

The things we do not understand

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Rev David Paterson

[0 : 0 0] Now shall we turn this evening to the passages that we've read, perhaps one or two others, but in particular in Cuypronomy 32, verse 11.

As an eagle stilleth up his nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth forth her wings, taking them, bearing them on her wings. So the Lord alone did lead him when there was no strange God with him.

There are certain things in the scriptures that mostly all of us can understand quite plainly, quite simply.

There are things that God has warned against, God has promised, and God has acted in history itself.

These things are easy to understand. But there are many things in God's providence that we don't understand.

[1 : 3 1] And largely this evening, I want to look with you at the things that we don't understand with regard to God.

And to do that, perhaps we might look again at the eagle. Because God, in a strange way, has illustrated much of his thinking in the illustrations that we find with regard to the eagle.

There are other things that we don't understand. There are other things that we can understand. Perhaps, this evening, first of all, we'll look at some of the things that we understand.

And then we'll look at other things. And let's hope that God will help us to understand a little bit clearer, perhaps, than before.

The things that God makes clear to us is quite obvious. And we understand it.

[2 : 5 8] When we looked at Jeremiah, we looked at a passage from Scripture, which tells us that a certain city that was built almost at the top of a hill.

And in that city, the people were confident that nobody could reach them.

They felt that they were impregnable. And what God says, and he says quite simply, he says, O thou that dwellest in the cleft of the rock, that hold the height of the hill, Jeremiah 49 and 16, though you make your nest higher than you are at that moment, though that you make your nest as the eagle, I will bring you down.

And what we learn in that is no matter how we think with regard to God, ultimately, God will have the last word.

You're here this evening, and you're unconverted. God will have the last word.

[4 : 4 2] You see, he tells us again, your terribleness has deceived you, and the pride of your heart.

See, the people up there, on that city of Edom, they were proud. They were proud. They were sure that they knew the answer, and that no army could ever overcome them.

The prophet of God came and said, God tells you that you're going to be destroyed. Even though you're up there in that hill in the clefts of the rock, you've got the height of the hill, and you can throw down mountains down the hill to destroy the army coming up.

God says, if you want to go farther than that, go up where the eagles of the nest. You hide in there. And he says, I will bring you down.

And so if you're here tonight, and you're without God, whatever you've got, God has given you a solemn warning, a divine assurance, and a coming certainty.

[6 : 14] I will bring you down. For God is not mocked. But whatsoever a man's bow, that person will reap.

You see, that city seemed to be a place of apparent safety, the cleft of the rock.

It seemed to be a place of impregnability, the height of the hill. But God says, I'll take you down.

Now we all, most of us sometimes, we've got our own kind of hills, that we go up, and we think we're alright up there. Some people think that, if they live a good life, and we go up to the top of that hill of morality, and their morality is better than those about, everything's going to be alright.

Some even people think that, if they go up to that hill of orthodoxy, if they believe the right things, everything's going to be alright.

[7 : 21] And many as a man died believing the right things, and never believed in Christ as his own Saviour. They went up to that hill of orthodoxy, and they looked around, and they said, there's liberals around about, the other churches, look, they don't have the gospel like I've got.

And they died, and went to hell. The hill of orthodoxy, they thought they were alright there. Some people thought that, if they go up this hill of evangelicalism, and they say the right things, and they do the right things, and they sing the hymns, or the psalms, just because they're there.

No. I'll bring you down. You and I don't have a love for God. We don't have a trust in Jesus as our Saviour.

If we've not given him a heart, whatever place we are, we're going to be destroyed. Some people think they're young. There's boys here in church this evening.

You're young. Very shortly, there's going to be a communion here. You'll be invited. Are you Christ? Are you trusting Christ? If you're trusting Christ, then I would hope that you would remember His death that He paid to take you to Heaven.

[8 : 52] I say that to older people too. Young people think that they're protected because they're up the hill of youth, and they'll be up there for a long time.

No, God will bring you down. The bus is on the road just now that might be going to knock a young boy of 14 or 15 down.

I will bring you down. Be ready. Some people have got plenty of money. They've got that hill of materialism and they think that they're alright.

They've got all that they need and a good pension with it. No. Now God says, I'll bring you down. I'll bring you down by my providence.

Remember Belshazzar? He had everything. He was a crown. He had a crown and he lost in the night. God will bring you down by his purposes.

[10 : 01] Pharaoh was crowned. And he will bring people down by his own power. Even like Ananias and Sapphira, he brought them to death in a night.

Okay then, that's just for those that are rejecting. And we understand that. These are God's providences.

When we look at perhaps in Proverbs, we'll find another thing from the eagle. The eagle says in the book of Proverbs, he says, Riches fly away like an eagle into heaven.

You ever see an eagle flying? They'll swoot. They'll go right up into this, up into the heavens. And then you've lost them. And the Bible tells us that riches, which is basically the emblem of materialism, they're dangerous.

They're not lasting. They're not satisfying. They're not saving. They fly away like an eagle, whatever you've got.

[11 : 16] Sometimes they go away themselves. Who was it that lost so much recently? That man who owned the daily record, remember?

Maximum, that's right. There's another one there this week. His stocks lost 50 million in just in a day. Sometimes they fly away themselves, and the work that, you know, some men in this country were in a difficult day, and they lose our jobs.

We were secure, we thought. Sometimes, you see, our riches go. The security that they promised is taken away.

And the power sometimes that generates with rich people gets taken away. You see, riches are not the coins of eternity.

But we know that, don't we? We know that. Just one more thing that we know. In Hosea, verse 1 in chapter 8, it says this, Set the trumpet to my mouth.

[12 : 40] Now, the trumpet in the Bible is always, usually, the symbol of danger, the symbol of warning, the symbol of realism.

When the trumpet blew, the people knew what it meant. And this is what God says with the trumpet. He will come, himself, as an eagle.

I'll come like an eagle against the house of the people. For they have transgressed my covenant and trespassed against my law.

But we understand that, don't we? God coming, the eagle is the bird of prey. He's going down, he's swinging down. God coming, sweeping down.

How unexpected it is. How frightening. Yet how deserved. Every sin we know is noted.

[13 : 44] Every sin is exposed. Every sin is punishable. And God comes to us. And God comes to us. But we understand that, don't we?

And what we do, if you're unconverted, this is a word of warning to you. God is going to come down. He's going to, then, bring you down.

And so if you're not converted, may I say to you tonight, whether you have riches, whatever hill you're up on, get out of it.

And do something. Go to the cross. And ask Jesus to be your saviour tonight before it's too late. And so I'm leaving that. We understand these things of God.

We understand them, don't we? There are many things of God that we don't understand. And that's, again, which I'm going to look at again.

[14 : 51] In Deuteronomy 32 at 11, As an eagle stirreth up her nest, and flutters over her young, and spreadeth abroad her wings, and taketh them, and bearing them in their ways.

You know, in that verse, there's so much that will help us to grasp what we don't know, in God's providence.

And I want to look now, not at the things of God's providence and His word that we know, but the ones that we don't know. Can I illustrate the chapter again?

I think this comes back to me. I want you to imagine that, if you've got a good imagination anyway, that you're in a...

in a... an egg. Yes, you're in an egg. You're in an eagle's egg. Right? Use your imagination.

[16 : 03] Then all of a sudden, the time happens in nature when you burst the egg. Right? And you come out. You're born.

And then from that moment, you're a baby eagle. And very shortly, the mother eagle does what must be done at that time.

And then as the days go on, we'll say that mother goes out at seven in the morning, and goes away at seven in the morning, and goes looking for food.

Maybe about nine o'clock, she comes back. There's the wee eagle there, not able to do very much, but just...

expecting. And there the mother comes in, pours into the beak the food. That's quite normal, isn't it? And then again, maybe at six o'clock at night, mother goes out again.

[17 : 10] The baby eagle is just waiting for mother to come back. What's she've got today? Is it this, or is it that, or is it the next thing?

And then mother comes swooping in, as usual, and feeds the baby. This does maybe for six weeks, or eight weeks. Nine weeks.

Three months. I don't know. And then, the wee baby eagle is getting bigger, and bigger, and bigger. See? You can understand that, can't you?

And then one day, according to the scripture, the eagle then does something. The baby's waiting for mother at seven o'clock to go out for food, and it hasn't got a watch, but it says, well, there's something wrong.

Mother's not going out for food. What's going wrong with me this morning? I'm hungry. Mama! What about food? She doesn't say anything.

[18 : 09] She doesn't say a word. She doesn't twitter, or whatever eagles do, I don't know. And then all of a sudden, oh, my mother's gone mad.

She's wrecking the nest. Our home. Our mother's wrecking our home. And she pokes, and she pokes, and she makes a mess of the nest.

And way up there, and then all of a sudden, she's really gone wrong. She puts her nose in, and puts the baby out.

And all of a sudden, the baby eagle begins to fall. I'm dead, she says. I'm dead. But then as she goes down, she finds out that there's something in here.

And she lifts it out, and it's two wings. And the eagle baby begins to almost fly.

[19 : 14] And then she goes up, and he goes down, she goes up, and she goes down, she goes up, and she goes down, she goes up, and she goes down. Oh, it's a new thing altogether.

She never knew how to fly. But then she's only a wee eagle, and all of a sudden, the strength goes out of her. And she begins to fall now, and she's really falling.

At that moment, the mother eagle was away up there watching. She sees the baby eagle beginning now to fall, and she swoops down.

She goes underneath it, and strengthens it, and takes it up to the nest. That's what it says here. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth forth her wings, taketh them bearing in her wings, so the Lord did lead Israel.

Now, I want you to notice that. Recently, something has come to my mind. Some purposely, some reflectively.

[20 : 30] Not so long ago, as you know, five months ago, one of my very good friends died. Douglas McMillan. He was in his fifties.

You might even say, in one sense, ecclesiastically, he was in his prime. He was probably one of the wisest men, and the warmest.

And he was a very, very useful man in the denomination. Apart from being a friend, this was a fact.

And one Saturday, when he went out for a walk, he died. Some of us have seen that in our families, in this congregation.

And sometimes you ask the question, why? Why was Douglas McMillan taken away?

[21 : 36] I remember then, not so long ago, over two years ago now, after working for a year or two years, as men will remember that, the church opened.

And I had said to the elders that, after eight weeks, I was going to stop any preaching outside, and I was going to use my time to this church for at least a whole year.

I wasn't going to go anywhere for a year. Just a month later, and I took a stroke.

Why? This week, or in the last three or four weeks, five weeks, I met five ministers.

Spoke to them, at least on the phone, with some of them. And as I, with all these five preachers, every one of them, had frightening, and saddening experiences in their homes, either domestically, or with the children.

[22 : 53] And each and all of them were asking the same question, what have I done wrong? I prayed for them, I got them to read the Bible, I've tried to read them.

Why? Why? Five of them, for the last three weeks. I'm not going into, but that's a fact.

Why? They couldn't, they couldn't tell. I go just now, to a missionary, who's gone, from a good congregation, big congregation, to just a few.

And I've hardly seen anyone converted, in maybe 10 or 15 years. Who had seen people converted in his ministry, at home.

And he says, Lord, why? Why? Why? It looked to a, a young couple in a church, who have really, worked hard for, maybe 10 years.

[24 : 11] In fact, because of the church, they didn't have a child, in order that they could be useful for a bit longer. And then they decided they were going to have a child.

And then, the providence of God, they, expected a child. They waited, and prayed for it, and got all the clothes, and then everything.

And then the nine years, nine weeks, nine months passed, and they waited, and waiting to see their baby. And all of a sudden, she was handicapped.

And the two weeks, they were like, why? Why? Do you understand? Things that, you can understand with God, and other times that you, you can't.

Now, when I look, er, to that text, I find, three lessons. Three lessons.

[25 : 15] Three lessons. The first thing I see, is the strange activities of God. The strange activities of God.

Were I that baby eagle, I would have thought my mother had gone mad. And sometimes even believers, if not saying they think that God has gone mad, they ask themselves, is he there at all?

Why did he not come when I asked? We'll see that in a minute. The strange activities of God.

Douglas, myself, I often felt I deserved it. No mystery to me, to be quite honest.

The ministers, who prayed, over their children, instructed them. And then the family itself, and their relationships.

- [26 : 20] The missionary, who's pleaded and prayed for enough people, and never find no conversions, or very little. Or the young couple, who really was expecting so much.
- The strange activities of God, in his providential will, and in his permissive will.
- And sometimes we don't know the difference between the permissive will of God, and his providence. Sometimes we go to the Bible, and you know, there are certain things in the Bible, doctrines that, that we believe, but we can't fathom.
- Even the Bible. There's providence, that we can't explain, when a man, a woman will come to me, and say, why did God take away my boy?
- In Ireland. I prayed for him. He's a soldier. He's a police officer. I prayed for him. The strange activities of God.
- [27 : 37] We see that in the eagle. And then, the failures that we can't understand ourselves. He asked God to make us better people.
- And all of a sudden, I seem to be worse. God help me, to, to, to live for your glory. And, I let him down.
- I've asked God. And he hasn't, he hasn't come in the way that I expected. Is that not true?
- And in the eagle, you find the strange activities of God. But, two, you'll find the revealing activities of God.
- That you never thought of. When that eagle, was not, off the, nest, you'll find that the old eagle, swooped up, was way over watching it all the time.
- [28 : 55] That tells us something. We see there the love that watches. And then, when the, the young eagle almost fell, when the, there was no hope, the old eagle went down and lifted it down.
- Sometimes, our strength, takes a long time, a long time, to, be like that.
- And then, we see the strength, is extended, at the right time. And it's always God's time, not ours.
- But why? We may say, that's the strange activities of God, the revealing activities of God. And thirdly, we find the teaching activities of God.
- Why? We ask the question, why has all this happened? Why? What does God want in all this? Why does God permit it?
- [30 : 07] Why doesn't he do what we want him to do? We're honest, we've got to be. Well, it would seem to me, from the scriptures, that there were three things that God doesn't want in us, who believe.
- He doesn't want spiritually limp rags. You know, I think I've used this illustration before.
- There are certain people that you like when you were young, when they came to the house. Two aunties might come, you like one better than the other. Do you know why I liked one? Because she always brought a cake of chocolate for me.
- I liked her because of the cakes of chocolate, the sweeties that she brought. The other one probably was just as nice. But I didn't like her quite so much. She never brought chocolate.
- Can I say something to you? God doesn't want you to look at him as the chocolate bringer. He doesn't want that. He wants you to love him when you don't understand as much as when you do.
- [31 : 24] He's not the chocolate comer. You see, he doesn't give you chocolates. He gives you salvation. There's a big difference to the two. Okay, he doesn't want spiritually limp rags.
- Who when he does something that you don't expect him to do, you go away in the house. I do that. Stop reading my Bible. And I get hurt with God.

Two, what he doesn't want is spiritually produced clones.

You know what a clone is? You go into the factory at Austin, in the metro, it might be a different colour, but they're all the same.

God doesn't do that with his children. They're not clones. They are his creations. And he is going to make them part of his eternal kingdom.

[32 : 37] Priests and kings and to God, not clones. A Peter will never be a John. And a Thomas will never be a Matthew.

See what I mean? He wants everyone to be different. So even if you're a weak Christian, he loves you just as much as a strong one, because he doesn't have clones.

He's got weak ones as well as strong ones. Yes, he doesn't want us to be spiritually monotonous clones. And he doesn't want us to be inadequate disciples.

He wants us to exercise faith when we can't feel, when we can't understand, when we can't grasp, and even when we think that he's against us.

That's the story of it here. You see, God wants his people to develop. And when you come into a situation, and you fight against God, that's alright.

[33 : 46] Strangely enough, that's alright. Out of that, he will make you develop. He will tell you, you weren't as strong as you thought you were. You weren't as spiritual as you thought you were.

You perhaps thought that you were much better than so-and-so. I went some time recently, I think, with Stuart, to see a lady, who is, we don't see her, because she's been ill a lot.

But when she was really ill, I never saw a woman more courageous than this particular one. I've never seen him. And I say that was quite honesty and integrity.

You'd be surprised what God does with his children. But he wants them to develop. He wants them to mature. He wants them to grow in grace. And if the wind comes, it'll make the stalk over like that, but it'll make the roots go down.

You see, that's what God wants. That's the story here. That's what God wants his people to be. To develop, to mature, and to grow in grace.

[35 : 02] I want to say this too. God wants an unforced response from his people. An unforced response.

As I say, not because of chocolate. Or not even because of heaven. I say that even at that. He wants an, he doesn't want to force a response.

He wants a, a, a, a giving one. God wishes a growing faith from his people. And God wishes a giving without getting from his people.

You see, the young eagle might be frighteningly surprised at what her mother did.

The eagle not only might be surprised, the eagle, baby, might be shocked. The eagle might for a moment or two have been shattered.

[36 : 12] Have you ever been surprised by God? Have you ever been shocked by God? Have you ever been shattered by the providences of God? Yes.

Especially at the early part of the experience. When the pain is there. And the sadness is there. And the emptiness is there.

And it can go on for a long time. You see, the young eagle expected the feeding and he got the fluttering of the mother.

He got the expulsion instead of the caressing. He got the unpredictable instead of the unknown. Nevertheless, afterwards.

He had the ability to fly. He still could learn afterwards. His mother was out there. He knew the security of the love that was there all the time.

[37 : 21] And the extension of his experience has been enlarged. And so be with the people of God.

I was told recently that this was not true. True, and some other book says it is.

It is. But it was said that George Matheson wrote his hymn when he found out he was blind and his fiancée left him.

I don't know whether that's true or not. Or whether it was in another situation. When he couldn't understand. And he wrote these words.

O love that wilt not let me go. I rest my weary soul in thee. I give thee back the life I owe.

[38 : 26] But in thine ocean depth its flow may richer and fuller be. Afterwards. You sometimes are able to come to God and say thank you.

That's the things of God. But the eagle will tell us many more.

Just a couple or so before I finish. Remember what it says in Psalm 103 and in Isaiah 31.

I wonder if you are a child of God. And what you want most of all. You want. You really want to be a better Christian.

You want to be a nicer Christian. You want to be a holier Christian. And you've prayed to God for that.

[39 : 38] And he doesn't seem to answer these prayers. How do I become a better person?

Does God just do it always just like that? Well in verse 103 it says this.

Who satisfy your mouth with good things. So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.

And then it says in Isaiah 40 the same thing. They that wait on the Lord will renew their strength. And they will mount up like wings of eagles.

Who among us don't want new spiritual vigor? Well the Bible tells us there's a promise of being spiritually vigorous.

[40 : 44] How do I know? Because the Bible says. He who satisfies you with good things.

So that your youth is renewed like the eagles. They that wait on the Lord renew their strength. They mount up with wings as eagles. You see renewing in the scripture.

And sometimes means. It's bringing the back. To the strength that one had when they were young. And renewal is making you to be able to soar spiritually.

And there's a secret in that passage. And I'm just about finished. You see. How does an eagle get renewed?

Well. It's just like this. The eagle goes back to the nest. Right? Feeling empty.

[41 : 55] And in the nest something happens. All the feathers of the eagle comes out. That strong eagle.

All the feathers come out. It's called casting its plume. And during that period.

The eagle is totally incapacitated. It can do nothing. And this word of God says.

The saint is renewed. Out of weakness. Into strength. And what will make us weak. Will ultimately make us strong.

With the blessing of God. I finish. And I leave the rest that I've got here.

[42 : 59] There's an American writer. called Everton Fulham. And it tells us. What happens. When an eagle dies.

When an eagle's sense. Is going to die. I'm told. He leaves the nest. And he flies.

To a rock. And he fastens his. Talons. Into the rock. And looks up at the sun.

And dies. How like Stephen. He looked up to heaven.

And he saw Jesus. At the right hand of God. And his face was like an angel. He looked at the sun.

[43 : 56] Yes. The sun of God. Brighter than the sun. And he died. And he died. What does the believer do?

He puts in the talons. Of his faith. Into the rock. Christ Jesus. And he dies. And he awakes.

And he awakes. The glory. Of God. And then. He will know. What he doesn't know now.

Shall we pray. Shall we pray. Shall we pray. O gracious God. O gracious God. We ask you to.

Bless your word to us. This evening. We thank you. We thank you. For the things. That we know. And understand. And the things. That we don't understand.

[45 : 01] And the things. That we don't know. We know. That we can leave it. Within. The power. Of the God. Who does all things.

Well. Help us to learn. From the ego. We pray thee. For Jesus sake.

Amen.