

An Evening with John MacArthur

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Pastor Don Green. The Bible tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and 13, the Apostle Paul said this writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, giving a command to the people of God for all time and it says this,

12 ...we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, 13 and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, in light of that command, I invite you to show your appreciation for Pastor John MacArthur as he joins me on the stage. [applause]

Pastor John MacArthur. You all are messing with my eternal reward here. [laughter]

Don. John, welcome to the east side of the Mississippi River.

John. Thank you, it's wonderful to be here.

Don. John, I told you earlier many people have told me that this event is their one opportunity in a lifetime to see you live and to hear you preach in person and so it's particularly meaningful to them, and I just wanted to give you an opportunity to say a few words to people like that. I know there's a lot of them in the audience, some have driven from as far as Idaho to be here tonight.

John. Well, first, I want to introduce my wife Patricia. Stand up, my dear. [applause] And my number one son Matt and his wife Kelly. Stand up. [applause] They have been God's primary blessing in my life without question.

So yeah, you know, I understand the connection that you have with me to really be a connection with the truth. I understand that. When I first felt the Lord call me into ministry, the Lord was working in my heart in ways that, I think, prepared me for what he wanted me to do by giving me the conviction that all I ever was to do was to teach the word of God; that I was a waiter, I wasn't the chef, God cooked the meal, just get it to the plate, get it to the table without messing it up. As a result of that, the bond that grows

between the teacher and the student doesn't necessarily always have to be person-to-person, through all the media avenues that the Lord has allowed the word of God to go forward, I've made connection with so many of you and I'm so deeply grateful for that for a couple of reasons. 1. Because if you have any interest in the teaching of Grace to You or in my preaching, it's because you love the truth, and because you love the truth I know that what you're learning is going past you. I used to say when I was starting out in ministry, I want to teach in a way that people will understand the interpretation of the Scripture so they can pass it on. So you're not only teaching what the Bible says but you're showing people how it has to mean that. So you're putting them into the process of Bible interpretation and so I know you all have in common a love for the word of God, a love for the truth, and by the kindness of the Lord that somehow gets transferred to me and then you have an amazing, encouraging evening like this.

You know, life for me has been similar to a conversation that I was having with Justin Peters not long ago and we were talking about how it is that you can teach the word of God faithfully and be making friends and losing friends through your entire ministry, and the reason that happens is because, to just make it simple, we fight every battle. Every battle. Every battle for the integrity of the word of God. Every battle for sound doctrine. Every battle for godly living, sanctification, truth. We fight every battle. We don't pick and choose battles. We fight every battle but not everybody does and so you have the process of your life people getting on and getting off the train as you go, and that was said about David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, that he spent his entire life making friends and losing friends. So I understand the power of the truth to attract and I also understand the power of the truth to deflect, and so it's really encouraging to me because there's nothing more gratifying in my heart than to know that the word of God is at work in your lives and this is just amazing, refreshing to me.

Don. Well, the privilege is ours to have you with us tonight, John. Let me just kind of ask you a very broad question. It's a matter of public record that you will turn 83 years old next month, and you have been the pastor [applause], you have been the pastor of Grace Community Church since February of 1969; the United States has cycled through 10 Presidents during that time; but most pastors your age have either retired or they've gone to glory, what keeps you going, you know, at 82 what keeps you going at such a high level of energy that you are doing these days?

John. Well, they won't let me quit. [laughter] They ride me like a cheap horse. [laughter] No, what am I good for, Don? The only point in time when you want to set aside the ministry of the word of God is when you can't do it. Honestly, a lifetime of studying the word of God and you get to this age and because I've spent, you know, so long in the word of God, started preaching when I was about 19 years old, and the accumulation of truth and knowledge and also the accumulated blessing of God that just continues to pour out in my life through his providence has enriched me to the point where to shut that in would make no sense to me at all. There's too much truth and too much blessing that has flowed into and through my life to just decide to walk away.

So I feel in some ways, and also I think because the whole COVID thing, I think the Lord knew that he had something for me to do in the midst of this bizarre couple of years, and that I would be able to navigate that at our church in such a way that would be dynamic and transformative and that's exactly what's happened.

Don. You took some criticism from some circles about keeping your church open during COVID, you faced a lot of government opposition and threats to it, and one of the things that I think was underappreciated about that was that it wasn't simply about Grace Community Church, you were making a stand for the principle that churches must be free to worship Christ as they see fit and you were making a stand that far transcended Grace Community Church, this served all of the churches everywhere if they would only have the eyes to see it.

John. Yeah, it was never about rebellion, it was always about faithfulness. It is required of a steward that a man be found faithful. So I know what that means. I know what God has ordained for his church and I have to be faithful, and if it were a far more deadly plague than it was, that wouldn't change anything because what matters is faithfulness. And the fact that the government could tell you as a church to shut everything down when we knew early on that it was a 99% survival rate for this virus and I've always believed that God designed his people to be together face-to-face so we didn't have any masks, we didn't have any of that, we just said we're going to be the church. If you want to come, come. If you'd rather be outside, be outside, we'll put a tv screen out there. If you'd like to be in a tent with open sides, we'll put a tent. So we had two tents. We had patio people. We had people everywhere and they just started coming and coming and coming, and we became the healthiest church in LA because we were just sharing all our germs so everybody had natural immunity. [applause] And that is exactly the way God designed it to operate, you know, you can't greet one another with a holy kiss, if God commands you to do that then he's got that intention that it helps you actually on a physical level to do that.

But the Health Department started fining us every single week and these Health officials would come. They wanted us to stop everybody at the exterior of the church and put a thermometer on their heads and go through all that. We said we're not doing any of it. None of it. And they wanted us to distance, do masks. They wanted us to put tape on the sidewalk. I mean, it was ridiculous. It was bizarre. It could never be done so we said we're just not going to do any of it. So every Sunday that we met, I was in contempt of court which had attached to it a jail sentence and a fine, and so we were racking it up, you know, through the whole thing. And there were 12 hearings set to settle this with the same judge, and the judge that was handling the state and the county and the city's case against us, the judge was a man who was married to a man, so he didn't like us, as you could easily understand, but he kept saying I'm sorry to the county and the city, you can't litigate this church's behavior until you've dealt with the First Amendment, freedom of religion, until you litigate that, you can't litigate this.

So it was pretty amazing that a guy who's a very open homosexual but a Constitutionalist gave us that kind of protection by God's goodness. Finally after the 12th postponement

and the fines kept being racked up and the city said, "We're taking away your parking lot. We're going to do this." They were trying to do all kinds of things. Our attorneys, we decided to tell our attorneys we're going to depose the Health officials, the top three in LA, we're going to depose them, bring them into a legal deposition. You know that, you're a lawyer, and you'd better tell the truth there. You can't perjure yourself and these are the Health officials. When we told them we were going to depose the top Health officials in LA and get this thing over with, in 24 hours they dropped all charges, gave us everything we wanted, the whole case was over [applause] because they were terrified of the truth if the truth were known about COVID. The Health Department actually had to put on their website that no outbreak of COVID ever happened at Grace Community Church. Pretty amazing.

We had one Sunday we decided to bring all the kids back and a thousand elementary and from babies to sixth grade, a thousand kids showed up because they hadn't been in school and we had them back. We had balloons everywhere. We had lollipops this big. And parents brought their children back and it just kept exploding and exploding and the result of it is we are starting this fall, we'll have two complete new Christian elementary schools just to absorb all these kids that are coming to our church. [applause] Master's University under the banner of the church and driven by the same commitments to be the church in the world and be faithful has exploded to such a degree we've had the two largest incoming classes in history and we don't know what we're going to do with all the students that are coming just because we were faithful to the word of God and we stayed faithful to the biblical mandate to be the church in the world, we didn't cave in to the culture.

So it's really caused all our ministries to flourish and the people that started coming to our church were from all kinds of churches. Normally a church like ours grows when people are saved or when they come from another church because they want better teaching, but we were getting like Episcopalians and Lutherans and so we were having interviews that were very different than the ones that we would normally have with new people...

Don. For church membership.

John. For church membership, yeah.

Don. Right.

John. We were baptizing, we were taking in 85-100 people a month in church membership and we didn't do any recruiting, we were open.

Don. Right.

John. And people were safe and they weren't fearful. You can't, you cannot, simple truth, you can't project fear of any kind to people and then tell them you trust God. You can't do that. [applause]

Don. So, John...

John. That's a long answer. I'm sorry, my friend.

Don. No, that's okay. [laughter] I don't think anybody here minds. John, you're an elder statesman in the church of Jesus Christ, speaking beyond Grace Community Church and just looking at the state of evangelicalism broadly, assess for us the state of the church.

John. Oh.

Don. What do you see coming down the road? What's the future hold?

John. Well, I'll tell you, I'll tell you exactly what the future holds for the church. The true church will prevail. "I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." But, look, if you want to assess the contemporary church and its failures, you can go back to the first century and read the book of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 and you will find in those seven churches five churches that were in desperate condition to the point that the Lord threatened to vomit them out of his mouth or to come and remove their candlestick altogether, bring them under judgment. So a false church or a weak church or a compromising church or a worldly church is nothing new. You're not even out of the New Testament and you've got Peter writing an epistle saying what's going to come, chapter 2, right? False teachers. False teachers. False teachers and all that. And then as if that's not enough, Jude writes almost the same thing and says, "Oh by the way, they're all here." And so the New Testament ends in a most remarkable way. You have the warning of Peter about the false teachers, then you have John's three epistles and that's all about the truth, the truth, the truth, the truth, the truth, the truth, then you have Jude saying earnestly contend for the faith, and then you go to the end of the world in Revelation with the warnings extended in the early part and the rest is eschatological. So there's an assumption at the outset, I think even in Matthew 13, Jesus gave all those parables describing the church age, wheat and tares, don't think you can separate them, you can't, wait until judgment, God sends the angels who will separate them in the judgment; the kingdom is like a dragnet, it drags in what the fisherman wants and all the debris on the bottom of the surface; and there's going to be seed cast on hard ground and some people will ignore it and others will have kind of an emotional response but no root.

So Jesus told us it would be like this but the true church will prevail, so while I say that I fight all the battles because I have to earnestly contend for the faith, at the same time I know who wins.

Don. Good. [applause]

John. But one footnote to that. One of the reasons the church is triumphant – and this is very important – is because God not only chooses the end, he chooses the means and the end is triumphant but the means is the faithfulness of the leaders of the church. It's just like salvation, you could say, well, God chooses who will be saved but he also chooses the means, then how will they hear it without a preacher. The same thing is true in

fighting the battle for the truth. The reason the church wins is because God raises up faithful men who fight the battle and protect the church.

Don. Well, that leads right into one of the questions that I really wanted to ask you tonight because there's no doubt a number of young men in the audience that are wondering if ministry might be the path that their lives should take, you know, there's a lot of opposition and it's going to get even more difficult to be in ministry, what would you say to men to help them count the cost and to assess whether the Lord would actually be leading them into a ministry of the word for their life, you know, their life commitment and what they give their life to?

John. Yeah, so, I think the cost, I mean, you don't know the specific cost. I mean, so far I haven't been thrown in jail. They've tried that but it just didn't go that way. James Coates, one of our graduates in Canada was thrown in jail. The actual cost you don't know from the standpoint of what harm may come to you physically, but Paul understood that was kind of the minor side of harm, the real burden of ministry is can you carry the weight of the sanctification of the church, and that takes consistency and it takes courage and it takes strong convictions.

This may leap over a lot of things but I would say this: if you want to go into ministry, make sure you have very strong convictions. So what is a conviction? It assumes comprehension, it assumes that you understand the truth. Okay, you understand that, "I see that. I believe that truth." It's a conviction when nothing, nothing can make you compromise at that point. If somebody comes at you and denies the deity of Christ, you can't wince. And everybody would say, "Well, of course," on that, or somebody comes and wants you to compromise the authority of Scripture, you can't move. When you would literally go to the ground to hold onto that, that's a conviction but it shouldn't stop there. If you're going to go into ministry it has to be more than a conviction because fighting for those convictions can kind of wear you down. There's another element that I think is so critical and I like to think of it as affection. So you have comprehension of the truth, you have conviction about the truth, and then you have affection and you get to the point where you just love the truth and it's not...the battle takes on a completely different frame when it's what you love. It's David saying, "O how I love Your law."

Now the only way you're going to give a life of courageous conviction and affection for the word is if you really spend time in the word. For any Bible student, any young Bible student, it starts out spiritual young man knows the truth but it grows into spiritual affection, affection like a spiritual father, I John, who knows him who is from the beginning. You go from the knowing the theology to knowing God and that's where the affection comes in and that's why your training is so important.

Don. Yeah, and speaking of training, the Master's Seminary has a booth here, would love to meet people, talk to young men that are considering ministry. Look for their booth out on the concourse. I know they're scheduled to be here, anyway.

Two final things, John, so that we leave plenty of time for you in the pulpit. Scripture...

John. Oh, am I preaching tonight?

Don. You're preaching tonight, yeah. [laughter] I have some notes if you need to borrow anything.

Scripture warns about the dangers of self-deception, that's a topic that you've preached on many many times, people thinking that they are Christians when they're actually not, they've never been born again. I lived a number of years in that condition as a young man, and in an audience of this size, several thousand, there must be dozens, scores, hundreds, in that sad condition just as a matter of statistics; Jesus said that, "Many will say to Me on that last day, 'Lord, Lord.'" What would you say to them? What should they be thinking about as you enter the pulpit tonight, help people to examine their own hearts here tonight to get the maximum benefit from the text that you've chosen to preach on?

John. I think and you know, Don, of all people, but I have spent most of my ministry life trying to explain the gospel to the church. Not to the world, to the church. I write books on the gospel but I don't write them for unbelievers, I write them for professing believers. Probably the most, the watershed of those books is the gospel according to Jesus which was, you know, a real blast when it came out because what it basically said was that you know who's a Christian by the transformation of their life. How do you know you're a Christian? Not because there was an event when you prayed a prayer. Not because you have emotional feelings about Jesus. But because you've been totally transformed, just completely. You know, we all like to quote Ephesians 2:8 and 9, "For by grace are you saved through faith; that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, so that anyone should boast." But then we say it's wonderful, you know, salvation is all of God, it's divine, monergistic, elect power that strikes the sinner and awakens him, but God has also ordained your sanctification and it's unmistakably connected. So the next verse says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we would walk in them." As much as your justification was sovereignly ordained by God, so was your sanctification and there's no justification where there's no sanctification. So by grace you were saved unto good works and God not only ordained your salvation, he ordained your life of good works. He ordained, God pre-wrote your sanctification in the eternal record.

So the question of who is a true believer is answered directly by looking at an individual. It goes right back to what Jesus said in John 7, by their fruits you will know them, or James says faith without works is dead. So you're not trying to get in touch with some emotional experience, some prayer or some event, some walking down an aisle, some baptism or whatever, it's what's your life like. Look at your life. And there's a series of contrasts in Ephesians 2 where it says this is how the world is, futility of mind, darkened in their understanding, callous, sensual, greediness and impurity, but you have not so learned Christ. If the truth is in you, you don't live like that, you live differently than that. The old self is gone, the new self has come and the new self – this is so powerful – is created in the holiness and righteousness of the truth. So if you've been saved, you've gone from all the corruption to holiness, righteousness and truth. John is even more bold

than that, he says the children of the devil are known by this, this is how they live. Children of God are known by this, they don't sin, the pattern of sin is shattered, it's broken, it's interrupted significantly. And Paul at the end of the chapter lays it out, you stop lying and you start telling the truth; you stop being unrighteously angry and your anger is righteous indignation over the honor of God; you stop the filthy communication of your mouth and you begin to speak gracious words; and you stop bitterness and clamor and retaliation and vengeance and you forgive everybody the way God forgave you.

So it's the transformation of the life that is the evidence because before you're saved that life shows itself, right? What else could, I mean, that's like a dog barks, right? That's who you are. But when you're a new creation, the new creation is necessarily manifest. So I say to people if you want to examine yourself whether you be in the faith, 2 Corinthians 13:5, you look at the fruit. It doesn't mean that it's all that it should be but it does define the direction, not the perfection but the direction of your life.

Don. Yeah. Good. Well, John, I want to pivot to something else and bring this portion of our evening together to a close, and I'll ask you to forgive me as I use my notes here because what I have to say in this moment calls for precision and I don't want to ad-lib this. Excuse me just a second, I need to pull something out here, have a little something for you in a moment. But, John, I have known you for over 25 years. You have been my teacher before we met, then you were my pastor, then you were my boss at Grace to You, fellow elder at Grace Community Church, and in recent years, if I can be so bold, you've become, I consider you a friend, and tonight I speak for thousands in this arena and other thousands watching on the live stream with what I am about to say and I'm going to do my best to control my emotion in the moment.

You are an extraordinary teacher, pastor, and leader. I have seen you closely in all of those capacities and more, and in recent years I've watched as men that you have helped and elevated in ministry distance themselves from you. When the battle was intense, they went AWOL on you and people that professed to be your friends turned out not to stand by you. I've watched as others who have never met you painted a false picture of who you are, and I've felt a sense of indignation about that. And John, I just want you to know that those people like that do not speak for me and they do not speak for us and they never will. [applause]

I know you to be a man of integrity, a man of wisdom, and a man of profound generosity and so as I've reflected on those things over the past few years, I felt like I had a responsibility before God to lift my voice to affirm you as the man of God that I know you to be from the position of access that I've had to you. It was not enough for me to make passing posts on social media, they are too quickly forgotten. I wanted to set the record straight in print and so, my brother, with the support of over 4,000 friends and witnesses in Truist Arena, I have a gift for you. On behalf of Trust the Word Press, I give you the first public copy of "John MacArthur: An Insider's Tribute." [applause]

John. I don't know what to say. This is overwhelming but thank you, Don. I deeply thank you.

Don. Well, it's what everyone in this room who has known you at all would say if they only had the opportunity. So may the Lord use that book to his glory and to encourage you and your family in Christ. That's why we did it.

John. Thank you, Don, and I think it will do that. I'm eager to read it but I'm a little embarrassed about doing that.

Don. Another threat to your eternal reward, right?

John. Yeah. [laughter]

Don. Well, John, you have the floor for a final word to say whatever you wish before DC comes and leads us in another song.

John. Now, first of all, I would say thanks to you. This is way over the top to invest in doing this and that is as profound a gift as one could ever have from a friend and I consider you definitely a friend. It's just an amazing tribute. I hope, I hope the story will make a difference in people's lives. You know, I mean, when you started out in 1 Thessalonians 5, right, to honor those who lead you in the Lord and Hebrews 13, follow their faith, and so the last thing anybody in the ministry wants is to be thought of as a hypocrite, a fake, a fraud, but the internet can recreated somebody into a monster that is nothing like reality. But I can't fight that, you know, I think about what Paul said with the Corinthians, "It's a small thing what men may say about me because they don't know the truth." Even I, if I have nothing against myself, I'm here and not justified because even I may tend to be biased in my own favor or biased one way or the other. I'll wait until the day when the Lord who knows the secrets of the heart, then everyone will have the praise from him.

So I'm content to let the Lord evaluate and I've lived to see the power of his word in ways that are beyond imagination. When I came out of seminary, I thought a lot about Ephesians 3, "Now unto Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think," and I could think of a lot of things and I could ask a lot of things but the Lord surpassed that probably in the first couple of years of ministry. So I've seen the hand of the Lord and no matter what people say about me, I have seen the hand of the Lord and I have seen God's blessing continuously and now at a level that is, I don't know if it's just for this era or if it's somehow cumulative, but I've seen the hand of the Lord so what men say is of small consequence to me. But I think what you've done is to fulfill the intention of the Scripture to give honor to those who serve in the Lord's work and I appreciate it.

Don. Well, thank you, John. On behalf of everybody here, thank you for your life and ministry. The church of Jesus Christ is better because God appointed your life for our generation. So thank you very much. [applause]