

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon Title: My Grand Canyon Experience as a Metaphor for Life, Various Scriptures

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INTRODUCTION: There are times when I leave my planned sermon because of a special event or because of a desire to do something else. I am leaving my preaching from the Book of Mark to tell you about a most unique experience. A few weeks ago, a friend who works for Western River Adventures called me about a last minute trip through the Grand Canyon on the Colorado River. There was a vacancy on raft he was going to take through the canyon. I was a bit hesitant at first but decided to go. It took awhile to arrange things for my time away. I can't remember when I was completely off the grid in every way, including no communication with the outside world.

On a Tuesday morning at 4:30 in Las Vegas, I joined a group of people I'd never met before and a bus took us to a small airport. We took a plane to Lee's Ferry, the launching point for the great adventure. It was there I met my friend Trent who talked me into this.

Over the next six days, I had the adventure of a lifetime. My knowledge of the canyon was very limited. I'd been to the canyon before. I had looked down into the canyon. I had even hiked down into a side canyon. My knowledge of the inside of the canyon, though, was very limited. I knew it was large, deep, and had the powerful Colorado River going through it, and many had drowned through the years in their attempts to conquer the canyon. I had even seen a TV show or two about the canyon, but I really knew nothing about it.

Fifteen or sixteen other people were on the large raft. We had two guides and all the provisions we needed for a week. Being the preacher I am, I met another preacher on the trip, and we talked about possible sermon illustrations related to the canyon. And, then one day it hit me; I mean it just came to me. The whole experience was a metaphor for life, and I want to share that with you this morning.

From the very beginning, I was completely taken away by the beauty of it all. It's hard to put into words as many people have tried to do in books and articles. So, my attempt here this morning is not to describe a vacation but instead, to point out the spiritual parallels from my journey.

I have four spiritual parallels from my journey through the Grand Canyon:

1. Life can be inhospitable unless you have what you need.
2. Life is a lot better when done in community.
3. If life, we've got to keep the order right— Worship the Creator, not the creation.
4. In life, it's all about the guide.

First, LIFE CAN BE INHOSPITABLE UNLESS YOU HAVE WHAT YOU NEED.

While in the canyon, we heard stories about people who went into the canyon unprepared—people who were daredevils but did not have adequate skills or adequate provisions. We even met a guy who was doing the trip by himself in a kayak. Several of us from our amateur point of view noticed how his provisions were inadequate. I have wondered what happened to him.

Many of the early pioneers died because they did not have life jackets and were thrown overboard by the rushing rapids. Many of them had inadequate watercraft not designed for this type of journey. Others died of exposure. Before 1960, only

about a thousand people made that river run successfully. Now fast forward many years, and from trial and error, we've learned what it takes to make a trip successful— a good boat, supplies, and skill. A checklist was provided, and we had all we needed.

Life itself can be inhospitable if we do not have what we need. What does a person need to navigate this life? We might have all kinds of material goods that help us along the way, but what we need more than anything else is the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ gives the spiritual resilience to bounce back when adversity comes our way. We need to grow our faith resources so we can make it through tough times. What are those faith resources? Perhaps there are many I believe the greatest faith resources we have are prayer and Bible study and Bible memorization. I believe these two things are the most basic of all tools for the Christian.

The main thing we need is the mind of Christ. If we put on the mind of Christ, an inhospitable place can become a beautiful place. As I traveled through the Grand Canyon with a group of professionals who had everything they needed—through a place considered inhospitable at one time—we traveled with a sense of luxury. In the same way, if we put on the mind of Christ, we can navigate this life with a sense of luxury because we have everything we need.

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 3:1-4 ¹ *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.* ² *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.* ³ *For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.* ⁴ *When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

EXPLANATION: In verse 4, it says “*when Christ, who is your life.*” There’s a debate as to whether it should be translated “your” or “our” life. Think about how it reads: *When Christ, who is your life* OR *When Christ, who is our life.* Either way

you look at it, it's a win-win. In other words, Christ greatly increases our value of life. He is our life.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 13:14 ¹⁴ *Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

When we put on Christ, we have a completely different perspective.

ILLUSTRATION: A very interesting article demonstrated the importance of prayer and a particular disease. Those who were prayerful had a higher rate of healing and were calmer as they coped with the disease.

Life can be quite inhospitable if you do not have what you need. If we have what we need, then we are resilient when tough times come.

Another observance during my Grand Canyon trip was this—

Second, LIFE IS A LOT BETTER WHEN DONE IN COMMUNITY.

In life, we learn early on it's all in who you know. There is a lot of truth to this, isn't there? We spend a lot of our time making referrals, don't we? If we need something, we ask for a referral from friends. And, you know, getting to heaven is all about whom you know—Jesus. Think about that one.

On the raft, it did not take long for everyone to become comfortable with community. Everybody was there for a single purpose, and everybody really set aside the cares of the world. When you're unified—when a community is unified behind one mission—life's just a lot better. Everyone on this particular trip was an optimist. Everyone had a zeal for life. There were no pessimists, no complainers. There were workers. Some worked harder than others, and there were the ones who told jokes and others who were great story tellers. People helped each other. People

relied on each other. At some point I realized the trip was more about community than it was about tourism.

Let's explore the truth of doing life in community. I hope all of you can say you are better people because you are a part of a family of faith.

- As a Christian community we function better together.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 12:4-5 ⁴ *For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,* ⁵ *so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.*

- As a Christian community you have other with whom to share your joys, your fears, and your burdens.

SCRIPTURE: Galatians 6:2 ² *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” (ESV)*

- As a Christian community we stimulate each other to good works.

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:24-25 ²⁴ *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,* ²⁵ *not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Have you ever been to a funeral where one side of the family had a Christian family of faith, and the other side of the family did not? There is a stark difference. Those who have done life together in Christian community, fellowship together. They offer hope to grieving family members. Those who've studied the scriptures on the afterlife, know about heaven and security in Christ, and as the Scripture says, they

“grieve, but not as others who have no hope.” But those who have no family of faith are completely lost, afraid, and off to themselves.

I believe being a part of a church family is really important and vital to a person's well being. I don't see any benefit in being a Christian loner.

There are many who are too sick to be a part of a church, but hopefully, they have a church who reaches out to them while they are homebound.

The Church, with all our flaws, is better than a life of loneliness. I hope you agree with me that life is a lot better when done in community.

Third, IN LIFE, WE'VE GOT TO KEEP THE ORDER RIGHT—WORSHIP THE CREATOR BEFORE THE CREATION.

While on the river, I saw why some ancient people groups worshiped the creation. The river was the sustainer of life. From it, our drinking water was filtered, and it provided drink for the big horn sheep and other animals. The river provided our transportation and our fun. I took a bath in 48 degree water. Waterfalls and other rivers flowed into the main river. Ancient peoples used the river to irrigate their crops. Everything centered around the river. Without it, life would completely dry up.

I can see why some ancient people groups looked at the majesty of creation and worshipped it. (In parts of the world, many still do.) But, as believers in Jesus Christ, we have a greater revelation. We've been told about the Creator. We have the story of his creation and how man is a part of it. We have the story of the fall of mankind and the curse put on creation as a result.

When you get the order right, you become grateful for the handiwork of the Creator and you look at nature with a sense of mystery and awe.

Keep the order right, worship the Creator not the creation.

SCRIPTURE: John 1:3 ³*God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. (NLT)*

SCRIPTURE: Romans 1:25 tells us about a group of people who worshipped the creation. ²⁵*They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised.*

EXPLANATION: If I can put a modern translation on this, it's this: don't let anything have more importance in your life than God. Everything is at his disposal, including us. If we think we've earned something on our own merit, we have deceived ourselves.

Last, IN LIFE, IT'S ALL ABOUT THE GUIDE.

We had four guides on our trip. They had all floated the canyon and its rapids so many times it was second nature to them. This was our lead guide's 158th time down the river, and the other three were on trips 78, 82, and 40. That's a combined total of 358 trips through the canyon. All of them were professionals. Whatever question was asked, they had the answer. Whatever the problem, they had the solution. It really was quite incredible.

Here are some things I learned about guide:

1. When you are confident in your guide, you will be confident during your journey.

I must say I was a bit afraid when I signed on to go some 188 miles on a raft. Ignorance makes us afraid, but then when I saw the confidence in the guides, my fears were put at ease, and later I felt silly that I had ever been afraid.

In life, if you find yourself living in fear all of the time, something isn't right. Last week, a woman told me she worries all the time. I don't think fear and worry are the default personality traits of someone who truly trusts God. If you find yourself in this category, it's time to take a spiritual inventory. As a Christ follower, it's important to be confident he's got your best interest at heart.

SCRIPTURE: *2 Timothy 1:7* ¹*For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.*

2. A good guide knows where he's taking you. At any time, our guides could tell us how many miles we'd traveled and what was ahead.

In John Chapter 14, Jesus was with his disciples, and he told them of the things that lie ahead— Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial, and they were troubled.

SCRIPTURE: John 14: 1-7 [Jesus said], ¹*“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.”*

⁵ *Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”*

⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

3. A good guide will teach you through difficulties.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 5:3-4 ³ ...but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope.

If a person bounces through life never learning through difficulties, then the person is destined to face the same issues time and again.

4. A good guide will never leave you under any circumstances.

It never crossed our minds that our guides would abandon us. They were dedicated to stay with us through the whole experience. I never really considered breaking the rules, but if I had, the guides would have never left me.

APPLICATION: Jesus, as our guide, will never leave us or forsake us.

SCRIPTURE: John 10:28-30 ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 13:5 reminds us numerous previous scriptures where the Lord promises his people: “...I will never leave you, I will never forsake you.”

5. A good guide will bring you to your final destination.

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 1:6 ⁶*And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. (NLT)*

EXPLANATION: That's our final destination. The point between today and our final destination has a journey in between it. That journey is meant to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ.

God loved Jesus so much he wants to populate heaven with people like him. So, he has begun a good work in those who know Jesus as Lord and Savior, and he is refining that work every day until that work is finished on the day Christ Jesus returns.

SUMMARY:

- Life can be inhospitable unless you have what you need.
- Life is a lot better when done in community.
- If life, we've got to keep the order right—worship the Creator, not the creation.
- Finally, in life, it's all about the guide.

CONCLUSION: I ask you this morning: Who is your guide? What is your road map? What is your river map? Do you trust Jesus as your guide? Are you treating Jesus as your map? Do you just pull him out of your pocket when you've lost your way? If we trust Jesus as our guide, he'll take care of us. The Bible tells us "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16). You can trust Jesus as your guide today.

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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