

25th April 2021 6 pm What is God Doing in Western Culture?

Service led by Andrew Attwood, Talk by Andrew Attwood

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Introduction

[Andrew:]

Good evening everybody. You're very welcome to St. John's this evening. It's good to have you with me. My name is Andrew, I'm the vicar at St. John's, and I'm going to be leading this time together.

This is going to be an evening where we will have some songs, a little bit of Scripture, and some extended teaching from me. And the theme of this evening is going to be focusing on some material that's actually come out of a podcast that I've been listening to and is seemingly having a bit of an impact around the place, to do with understanding what God may be doing in the West, in western culture generally, and what that means for the Church in the West. I'd really encourage you to kind of engage with that, because some of this is pretty dramatic stuff if you can get your head around it. I'll be reading a bit of Scripture in a moment; we're going to have two songs in a tick, but after the songs we're going to be reading just a few verses from 2 Kings chapter 6 verses 15 to 17 to set the scene, and the scene is very much to do with having our eyes opened.

So I'm going to pray now, and it's going to be an opportunity to get our hearts ready to learn, to learn perhaps things that we haven't thought before. So let's pray now.

Holy Spirit, I want to thank You for Your grace and Your goodness to us. You are always there, and You are always shaping and discipling and opening our minds. I pray that this evening, as I share some things that I've learned from other people, that this would be helpful, but even transformative in our perception of what is going on in the western world at this time. So open our eyes, open our ears, open our spiritual heart to things that perhaps are from You, that could give us great hope to new opportunities. We ask this in Jesus' Holy Name. Amen.

We're now going to have two songs. Use these songs as an opportunity to soften your heart in the presence of God. Let's worship God.

Song: Above All Powers

1. Above all powers,
Above all kings,
Above all nature and all created things,
Above all wisdom and all the ways of man,
You were here before the world began.

2. Above all kingdoms,
Above all thrones,
Above all wonders the world has ever
known,
Above all wealth and treasures of the earth,
There's no way to measure what you're
worth.

Chorus:

Crucified,
Laid behind the stone,
You lived to die,
Rejected and alone.
Like a rose trampled on the ground,
You took the fall
And thought of me
Above all.

Repeat verses 1, 2 and chorus

Repeat chorus again

Song: Great Is Thy Faithfulness

1. Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with Thee,
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not,
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.

Chorus:

Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

2. Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above;
Join with all nature in manifold witness,
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Chorus

3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.

Chorus x 2

Reading: 2 Kings 6:15-17

Amen. So once again, just a brief prayer.

Father, would You cause us to focus on Jesus and to remember Your grace and Your faithfulness. And Lord, would You give us teachable hearts now as we engage with Your word, and as we engage with insights from others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So very, very briefly as a kind of an initial whetter of the appetite, in 2 Kings 6 we have one of the stories relating to Elisha. And it's one of those occasions where the enemies of Israel, or the enemies of Elisha if you like, are oppressing him, and there's nervousness in the servant of Elisha. You find it says this, from verse 15,

15 When an attendant of the man of God {which was Elisha} rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, "Alas, master! What shall we do?" 16 He replied, "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them." 17 Then Elisha prayed: "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Talk

We have this story from Scripture of a servant who can't quite get how overwhelmed and oppressed he feels by a surrounding army that makes him feel very small, and yet Elisha the man of God says, "You don't realise: there is more with us than there are against us," and he helps pray for this extraordinary new vision for his servant, who sees God's power markedly bigger than he had previously understood.

That's kind of the tone of where I want to go with this evening's talk. If we can just have this first slide up to set the scene. I wanted to talk to you about a podcast that I've been watching and listening to. It's hosted by John Mark Comer, it's called *This Cultural Moment*. And the podcast is often a discussion between John Mark Comer and Mark Sayers; they have other other guest speakers in, and I was pointed to this by some friends who said, "Andrew, you've just got to listen to *The Portland Sessions*. You've just got to dial in to *This Cultural Moment*, listen to *The Portland Sessions*." And these sessions were done back in 2019, so just a couple of years ago, and it was from a tiny little conference that was talking about life in secular America post-Christian environment with some excerpts from what Mark Sayers was saying in his lectures about the health of the Church and the future of the Church.



John Mark Comer

'This Cultural
Moment'
(Podcast)



Mark Sayers

'The Portland Sessions'

The thing that is so gripping about this kind of material is that it completely changes your perception of what's really going on, just like in that passage from 2 Kings where the servant thinks that everything is against him and he's going to get killed. He looks again and thinks "Oh my gosh, things are different to what I saw."

Let me see if I can set the scene. Mark Sayers is a guy who for the last 20 years was kind of on the cutting edge of Cool Church. He was pressing into all kinds of different ways of doing Church. Kind of like Church that was very youth-relevant, different styles, different forms, all at a time in Australia (because that's where he comes from) when young people seem to be increasingly disinterested in inherited traditional Christian faith. He was trying everything in the book, he was a creative guy, he was wooing them with all kinds of different means of getting them through the doors to enjoy stuff. He wasn't just doing cool services, he was doing all kinds of exciting things that didn't even look like services. But one of the things that he started to find was the sheer effect of consumer Christianity and radical individualism was making it harder and harder to make actual disciples, particularly out of young people, and Mark Sayers, as a pastor and leader of various churches, was saying to himself and to God, "I can't turn this around! No matter what I do!" Cool Church wasn't working. It was almost as though the enemy wasn't simply pressing in from the outside, it was almost like the enemy was inside the Church.

And he recounts in one of his podcasts, he was standing up when he was talking, as usual, from the front about something. And as he was speaking, a kind of

question came into his head, that was, he perceived, from God, and he was reflecting, he'd tried all kinds of styles of church, he'd tried to reach people with all kinds of different things, trying to be desperately relevant. He'd started several church plants with people, and some of those had failed. People were reinventing their faith to be connected and relevant, but some of those people were now beginning to lose their faith because it didn't seem to be founded on anything. And Mark Sayers, he was thinking, "Well, what's the only thing I can do at this time? Is there any kind of merit in making Church at this time in Western history, a kind of little fortress where we all kind of like pull up the drawbridge and look after ourselves while society is changing and moving away from us?" But he started to get this sense that God was speaking and interrupting him at this very moment of his biggest doubts and fears.

He knew that cultural Christianity was burning up, he knew that in the West we were becoming marginalised, he knew that persecution was just beginning to increase a bit. But he had this strong sense in the middle of him doing a talk one time, he had a strong sense of God interrupting him and putting a question to him. It was as though God was saying, "What if, at this particular moment, I want to renew the Western Church - at this particular moment. What if the Church has to get so bad, before it can be turned around?" What if the Church can have the best teaching and the best worship and it's still not working, nothing working, no new structures working, what if, when the Church has gotten to the end of themselves, the end of their resources, it is only then, at this moment, that God decides to intervene, when renewal happens, where the people of God are left with nothing but a prayerful longing for God Himself to come and do something. What if this is that moment in the West?

Now this was a real interruption, because for Mark Sayers, he was feeling very defensive. He was feeling as though he he couldn't make anything happen. He'd pressed every button, pulled every lever to see if he could make a difference, and God was saying, "You're meant to get to the end of yourselves, you now need to move from crisis to thinking that this might be a new opportunity."

Now from that point on, Mark Sayers realised he was going to have to do some research and some historical study, because this felt crazy, it felt like the opposite. It didn't seem to make sense. And yet, one of the things that he says in his podcast is that we have been here before. He talks about different phases over the centuries, where it has looked like the Church was in a crisis, and then something happened to change things around. He talks about 18th century Australia and America where at that time, people thought, like some of them are thinking now, that they were going to have to close church doors for good, in the face of the Enlightenment. At that time, the Enlightenment was becoming the new way of thinking, which was, if you like, raising up the significance of human beings instead of God, and there was a sense of not needing God. And at that very time churches were feeling like "We'll never reach the youth, we'll never sustain it, we're the last generation." But what happened in the 18th century, at that very time when things were so bad, all kinds of key figures started to emerge. Some of you may be familiar with the character Charles Simeon, a significant evangelical based in Cambridge. He was writing this (you just get this), he was struggling, Charles Simeon at the time in Cambridge trying to write sermons, and he would be forever distracted and knocked sideways because you know what? Outside of his window, people were rioting and having sex outside his window in Cambridge, in the 18th century, that's what he had to cope with while he was writing sermons; and yet Charles Simeon was somehow launched into a renewal and a season of people coming to faith that is historically amazing.

What else was happening at that time? The Wesleyan revival started to kick off with John and Charles, and then missionaries being sent out from all of that movement that was happening in the UK, that spread all over the world. Jonathan Edwards over in the US, and missionaries going all the way, literally to the

ends of the earth, including Australia, and working-class missionaries in the 18th century, with very little training, being sent off on horseback, across the world, even reaching as far as New Zealand, the furthest outreaches of the world. It was like, "How did that happen? Where did that come from?" All of these these occasions were like, unpredictable, but happening just when the Church was on its knees, and at the end of itself.

This idea is a kind of picture that Mark Sayers describes as a sense of when the tide goes out. I don't know how many of you can picture this in your mind: when you're standing on the beach, particularly if it's a kind of a shallow beach that just stretches out when the tide goes out, and you can see miles and miles of sand and you can barely see the waves in the distance, you can barely hear the sea, and it's reached such a point that you think, "Oh my gosh, where's the sea?" And then you start to see in the far distance the churning of waves, and a sign of waves coming back in. Mark Sayers started to review Church history and sensed that there were different occasions where it was as though God was saying, "Get ready, the waves are coming in again." Another kind of image that might help: it's almost like the Church has breathed out as fully as it can, it's expelled itself, and breathed out that it can't go any further, and the only thing that it can do is go [breathe in deeply] and the Spirit comes, and re-animates the Church in a way that hasn't been seen for decades.

Mark Sayers was describing all of this as a way of reframing how we look at our present context in the 21st century. He poses this question to those people who are listening, and I pose it to you this evening. Think about this. When you think of the surrounding culture: secularism, post-Christianity, this pervasive sense of loss of faith, and a negative attitude to faith, the question posed is this: what if secularism and post-Christianity is far weaker than we realise? I'm just going to say that again. What if secularism and post-Christianity is far weaker than we realise? What if the Big Bad Wolf is far weaker? What if it's not just the Church that is in absolute crisis - what if secularism is in absolute crisis?

Here are some examples that something is breaking down in the West, and we know it all, because these are things that we've lived through in recent times. Think back to the divisions in the UK, over Brexit, regardless of your position on it. That was a time of enormous dissent and division in our own country. Think of the rise of Donald Trump in the US, which was a picture of a divided nation, where it was almost split down the middle in terms of people feeling disgruntled and getting behind someone who everybody else thought was entirely inappropriate. These signs are parallels to all kinds of nationalistic division that are happening all over the place in the West. People seem to be kind of retreating back into a sense of not joining in with the whole, but pulling back and wanting to be more of their own separate self: division in all kinds of different expressions of that, not a positive picture of a united world heading together in the same direction with a kind of united triumphant plan. No, a fractured West. These are signs that something is wrong with the West, not that something is working with this model of secularism: something isn't going right. That's not usually how Christians look at the world. Most people tend to have a fairly crude idea of how the philosophy of secularism has happened in the West, we kind of think it going a bit like this: "But in the distant past there were lots of people who were Christians, and then gradually after the Enlightenment people started to get a bit kind of individualistic and atheistic and gradually secularism got bigger and bigger and bigger. And now, no one's into the Christian faith." That's just not real. That is not what has really happened. In fact, one of the leading Jewish thinkers of the day has said, "Just when we thought that everyone was getting less religious, there's more religious interest climbing in all directions, including in the West."

One of the things that I'd never heard of before, that Mark Sayers talks about, is why secularism works like it does. It's based on the idea of progress. We

talk about progress in the West as a kind of inevitability, a kind of, "We will learn from technology. we will learn from medicine, we will learn... We will triumph over all kinds of obstacles and we will arrive at some kind of Utopia. We will just get better and better and better." Mark Sayers says, ironically, secularism has derived that idea of progress from the Judeo-Christian view of reality. Did you know in other cultures, other ancient cultures from Asia, places like India, before the Christian faith, people tended to see the world and the history of the world as probably a cyclical thing, where it didn't go forward, it just went round and then back again and then back again. In fact even in Grecian times from Plato and Socrates, there was a kind of more pessimistic view that actually, we will probably sort-of like getting worse, and going down to a kind of more primitive understanding of reality. But when the Gospel came through Jesus Christ, that was actually the beginning for the first time in human history of something progressing forwards. How ironic that secularism has taken that idea and chosen to pursue it as a kind of a linear way of making everything better, but without God and in our own strength. This is the myth of the West, the idea of being inherently progressive, heading towards some kind of Utopia. Some people argue that it's almost a kind of religious belief in the West, that we should just naturally progress. And yet here we are, after two world wars, in the 21st century, with all kinds of chaos and strife rising up for the first time in a long time, and the pandemic hasn't helped: people are now beginning to think for the first time in decades, maybe there is no actual guarantee that we're heading anywhere!

Now what is the effect of this? I mean it's not articulated as plainly as that, but you can tell that some people are being thrown into a bit of a crisis. The younger generations, millennials and younger, are starting to think, "Will my future be better than my parents' or worse?" It's almost as though there are moments of doubt creeping in, that the future looks actually shaky rather than better. Of course some people are in denial, and there's a kind of "No, we'll just plough on," but quite a lot of people are beginning to scratch their heads and wondering, "Is there actually a guarantee that things will move forward?" Of course from a political point of view, we hear it every single time there's a general election in our country or in other Western nations. There's a sense of, "We just need to believe this enough, and it will happen. Come on, let's just rally the troops and press on." But those of you who are old enough to see phases come and go, you will realise that that way of thinking just isn't working. But one thing that Mark Sayers reviews when he goes around all the major cities of Europe and even America, he thinks of places like London, Paris and other places, and he's started to take note that all of the famous buildings, the civic buildings in big cities like London are modelled on what? They're modelled on Greek and Roman monuments, there's pillars everywhere, you find them in Birmingham don't you, from the Victorian age, and it's almost as though, at periods of time in the West, we have tried to harken back to some kind of golden age, and it's almost like "Come on, just like it was great back then! Let's move forwards." But it's starting to feel like that might be clutching at straws. Maybe there never was a golden age, maybe there is no guarantee of natural progression.

What should the Church be thinking at this time? Well, that's an interesting question. You will know from many times when I've spoken about the role of the Church and the future of the Church, I think quite a lot of change is necessary at this time. But the Church has probably fallen for the same deceit of secularism, because we've been caught up in this culture just like that. There is a sense in which the Church has probably sold itself to the virtues of human effort, all of our energy and all of our striving and "let's just educate everyone and let's just do it professionally, and I'm sure it'll all turn around and I'm sure it'll all work." Maybe the Church has got caught up too, in this myth of progress based not on God but in our own human initiatives and our own human abilities. You see, Mark Sayers has proposed that the secular myth is progress without the presence of God. I'll say that again, the secular myth that

drives everything is progress, but without the presence of God. It's almost like post-Christianity wants elements of the Kingdom, equality and fairness and a loving community, but Kingdom without the King. Guess what? This idea is failing, it's failing badly.

Those of you who know anything about how people have felt through the pandemic, those of you who know anything about the new topic of mental health, all the way through the age brackets, and especially in the young, mental health problems are rocketing, skyrocketing, because people are feeling unwell, unhappy, isolated, and with no hope for the future. Let me give you another particular metaphor that Mark Sayers makes reference to. You'll be familiar with the story of Babel in the Old Testament, the Tower of Babel is, I mean it's a potentially real place, maybe a ziggurat that was built at the time, but the idea of Babel is human beings come together to build their own sense of climbing to the stars, if you like, and making it big on their own. And in the account of Babel God intervenes. God intervenes and scatters all the human race, giving them all kinds of different languages so that they cannot unite around something in their own strength. There's a particular phrase that Mark Sayers proposes to do with this moment in history, now in the 21st century, and he says this, "Maybe God is flicking a Babel kill switch." Maybe God is pressing a Babel kill switch (the kill switch is the big switch that turns everything off). Maybe just at the point when the West has been pressing hard to succeed in its own strength and, "Educate, educate, educate - just solve it by our own initiatives," God is going, "No!" Click. How ironic that His presence in the world at the moment in the West may be to dismantle what human beings are trying to do in their own strength. Maybe all of this tumult and chaos and crisis is actually a sign of the presence of God in the West, but His presence dismantling things.

You see, for the Church, *if* the Church is open, *if* people are hungry for God's actual presence for Him to come as King, if God is going to be enthroned as King and His presence is going to be revered by people, He delights to come, He delights to invade, just like at Pentecost, to bring transformation and joy and unity. Pentecost is almost like the opposite of Babel. However, if people are seeking their *own* kingdom, then what happens? It seems that the presence of God comes again but this time to burn and confuse and to thwart. You see without God, the Kingdom can't come. Without God, progress is actually impossible.

This moment of time, this phase, may actually be a significant time of failure and doubt in the West, and Mark Sayers was hearing this from God for the first time, and God was saying, "This naturally creates completely new opportunities." I don't know if this is sounding crazy to you. But the first time I heard this, I had to listen to it again and again to believe that this might actually be true. But there are historical precedents for this, back to the 18th century, Diderot and Voltaire were writers and keen communicators at the time, and they thought, "Religion is going to be gone by the 19th century." Didn't happen. There was a huge awakening, even in the 20th century, there was the sense that, you know, all the cathedrals of Europe would be closed. There was one guy who was insistent that the Paris cathedral Sacré-Coeur would shut its doors by the middle of the 20th century: never happened!

You see, something seems to be happening that we might not be noticing in the West. You may not be aware of this; some of you will be, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ is absolutely running like wildfire *outside* of the West: people of all kinds of backgrounds and nationalities are actually turning to Jesus Christ in their millions around the rest of the world. And guess what? (This is another insight from Mark Sayers) Just as during the 18th century, where a lot of folks from the UK were sent into distant lands to take the Gospel in the first place, guess what's happening now? People from all these different nations are finding their way back into the West, just at a time when people are kind-of like staring at their jobs and staring at their incomes and wondering what on earth all of these possessions actually mean in the end and wondering what the meaning

of life is, if it's not to do with possessions, just at this time, who are coming to work for companies and groups and organisations in the West? People of faith from other nations.

He tells the story (Mark Sayers) of a fascinating experience he had, visiting a Maori village. This is only two years ago, visiting a Maori village, this is on the kind-of the most extreme ends of the Earth from where we are. And in this Maori village there was a bunch of Western tourists who were visiting at the time, and they're all sat round, you know, really keen to learn from these ancient cultures, and this Maori leader shows them this flag that represents the Maori tribes of that area, and he says, "There's a black mark in this flag, and it represented all of the divisions that used to be here across the Maori tribes," and then he showed them this red mark that was in their flag, their national flag. And he said, "This red, let me tell you about this red. This red is the blood of Jesus, because we heard of Jesus, and Jesus united all the tribes by forgiving us our sins and drawing us into unity with each other." And Mark Sayers is watching all of this as a tourist, looking at all of these Germans and English and Australians listening to a Maori evangelising Westerners! It was kind of bizarre to think that this Gospel message was bouncing back. Some people have called this 'The Empire Strikes Back', there's a sense in which all of these people are beginning to bring something back, these ethnicities coming to the West, who are all believers. The question Mark Sayers raises with regards to what God may do in the West is this: "Are we who are white going to join in with what God is doing through many of the people from other ethnic backgrounds?" I don't know if you're aware of this, but if you look at the statistics of churches in London, black churches in London, they are growing like wildfire. Black churches in London are growing and growing and growing, because they believe, because they're serious about their faith, because they're unswerving in their commitment to Jesus Christ.

I just want to focus again on how tangible the crisis is in the West, because you need to understand that this is a real opportunity. Like I said, at a macro level, you have signs nationally of nations fighting against nations: populism (that's what got Trump elected). The Chinese GDP is bigger than the US's right now. Okay, that's going to change the balance of how the world works at some point. So, macro, there's a problem.

But also focus in on the individual. The individual in the West is definitely in crisis. You see we stare, these days, young generations in particular, we stare at social media, we live on social media, on Instagram, on TikTok, and we see all of these beautiful lives with all of these exciting visions and these opportunities. And all that does is make us feel miserable about our own real life. Now of course everything on the social media is largely fake, but it has an effect. Another thing Mark Sayers says is that there is a significant gap that has emerged. Just imagine this, this is the kind of the mantra, the vision of the West, this is kind of ambitious trying to progress. "We can do all kinds of creative things," it says, "We're amazing, we can find meaning to self-expression through pleasure, through choosing well." All of that's put in front of our children, often through education, through media. But meanwhile, in the real world, big business knows that humans are not actually like that. They know that humans are predictable, mostly unoriginal, that they herd as consumers, and they're very easy to manipulate, to behave in certain ways. In fact, they know that desires can be engineered. That's why they put adverts on our TVs, that's how they make money.

So you have this potent vision in the West of self-actualization. "You can do it if you just try hard enough." And then you have the reality [on the other hand] of people feeling overwhelmed by choice, and inadequate in the face of all these choices, thinking, "well, I don't know what to choose. I don't know who to be, I don't know what to be concentrated on" and feeling increasingly broken, and mentally ill. People who diagnose what happens when there is a gap between

aspiration and reality is 'crisis', and how does that look? Anxiety, brokenness. Did you know that in the West, the trend for households now is one person. Instead of families being the dominant household, more and more people in the West are living alone. What's going on? If the West should be progressing, why are we not getting on very well? Why are so many relationships broken? Why is there so much confusion over who we are? Why is there so much damage? You know, this sense of pursuit of pleasure and 'just express yourself' and then as a result, brokenness and even relational brokenness, or even sexual brokenness. People are limping badly in the West. It's fair to say that people in the West are feeling disconnected. It's hitting people hard.

I think we need to be honest too though. Again another insight from Mark Sayers: it's hitting the Church hard too: people in the Church are scratching their heads thinking, "Why am I so mentally unwell? Why am I feeling alone?" Some of that is to do with the Church colluding with consumerism of the West. This is where we need to start focusing on a way forward. If the West is actually in crisis, if secularism is actually much weaker than we thought, then how might this change? How might God begin to turn things around?

One phrase is this: corporate renewal (for the whole Church) begins with personal renewal. It starts with one person somewhere experiencing their doubt and their loss and their brokenness and then fully throwing themselves back on God. Think back to the 18th century with the Wesleys of this world, with the Jonathan Edwards of this world. What were they like as people? They were broken people at first, who spent time on their knees saying, "I'm at the end of myself, Lord, but come, set me on fire, change my heart, change my mind." The challenge of a West in the crisis, the challenge to the Church, is that renewal in the Church has to begin with a de-secularising of yourself. You have to become separate from this pervasive mindset that has surrounded us for decades. To some extent, the question is, has the Church been living without God for some time? Have we been self-reliant like everybody else has? Have we trusted not in God but in our pensions, in our properties, in our qualifications, in the things that we own, in how people assess us and view us, in the 'like's on Facebook? Have we capitulated to the way in which life is valued?

You see, one idea that Mark Sayers talks about is, is it possible that Western Christians want the goodies of consumerism, with a thin veneer of faith to cover the top, where it's pick-and-choose, where you choose what you believe, where if you don't like that doctrine, you'll bin it, if you like that one you'll have it? What's the effect on you as an individual? What's the effect of this on the Church? It may well be that that kind of approach is going to destroy the Church. The call of God, at this time, like with the heroes of faith in the 18th century and onwards, is that we might need to get to the end of ourselves and start again with God.

Did you know (final points) did you know, William Wilberforce the man who was famous for bringing the end of slavery in this nation, William Wilberforce, long before he got to that particular point, he was part of the Clapham sect, which was a relatively small group of very earnest pure evangelical Christians who would meet and pray, and you can read in William Wilberforce's journals extraordinary signs of personal commitment and holiness before God. There's a quote in one of his journals where he says, "Lord, how much food should I eat? How might I purify myself daily before you?" This is the kind of thing that that the saints of the past were doing long before they made significant changes in society. They were on their knees devoted to God. That's the challenge that God is setting before us now. It may be, therefore, that as we, even as a local church, sense that we've kind-of got to the end of ourselves, that we've run out of good ideas in terms of reaching out, that we feel that all we have are broken efforts, and nothing left but longing for God, maybe this is the moment when God is going to move, maybe this is the moment where we have nothing left but God Himself.

Final point, again back to a story from Mark Sayers, as he was closing one of his podcasts, he talks about this rediscovery of God, reviving the Church at a time of weakness. And he went on a tour around Europe where he was finding sites and signs of revival from the past, and he made it all the way from Australia over to the UK, and he was visiting signs and sites where Wesley was. He wanted to track the story of Wesley, and he made it all the way to Wesley's house which is preserved, and it's a kind of museum now. And he and his wife were guided in to Wesley's study, and there in Wesley's very small room was a desk and a kneeling place where Wesley would pray. And as Mark Sayers was in there with his wife, he noticed, he says, I'm kind of in this room, and there's a Nigerian tour guide, someone from overseas who's a believer, guiding them around, and additionally, on this tour were two people from Korea. And the guy from Korea was wearing a T-shirt that just said the word 'Revival' across his T-shirt, which was a bit intriguing. And the Nigerian tour guide said to Mark Sayers, and everyone in the room, "Can I take it that you are Christian believers?" And they all nodded and said "yes." And this Nigerian tour guide said, "Might we pause here in Wesley's study, and might we pray." Mark Sayers thought to himself and thought this is the classic moment where you say a well turned prayer that goes something like, "O God, thank You for the history of John Wesley, and for all that he did in this land. We thank You for all of his work and all of his faith that turned so many people to You." But he didn't want to pray that. He stood there in Wesley's study, and he said, "This is a moment for bold prayer." And his prayer was this, "Lord, do it again. Lord, do it again, raise another generation. Do it again."

So I want to finish there with some prayers. I would encourage you to go to the horse's mouth and just get these podcasts, listen to them, to Portland Sessions, John Mark Comer and Mark Sayers, you'd probably get much more out of it hearing it directly from there. But I want to just encourage you to understand, God is on the move. The secular West may be a lot weaker than we thought. And maybe, just maybe God is getting the Church to a place of brokenness, vulnerability, longing for Him. This may be the moment that He wants to move. So let's pray.

Father God, we're used to running services. I'm used to doing talks, I'm used to the routines of religious life. But that's not going to change the world. All of our efforts, Lord, can turn to ash, and have turned to ash sometimes. Lord, I acknowledge getting to the end of myself. Lord, for those who are listening, I pray by Your Holy Spirit that You will help us see maybe we're at the end of ourselves. Lord Jesus, would You open our eyes to the presence and glory of God. Would You take our eyes off ourselves. Would You take our eyes off the Big Bad Wolf of secularism, which may be nothing to be afraid of at all. And would You cause us to gaze into the face of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, we pray that You would do something in this time that can only be done with broken believers, that can only be done with people who know they are at the end of themselves. Lord, we humbly pray in Your name, do it again. Amen.

Okay, we're going to have a final song now. Use this song to praise God, but also to reflect, perhaps, on some of the things I've said. If you need to go back to the podcast, you know where to go¹, or just re-listen to this, I hope it was coherent. I don't know if it was, but I'm going to finish with this song, and then we'll go into our end video. So God bless you, thank you very much for listening. We'll finish with the final song.

¹ One way to access the sessions is with these 2 links:

<https://bridgetown.church/teaching/this-cultural-moment/the-portland-sessions-part-1/>

<https://bridgetown.church/teaching/this-cultural-moment/the-portland-sessions-part-2/>

(scroll down the page in each case for the audio)

Song: You Alone Can Rescue

1. Who, oh Lord, could save themselves,
Their own soul could heal?
Our shame was deeper than the sea,
Your grace is deeper still.

Repeat verse 1

Chorus:

You alone can rescue, You alone can save,
You alone can lift us from the grave;
You came down to find us, led us out of death;
To You alone belongs the highest praise.

2. You, oh Lord, have made a way,
The great divide You heal;
For when our hearts were far away,
Your love went further still;
Yes, your love goes further still.

Chorus

Bridge:

We lift up our eyes, lift up our eyes,
You're the Giver of Life.

Repeat bridge three times

Chorus

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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