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(choir sings)

SPEAKER#1: Welcome to the Bethany Experience, one hour of worship recorded at Bethany Baptist church, 460 Sumner Avenue from Decatur to McDonough in Brooklyn, New York. Dr. William Augustus Jones is pastor. Worship services are held each Lord's day at 8 a.m. and 11 a.m. The Bethany Experience is but one of our several outreach ministries. Unapologetically Black, and unashamedly Christian, Bethany is a caring church seeking all ways to minister to the totality of human need. A warm welcome awaits you within these hallowed portals.

(choir sings 3 songs)

REV. DR. WILLIAM AUGUSTUS JONES, JR: I want today to predicate what I hope to say on what was read in your hearing for the lesson. That body of material in the 10th chapter of Luke that is commonly called the Parable of the Good Samaritan—and I want to talk, The Holy Spirit willing, about *Beyond The Contract*. That's what I want to talk about for the next little while, *Beyond The Contract*. Frederick Spanheim, a German theologian of the 17th century, once wrote, “the true disciples of Christ are not those who know most but those who love most.” Spanheim, in all probability, was speaking out against a swelling tide of reason which was doing violence to the concept of faith. That was no new phenomenon, not even in his day. For the church of Jesus Christ has always had to wrestle with the problem of the proper relationship between faith and reason that developed in the first century. A group of Christians who made knowledge the summum bonum, the highest good in the Christian life. They were called Gnostics. They derived their name from the Greek word gnosis, which means knowledge. Those Gnostics were a rather interesting breed, they bitterly opposed those Christians who considered faith to be primary. The people of faith were called psychics and one of the roughest battles in the early church was between the Gnostics and the psychics. The apostles of knowledge and the disciples of faith. Influenced by Hellenistic or Grecian thought, the Gnostics segregated Christians on the basis of intellect. If you were smart you qualified for the in crowd, if you were not smart you had to take your place with the commoners. The Gnostics created a privileged class, a religious hierarchy and only people who were admitted there too were those of keen mind and sharp intellect. Those who knew the most about the sacred writings and about religious history. They said in their preachments that the best Christian is the one who knows most but Jesus had already said by precept and by example, that the real disciple is the one who loves most. By this, said the master, “By this shall all men know

that ye are my disciples, that ye love one another.” Though the Gnostics were influenced in the main by Greek thought, there were traces of the same sort of emphasis in Hebraic thought. You remember that the Pharisees had an undying devotion to knowledge. For them the apex of life was to know the law. The top person in Jewish religion was the man who had fully digested the law. They argued that Israel and God had entered a covenant relationship and the covenant had been sealed by a certain contract. A contract known as the Torah. The Torah or the holy law, represented God's unchanging will for his people throughout the ages. It had fixed boundary lines. It had established limits. Do this and receive this, obey, and be blessed. It was a quid pro quo—a this for that arrangement. The Jews viewed the law as a great contractual relationship between God and man. Nothing else mattered, no warm zephyrs of the spirit blew outside the law's boundaries. No ethic of grace gave expression and meaning to the law. The law was all and in all, it was cold and calculating and exacting. The law for the Hebrews was the essence of life and knowledge to know the law was the highest achievement. I reiterate, in their thinking the religious person was the person who knew most. The Pharisees in Jesus day pushed and promoted this doctrine and in the morning time of Christianity. The Gnostics pushed the doctrine. The effects were evil, the results were devastating. For it appeared that the intelligentsia had a monopoly on God. That made God partial. It reserved the best of heaven and earth for folks who knew the most. The ordinary person was the helpless victim of religious prejudice, and you know that no prejudice is worse than that employed and exacted by religious people in the name of the Lord. This concept was a violation of the law and the prophets and suddenly a vitiation of the life and teachings of the field preacher from Galilee. One day in an encounter with a Jewish lawyer, Jesus made it plain that kingdom existence is something beyond, something more than something beyond the contract. If you want to see God, if you want to be like God, if you want to enjoy God's favor you've got to have more than knowledge. This man, this lawyer, a man of logic, a man who knew, walked up to Jesus, and queried him saying, “master what shall I do to inherit eternal life? I want to live forever. I want to get past the cemetery. I want to out distance my gravestone. I don't want this earth to be the terminal station. I want to get out of this world and beyond this mortality. Good master, how do I get that life which extends beyond the graveyard?” Jesus retorted, “well you're a lawyer, what does the law say? How do you read it?” The lawyer then quoted from the law, “thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength and thy neighbor as thyself.” Jesus said, “well you've answered rightly. Do this and you'll out distance the cemetery.” But the lawyer, highly knowledgeable but bereft of spirituality said, “I know this. I know it well. It's in my mind. It's been inculcated in my mind from my youth up. I've been taught these things but messed up. I've got a problem. I have trouble with the neighbor issue. I got no problem with the ultimate dimension. I got no problem with that which is at the highest apex of the vertical plane. My problem is horizontal in character. The God issue is no problem. I got a neighbor problem; I can't fathom this neighbor question. Who is my neighbor?” And Jesus at once told him a parable, a hypothetical story, yet amazingly real. Said Jesus, “a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He went down on that rough and rocky road which runs some 17 miles and drops 3,400 feet and that man fell among thieves. He was stripped, he was beaten, he was left half dead and as he lay there dying, a priest came by and saw him and passed by on the other side and shortly thereafter a Levite came by looked at him and he too passed by on the other side—but then a certain Samaritan came by. He saw him, he had compassion, he treated his wounds, put him on his beast, carried him to a hotel, took care of him, stayed with him all night long and upon leaving the next morning, paid the bill and told the cashier if there's any more expense charge it to me, I'll take care of it the next time I come through. He picked him up, he paid him up. In this

story, ancient in its telling but hopefully contemporary in its relevancy. I think there are three levels of existence that are plainly visible my brothers and my sisters. All of us any ineluctably fall into one of these levels. There is first of all, that level of life which is below the contract. Now the man fell among thieves. Some treacherous bandits on Jericho road jumped an innocent man. He wasn't bothering anybody; he was just making his journey. He wasn't picking a fight. He wasn't looking for trouble but robbers, some robbers who made their living by taking advantage of others stripped and mugged the man. I think this is almost all too familiar to every one of us is it not? Police and hospital attendants have daily knowledge of the consequences of life at this level below the contract. This city is overrun with ruthless thugs who go through life making their fare by taking advantage of decent people. Stick up artists, purse snatchers, hoodlums, con men, pimps, hustlers—they're all here in plentitude. We've got enough and then some to spare. Some of them hide in the shadows. They are sneaky creatures, mean and wretched and low down, subtle and insidious—and then some are bold as the summer sun, have no fear of God or anybody. Then some of us, some of the time, are prone to make excuses for their vicious behavior. I've probably been guilty of this. Giving sociological excuses for the sins of certain folks and God knows there is a spirit in the very societal stratum which gives birth to the worst in humankind—but the root cause is deeper than that. I've discovered that even animals are not as cunning and wicked as some people are. There are people who have no regard for anybody. They live below the contract level of existence. They are the bandits of every Jericho road. There's a second level of existence portrayed in this parable, and it is life lived at the contract level. This level is represented by the priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side. These religious functionaries had been up to Jerusalem performing their religious duties. They occupied significant places in the public worship of God. They were prominent in temple ministrations. Their temple duties now ended, they are on their way from church and after all the pomp and pageantry and after leading the people in public prayer—they come upon human suffering enroute to their respective homes. You remember that the priest was the people's representative before God and the Levite was a priestly attendant or assistant and these men heard the groans of that man who had been beaten and left to die. They beheld the pitiful sight, but they pass by on the other side. Various theories have been propounded in an effort to explain their behavior. Some say that the Jewish purification laws prevented their touching a wounded man and some have said that they were in a hurry because they had to make it on schedule to some special religious duty and some have argued that they were fearful that they might get hurt like that wounded man. Regardless of the reason, they lived by a certain contract which would not permit them to help somebody in need. They didn't hurt the man, nor did they help the man, they simply passed by on the other side. They reasoned if I tried to help him, I might get hurt. Their religion permitted them to get around the victim. Legalism stood in the way of love. They had a kind of religious contract which prescribed and circumscribed the extent of their involvement in the hard and bitter realities of life. You and I are rather prone to look with this favor on these religionists who pass by on the other side. Some of us are very quick to discover and point out the fault and the sin in others, but the bad naked truth reveals that most religious people live at the contract level of existence. At best, most of us go not beyond the limits of that which we think is required our religion. Our faith is fundamentally external. We try to meet the visible demands. We try to satisfy the fundamental requirements. Let me make it live. We don't have a real problem getting up and going to church. We'll give enough to get by, we'll sing the hymns of the church, we will pray with some regularity—especially if something's bothering us. We'll be real nice to our friends won't we? We don't mind helping those who help us but by and large that's as far as it goes. We have the external features of religion. We follow the ____?? We

adhere to the ____ ?? and that's about the extent of it, but whenever you live life on a quid pro quo basis, a this for that arrangement, the kingdom is far off. Now make no mistake about it, life at the contract level is far better than life below the contract level. It's much better to be decent than to be wicked. It's good to be law abiding, doing no wrong and inflicting no harm, but you can satisfy all the legal demands, you can be a perfectly good citizen of the kingdom in terms of outward appearance. You can be respectful and decent and yet never know the glory of the Lord. There is a third level to which God invites us all, and that's life living beyond the contract. A certain Samaritan came down that road and a Samaritan was a man of an alien race. A Samaritan was the adherent of a despised religion. You remember that old saying, the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. This Samaritan had not been to church. He had not been at prayer. He just came by but when the wounded man cried something inside of him began to cry. He felt the pains. He experienced the problems, he sympathized, and he empathized. He said, "if I don't help this man, he might die." He got down from his beast, helped that man. He went beyond the contract and Jesus says if you've got kingdom hopes and kingdom dreams, if you really want to get past graveyard dwelling, if you want to get up yonder where God dwells, up beyond the eagle's playground, if you want to know the spirit of God, you've got to live beyond the contract—but how do you get there? That's our real problem, learning how to get from law to love. I believe Paul can help us. Paul said that he was always having problems with the law until he ran into Jesus, and it wasn't that the law was bad. The law was good but it hemmed him in. He didn't have freedom. Anytime you legalize, you shut out more than you shut in. Paul was restricted and bound but when he met the Christ, he then began to understand the law—and he looked at the law and said, "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. The law was our schoolmaster, just a teacher, not at the end of itself, not the highest good and since I met the Christ, I don't have to rely on the school master anymore. For I have graduated. I've been born again. I've been lifted. I've been elevated to a new level and I now live and move in the boundless circle of love." You see the law limited the circle of fellowship, but Jesus opened it up to everybody and whenever you're in Christ, you're operating under a new definition of neighbor. He redefined neighbor. Jesus said that your neighbor is anybody who needs you and the beautiful thing about it is this, when you help somebody in need, you not only help that person, you help yourself. There is that in me that can never know fulfillment until it reaches out and helps somebody else. That's why it's just good to do good. It's good for you, it's good to you, it lifts your vision, it expands your heart, it deepens your spirit. This is real righteousness, real righteousness. Righteousness is not your going about parading under some banner of personal piety. Real righteousness is not garb in your sanctimony. In a certain way, real righteousness is loving somebody who needs to be loved. You see when you go to first mile you help the other person but when you go to second mile you help yourself. You may say, I tithe I give a tenth, I measure up, I meet the demand. Jesus says, "so what? that y'all to do but you ought to do more." You're the love message. See the person who simply obeys rules is serving himself but the person who loves his servant God. The law compels but grace frees. The law says I have to do it. Love says I want to do it. The law says I ought to do it. Love says I can't help doing it. That lowly unnamed Samaritan went beyond the contract. He healed the man. He treated his wounds. He paid the bill. All of that wasn't necessary but love made him do it. Musicians tell me that instrumentalists sometimes play what is known as grace notes. Now grace notes are not really necessary, but they add color and flavor to that which is necessary. If somebody gets on a keyboard and simply plays what is written, we can enjoy it but if they know how to add grace notes, it embellishes the composition. What that Samaritan did added grace and beauty to his own life. Well to sum it up, that man, member of an alien race and adherent of a despised religion, in helping that

man in trouble was like unto God. For the record declares that God is always going beyond the contract. He made me. He's provided for me. He's fed me, he's clothed me, he's protected me, he's kept me, but he hadn't stopped with these. God went beyond the contract. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believed in him should not perish but have life eternal. I see the Christ of God with calvary in view. A rugged hill beckons to him, bitter abuse is about to greet him. Rusty nails are waiting for him, a sharp spear awaits him too, but I hear him say, "no man taketh my life. I lay it down. No mere mortal is in control of my destiny. I'm moving according to my own tempo. For I have access to legions who can fight my battle if I desire that but I am operating under my own auspices." Afraid of love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends. I tell you God went beyond the contract for us. Dr. Watts realized it and said, "amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved the wretch like me. Once was lost but now, I am found. Was blind but now I see." That grace was so wondrous and so wonderful that he had to call it amazing. He had to give it the greatest superlative, amazing grace, not ordinary grace but amazing grace—and if you walk with God and do his will and love his children, if you treat everybody right, if you look on all his neighbors, if you go beyond the limits of the law—God will bless your soul. Do I have a witness? Yes! Beyond your fondest dreams, he'll open the windows of heaven. You won't have to worry about your cup being filled, he'll run your cup over. He'll give you the desires of your heart, yes, he will. Love will write a blank check and you can ask what you will of the father. Yes, and it shall be given! Seek and ye shall find, knock and the door shall be opened unto you. My plea to you today and God's name is to get up from some low level. You were made to live life beyond the contract. Step out on faith beyond the contract level. Step on up into the level of love. I don't want to dwell in the valley. I don't want to do just enough to get by. I was made for the heights. There's something in me that transcends this low ground. I was made for higher ground. Yes! I'm pressing on the upward way. New heights I'm gaining every day. Still praying, yes! I'm onward bound. Lord, plant my feet on higher ground, higher ground. My heart has no desire to stay where doubts arise and fears dismay. Though some may dwell beneath the contract where knees are bound. My prayer, my aim is higher ground, higher! Higher, yes! I want to scale the utmost height and catch a gleam! You don't mind me talking about it do you? And catch a gleam of glory bright, but still I pray till heaven I found. Lord, lead me home to higher ground. Lord, lift me up and let me stand by faith on heaven's sable land. A higher plane than I have found. Lord let my feet on higher ground. Higher ground! Higher! Higher! Higher! Higher ground! Where love abounds, where mercy is real, where God smiles. Higher! Remember always what Frederick Spanheim said, that the true disciples are not those who know most but those who love most. You got to love everybody if you want to see Jesus. Yes! Have you got good religion? Certainly, Lord. Have you got good religion? Certainly, Lord. Have you been to the pool? Certainly, Lord. Have you been to the pool? Certainly, Lord. Well how can you validate it? Do you love everybody? Certainly, certainly, certainly, Lord. For love is the badge of Christian discipleship. Love is the passport to the city eternal. Love is the only reality that can get you past the cemetery. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Anybody here this morning who wants to go where I'm bound? Anybody here who wants to say, "I believe on Jesus Christ, the son of God. I accept him as my lord and savior, and I want to walk in his way and subscribe fully to his ethic. I want to be his disciple?" If that's your decision, I want you to come right now, whoever you are, whatever your condition and give your life to Jesus Christ. The doors of the church are open. There may be somebody here who knows the Christ, but you live in this city without church home. You ought to unite with the people of God. We're going to sing this grand old hymn, selection 141, "Love Lifted Me." That's what lifted me. The law didn't do it because the law couldn't do it, but love did it. I

declared it. God bless you, my dear. God bless. Who else will come today? The master is calling. The doors of the church are open. Let us stand and sing to the glory of God. God help you to come, whoever you are, whatever your condition.

(choir and congregation sing “Love Lifted Me”)

JONES: Who else will come?