



WHY I AM AN OPTIMIST

Psalm 102:5-7

*“I’m like a pelican in the wilderness. I’m like an owl of the desert. I watch, and
am as sparrow alone upon the housetop.”*

BILLY GRAHAM

Portland Crusade, Portland, Oregon

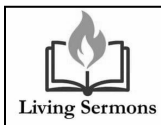
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Preacher: Billy Graham

Publisher: LivingSermons.com

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Foreword

Every generation asks the same quiet question: is there any real reason for hope? Headlines change, leaders come and go, and fears take new shapes, yet the human heart keeps searching for something that will not shake. In this classic message, Billy Graham opens Psalm 102 and a surprising picture of a pelican in the wilderness, an owl in the desert, and a lonely sparrow on a housetop, and shows that the longing behind those images is one that Christ alone can answer.

The sermon begins with a moment of honest weariness and ends with a confident invitation. Along the way it walks through a world that is searching, the problem of sin, the forgiveness won at the cross, the victory believers have over the world, and the certain return of Jesus Christ. The optimism Dr. Graham describes is not a mood or a political outlook. It rests on what God has done and what He has promised to do.

In preparing this edition, our task as editors has been one of care rather than change. The message, the wording, and the voice of the preacher have been preserved as delivered. We have only arranged the transcript into chapters, added clear subheadings to help the reader follow the flow of thought, and corrected punctuation and capitalization for easy reading.

As you read, we encourage you to keep your Bible open, to pause where the Spirit speaks, and to respond. If you are weary like the pelican in the wilderness, may you find in these pages the One who brings you home. And if you already know Him, may you rise from this book more settled in hope, ready to say with joy, “I am an optimist because of Christ.”

Wisdom Epsi

— The Chief Editor, LivingSermons.com

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Publisher's Note

This book is a faithful transcript of a live sermon delivered by the preacher under the inspiration and unction of the Holy Spirit. Every effort has been made to preserve the preacher's exact words, tone, flow, and spiritual authority, while carefully proofreading and formatting the message into a clear and readable ebook format.

The message you are about to read was originally ministered in a live congregational setting. As such, it carries the weight, urgency, and atmosphere of that sacred gathering. Minor grammatical and structural adjustments have been made solely to enhance readability, without altering the substance, intent, or power of the original delivery.

[Watch the live sermon](#) from which this message was transcribed on YouTube

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Our standard is reverence for the Word of God. Our daily goal is to transform powerful live sermons into polished PDF and ebook editions for the edification of the Body of Christ. It is our prayer that as you read, the same grace, conviction, clarity, and impartation present in the live service will minister to you afresh.

— *Livingsermons.com*

A Spirit-led Publishing Stewardship

Main Message

Begins Here

A Pelican in the Wilderness

The Text: Psalm 102

Now tonight I want you to turn with me to the 102nd Psalm. The 102nd Psalm, and a very strange verse in a way, the fifth through the sixth and seventh verses.

"I'm like a pelican in the wilderness. I'm like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as sparrow alone upon the housetop."

Choosing the Optimistic Look

This week President Reagan in his news conference declared to the world, "You can look pessimistically on the world today, or you can look optimistically." He said, "I chose the optimistic look." And tonight I want to speak on why I am an optimist.

A Story from London

And in this passage of Scripture, an interesting little story surrounds it. In 1954, we were in England, and we were holding a crusade that lasted three months, at the Harringay Arena in London, England.

And my wife is a bookworm, and she loves to go to old bookstores and buy old books, and just browse through old books, and she has hundreds of them that she's gotten over the years, some of the great classics.

And on this occasion, she saw a little old man in there, well, he wasn't an old man, about a middle-aged man, and he was very discouraged and very despondent looking and he came up to her and said, "Are you Mrs. Billy Graham?" And she said, "Yes, I am."

He said, "Well, you know," he said, "I'm so discouraged." He said, "My marriage is breaking up." And he said, "Everything is happening to me. I don't know what I'm going to do." And she said, "Why don't you come out to the Harringay Arena tonight and hear the gospel?" And she gave him some tickets that she had in her bag and she didn't see him again. Wondered what had happened to him. Prayed for him.

One year later we were back in that same city of London, holding a crusade at Wembley Stadium, where incidentally it poured rain every night in the open air, like this, except on the last night and it was clear and ice cold. So we had a delightful time in the rain and in the cold. But an average of 60,000 people every night came, and on that last day I remember we had 90,000 people in that cold air.

But anyway, she went to that same bookstore. She was browsing around and this same man came, and he was bright and chipper, and Ruth said, I've never seen such happiness on the face of anybody.

And he said, "You know, I took the tickets. I went to the arena that night. I accepted Christ as my Savior. My wife accepted Christ." Said, "Now we have a Christian family." And he said, "You know the verse of Scripture that your husband quoted that night that won me to the Lord?" He said, "It was the 102nd Psalm," and he got a Bible and he showed her.

"I'm like a pelican in the wilderness, I'm like an owl of the desert. I watch and am a sparrow alone upon the housetop."

A Verse That Described His Condition

Now, I never thought of that as being an evangelistic verse. But it was to him, because he said, "That described my condition because," he said, "I felt like a pelican in the wilderness." A pelican doesn't belong in the wilderness. He belongs down in Galveston or someplace. "I'm like an owl of the desert." Well, owls don't go to the desert much. And he said, "That's the way I felt that night." And he said, "It changed my life."

Now the whole world tonight is like a pelican, an owl, or a sparrow.

A World Searching for Meaning

The Best and the Worst of Times

Dickens wrote of the French Revolution in 1775, that it was the best and the worst of times, and that's what we're seeing today. Damocles in the 4th century BC said something against the king of Syracuse and he was ordered to sit under a naked sword suspended by a single hair.

The Optimist and the Pessimist

Now there's a difference between an optimist and a pessimist. And I heard about one of our prisons, two convicts were looking out of a cell window one night, and the pessimist saw only the bars. But the optimist saw the stars.

Searching at the Feet of a Guru

Yesterday we read of a 31-year-old son of one of America's most wealthy and influential families. You'd know his name if I called it, who left America for India with this resolve. Here's what he said, quoted in the press: "I renounce capitalism. I renounce communism. I come to India to settle here permanently to have the grace of the Supreme God." And with this he assumed a brand new name. Forgetting his past, becoming a new name, hoping that there somewhere at the feet of a guru he'll find the answer.

One night we were leaving India about three years ago and we went to the New Delhi airport. We had been up in the northeastern part of India preaching up in the mountains, and at the Delhi airport, it was jammed with American students! They were lying all over the place. University students. And I said, "Who are these people?" They said, "There are three 747s coming to pick them up. They've been here studying at the feet of some guru and they're going back disillusioned." Young people searching for something, anything to find peace and happiness in a world that seems to have gone mad and insane.

When Heroes Are Searching Too

Nothing seems to make sense to some of our young people anymore. And then they read about some of their heroes. I can remember fifteen years ago, twenty years ago, people went absolutely wild over Elvis Presley. And now the trial has just finished and we've read all in the press about how terribly he had gotten in his latter days on drugs, and how these drugs probably contributed to his early death.

And many of the people that are your heroes and many of the people that you think are at the top are really in their hearts at the bottom. Searching. They don't find it in all this popularity. They don't find it in all the adulation. They don't find it in all the popularity. They don't find it in money. They don't find it in some other philosophy. But they can find it in Jesus Christ. And so can you.

There's a telephone number there on your screen right now. If you will pick up your phone and call that number a counselor is standing by to say a word to you. You can find the answer in the person of Jesus Christ.

Many of you here tonight have an unfulfilled longing in your soul.

The Problem of Sin

“Be of Good Cheer”

A New York taxi driver about, oh, it's been a year ago now, I suppose, asked me if there was anything to cheer about where I came from. And I said, “Certainly! There's many things to cheer about!” And I thought about at least four times Jesus said, “Be of good cheer!” The first time Jesus said it was to a paralytic. He said, “Son, be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven you.” Now this man was sick of palsy but Jesus knew that he had deeper needs.

Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone.” Jesus said a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. There's something deeper in your life that you need that materialism cannot satisfy, money cannot satisfy. Pleasure cannot satisfy. And one of the things that you need is the forgiveness of sin.

Lawbreakers Under Sentence

Because all of us have sinned against God, and the word sin means “lawbreaker.” You are a breaker of the laws of God and so am I. And the Bible says if you have broken in one point you have broken all of God's laws. So we are breakers of all of God's laws and there is a penalty for breaking the law of God and that penalty is death and destruction and judgment and hell. That's the penalty. And we're all under sentence.

We're like Damocles sitting under that naked sword. We're already under condemnation. We're not going to be condemned when we die. We're condemned now. We're already under condemnation. And Jesus came to save us from that condemnation and from the penalty of that sin.

Trapped by Sin

“Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” You see, man is trapped by sin. We're in a trap. Very much like a rat that's been captured in a trap.

A featured film in Houston this week is “The First Deadly Sin.” And the first deadly sin was committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when they rebelled against God and broke God’s laws and you and I inherited the same tendency to sin. It went to Cain and Abel and Cain killed his brother. He became jealous. He became filled with pride. And he killed his brother. Murder took place just outside the Garden of Eden. And it’s still taking place all over the world.

And then not only that, but we suffer spiritual death and eternal death and that means that when your body dies your soul, the spirit that lives in your body goes out into eternity away from God, lost! And that’s why it’s so important for you to repent of sin and turn to Christ while you can. We’re trapped in sin.

We saw today the account of a 54-year-old who beat up his 91-year-old mother to get money. He got twelve hundred dollars. Then from the torture of his guilt he committed suicide.

The Bible, thank God, assures wonderful forgiveness for all sin. “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered.”

Forgiveness Through the Cross

God's Problem and God's Solution

God can forgive you because of the cross. Because on the cross Jesus Christ died for our sins and because He was willing to die, God can now forgive you and remain just. You see, God had a problem. How could God forgive the sinner and remain just and holy and righteous? Because if God had come along and patted us on the back and said, "You're forgiven," He would have been a liar! And if God had been a liar, He would have not been God! Somebody had to pay the penalty.

You and I are guilty. Who's going to pay the penalty? Jesus paid it. That's the reason He came. We sing that song, Jesus paid it all. He paid it all. That's the reason the word blood is used in Scripture. Because the word blood stands for life. He gave His life for us on the cross.

"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." And it's wonderful to know that all your sins are covered by the blood of Christ. Yes, God can forgive sin because of the cross.

And if you'd like forgiveness tonight and to know that you're forgiven, you that are watching by television, pick up that telephone now and call the number on your screen and be sure.

God Gave Far More

You know, the United States Air Force, I read recently, was trying to locate a major who was lost in flight, and it cost \$10 million to search for that one man. But God gave far more than that for each of us.

He Became One of Us

The Los Angeles writer, Alice Ramirez, wrote in her syndicated column this week: in this year of the handicapped she spent a day in a wheelchair as an assumed paraplegic. It gave her a whole new perspective of what it means to be handicapped. You know, one

time I went several hours with a blindfold around me just to see what it would be to be blind. It gives you a whole new perspective on what it means to be handicapped.

But you see, God in Christ came down and became a man. He became handicapped in a man's body! The mighty God of heaven went into a man's body, as it were. And just like us, only without sin, and finally died on the cross. And when He died, He became guilty of our sins. He'd never told a lie. He'd never committed adultery. He'd never had lust. He'd never been jealous. And yet He became guilty of all of it because He had your sins on Him.

And when they put the spikes in His hands and the spear in His side and the blood gushed forth and He suffered, and the angels of heaven were ready to come to rescue Him, He said, "No, forgive them, they know not what they do." And He's saying tonight, "I'll forgive you if you'll come to Me in repentance and faith."

Redeemed by Grace, Not by Works

In 1 Peter, Peter says in the 18th verse of the first chapter, "For as much as ye know you were not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ as a lamb without blemish and without spot."

We were redeemed, not with silver and gold—all the gold in the world can't save your soul. You can give all your money to charity, you can give all your money to the church, but that won't save you. You can work the rest of your life in good works but that won't save you. You could join every church in town, but that won't save you. You must repent of your sins and receive Christ by faith.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It's the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." You can't work your way. It's grace, and the word grace means unmerited favor. Something you don't deserve. God gives it to you as a gift. Something you can't buy, you can't work for. It's a gift! And God offers you the gift but you have to reach out and receive it.

Conquering the World

The World System

And the Bible teaches that this world system is dominated by evil. Satanic, cosmic principles of force and greed and selfishness and ambition and pleasure seem to be in control most of the time. And the world system is very powerful. It is often outwardly religious, and scientific and cultured and elegant, but underneath is seething with rivalries and ambitions and lust and hate and greed and jealousies. That's the world!

And Jesus said that world will not like you because you're following Me. It hated Me, it'll hate you. And often this world of evil is upheld in a time of crisis only by armed force. I don't mean everybody in the world is evil. I'm talking about the sins of the world, the evils of the world dominated by the devil.

Christ Has Conquered

But Jesus met the world, with all of its evil, He met the devil. He met the flesh, which means the evil principle within us. And He conquered! He conquered death which is the last great enemy of mankind. And by the cross we are crucified to the world.

In other words, because Jesus died on the cross the world system with all of its power has been crucified as far as we are concerned. It has no longer power over us. Sin shall no longer dominate us. Sin no longer reigns over us. We may fail and sin, but the moment we do, we'll be convicted by the Holy Spirit and we get up and confess our sins and He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But Christ has disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them triumphing over them, the Bible says. Our authority over the world is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ! I have authority, I have power! So do you! An ordinary believer over the evils of the world.

The Power to Say No

So let the temptations come, let the devil try to get you off track, and you have a power there with you. That's the reason we try to get you into the Scriptures and get you studying the Word of God and memorizing Scripture because when Jesus met the devil He didn't argue with the devil, He didn't debate the devil, He quoted Scripture. He says, "It is written" three times, and three times the devil was defeated.

The tempter is going to come, but you have a power in the Word of God and you have a power in the Holy Spirit living within to help you as you meet the temptations and troubles and trials of this world. Yes, I'm an optimist. I believe that I can overcome the world because of Christ!

I'm not afraid of all the sins and the evils and the lusts and the temptations around me. I can walk straight in the midst of this world. It doesn't mean that I get out of the world. I have to live every day in the world, and those temptations are there. But I have a power to say no! So do you have a power to say no, the same power that's available to all of us in Jesus Christ.

The Coming Again of Christ

“Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled”

And then lastly, the coming again of Christ. He said, “Be of good cheer, let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you unto Myself that where I am, there ye may be also.” Yes, Jesus Christ is coming back again.

Christ Will Reign Forever

He’s going to set up His kingdom, and He’s going to reign forever and ever and ever and the Kingdom of God is going to triumph! No ideology existing today is going to last. None! Only Christ will last as King of kings and Lord of lords.

And He will come back in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. They’re going to be punished with everlasting destruction. But “when He comes, He shall be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe because our testimony among you was believed in that day.”

“In That Day”

You’ll find that little phrase used everywhere. “That day,” “in that day,” “in that day,” “the last days,” or “the day.” It’s used all the way through. That is the day of His return. I go to bed every night with the hope that Christ is coming.

God Has Other Plans

No, this world is not going to blow up in some great atomic war. The human race is not going to be totally destroyed. God has other plans. He has a plan that Christ is going to be on the throne. And Christ is going to rule. And evil will be destroyed. The devil will be cast into hell and the demons will be cast into hell. There is going to be universal joy. There is going to be universal peace. There is going to be universal justice.

Choose This Day

A Choice to Make

And the Scripture says that you and I have to make a choice. Joshua said, “Choose you this day whom you will serve.” Elijah said, “Why halt you between two opinions?” Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters.” Jesus said, “Enter in at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be that go therein, because straight is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life and few there be that find it.”

He said in that seventh chapter of Matthew that there are two gates. He said there are two trees. He likened life to a tree. One produces good fruit and one a bad fruit. You’re like a tree. He said there are two foundations—one is built upon the sand and when the wind comes it blows away. And the other’s built upon the rock and it lasts. Which is yours? You must choose.

What Must I Do?

You say, well, Billy, what do I have to do? First, you have to repent of your sin. The word repent means that you’re willing to change your way of living. You say, O God, I’m a sinner. I’m sorry. I’m willing to change my way of living.

And then by simple childlike faith, like a little child trusts his father and mother, you trust in Jesus alone for your salvation. And then you’re willing to follow Him and serve Him, whatever the cost.

The Invitation

Come Publicly

If you have a doubt that you know Christ tonight, I'm going to ask you to do something we've seen hundreds and several thousand people already do this week. I'm going to ask you to get up out of your seat right now, hundreds of you, and come down on this field and say tonight, I want to know that I have eternal life. I want to know my sins are forgiven. I want Christ to have all of me tonight. And I'm ready to pay whatever price He calls upon me. If you're with friends or relatives, they'll wait on you.

And why do I ask you to come? Because every person Jesus called in the New Testament He called publicly, and He said, if you're not willing to acknowledge Me publicly before men, I'll not acknowledge you before My Father which is in heaven. He died on the cross publicly for you. People sneering and laughing at Him. But He hung there for you. Now He says, you come publicly and declare yourself for Me.

The Bible warns that His Spirit will not always strive with us. You may never be this close to the Kingdom of God again. This is your one moment. You better take advantage of it. When will we ever see this in Houston again? Never in this generation most likely. You get up and come and make your declaration for Christ tonight, and receive Him into your heart and let Him come and change your whole way of living. If you're with friends or relatives they'll wait on you.

And after you've come here, I'm going to say a word to you and have a prayer with you and give you some literature and you can go back and join your friends. Just that simple decision that means everything in eternity. You come, we're going to wait. Quickly, men, women, young people. From over here, all around. And up in that top stand up there it takes an extra minute, so start now. Don't let anything keep you from Christ. You come. Bring your friend with you.

The Invitation Hymn

*Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

(Cliff Barrows) As people respond here at the stadium to commit their heart and life to Jesus Christ you can call that number right now that you see on your television screen. If the line is busy, just wait a few moments and call again. Trained counselors will be standing by ready to talk to you.

*...of one dark blot
To Thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.*

Call the Number on Your Screen

You that are watching by television can see scores of people coming here to make their commitment to Jesus Christ. You can do the same where you are. Pick up that telephone and call the number on your screen, and if you don't reach the counselor immediately call again and again and again. They'll be there all evening if you can't get through right now. And make that commitment that these people are making here. And be sure and go to church next Sunday.

(Cliff Barrows) Across the nation tonight trained counselors are standing by at several counseling centers ready to take your call. If the line is busy, just wait a few moments and then call again. They will be standing by as long as the calls keep coming in. Until then, Cliff Barrows here for Mr. Graham and all the team saying good night and may God richly bless you.

Closing Words

If you just prayed that prayer with my father, or if you have any questions about a relationship with Jesus Christ, why don't you call the number on the screen. There will be someone there to talk with you, pray with you and answer those questions. And

remember, God loves you! If you would like to commit your life to Jesus Christ, please call us right now, toll free at 1-877-772-4559. That's 1-877-772-4559. Or you can write to us at: Billy Graham, 1 Billy Graham Parkway, Department C, Charlotte, NC 28201. Or you can contact us on the web 24/7 at peacewithgod.tv. We'll get the same helps to you that we give to everyone who responds at the invitation.

On behalf of Franklin Graham and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, thank you for watching and thank you for your prayers.

(Franklin Graham) The Bible says seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. The Bible says without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. You come to Christ tonight, you've got to be willing to turn your back on your sins. Will you call upon His name? Will you seek Him tonight?

About The Speaker

William "Billy" F. Graham Jr. (1918–2018) was raised on a dairy farm in Charlotte, North Carolina. In 1934, at age 15, he made a commitment to faith during a revival led by Mordecai Ham. He was ordained in 1939, graduated from Florida Bible Institute in 1940, and earned a B.A. from Wheaton College in 1943, where he married Ruth McCue Bell.

After pastoring in Illinois and serving as the first full-time evangelist for Youth for Christ International, Graham was vaulted into national prominence by the 1949 Los Angeles Crusade. This event launched decades of global outreach, including historic, extended crusades in London (1954), New York City (1957), Seoul (1973), and Rio de Janeiro (1974). Overall, he preached live to nearly 215 million people in over 185 countries and territories.

In 1950, he founded the [Billy Graham Evangelistic Association](#) (BGEA). Through BGEA, Graham hosted the syndicated *Hour of Decision* radio program for over 60 years, published *Decision* magazine, and authored 33 books—including bestsellers such as *Angels: God's Secret Agents* (1975) and his 1997 autobiography, *Just As I Am*.

A counselor to U.S. presidents, Graham appeared on Gallup's "Ten Most Admired Men in the World" list a record 61 times. His honors include the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1983), Congressional Gold Medal (1996), and an Honorary Knighthood (2001). Following his passing in 2018 at age 99, he lay in honor in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda, and a bronze statue of him was added to the U.S. Capitol in 2024. Billy and Ruth raised five children, 19 grandchildren, 44 great-grandchildren, and nine great-great-grandchildren.

About Living Sermons

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Our Mission

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