

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 18 October 2026. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

“If I Perish, I Perish”

Esther 4:13-17

For the past 2,000 years, countless believers in Jesus Christ have made great sacrifices to produce copies of God’s Word. Others have risked everything to distribute Bibles within their own country, or to smuggle Bibles into other countries. Probably one of the most well-known Bible smugglers in modern times was a Dutch Baptist believer named **Andrew vander Bijl**, who was known simply as “Brother Andrew.” In 1957, Bro. Andrew set off from Holland in a little blue Volkswagen, and drove to the border of Yugoslavia with a large suitcase full of Bibles, to distribute them to churches behind the iron curtain. Andrew knew very well that bringing Bibles into a Soviet country could result in imprisonment, torture, or even death; but he trusted God to make a way for him. As he approached the Yugoslavian border, he prayed, “Lord...when You were on earth, You made blind eyes see. Now, I pray, make seeing eyes blind. Do not let the guards see those things You do not want them to see.”¹ Incredibly, the border guards opened up his suitcase, pulled back a thin layer of clothes, and looked right at a stack of Croatian and Slovenian tracts; yet, they didn’t seem to see them! In fact, after a friendly exchange, they waved him on! This sort of thing happened many times, as he crossed the borders of Yugoslavia, Macedonia, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Russia. Miracles often took place. In one case, a Christian brother had travelled 3,000 km from Siberia to “ground zero” of the Soviet Empire—Moscow! He had made this dangerous journey because he had had a dream in which God told him to go to Moscow, where he would receive Bibles from a brother that he didn’t know, and take them back to his 150 church members (who had no Bibles)! The men didn’t even know each other; yet, when they saw each other, they knew, in the Spirit, that the other was a believer, and that they were supposed to talk.² Even Brother Andrew’s car was a miracle. He travelled hundreds of thousands of kilometres in that little VW, until it shouldn’t have been able to run anymore: yet, it kept running (sometimes without oil).

Sometimes, border agents would look right at Bro. Andrew’s Bibles, yet didn’t seem to see them. Other times, they would wave him on, without even stopping him—while everyone else in the queue had to go through a gruelling 30, 45-minute, or one-hour inspection (or more). Perhaps the most intense experience he ever had was when he was at the border of Romania (the most brutally anti-Christian country in Europe). Only a couple cars ahead of him, a family had to strew out every possession that they had on the ground, while the guards took their engine apart, took off their hubcaps, removed seats, and looked at every square inch of the car, to find any possible contraband. Bro. Andrew knew that he couldn’t get out of this situation by any human wisdom. He knew that he had to depend utterly on the Lord. And so, he took his Bibles out of their hiding places, and stacked them right out in the open, on the passenger seat! When it was his turn for inspection, he started to open his door to get out of the car; but, incredibly, the guard put his knee against the door, and motioned for him to stay in the car. He briefly looked at Andrew’s passport, and scribbled something down; and within 30 seconds, the guard waved him on.³

Brethren, *that* is the power of our God! He does what He pleases, when He pleases; and no one can tell Him what to do, or how to do it. It seems that God delights in bringing His people to a point at which the situation seems utterly impossible—just to show us that *nothing* is impossible with Him (such as when He brought the children of Israel to a narrow beach, surrounded by high mountain walls on both sides, the Red Sea in front of them, and the army of Pharaoh directly behind them). All God requires is that we rest in Him, and let *Him* show us what to do. The title of this message is “*If I Perish, I Perish.*”

Read Esther 4:13-17.

I. The power of supplication to God (vv. 15-17)

When Andrew vander Bijl approached the borders of Soviet countries (especially rabidly anti-Christian countries, such as Romania), he was, at the very least, facing the possibility of long detainment in a communist prison, in an environment that can only be described as “living death.” However, Esther was facing the prospect of *immediate death*. The possibility that she would be immediately arrested and executed was about 100%. The king was crazy about Esther; however, he had also been crazy about Vashti: and we’ve already seen what happened to Vashti when she refused to be ogled at the king’s drunken party. How much less likely was Esther to escape *death* for breaking the number-one security protocol in the palace?

Yet, despite the danger to her life, she was now resolved to do what she knew God wanted her to do. However, she didn’t go to the king straightaway. She knew that she needed to spend some serious time with the Lord first. She also knew that her cousin Mordecai, and every God-fearing Jew in Shushan, needed to spend serious time with the Lord, as well. She asked her cousin to gather every Jew in Shushan, and to fast for three days.

Now, did you notice that there is no mention of the word “prayer” in this passage? The word “fast” is mentioned—but not the word “prayer.” Believe it or not, there are some who take this to mean that Mordecai and Esther weren’t actually very spiritual people. They say, for example, that since Esther had been hiding her Jewish identity for five years, she *must* have been eating non-kosher food there in the palace. They simply *assume* that it was impossible for Esther to eat *kosher* food, and hide her Jewish identity at the same time. They also assume that since the name “God” is not mentioned in the book of **Esther** (and since Mordecai was probably the author of it), then God must not have been much in Mordecai and Esther’s thoughts. With this same reasoning, they assume that since the word “prayer” is not actually mentioned in this book, then prayer must not have been an important part of Mordecai and Esther’s lives. All I can say is, “Seriously?” Why would you fast for three days, if you were not also praying? Why would you starve yourself for three days, if you were not intent on petitioning God for help? What would be the point of making yourself physically weak, when you are preparing to do a daring act that might cost you your life? And why would you urge thousands of others to join you in fasting—if you were merely depriving yourself of food, for no particular reason? People who don’t know the Lord (or believers who are distant from the

Lord) don't see any need to fast when tragedy strikes. The only reason you would fast is that you were, at the same time, *humbling yourself before God in prayer*.

Why, then *isn't* the word "prayer" mentioned? For the same reason that the name "God" isn't mentioned! In the book of **Esther**, God reveals His power and providence *without* actually mentioning His name. (God is the Author of Scripture; and He can express Himself in any way He wishes!) God moved Mordecai to mention the word "fasting," so that there would be no doubt that he, Esther, and the Jews *were* praying. (Prayer and fasting go together!) However, God left out the actual word "prayer" so that we could see, through the unfolding of events, that *He was there all along*—even though He *seemed* distant and hidden.

Folks, Esther *was* a godly woman, who lived by faith. Esther knew that this daring act that she was about to do must be bathed in prayer and fasting. She knew that there is *power* in prayer. Even *one* believer's prayer is incredibly powerful and effective, if that believer be praying fervently, with a heart that is cleansed from sin.

Read James 5:16-18.

Back in the 1800's, an evangelist named Charles Inglis told the story of a conversation that he had once had with a ship captain, while they were sailing near the coast of Newfoundland. The captain told him that only a five weeks earlier, George Müller, the famous pastor and founder of the children's orphanage in Bristol, had been on this very ship, on his way from England to Canada. However, on the way, there was incredibly dense fog, which had slowed them down to a standstill. The captain had been on the bridge for 22 hours, watching for approaching danger; and while he was standing there, Goerge Müller tapped him on the shoulder. Müller said, "I have come to tell you that I must be in Quebec on Saturday afternoon." Since this was Wednesday, the captain replied that this would be impossible. Müller then said, "Very well, if your ship can't take me, God will find some other means of locomotion to take me. I have never broken an engagement in fifty-seven years." Again, the captain insisted that he was "helpless" to do anything for him; and so, Müller said, "Let us go down to the chart room and pray." By this point, the captain thought that Müller was crazy. He said, "Mr. Müller, ...do you know how dense this fog is?" Müller said, "My eye is not on the density of the fog, but on the living God, who controls every circumstance of my life."⁴

Well, the captain decided to humour Müller; and they went together to the chart room. Müller then got down on his knees and prayed a short, simple prayer, which, to the captain, seemed like a prayer that an eight-year-old Sunday School child would pray. He simply said, "O Lord, if it is consistent with Thy will, please remove this fog in five minutes. You know the engagement You made for me in Quebec for Saturday. I believe it is Your will." When Müller

was finished praying, the captain was about to pray, too; but Müller put his hand on his shoulder, and told him *not* to pray. He said, “First, . . . you do not believe God will do it; and, second, *I* believe He *has* done it.” He then said, “Captain, I have known my Lord for fifty-seven years, and there has never been a single day that I have failed to gain an audience with the King. Get up, Captain, and open the door, and you will find the fog is gone.” And guess what? Not only was the fog gone, but the sky was so clear, that it was as though there had been no fog at all! (And Müller *did* make the appointment by Saturday.) The captain told Inglis that before this event, he had been an “ordinary” Christian (a Christian in name); but after seeing Müller’s faith, he himself placed his faith in Christ, and began to live by faith.⁵

In ourselves, we are powerless; but God has all power. Make no mistake, though: prayer *is* hard work. Prayer *is* a battle. That is why the enemy tries to barrage your mind with a thousand distracting thoughts while you are praying. The devil knows that prayer is our most powerful weapon against him! As you allow the Holy Spirit to pray through you, you are able to put down wrong thoughts, and to pray with power. God moved Elijah to pray that there would be no rain in Israel for 3 ½ years, as the chastisement for their national sin; and God answered his prayer. That’s power! But guess what? If *one* righteous person’s prayer be that powerful, how much more powerful is the *corporate* prayer of *many* righteous people?

Read Acts 12:5-17.

To all appearances, Peter’s situation was hopeless. Yet, the Jerusalem church prayed for him, anyway. Apparently, their faith wasn’t very strong, because when Rhoda told them that God *had* done a miracle, and that Peter was standing right there at the door, they didn’t believe her. Yet, God honoured their small faith, and delivered Peter. What would have happened, though, if they had *not* prayed corporately for Peter? Would Peter have been delivered? Probably not. Yes, God *could* have delivered Peter without anyone’s praying for him, *if* it were His will; but what we need to realise is that praying for each other *is* God’s will! God responds to our needs when we humble ourselves before Him, confess our sin, and *ask* Him for help. God doesn’t answer prayers that were never made. The Apostle James said, “***Ye have not, because ye ask not.***” Christ Himself said, “***Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.***”

Now, what about *fasting*? If prayer be a battle (and it is), then prayer with fasting is even *more* of a battle. When you are fasting, you are not only battling spiritual forces, but you are battling the basic bodily craving for *food*. What is the purpose of fasting? And how should we go about it? Let’s go to the Sermon on the Mount, and see what Jesus said.

Read Matthew 6:16-18.

Probably one of the least understood exercises of the Christian life is fasting. Fasting is something that we read about throughout the Bible; yet, rarely do you see a specific command to fast. Fasting is not something that God commands New Testament believers to do at such-and-such time, or for such-and-such a length of time. There *were* times in the Old Testament when God required the Jews to fast (such as in the three days before God came down to Mount Sinai, and on the Day of Atonement). However, in the New Testament, you see people fasting voluntarily. Jesus says, “***When ye fast.***” God leaves the “when” and “for how long” up to us. Fasting is a private matter between the believer and God. It is like the Old Testament “freewill offering,” which could be done whenever one sensed that God was leading them to do it.

Now, in general, the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry was a time of rejoicing. It was like a giant wedding feast, in which Jesus was the Bridegroom. Jesus often went to people’s homes to dine with them, so that He might preach the Gospel to them. Now, this was confusing to some of John the Baptist’s disciples, because John heavily emphasized fasting. However, there was no conflict between Jesus’ and John’s teaching. Jesus never told His disciples, “*Don’t fast*”: He simply pointed out that soon He would be taken from them, and that *then* there would be a great need to fast. Jesus also taught His disciples that casting out demons should be accompanied by prayer and fasting. As we await for our Bridegroom to return, fasting *should* be a regular part of our lives.

Many Christians have a dim view of fasting, because they’ve never fully understood its purpose. Many Christians, when they think of fasting, think of the Pharisees, who boasted about their fasting. However, it wasn’t the fact that the Pharisees *fasted* that was the problem. The problem was that they *flaunted* the fact that they were fasting, so that people would admire them. This is Jesus’ whole point: don’t be *like the Pharisees* when you fast! Conceal the fact that you are fasting, and keep it between you and God.

Fasting is an extremely important exercise; but when you do it, you’d better make sure you’re doing it for the right reason! First, fasting should *not* be done to try to earn salvation! Countless religious but lost people through the centuries have starved themselves nearly to death in the attempt to earn eternal life; but God says that it is “***Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us.***” Secondly, we should not fast simply because it’s a ritual. In **Zechariah 7:5-6**, God asked the children of Judah *why* they had fasted in the fifth and seventh month during the seventy years of captivity; and then, He proceeded to answer His own question. God said that they had fasted not for *Him*, but for *themselves*. Rather than fasting for the *right* reason (to humble their hearts before God), they had done it as a sorrowful “national memorial” day. It was all about *them*!

Another wrong reason to fast is to try to eradicate the flesh, and move on to sinless perfection. Folks, not only is this a wrong reason to fast: it is downright dangerous! No amount of bodily punishment can *eradicate* the sin nature. Only the power of Christ can mortify the sinful flesh. Fasting for the purpose of doing something hard in order to eradicate your sin nature makes you even *more* prideful, and thus even *more* vulnerable to your sin nature.

Read Colossians 2:20-23.

There are many wrong reasons to fast. What, then, is the *right* reason? Simply this: fasting accompanies prayer, as a means of *humbling your heart*, and *reminding you of the seriousness* of what you are doing. When you are eating and drinking as usual, you are more prone to have a casual attitude about your business. That's why Paul said, in **1 Corinthians 7:5**, that husbands and wives should have physical intimacy regularly, *except* during times of prayer and fasting. A season of intense, serious prayer is not the time for the pleasure of intimacy; and for the same reason, it is not a time for stuffing your face. The gnawing hunger in your stomach reminds you that you have a serious matter to pray about.

Denying yourself physically for a time is a discipline that spills over from your *spiritual* life into every area of life. A believer who is disciplined to deny himself physically (for the right reason) is more likely to deny himself sinful pleasures. Likewise, *not* ever being willing to deny yourself (and especially *gorging* yourself) is a lack of self-control which reveals a weak relationship with God. If you won't resist the temptation to stuff your face all the time, would you really resist the temptation to indulge your sinful desires? Paul was "***in fasts often***," and kept his body under subjection. Brethren, let's follow Paul's example, and make fasting a periodic part of our walk with the Lord. We have serious things to pray about. Christ's church must be built, and souls must be saved!

Now, before we move on, let's look once more at **verse 16**. (**Read Esther 4:16.**) Did you notice that Esther said that her *maids* would pray with her? That's significant. I don't believe Esther would have pressured her maids to pray to a God in whom *they* did not personally trust—and especially for a matter relating to her nation. The Jews were *not* in the habit of inviting unbelieving Gentiles to join them in worshipping and serving God. *Believing* Gentiles, yes—but unbelieving Gentiles, no. (For example, when the Gentiles offered to "help" to rebuild the Temple, the Jews said, "***Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves will build unto the LORD God of Israel.***") Apparently, these maids either were all fellow Jews (which is unlikely), or they were Gentiles who had placed their faith in Jehovah because of Esther's testimony. I believe it was the latter! Esther had been a light to

the Gentiles around her; and because she had been that light, she now had a small band of Persian prayer warriors to help her pray!

Christian, God can use your very *prayer life* to draw others to Himself—just as He did that sea captain that Müller met. (In fact, Müller himself, when he was still a phony “Christian,” ended up receiving Christ because of the *power of God* that he sensed during a prayer meeting with real believers, who were praying fervently.) Brethren, *we must* be praying fervently!

II. The power of submission to God’s will (v. 16)

(Read Esther 4:16 again.) Not only were Esther and Mordecai’s prayers powerful; but their *submission to God’s will* was powerful. For Esther, she had to be willing to lose her own life, if need be; and for Mordecai, he had to be willing to lose his beloved daughter-by-adoption, if need be. Esther said, **“If I perish, I perish”**; and God honoured her willingness to lay down her life for Him, and for God’s people. The same is true for us. If we are to accomplish anything for God, *we must* be willing to *lose* our lives for Christ’s sake.

Read Matthew 16:24-27.

When Jesus spoke these words, He was less than a year away from taking up a cross, and being nailed to it; and Jesus was telling His disciples that *they*, too, must “take up the cross.” Can you imagine how shocked the disciples were to hear this? A cross was the cruellest method of execution, and the ultimate symbol of shame. Why was Jesus speaking of *death*? Did He really mean this? Did they really have to bear a *cross*? Yes, they did; and so must we!

To this day, Jesus still puts forth this requirement. To be *His* disciple, you must take up the cross of death to self. There is always a high cost for serving the Lord; and oftentimes, Jesus’ demands seem impossible. “Jesus is calling me to do *that*? Surely He can’t mean it! I’ll lose friends. I might even lose my job! I’ll have to give up that relationship with that person who doesn’t love the Lord. I’ll have to give up all these things that I’ve worked so hard for. And where will this end? What if God should call me to go to a place that is dangerous? What if He should call me to go to a place where people would actually try to *kill* me for my faith? Can’t I be a disciple *without* walking such a difficult road?” The answer to that question is, “No, you can’t.” To be Christ’s disciple, you *must* take up the cross.

The cross was the ultimate symbol of death in the Roman world; and no matter how much we may try to beautify it, we cannot remove its message of death. Jesus died for us; and we, too,

must die, if we would follow Him. Paul said, ***“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live.”*** To lost people, this teaching is foolishness; but to us who are saved, it should be a daily reality. It’s not just a nice goal to strive for: it is the Christian’s charter for life. To *win*, you must *surrender*. To *gain* your life, you must *forfeit* it. To *find* your life, you must *lose* it. To “lose” your life means to surrender your *whole life*—every part of it—to Christ. By the way, you’ll notice that Jesus said, ***“What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*** When we enter this world, our souls are *already* lost, because we were born in sin, and separated from God. Satan wants people to believe that they can *sell* their souls to him, by doing something extremely evil (such as signing your name in blood, and joining a witch’s coven); but this is a lie. You *can’t* sell your soul to the devil, because until you come to Christ for salvation, *your soul already* belongs to Satan! That’s why Jesus says, ***“What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*** In other words, “What can you *give* to ransom your soul?” The answer is: Absolutely nothing! Christ has already purchased your ransom on the cross *for* you: you simply need to *receive* the gift of salvation *from Him*, by humbling yourself, admitting that you *need* His gift, and, by faith, receiving it.

The **requirement** to be a follower of Jesus is that you die to self. However, there is also a wonderful **reward** for being Christ’s disciple. Jesus says that those who ***“lose”*** their life will ***“find”*** it. What is Jesus talking about? He’s talking about the *abundant life* that God has promised to all who follow Him. He promises things that money cannot buy—such as ***“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,”*** comfort, hope, and consolation. When we lose our lives for Christ’s sake ***“and the gospel’s,”*** and live a life of dependence upon Him, we receive all these spiritual blessings. We also receive the blessing, in *this* life, of seeing souls saved, through our testimony; and this blessing carries on into ***“the world to come.”*** The souls that we had part in leading to Christ will be our ***“hope,” “joy,”*** and ***“crown of rejoicing”*** when Christ returns.

Read Mark 10:23-31.

Conclusion: In the Berlin Art Gallery in Germany, there is a painting by a German painter named **Adolf Menzel**. It is a painting of Frederick the Great, who was the king of Prussia in the late 1700’s; and it is a beautiful painting. In the painting, Frederick’s top generals are all gathered around him on a snowy day; and in the background are all kinds of secondary details, such as cavalry soldiers, horses, and forest. However, there’s just one problem: Frederick the Great, the main person of the painting, *is not in the painting*. In the spot where Frederick was *supposed* to be there is only blank, white canvass, with only a faint chalk outline of his figure, standing there like a ghost. Why? Because Menzel died before he got around to painting Frederick himself. He painted everything and everyone else except the main person!

Unfortunately, this is the way it is for many Christians, in the painting of *their* lives. Many Christians, after their salvation, *set out* to glorify the King with their lives: yet, somewhere along the line, they begin to put off painting the Person that their life is supposed to be all about—the King of Kings! They paint all kinds of other details (their dreams and aspirations); and they leave a spot open for Christ: however, they

haven't gotten around to "painting" Him yet! Others can see only the faintest outline of Christ in their lives, because they've been too busy with all the "details" of their daily lives—the things they *think* are highly important. Perhaps this describes you. Perhaps you are saved; but you have the notion that you can get serious about serving the Lord *someday*, when you're not so busy. But when is "someday"? That day may never come. The Lord may call you home *today*; and your chance to paint a beautiful portrayal of Christ in your life will never come, because you had your priorities all backward. Christian, don't let that happen! Serve the Lord with all your heart, no matter what the cost. Die to win! Lose your life for Christ's sake, so that you can find it. In your heart, say, "If I perish, I perish; but I will serve the Lord!"

Maybe you've never been saved. You've never set out to paint a picture of Christ with your life at all, because you've never known Christ personally. You've never repented of your sin and placed your personal faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour. If so, ***"Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."*** In your heart, believe that what Christ did on that cross is all you need to be saved; and turn in your heart to Christ, from sin. He will save you; and He will give you abundant life.

¹ John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *God's Smuggler* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967 & 2015, pp. 117-118.

² *Ibid*, p. 223-224.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 184-185.

⁴ "My Eye Is Not on the Fog," <https://www.georgemuller.org/devotional/my-eye-is-not-on-the-fog2874126>

⁵ *Ibid*.