chapter 1:1 through 18, when he talks about Jesus being the word, the logos, what's he talking about? He's saying Jesus is the mind, the reason behind all of creation. Isn't he? He is the creator. He is the truth, the word of God, the last prophet. There's so much in this whole idea of Jesus as the word of God.

When you think of John one, "In the beginning was the word," that phrase, in the beginning makes you think of what other book of the Bible? Immediately, it makes us go back to Genesis. Doesn't it? Genesis starts out, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Fascinating, isn't it, how John's

gospel ties in with Genesis chapter one. What it's showing is in Genesis chapter one, it says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." It says, "The Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters." Then, you go back to John chapter one, and it says, "Jesus is the word." Then it says what in John chapter one? "All things came into being by him, and nothing has come into being that he didn't cause to come into being." In Genesis chapter one, you've got God the Father as creator and the Spirit of God as creator. In John chapter one, you've got Jesus as creator. We see this high view of Jesus in the prologue of John chapter one.

Now, what John does, because this is an evangelistic book, what he's trying to do is build faith in us, strong faith in Jesus. In the verses we want to look at, what he's trying to do is he's trying to give a compelling reason, first of all in the verses we're going to look at, why Jesus is the center of all of history and therefore you can put your faith in him. Then, he's going to show why, later, we're not going to look at this part, how these first guys came to faith in Christ, the first disciples, why they trusted him. Then, he'll get in John chapter two to the first miracles of Jesus, showing that we can trust him. By the way, what was Jesus' first miracle? Water into wine at a wedding. What we're going to do now is look a little bit at this idea of a strong faith. Real quick, I want to give the evidences historically why we can trust Jesus completely in every area of our life.

The question is: What really is a strong faith? Some of you have been following Jesus for a very long time, since the time of the apostle Paul. Some of you are new to the faith. That's a good thing. Isn't it? Some of us have been following Jesus for a long time, and we can say, "I have a strong faith." Some of us say, "I've been going to church for a long time, and I really don't have that strong of faith." As I studied John, I was thinking, "What does it mean to have a strong faith?" These were the three things I came up with. The first thing I came up with as I thought about John's gospel is that a strong faith is an informed faith. In other words, Christians are not people who just have sort of this idea of an emotional, "I like religion, and I trust God."

The first Christians had an informed faith. In other words, they didn't just believe that there was a God or that Jesus was the Son of God. They had an informed faith. Didn't they? You see, the reality is and the line I have up there is that evidence precedes faith. For a Christian, the evidence of Jesus' trustworthiness always precedes trusting him. The first Christians, were they expecting a resurrection? You think that's a trick question? Let me ask you again. Were the first Christians, after Jesus' death, were they expecting a resurrection? No, they were not. They were shocked. In fact, where were the disciples, the guy disciples, on the morning when the women went to further anoint the body of Jesus? Where were the guys? Hiding. The women went to anoint the body. They got there. They were saying, "How are we going to get into the tomb? How are we going to roll that stone?"

They got there, and the stone was already rolled away. The body was gone, and they were shocked. They go running back and tell the guys. The guys come running and go, "No. Say it ain't so." See, evidence always preceded faith. The empty tomb is what gave them the ability to believe in Jesus. Then, Jesus shows up. Christians have an informed faith. It's a factual faith. It's an intellectual faith. We believe in the realities of the gospel. Before you put your faith, you've got to have something to put your faith in. Right? That's a strong faith. Antony Flew, how many of you know that name? Antony Flew, 2004, he becomes not a Christian but a believer in God. Since the 1950s, he was the preeminent atheist in the world. In 2004, he overthrows all of that. I love what he said in his book *There Is a God*. He says, "One of the problems I have is the dogmatic atheism that we see."

He said, "Take utterances like this." This is what atheists say. They say, "We should not ask for an explanation of how it is the world exists. It is here, and that's all." He says, "How about this one? 'Since we can not accept a transcendent source of life, we choose to believe the impossible, that life arose spontaneously by chance for matter.' That's what atheists do. They make these..." See, I've come to the conclusion that atheists have more faith than Christians do. Atheists have more faith in believing that there is not a God because they have said there can't be a God, so we don't believe there's a God. That, gentlemen, is intellectual stupidity. The reality is that, for Christians, we need to understand and we need to reclaim the reality that we are not the fools that atheists and the modern atheists try to make us out to be. We've got evidences for our faith. It goes back to the Bible, but it goes back to the first century.

Christian faith is, first of all, an informed faith. Because Jesus really did rise from the dead, then we can have a saving faith. Then, we can trust him. I don't trust this rabbi that walked on the earth. I trust the rabbi that taught the truth and that rose from the dead. That's who I trust. I have a saving faith because I have an informed faith. Then, I have an applied faith. An applied faith means that if Jesus is not Lord of all, he's not Lord at all. Right? Discipleship means that because he is the way, the truth, and the life, I can trust him for salvation. Then, whatever he says I do in my life I can do. That's what makes a disciple. That's what makes a real man, where we take the faith and the teaching of Jesus and apply it in our life.

Now, John goes on. Now we're going to look at some scriptures. You're looking at your watch and say, "We don't have enough time." Yeah, we do. We're going to get through this. I have till 10:00. Right? If you have your Bibles, look at this because we see leadership's due diligence when they come to talk to John the Baptist. They're trying to find out from John who he is. That leads to John telling them who Jesus is. Look at John 1:19. This is the testimony of John. "When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, 'Who are you?' He confessed, and he did not deny but confessed. He said, 'I am not the Christ.' They asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered..." What did he answer, guys? No. They said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

Now, notice here that the Jews that come to John the Baptist, now, John's the author of the gospel. This is a different John, John the Baptist. I'm a Presbyterian, so I like to call him John the Presbyterian. The reality is John the baptizer was baptizing people. He was doing something that got the attention of the Jews from Jerusalem. Who are the Jews? John's gospel mentions the phrase the Jews 70 times. Sometimes it's positive. Sometimes it's national. They're just Israelites. Most of the time when he uses the phrase the Jews, John means those who are opposed to Jesus. These are the guys that want to get Jesus or get John, but they're from the Sanhedrin. How many of you have heard that phrase, the Sanhedrin? Yeah. These were the rulers of the Jews in Jerusalem, probably about 70 of them, who controlled the everyday life of the average Jew.

Now, what other power was over Israel at this time? The Roman government. The Romans had the ultimate power, but the Sanhedrin were those that had the day to day power over the average Israelite. Catch this, guys. Catch this. They were the judicial, executive, and legislative branch all wrapped into one. How about that? The high priest was the boss. Most of the Sanhedrin consisted of the high priest's family, his sons, and his sons-in-law. It was nepotism par excellence. These guys, these were the guys that come to John the Baptist and say, "Who the heck are you? Are you the Christ?" which means anointed one. Christ is not Jesus' last name. It's his title from the Hebrew word messiah.

Daniel talks about the coming of the anointed one. The Old Testament has this idea of the anointed one. You know that. Right? The Messiah was coming. From ages past, there was this idea that this special anointed one would come. Priests were anointed with oil. What kind of oil? Not 30 weight. Olive oil. Priests were anointed with oil. Kings were anointed with oil, but there was this prophecy line that a special anointed one would come. When John the Baptist is doing all this stuff out there, the Jews come to him and say, "Are you the Messiah? We got to figure you out." He says no. "Are you Elijah? Are you the one that was supposed to come, Malachi 4:5, 'I send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord.' Are you that Elijah?" He says no. In John, he says no, but interesting. If you read Matthew, Mark, and Luke, those gospel writers say John the Baptist is coming in the spirit of Elijah.

There is a sense in which John says, "I'm not Elijah. Elijah's dead," but he does come with an Elijah role in a sense. "Are you the prophet?" Deuteronomy 18, Moses was a leader of Israel, but he prophesied that there would come a great prophet. What do we have, guys? In Old Testament, have y'all read Old Testament prophecy? Is Old Testament prophecy easy to understand? If you believe that, then you understand the stock market too. Listen, Old Testament prophecy has many trajectories, many strings through it. It's very difficult to understand. Those guys that write books on prophecy, almost all of them are wrong. Nobody's got it 100% right. Have you read the book of Revelation? Why is it that some of the greatest theologians of all time never wrote commentaries on Revelation? Because they don't get it 100%. Right?

What's happening right now in John, when the Jews are coming to John, he's saying in the Old Testament, two-thirds of the Bible, there are these trajectories of promise going all the way through the Old Testament. There's Elijah. There's the prophet. There's the anointed one. They come to John, and he says, "Are you this?" He says no. They say, "Who are you?" He says, "I am a voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord." He says, "I'm a voice telling you that..." Real quick, Isaiah was a prophet, and Isaiah told them that Israel would go into captivity. Right? Did they go into captivity? This is historically a challenge. Yeah, they did. The northern kingdom went into captivity, 722 BC, into Assyria. The southern kingdom of Israel, did they go into captivity? Yep, 586 BC. Did they come back from captivity? Yes, and Elijah was supposed to be the one, the voice crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the way of the Lord."

Been to Israel, you know it's mountainous, rocky, hills everywhere. God is saying to Israel back in Isaiah, "You're going into captivity, but I'm going to bring you out of captivity. I'm going to bring you back to Jerusalem." Did it happen? Yes, 538 BC. Cyrus, the Persian king, let Israel go. They came back. Now, John, first century AD, is saying, "I am the voice crying in the wilderness," because all... Are you listening? All of the trajectories of Old Testament prophecy are coming together, all of Isaiah, all of the prophets are coming together in Jesus. Not me. I'm a voice crying in the wilderness. The Pharisees were still confused, just like we're still a little confused. They say, "Why are you baptizing if you're not the Christ, you're not Elijah, not the prophet?" They're still kind of going, "Who are you? Why are you baptizing?"

Why are they confused? They're confused for this reason because we look at John the Baptist, and we know that we've got Baptists in here, Baptist people. No doubt the right way to baptize in a Baptist church is dipping. In some churches, it's pouring. In other churches, it's what? Sprinkling like this. What's the proper mode of baptism? Don't go there. That's not that important. What is the matter is that when these Jews, the leaders of Israel, were looking at John the Baptist baptizing, they were confused because he was baptizing them differently than other leaders had baptized. You say, "What do you mean?" Well, somehow John the Baptist was involved in baptizing the people. Normally the baptisms that took place

of renewal in Jews in ancient times, people would baptize themselves, get in the water, baptize themselves, but John was in some way involved in this baptism process.

The first artwork we have on the baptism of Jesus actually is in the catacombs of Rome. John the Baptist is pouring water on Jesus. Baptizo can mean to dip. It can also mean to sprinkle. Don't want to ruin your world on that, but there it is. The mode doesn't matter. Does it? What matters is that John was not the Christ, but he makes the point, "I baptize you with water," here it is, "but after me. But among you stands one you do not know. Even he who comes after me, the strap of his sandal I am not worthy to even untie." John the Baptist is making this point, this argument. John, the writer of the gospel, is saying Jesus is the very center and fulfillment of all of Old Testament teaching, all of the very center of all of human history. "It's not me," John the Baptist says, "It's Jesus, and I'm not worthy to even untie his sandal."

You know, in the first century, if you became a follower of a rabbi, you would ask the rabbi, "Can I follow you? Can I learn from you?" If the rabbi accepted you, then you would have to do everything he told you to do. You'd have to listen to his teaching. You'd have to adopt his teaching. If he asked you to take out the trash, you'd have to take out the trash. If he asked you to clean up the backyard, you'd have to clean up the backyard. You're almost his slave. There's one thing he couldn't make you do, and that was take off his sandals. That was for slaves. John the Baptist says, "Jesus, I'm not even worthy to touch the strap of his sandal." Why? Because he is the prophet prophesied from Moses, because he is the anointed one, because, as we know, he is God come in the flesh. He is the center point of all history. Gentlemen, can you trust him? Yes, you can because he is the fulfillment of all of Biblical history.

I love the phrase that comes after this. John, the writer of the gospel, says this took place in Bethany across the Jordan. He has to give a historical note, which is fascinating. Isn't it? Here it is as you can see on this very small map. Those in the back, you need binoculars. There is a Bethany near Jerusalem, which you can't see, but there's a Bethany beyond the Jordan on the other side of the Jordan in the country that we call Jordan today that is a site that archeologists have actually figured they think they know where this took place, where the baptism of Jesus by John and where John was baptizing, it took place because it's historically powerful. What's the point? John the Baptist is saying Jesus is the most disruptive person in all of human history. Jesus is the center of human history. Look at the names given to him. The Lamb of God, the elect one, rabbi, Messiah, Son of God, King of Israel, Son of Man, the one Moses wrote about. That's just in the first chapter of John.

Can you and I trust Jesus? He is the center of all of human history. He is the Son of God and Savior of sinners. Yes, we can. We must. When we trust him, our faith grows. You and I are not putting our faith in a weak God. We're putting our faith in the powerful God of the universe. That means that I can trust him for my salvation. Doesn't it? Because he fulfills everything that nobody else fulfills. I can trust him for my salvation alone, not Jesus and, but Jesus alone. Can you trust him in the areas of your life that are challenging? Here's where the rubber meets the road. Can you trust him when you lose your job, when you get sick, when you lose hope, when you've messed up so bad? I had breakfast yesterday with a guy who lost his family because of his drinking. He's become a good friend, but, I tell you, his life's a mess. He's blown it up.

Can he trust God now when his ex-wife sends him horrible texts about how bad he is and he shouldn't even show up at church because he's such a hypocrite? I told him, "Hey, man. The church I go to is a hospital. I'm going to let you know church is not a place for perfect people who've got it all together. It's a hospital. We're all sick sinners who are getting redeemed and need a Savior. Man, I haven't arrived." I

said, "I'm more spiritual..." No, I didn't say that. I'm a mess too. I'm growing. Can I trust him for this area of my life? Have you ever taken the Enneagram test? Anybody take the Enneagram? Two people, I took it, three, four, five. I see that hand. My Baptist roots are coming out. Bottom line, guys, there's a lot of these tests out there. I took it just the other day. It shows that I've got more dysfunction than I even thought. My wife pointed that out to me. That was hard enough. Hey, can I trust God for growth in this part of my life? Yeah.

I called up five of my friends, and I said, "I want you to take this test. We'll send it to you because it's going to show some dysfunction." One of my friends in Saint Louis, he's as hard boiled as they come. He loves Jesus, but he's a mess like me. I said, "This is going to rock your world." He goes, "All right. I'm in. Thank you for helping me grow past my sin." You're going to help me. Can I trust God for growth now? I've been a minister for a long time. I'm paid to be good. You guys are good for nothing, I want you to know. I'm supposed to be mature. I'm supposed to be fully arrived. Am I? I'm older. Do I want to keep growing? Yes, I do. I don't want to level out. We don't need more guys with weak faith or Sunday faith or Christmas and Easter faith. We need guys with strong faith who keep growing all their lives and Jesus is the center point of that.

My daughter is a lacrosse coach at Winter Springs High School. The football players at Winter Springs High School have a t-shirt. TPW is what's on it. By the way, they're not a good football team, but the football players have TPW. You know what that stands for? Tough people win. Is that right? Sometimes. In football, probably. In all, are you tough by yourself? No, I'm not. I'm a lot weaker than I thought, but when I trust in Jesus and run to him for power, for growth, for making it through the day, for dealing, I can become stronger. Luder Whitlock was speaking at... Luder's a former president of Reformed Theological Seminary. He was speaking at Lifework Leadership Conference this past Thursday night, and I was there because a friend of mine was getting an award. Luder was telling the story of a preacher who preached a great message. It was so good. It was such a great message.

I mean, he was literally patting himself on the back about how good the message was. He was taking notes on himself. Walking out the door with his wife after church, and he turned to his wife, said, "Honey, how many great preachers do you know?" She turned to him, said, "One less than you think." We're not great in ourselves. We're not strong in ourselves. It is Jesus and Jesus alone that makes us strong. As we study together, as we get into his word, we grow and become men of faith who become stronger by faith. It's an informed faith, a saving faith, and an applied faith. Let's pray. Father, thank you for my brothers. Thank you that they're not playing a game, that they're here early because they want to grow. I just pray that you would bless a time of table talk right now. May iron sharpen iron around the table. We pray these things and ask you to build our faith in Jesus' strong name.