

Joe LaTour 5/22/22 Tucson Zoom “The Closing of the Margins”

I'm glad to be with you all this morning and you can pray for me because this is the first time that I've ever shared this. It's coming out of a kind of personal dealing so I want to talk to you from my heart. I think if I wanted to title what I want to share this morning I would title it “The Closing of the Margins.” I think the Spirit of God has been doing a tremendous work in laying out the positive aspects of redemption over the past 2 or 3 years. There's been such an influx of encouragement coming from all the ministry regarding our place in Christ. Regarding our choosing before the foundation of the world. Regarding our completeness in Him. Regarding His everlasting love for us. Regarding the fact that His mercies are everlasting and that he will never leave us or forsake us, highlighting the fact that He that has begun a good work is faithful to complete it. Can you say amen to that? Give me a wave or a nod if that's been coming to you, that kind of encouragement. But I don't know if maybe you're like me. I've rejoiced in this truth and I was talking to a good friend this morning and I was saying ‘You know, about 2 or 3 years ago God began to do something fresh and new in my life and there was a sustained consistency of the conscious presence of God, almost mystical, that would draw me off into a place of quietness and it was something that I was actually walking in throughout my day not just in times of prayer. But it seems as though that God doesn't leave you in that place. Do you know what I'm talking about? Have you ever been where you've had tremendous sustained experience with God and then all of a sudden it seems to lift? Because God wants to close the margins. When I talk about closing the margins Br Bill last week was talking about T Austin Sparks and how he was talking much about the objectivity of what God is doing, and the subjectivity. Do you know what that means? The object truth of God means something that is settled regardless of human experience. It can not be changed. Nothing can be added to it. Nothing can be taken away from it. And what God has spoken concerning you and I is solid. We have a solid foundation under us. But you know the subjectivity of it, the subjective truth of God would be your personal experience bringing into reality and into your life and into my life the truth that God has spoken concerning you and I in regards to His purpose for our lives. Does that make sense this morning? Are you yearning, like me, this morning for the closing of the margins between that which is objective and that which is subjective. To where it's not just doctrinal information that we have but it is actual reality in our lives.

Let's turn to Genesis 15. Starting in vs 5 regarding Abraham “and he brought him forth abroad and said ‘look now toward heaven and tell the stars, if you be able to number them, and he said unto him ‘so shall your seed be.’ And he believed in the Lord and he counted it to him for righteousness.” Vs 7 “and he said unto him I am the Lord that brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeese to give thee this land to inherit it.” And we know that Romans says that he was heir of the world. We know that it's not this world but it is a world wherein dwells righteousness. It is a world without end. It is a world that is the kingdom of God. “And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And he said unto him, Take me a heifer of 3 years old and a she goat of 3 years old and a ram of 3 years old and a turtle dove and a young pigeon. And he took all these

and divided them in the midst and laid each piece one against another but the birds he divided not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses Abram drove them away. And when the sun was going down a deep sleep fell upon Abram and, lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto him 'Abram, know of a surety that your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs and shall serve them and they shall afflict them 400 years. And also that nation whom they serve will I judge and afterward will I bring them out with great substance and thou shalt go to they fathers in peace and thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.' And it came to pass when the sun went down and it was dark, behold, a smoking furnace and a burning lamp passed between those pieces and in the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram." I remember Bro Sam preaching out of this and many of you who were around back then can remember him talking out of Genesis 15. And talking about the offerings and how that he started with the heifer and with each offering that was laid out there was less flesh until finally the birds, those that soared in the heavenly were offered and it's a picture of you and I offering ourselves at different levels of growth to God. But something was happening when those pieces were laid out before the Lord. There was a smoking furnace that was passing between those parts. And could I submit to you today that God is still, even though his love is everlasting, he's taking you and I through some things. Through a smoking furnace to close the margins between that which is objective and that which is subjective in our lives to bring into reality, into our very living experience the truth that we've been saying amen to. Can you wave if that makes sense to you. If it doesn't, say 'oh me.' Because this is where I'm finding myself, yearning and grieving. He said the people of the land where your people are going to be are going to afflict them for 400 years. And I want to talk just a minute today about some of the ways that God closes the margins.

You see it's not just the smoking furnace but it's also the burning lamp at the same time. And I think I'm talking to people today that are going through stuff. Unexplainable stuff. Things that don't seem to make any sense. And sometimes regardless of how you pray there doesn't seem to be any relief, but can I say to you today that regardless of the smoking furnace that you may be passing through keep your eyes on the burning lamp of truth. Because god will continue to keep everlasting truth in front of us so that while we're going through whatever it is we need to go through to close the margins we don't loose sight of wherever it is He's taking us. I like what he said there because he said 'where I'm taking them they're going to afflict them.'

So look over in Exodus and what I want to talk about for a few minutes today, and it's not a popular subject, are the afflictions of the righteous, the afflictions that you and I are appointed to and that are appointed for us. And can I tell you today that in your experience God is so tender and that He's so caring that when it comes to these afflictions he weighs them out by measure. Not more than what I need. Not more than what you need. Folks, there's a cross in this thing and even though we were crucified with him yet the outworking of that cross on a daily basis has to be applied to our personal lives if the reality and the release of the life of Christ within us is going to be

made manifest and become more than just doctrinal information. Even though it may be true doctrine to where the actual word can be made flesh in your life and in mine. And that is the cry of my heart today. I'm not trying to wow you with some new revelation but just to encourage you that wherever it is you are, whatever it is you're passing through God has not turned you loose. You know over in the Song of Songs, I think in chapter 2, he says that his left hand is under my head and with his right hand he embraces me. And the Hebrew word for 'left' also has a connotation of darkness which speaks of the dark and mysterious ways that God while he's embracing you with his right hand that brings salvation, yet he is working out and closing the margins. In a sense the works were finished from before the foundation of the world and yet the left hand of God that is at work in our lives, even though he's embracing us with his right hand, doing whatever he needs to do. And God sometimes uses darkness and he works in dark and mysterious ways his wonders to perform. I don't want this to be a downer word but I know that there are some that are going through some things out there and you know I could probably say all of us are going through some things. And we can put on our religious hat and our masks but folks I'd like to tear that thing off this morning and say that whatever it is that we're going through God is using it to close the margins between that which we've said 'amen' to and that which is actually, literally experienced in our personal life.

In Exodus 1:12 the Lord told Abram 'your people are going to be afflicted by the people of the land. But look at vs 12. What is the outworking of affliction that God weighs out in our lives? That God has appointed for us. 'But the more they afflicted them the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel.' Can I submit to you this morning that that affliction that's appointed and sent into your life by God, I'm not talking about you beating yourself on the back, I'm not talking about self performed affliction, I'm talking about affliction that God has ordained and brought into your personal life. That the outcome will be growth, the life of Christ. The people of God flourish under affliction.

Look over in Acts 20:22. The Apostle Paul here, to put it into context, has called the elders of Ephesus together and he's getting ready to leave them, letting them know that while he was with them he kept nothing back from them that was profitable. He took nothing from them and in vs 22 he says 'Now I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem not knowing the things that shall befall me save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.' I'm going to tell you that I think it's wrong for any preacher to tell people 'you know this path is going to be rosy, everything's going to be fine,' it is going to be fine but it may not all feel good. There's a work of God that's going on that God uses affliction in the lives of his sons. He says that he chastens all those that he loves, over in Hebrews 12, and he scourges every son that he receives. Now it's one thing to be chastened, and the word chastened means to instruct, to teach, it can be discipline, but in case there was any wondering he goes on to say 'and scourges'. You know when Jesus was scourged it was a 'cat o' 9 tails' and it went deep. It cuts deep. The dealings of the Lord cut deep. And if it's not cutting deep then there won't be the release. There won't be the closing

of the margins. It won't be by you spending more time in prayer, although you should spend more time in prayer. It won't be by you reading more of the Bible, although you should read the Bible. The hand of the Lord will finish the work in his sons and sometimes the cross has real teeth in it and it cuts deep. And the Apostle Paul said, 'listen the Holy Ghost is witnessing to me that in every city bonds and afflictions abide me.' The cross will be a reality in order for there to be a release of the life of Christ. There has been a divine seed planted in you and I, in the earth of who we are in the natural even. But you know the earth kills every seed planted in it. 'That which thou sowest is not quickened unless it die.' And so there is a cross and there are afflictions.

2 Corinthians 1:8. "For we would not have you ignorant brethren of the trouble which came to us in Asia" You know it's interesting because that word 'affliction' is the Greek word that Paul used in Acts 20:23, thlipsis, which means trouble, it means pressure, it means anguish. And I think there's a travail going on in the hearts of God's sons that are getting serious with him. That are unhappy. That are not satisfied with the margins that they see on their lives, to that which they said amen to and that which is really being made manifest. And I like what Bro Bill said last week talking about the seemingly sadistic teacher that when he took you out to give you swats. It used to be when we were kids they gave you swats but they don't do that anymore. They'd take you out with a paddle with holes drilled in it and they'd come down with the five fold ministry on the backside of the desert and do a work in our lives. But he said the teacher would say 'What do you say now?' And He would say May I have another? You know when I was listening to that I thought you know when you begin to see when God deals with you and you begin to see that the only way the margins can be closed is by the working of the cross and the dealings of the Father in our lives. As weird as it sounds, I'm finding myself asking for the judgements of God. Asking 'can I have another, God?' Do what you need to do but don't leave me. And I liked how Bro Jeff opened with prayer this morning when he said 'Lord don't leave us the way we've been'. Close the margins. Finish your work. May I have another, I'm not there yet. Keep working, Lord, to where what I'm looking at in the objective truth that you've proclaimed is the reality that's manifested. Manifested so that others can see as well. And where it really shows up is in your private life because that's where the margins seem to be. We get together with God's people. We get together with others. We can seemingly be whatever we need to be. But it's when we're alone, when we're in our 4 walls maybe with our spouse or family, how we are there is how we really are until God begins to close the margins. And that's what he's really doing in our lives today, brethren. This is the work of God, the work of the left hand of God while he's embracing us with his right. To finish the work in our lives. And Paul says 'I don't want you to be ignorant of the trouble which came to us in Asia' You know I like Paul because he was real. He didn't try to pretty it up. He said 'we were pressed out of measure' You know some of us are 'We're fine. Everything's fine'. No, not Paul. 'We we're pressed out of measure above strength in so much that we despaired even of live' We didn't even want to live any more. God, don't leave us like this 'but we had the sentence of death in ourselves so that we should not trust in ourselves. And I think that what God is out to do is to show us that we can't trust in ourselves. How many times

have you let yourself down? And again, this is not a condemning word at all. Because I've let myself down more times than I'd like to admit but you know what? We're not called to trust in ourselves. We're called to trust in Him. We should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raises the dead.

Romans 5. This is one of my favorite scriptures, especially vs 1&2. 'Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'. I don't care what you're going through. I don't care what's happening in your life you need to know you've got peace with God because of what Jesus Christ did for you. 'By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' And then he goes, 'And not only so' and that not only so is basically saying that even as we were justified by faith and we have peace with God, also by faith we glory in that word 'thlipsis', afflictions tribulations. 'Knowing that the tribulation, the affliction, the pressure, the anguish whatever it is that you're going through today brothers and sisters it's working for you. And it's working for me in a way that nothing else could. Bringing about a reality that nothing else can. 'Tribulation worketh patience, or endurance, and patience actually works experience. Bringing it out of the objective into the experiential subjective to where it's a made a reality in our lives. 'And experience, hope. And hope makes not ashamed because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us'. Because of the left hand of God working in your life the end result ends up being the love of God being released in our hearts, shed abroad in our hearts. And that doesn't mean it's just for you to experience, although you should be experiencing that love on a personal level. But I think it's talking more about the release of the love of God that touches other people. And where it has to start first is within your 4 walls. Within those closest to you because if it doesn't work at home it won't work anywhere. We're kidding ourselves. God is serious and I am travailing in my heart today that God would close the margins.

I can kind of give you an idea of what I'm talking about when I talk about the objective and the subjective. When I was 17 years old I joined the Army. I was a mess. I was on drugs and everything. I was a terrible mess and it didn't get any better when I went in the Army but that's another story. But on my 17th birthday my mother signed for me to go in and I remember standing in a room with a bunch of other recruits and raising my right hand and swearing, vowing, to defend this country. And when that was all over I was a soldier. I was in the Army. Couldn't get any more in the Army than what I was right then. I was actually owned by the government. I was theirs. But you know it wasn't until the next 16 weeks that that objective truth that I was owned by the Army was real. It wasn't until after the dealings and trainings of the drill sergeants that it actually became experiential. So you are a son of God but in order for it to be manifest, in order for there to be a release in the visible, that which is true in the invisible, the cross has to have it's full working in your life and in mine. In our soul.

You know I like what David said in Psalms 119:67, 'Before I was afflicted I went astray. But now have I kept thy word.' You see the chastening and the scourging what it does, if you're exercised in it, is it brings about the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Now

religious afflicting, we used to have the idea we preached it the day of atonement if you don't afflict your own soul...let me tell you something you trying to afflict yourself is not going to get you anywhere but more religious. And it just strengthens that old nature. It doesn't help a bit. But the afflictions that God has appointed for your life and mine they will produce and they will keep us from going astray. Vs 71 ' it is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn your statutes'. So I don't know what you're going through today but if you find yourself in the midst of affliction it's a good thing. Just trust God. Lean on him and even though it doesn't appear that he loves you keep the burning lamp of the objective truth of God everlasting foundation that is under you holding you up while his left hand does what it needs to do to bring into reality the truth that we've said amen to.

Lamentations 3 starting with vs 1, "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath" Now I think what you're going to see here is both the objective and the subjective. "He hath lead me and brought me into darkness but not into light" Maybe you feel that way this morning. Maybe you're going through stuff that you've prayed and it doesn't seem to be any release or you can't feel God "Surely against me has he turned. He turneth his hand against me all the days. My flesh and my skin hath he made old. He has the broken my bones. He hath builded against me and compassed me with gall and travail. He has set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old. He hath hedged me about that I can not get out. He has made my chain heavy. And when I cry and shout he shuts out my prayers." Have you ever experienced that to where it seems like the heavens are brass over you? Like I was telling you, it was like for 3 years there was a consistent consciousness of the presence of God throughout my day. It was probably one of the greatest experiences outside of my salvation experience that I'd ever had. But can I be honest with you and tell you that there are times in my life that I feel like the heavens are brass and that as in vs 9 "he has enclosed my ways with hewn stone. He hath made my paths crooked. He was unto me as a bear lying in wait and as a lion in secret places. He has turned aside my ways, pulled me in pieces. He has made me desolate. He has bent his bow and set me as a mark for the arrow. He has caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins. I was a derision to all my people and their song all the day. He has filled me with bitterness and he has made me drunken with wormwood. He has broken my teeth with gravel stones, he has covered me with ashes. And thou has removed my soul far off from peace and I forgot prosperity. I said my strength and my hope is perished from the Lord." Have you ever felt that way? Maybe I'm just talking to one person out there today. But have you ever felt 'There's no hope for me'? 'I'm not gonna make it.' But listen to the whole purpose of all of this look at vs 19 "Remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall, my soul" and again it's the soul He's dealing with "my soul has them in remembrance and is humbled in me." I mean, the pride of the soul. That pride the seems, well, I wish that I could tell you that I didn't have any of it. But those that say they don't have it are usually those that have the most. But God is dealing with pride in the soul and he's dealing with it through affliction. "This I recall to mind and therefore I have hope." And here it comes back in again, the objective everlasting. Underneath are the everlasting arms. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we

are not consumed because his compassions fail not.” I’m so grateful for that, aren’t you? “They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion saith my soul therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him.” So regardless of what God has taken you through it has an end to it. It is out to produce something. God is going somewhere with it.

Isiah 54. And again, I’m not trying to lay on you some heavy word but I think that all of us that are serious with God are grieved by the margins. And are tired of just putting on the masks and we’re crying out ‘God do whatever you need to do’ and he’s been faithful and he’s bringing us into the waters of affliction. But he has a word for you today also of comfort if that’s where you find yourself. Vs 11, ‘oh thou afflicted and tossed with a tempest and not comforted behold, I will lay your stones with fair colors and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your windows of agates’ I’m going to give you a view and a vision that is precious ‘and they gates of carbuncles and all thy borders of pleasant stones. All thy children shall be taught of the Lord and great shall be the peace of your children. In righteousness thou shalt be established and thou shalt be far from oppression for thou shalt not fear, and from terror for it shall not come near thee. Behold they shall surely gather together but not by me. And whosoever gather together against thee shall fall for your sake. Behold I have created the smith that blows on the coals in the fire and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work. I have created the waster to destroy. But no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper. Every tongue that rises against thee in judgement you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their righteousness is of me, sayeth the Lord” So brethren, if you find yourself afflicted and tossed with a tempest know this, your God with everlasting love is at work in your life and in mine. And he is set to bring you all the way home and he’s at work to close the margins and to bring to reality in your life and in mine everything that we’ve said ‘amen’ to.

Amen. Thank you for listening.