Woodlawn

By Jon Erwin
If you'd have asked me in 1973 if I believed in miracles, I'd have said absolutely not. I'd have told you it's a brutal world out there, and my only comfort in it is that I am the master of my own fate. I'm the captain of my soul. Some call what happened here a miracle, and there is only one explanation, only one way any of this could've happened.

In the city of Birmingham, the Department of Justice some time ago instituted an investigation, an attack on the city's segregation ordinance. I grew up in Birmingham, Alabama. Some very, very good friends of mine were killed by bombs, bombs that were planted by racists. I remember, from the time I was very small, I remember the sounds of bombs exploding across the street, our house shaking. So what do you expect with that type of injustice? We are angry. They killed Kennedy. They killed King. They killed Evers. I don't think there is much of a future at this point. Not much at all. They're just killing everybody that wanna... For the nation itself. The true picture of what goes on here can even be seen in American television. If you look at it long enough, the emptiness, the spiritual bleakness, the loss of meaning,
the loss of purpose.
There's no unity in the world.
You couldn't rally 500 people
to sincerely fight
for the same common cause,
no matter what that cause
might be, unless it's dollars.
The result of this is, of course,
the chaos that we live in.
They set fire to the country.
Get ridiculed, and you know,
discriminated, you know,
and be less than a man.
I don't think it's right, you know?
I draw the line in the dust
and toss the gauntlet
before the feet of tyranny,
and I say segregation now,
segregation tomorrow,
and segregation forever.
It's a sad day here in Birmingham,
a heartbreaking day,
the Crimson Tide about to be defeated
by the Trojans of Southern Cal
and their stellar tailback,
Sam "Bam" Cunningham.
A tough loss for
the Alabama Crimson Tide.
What happened, Coach?
We just got the stew
beat out of us by USC.
You weren't paying attention?
Why'd you bring USC to Birmingham?
Trying to make some sort of statement?
That's it, son.
We have a visitor.
Gentlemen, if wanting to win is a fault,
then I plead guilty.
I like to win.
Know no other way.
It's in my blood.
When I get beat, which
is gonna happen occasionally,
I like it to be by an opponent
worthy of my respect.
Fine game, son.
Thank you, sir.
Brave of you to play it.
Thank y'all for coming down here.
Where you been, Coach?
Talking to a real football player.
Time and a place for everything.
Ain't that what the Good Book says?
In memory of the 10-year
anniversary of the bombing
of the 16th Street
Baptist Church in Birmingham,

here's the late

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.:

What murdered these four girls?
The apathy and the complacency
of many Negro
who will sit down on
their stools and do nothing
and not engage in creative protests
to get rid of this evil system.
Tell your mom I'll be home late.
Nobody forcing you to play.
You know that, right?
You sound like Mama now.
She just don't wanna see you get hurt.
That's just natural.
Hey, Tony.
Where you live from?
Love you, boy.
I'm frustrated all the time
by what I see,
and wonder when it'll end
and if it ever will end.
What do you think?
It's unbelievable.
What's the name of the school?
Woodlawn.
Listen up, guys.
Listen up.
Morton.
Allyson.
Parker.
Parker?
Anger.
I see it in your faces.
You're angry because of what's
happened to this school.
You've been berated...
or beaten...
or shot at.
So have I.
None of us chose this.
It was forced on us.
But we can choose together
what we will do with it.
So, if it is anger that unites us,
then let's use that anger to win, boys.
'Cause winning fixes just
about everything, doesn't it?
Are there any questions?
I didn't think so.
Let's go do it.
Sweet home Alabama
Where the skies are so blue
It's not that hot out here, boy.
Come on, let's go!
Sweet home Alabama
Lord, I'm coming home to you
Stay down, boy.
You don't belong.
Whoo-hoo-hoo-hoo!
That's my boy!
- You see that?
- I'm right here, Jerry.
Hey, it's okay, cupcake.
That was just Superman
flying over your head.
It's not your fault.
Watch your mouth, boy!
Hey! Hey!
That's enough!
Suicides, everybody, thanks to you two.
Let's go.
Look at the man beside you.
This is what happens when
you fight against each other
instead of fighting to be a team.
You shower when we're done, Superman.
Over, under, through, and tie.
Let me help you.
I don't wanna go.
It's okay.
Your school is not like my school.
Will it ever be?
Over, under, through.
Ready?
Yes, sir.
Let's go.
See ya, buddy.
Mornin'.
In whose world?
I am Coach Gerelds.
I love football and not science,
so please pay attention
while I give you all the answers.
Okay, let's get started.
Hey, you gonna quit?
Why?
It's what y'all do.
Come in.
Hey, Coach.
I'm Hank.
So, you're making plays?
Mm-hmm.
Yeah.
Look, I know you're a busy man,
so I'll get right to the point.
I'd like to have a meeting
with your football team.
About what?
Jesus Christ.
Oh, wow, what are you,
some kind of preacher or something?
No, no, not a preacher.
I'm a sports chaplain, actually.
I like to find different
teams to work with.
I just wanna talk to 'em.
Well, I'm sorry, Hank, but you can't.
You know this is a public school?
Yeah.
Yeah, I know.
Look, I've seen some things
all over the country.
I've seen amazing things.
Well, you are not gonna see them here.
I think your players could use it.
I think you could too.
Listen, Hank, if my team
needs something,
I will tell you.
Wait up, Johnnie.
So, who is she?
Her name Johnnie, I told you.
That's her real name?
That's the name she go by.
If you're so curious, why
don't you just ask her yourself?
Of course, that would
require you to actually talk,
or ride the bus with the rest of us.
I talk.
She don't even know you exist.
Nobody does.
How she gonna see what's invisible?
Reggie...
Hey, break it up!
Break it up, now!
I expect you to control
your school, son!
Five hundred kids getting bussed to
a place every day they don't wanna be.
Twenty-five hundred kids
don't want 'em here.
What did you think was gonna happen?
What's he talking for?
He ain't got a right here.
- I'm not gonna stand here...
- Let me deal with it.
I don't have to stand here
and be berated by this gentleman.
- Coach!
- I'm not done!
COACH! I could arrange that!
Now, who do you think you are?
Oh yeah, you're the assistant principal.
Only reason you are that is 'cause we ain't got nobody else.
Now, if you're done, I got something to say to you.
The national spotlight is off our city first time in a decade, so I think it's time our town came to its right and proper balance.
And if that means closing the doors to this school, well, so be it.
We've stayed.
While others have left, we've stayed.
And we stayed because we love this school.
This school has been an enduring beacon to this city for many years, and we all know that.
Now, do you really want its final legacy to be failed integration?
What would that do?
Why don't you tell me about that, sir?
All right, Tandy, I'll tell you. If there is one more incident... you're done.
Both of you.
Y'all have a nice day.
Thank you, Gene.
You too.
Mm-hmm.
Comin'!
Hello?
Hey, babe.
Hey, oh, hey, listen, Todd's got a Pop Warner game now on Saturday at 3 p.m.
Now, you tell me you're gonna be there.
Look, something happened.
I'm okay, but...
What happened?
What always happens.
How bad?
Six went to the hospital.
Knives mostly.
You okay?
Let's go, Tandy.
Tandy, are you okay?
I gotta go.
Yeah, I'm okay. Bye.
Hey, Coach.
Can I talk to the team now?
Look, I don't have time
to deal with this right now.
Tandy, let's go.
Tandy, now!
Coach!
This is what I do.
I help people.
You know what?
You have five minutes.
After training in the gym.
You talk to Stearns.
You better be good.
Now!
Can I get an introduction?
No.
All right, guys, let's settle down.
Bring it in.
Guys.
Hey, hey!
Settle down.
We have a motivational speaker
here, if you guys don't mind.
Hey, guys.
I got it.
Good luck.
Hey, everybody. My name's Hank.
Hey, Hank.
I'm not a coach.
I'm not a teacher.
I'm not a counselor.
In fact, nobody asked me
to come here today.
But I look at what happened
this afternoon, and I think,
"Aren't you sick of it?"
I mean, I'm sick of it.
I'm not even from here,
but does this kind of thing
happen so much
that it just feels normal?
I mean, you don't know me,
you've never seen me before,
but what would you say if I
told you that 100% without fail,
it doesn't have to be this way?
Birmingham has seen
nothing but hate for so long,
it has lost its ability to believe.
It's lost hope.
Let me tell you what Jesus said.
He said, "I am the way,
I am the truth, I am the life."
And that means something to me
because I let it mean something to me.
I'll tell you something else
that seems crazy, only it's not.
I love you.
I care about you,
each and every one of you.
I care about what you've seen.
I care about what you've been through.
I care about your pain.
So does God.
Jerry, what's going on?
I said 5 minutes.
He's been here for an hour.
We need to wrap this up.
Tandy, hold on, man.
Man, I know this sounds crazy,
but just give the guy a chance.
We ain't got nothing else to lose.
You don't know me,
but I'm asking you anyway
to stand up right now, right here,
and make a decision...
a decision to change, to forgive,
to be forgiven
no matter what you've done.
That's how much God loves you.
I'm asking you to choose Jesus.
Can you do that?
Will you do that...
with me, right now?
Thank you.
Brave men.
What just happened?
Where have you been?
The gym.
And what happened at the gym?
I let an untrained religious nut
convert the whole team.
I'm going to bed.
The whole team.
Is that good or bad?
I don't know.
Birmingham Post Herald believes
something about this team.
They believe we're
only gonna win two games.
They believe that this season
is the death rattle
of a school that is
barely able to stay alive.
You see, I don't believe this
for a minute.
I believe that we are
the masters of our own fate.
I believe that we can prove
these people wrong.
Why don't you go out there and show me
what you all believe?
Let's go do it!
Play our boys!
Come on, Tandy!
Just no win.
Puts them black boys in, we riot.
He doesn't, they riot.
Bring 'em in, bring 'em in,
bring 'em in!
Bring 'em in!
Play our boys, Tandy!
I know you hear me!
Hey, sit down and shut up!
Hey, don't talk to my wife like that.
You don't talk to my wife like that.
I don't expect you to win,
but I expect you to keep things quiet.
It's not my fault, Owen.
I'm trying to coach football.
This is bigger than football, Tandy.
All right, then.
Get Nathan.
What?
Nathan!
Nathan, let's go.
Come on, son.
Let's go.
That's right.
Our boys wanna play too.
Hey, safety.
Go.
Field wrangler, cover two.
Field wrangler, cover two.
Ready, break!
Nathan!
The slot!
The slot, Nathan!
Hut!
Run! Go, Nathan!
Don't just stand there!
Go, go, go, go, go!
Come on, ref!
That was a late hit!
Are you kidding me?
Come on, Ref!
Welcome to the game.
I thought you said God
was gonna bless us.
I thought we were gonna win.
Maybe God is testing us.
Maybe he wants to know
that our commitment is real,
not just to win football games.
Look who decided to ride the bus today.
Hey, Johnnie, this is Tony.
He don't talk much.
I know who you are.
Really?
So, what you mean you don't talk, hmm?
It's 'cause you just ain't got nothing
to say or too afraid to say it?
Both.
Reggie, let him talk.
If you scored, we would've won the game.
Why you so afraid of getting hit?
'Cause it hurts.
That's too bad.
Ooh-hoo!
Hey, guys.
Hey, Tony, did you hear
about the meeting tonight?
Fellowship of Christian Athletes.
Count you in?
What happened to your foot?
Oh, when I was in college,
I was working part-time
during the summer at a steel mill.
Accident took away half my foot
and my dreams of playing
professional baseball.
Man, baseball was everything
to me back then.
Man, I'm sorry about that.
Don't be sorry.
I think that sometimes
before you can have
new dreams in this life,
the old ones have to be
taken away from you.
Look, there's something
I've wanted to say to you
since the first time I saw you play.
There's something
special about you, Tony.
I can see it.
You have a gift.
That's something that can't be taught.
That can only be given.
But you have to decide
what you wanna do with it.
When you play for yourself,
you can be great. 
But when you play for something 
higher than yourself, 
that's when something 
extraordinary can happen. 
God has a purpose for all of us, 
and it is not insignificant. 
And obviously, I can't know 
what yours is, but I think... 
I think God wants you to be a superstar. 
No such thing. 
As what? 
There's no such thing 
as a black superstar. 
Not in this state. 
You okay, buddy? 
I just hate to lose, Dad. 
I hate it. 
I hate it so bad. 
You say you'll do anything 
to win, but you won't. 
Didn't you see him run? 
Hike! 
Come on, they're killing us! 
If they're not gonna give him the ball, 
this is just a waste of time, Junior. 
We need a new coach! 
Tandy, you're in trouble! 
Time out. Time out. 
Boys, bring it in. 
Come here. 
Nathan, come here. 
This your time to shine, let's go. 
That a boy, Tony! 
Okay, Nathan's in at tailback. 
Wait, wait, Coach! 
Power I, guys. 
Eleven yards, that's what I need, okay? 
That's my position! 
He don't know the offense yet! 
Morton! 
This is my team! 
It's not a democracy! 
Now go sit down!
All right, let's go.
Nathan.
You know what I believe?
That you are faster than them,
so you show me.
Yes, sir.
Tandy!
This is a contact sport, okay?
When someone wants to hit you,
it feels good to hit 'em
first, okay? Try it.
Atta boy, Tony!
Gonna be 1st down right now!
Tandy, put my boy in.
You're killing us!
Break!
That's my baby!
All right, let's punch it in.
Nathan, out.
Nice one, 22!
Hey, Tony.
How'd that feel?
Good.
Really good.
Come here, baby!
Momma is so proud of you.
Great game, son.
Great game.
Who is this?
This is Johnnie.
Hi.
Oh, she sure is pretty, Tony.
Oh, it's not like that.
What church you go to?
Momma!
No girl better even think about marrying
my Tony without being church-going.
I don't go to church.
Well, you gonna go to church with us.
And I see I'm a have to fatten you up,
'cause I don't know how you think you gonna
have my grandbabies with hips like that.
Uh, let's just let them be.
Yeah, well a closed mouth
don't get fed, Junior.
I want my boy to play college ball.
All right, he has that opportunity,
and I don't think it's right
that it's being taken away
by somebody who don't even belong.
I coach the team that I am given, Bull.
I coach to win.
That is my commitment
to myself, this school,
and every parent in it, including you.
Hey. Hey!
You gonna get that colored boy hurt.
Therefore, since we are surrounded
by such a great cloud of witnesses,
let us lay aside every weight.
We have to run this race
called life with patience.
Are you willing to run the race
and put down the shame?
Amen!
Turn to your neighbor
and say, "Put it down."
Put it down!
How many of y'all have a race
you know you got to run?
You think 'cause you
got that many races to run.
We need those that will accomplish
all God has laid before us.
We need a man, a woman, or someone...
Finally.
Amen, Pastor!
Because they're looking at you.
Because they're looking to the church.
Because they're looking to a better day.
Because they're looking to a new day.
Why? Because
it's time to rise up!
Rise up!
Somebody's gotta rise up this morning!
Rise up.
You buy all that stuff?
Yeah, I do.
Been taught it all my life.
I finally feel like I own it,
like it's mine.
What about you?
I'm Christian same as the next person,
but I believe rising up
means fighting back,
only way things are gonna change.
Tony, we in a system that
prevents any type of aspiration,
any type of growth.
Johnnie...
And then when one of us can't take it
anymore, we're made an example of.
We take the blame.
Hey, Johnnie!
Nuh-uh, but the blame
belongs in the system,
the system that's been keeping
us down time after time.
Johnnie Francis!
Go out with me.
What?
Friday night.
Okay, fine.
I'll pick you up?
Nuh-uh
I'll meet you there.
I'll pick you up.
I'll meet you there.
Rising up still means fighting back.
All right, let's bow our heads.
Dear God, thank you for this day.
Thank you for this chance
to play football
and fellowship together.
And we hope that we
honor you and your glory.
In Jesus' name, amen.
Let's go, man.
Come on.
First team O, first team D, let's go.
Well, he's paying attention.
He's paying attention now,
and that's the whole thing.

Excuse me.

Amen.

So, you're all in, huh?

Yep.

You are?

Yeah.

All right, then.

You know, we're meeting with the players tonight over at Crestwood.

You should come.

If it was my neighborhood, maybe.

But Crestwood, come on, you know it's only gonna be white players there, Jerry.

I mean, what's that gonna achieve?

Shorty White, 2 o'clock.

Whoo!

I give you 30 seconds.

I'll give him less than that.

We're coming after you, Tandy.

Ooh, 8 more weeks 'til judgment day.

Glorious rivalry day.

Banks' Jets coming at you from the clouds.

I'm bringing my white knight, son.

I know you know who he is, Mr. Jeff Rutledge.

He's only the best quarterback in the state, folks.

Birmingham News printed that.

I didn't say it.

Simple kind of man

Oh, be something you love and understand

Baby, be a simple kind of man

Won't you do this for me, son...

Hey, Coach.

Good to see you.

Ain't never seen a house this big.

No, me neither.

You coming in?

You go ahead.

I'm just gonna have a quick smoke.
You really should.
It's pretty cool.
Well, Shorty White
beat 'em two seasons ago.
Golly, how many'd they dress, a hundred?
They got three times our budget
and a new stadium.
I don't see how that's fair.
We need to redefine winning.
Like a field goal, right?
I mean, no one's scored on 'em
this whole season,
and a field goal, bam, that's winning.
Jerry, is this real?
How does a whole team convert?
How is it that the only
place in the whole city
that blacks and whites get
along is my football team?
Why are you so cynical?
Because I believe in what I can see.
With all due respect, Coach,
you might start looking around.
Hey, we're gonna win this thing.
- Oh, here we go.
- Really?
We're gonna win this game,
and I've got something
I wanna say to the team.
Whoo!
Woodlawn!
Whoo!
Welcome back, everybody.
This is WXJC Birmingham,
and we're following
the number-one team in the state,
the Huffman Vikings,
on their so-far uncontested road
to another championship.
Now, tonight, they square off
against the Woodlawn Colonels,
and this should be a routine,
regular season ball game,
as they're favored by 6 touchdowns.
And on paper, folks, there's no way at all that Woodlawn has a chance against this powerful ball club.
Okay boys, listen up.
The preacher wants to say a few words.
Thank you, Coach.
Make it good.
Yeah.
Read the highlighted, right there.
"This day..."
"This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand and I will strike you down."
So that all on earth know that there is a God in Israel.
And David reached into his pocket, and he pulled out a stone.
And he slung it, and it struck the Philistine in the head.
And he fell.
You know what's gonna happen?
You're gonna win this game tonight, you hear me?
Yes, sir!
You're gonna win this game!
You wanna know how I know that you're gonna win this game?
Because it's not about you.
Nobody out there knows what's happened with this team.
But when you win, on this day, they will.
When you do what everyone said is impossible, they will.
When you strike down this giant, they will!
And when they find out how you did it, then all the earth will know that there is a God in Israel on this day.
On this day!
On this day!
On this day!
On this day!
Hey, you're starting
at tailback tonight.
One, two, three, Woodlawn!
Nathan, come on.
We gotta go.
Yes, sir.
Let's just see what happens, okay?
Your momma's gonna kill me.
Turn, boys!
Receives deep at the 10-yard line.
Outstanding blocking as they
break open the double wedge,
just bowling over the much
smaller Woodlawn colonels.
Good job.
Good job.
Stack grip, cover two.
Get out of here, come on.
Stay in your lane!
Stay in your lane!
And touchdown.
Ackman is in the end zone,
taking only two plays.
And I have a feeling
this is just a portent
of what we're gonna be
seeing here this evening.
It could be a massacre
on the football field tonight.
They're big, Coach.
Really big.
Hey there, David.
What do you say you go in there
right now and take down that giant?
Make 'em all believe.
Break!
Woodlawn lines up
at their own 20 in the I formation.
Their tailback, number 22,
we've not seen him before.
His name is Tony Nathan.
Go Tony!
Nathan breaks the tackle.
Look at this guy go. He's 40 past midfield. One more man to beat. There he goes to the 30, the 20, the 10. And for the first time in over a year. Touchdown Woodlawn. An unbelievable run. What a play by young Tony Nathan. Hey, brother. Jesus has a plan for your life. Ackman Driving back with a vengeance. They're deep in Woodlawn territory. Murphy breaks left, picks up 5 yards. It's a fumble! Woodlawn has it. An incredible hit by middle linebacker, Mike Allyson. Allyson, Allyson, come here! Come here. Good hit, son. Great hit. How many players are out there? No, there's one. Just one. Number 45. You take him out and you clear a path for Nathan. You take him out, we win this game. Nathan, get in there. Alright, so what are you gonna do now, coach? I'm just gonna give the ball to Tony. And this is unbelievable. The underdog Woodlawn Colonels have the number-one team in the state on their heels. It is absolutely pandemonium here tonight. The number-one team in the state is being single-handedly dismantled by this young junior tailback from Woodlawn. We are witnessing a star being born. Touchdown!
Touchdown, Tony Nathan.
And there it is.
It's all over.
It is all over.
Woodlawn has done it.
Woodlawn has done the impossible.
The biggest upset we have seen in years.
I can't believe it.
That is it.
The champ is down.
Great game.
Coach.
Coach, I don't know what
your players are playing with,
but I've never seen
a team play like that.
Good luck the rest of the season.
Let's go, son.
For God so loved the world
that he gave who?
His only begotten Son.
That whosoever believeth
in him should not perish,
but what will they have?
Everlasting life.
God loved us, so he gave us Jesus.
If he gave you a gift,
why do you have it wrapped up?
Because the world needs the gift
that is trapped inside of you.
As a matter of fact, Tony, you stand up,
because you are using
your gift for God's glory.
Give Tony a round of applause.
We're proud of you, son,
for how you are letting God
shine through you every day.
Yeah.
Hallelujah.
Hallelujah.
Coach Gerelds, we welcome you
and your family here this morning.
Can I say a few words please, sir?
Come on, then.
I wanted to come here today because...
five of my players are here.
Five of my players
that have been mistreated
time and again by their school...
and by their teammates...
and I have not done enough to stop it.
Now, at the beginning
of this season, my team,
almost my entire team,
they gave themselves to love.
A love that I didn't understand.
A love that began to conquer hatred.
And after the game on Friday,
I went home...
and I prayed.
Not that I really know how to do that...
but I told God that,
"I don't know if you're real...
but I want whatever my players have."
And I came here today because I believe.
I believe, and I wanna be baptized.
Thank you, Jesus.
Amen.
I'll baptize you.
In the name of the Father,
the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
Buried with Christ in baptism,
raised to walk in the newness of life.
Knock, knock,
knocking on heaven's door
Knock, knock,
knocking on heaven's door
Knock, knock,
knocking on heaven's door
Knock, knock,
knocking on heaven's door
Knock, knock,
knocking on heaven's door
Hey buddy, can I speak to you
for a moment?
Sure.
Look, I know that this has been...
this has been a real tough year,
and it's been tough at school,
and I know we haven't spent
much time with each other.
That's okay.
No, it's not.
There's no excuse for it.
You mean a lot.
I love you, son.
You mean the world to me.
I think my biggest problem is that I...
I haven't had enough staff.
So, I was wondering if you
would be willing to help me
as an assistant coach.
I was thinking running backs, huh?
Calling out to everyone
across the nation
Nation, nation, nation
Said the world today
is in a desperate situation
Desperate situation
Move it! Move it!
Faster! Faster!
Stealing, burning, fighting, killing
Nothing but corruption
And it felt like he scored
every time he touched the ball.
Five touchdowns, three hundred yards.
He got a move, like Gail said.
Yeah, he got that...
he got that cut back speed.
We've got to learn
to live with each other
Twenty-two.
That's who he's like.
Twenty-two, yeah.
I'll tell you what, them recruiters
got to be calling, ain't they?
No, man, he's just a junior.
He's got another year left.
What the world needs now
is love and understanding
So get on board the friendship train
Everybody shake a hand
Now break it on down
Friendship train
Everybody shake a hand,
make a friend
Touchdown Tony Nathan.
Birmingham News, what's your secret?
I don't know.
How's it feel to have your
whole team on your shoulders?
Heavy.
He's something special, Mr. Nathan.
That boy is something special.
You hear me?
Good football player too.
I'm very proud.
Hey, Uncle Tom.
They gonna turn on you.
You see, we could use
a voice like yours,
so join us.
Okay, then, you stay away from her, huh?
I mean, she ain't your kind no more.
You wanna be one of these
cracker's trophy, that's fine.
So, why don't you just
stay with your own, huh?
How'd you find out where I live?
I asked.
Look, some people came
to talk to me from school.
Told me about some gangs,
some robberies.
About you.
Well, is it true?
I'm sorry, Tony.
Not everybody can be
as squeaky clean as you.
That's not you, Johnnie.
I know you.
You don't know anything about me.
What's going on?
Nothing, Daddy.
I was just telling him to leave.
Well, I guess you better be going, boy.
Go, get out of here.
Ladies and gentlemen, may
I have your attention please?
Thank you very much for being here.
This is the 11th Annual
Father-Son Banquet
for the Birmingham Quarterback Club.
Now, we are here to honor
the Birmingham player of the year.
Not since Pat Sullivan and Johnny Musso
has this award been given to
not one, but two individuals.
And those two tonight, Jeff Rutledge,
fine quarterback for Banks High School,
and Woodlawn's very own Tony Nathan.
Y'all boys come on up here
and get your awards.
Of course, these two teams are meeting
for the Birmingham City Championship,
and only one can advance
to the state playoffs.
Have a seat.
So now, ladies and gentlemen,
it is my distinct pleasure
to introduce our featured speaker tonight,
although he needs no introduction.
Please welcome our governor,
and if I had it my way,
the President
of these here United States,
George C. Wallace.
We'll have to take care of that.
Well, then, the governor
has just informed me
that he would like to have a picture
taken with these two young individuals.
So, Jeff, Nathan, come on up here.
Nathan, you hard of hearing?
Come on up.
We ain't got all night.
I'm sorry.
I can't.
What do you mean you can't? Huh?
You shy or something?
I can't
Well, of course you can.
The governor ain't gonna bite.
Just stand up, walk up to the governor,
and take a picture with him.
He said I couldn't go to Alabama,
not me or anybody like me.
Not today, not tomorrow, not ever.
So, I can't, sir.
Tandy, you get your
Negro up there right now.
I'll stand behind the wishes
of my player.
You sure about that?
Mm-hmm.
Take the picture.
Get on, come on!
Okay, second stop, the market.
You call the police?
No, I did not.
I'll call 'em.
You okay, champ?
The only way.
Welcome, everybody,
to Woodlawn High School.
One of the most heated rivalries
in the state of Alabama,
dating back over 4 decades.
It's no secret that the animosity exists
between Banks and Woodlawn.
You walk on this field,
you better walk off.
Gentlemen, shake hands.
Have a good, clean game.
I want you to punish them,
do you understand me?
Yes, sir!
What happens to compassionate people?
They lose!
They lose, that's right.
They lose. They lose!
It's been a Cinderella
season for Woodlawn,
but they have to win here tonight,
or that fairy tale is over.
Okay, come on, men.
Everyone take a knee.
Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Jesus can't save you now, fellas.
This is Jets football!
Jesus can't save you now!
You're going down!
Amen.
- Boys, you ready to beat Banks?
- Yes, sir!
- I said are you ready to beat Banks?
- Yes, sir!
One, two, three, believe!
A devastating hit on Tony Nathan,
and he is getting up slowly
at the 30-yard line.
Their gunnin' for him.
Hike!
I know, Jerry.
I know.
Come on, boy.
Nathan looks right,
then left, nowhere to go.
High left, 4-24 draw.
Hike!
He is short.
Down set.
Blue 18.
Blue 18.
Hike!
Excuse me, Coach.
Can't guard perfect, Coach.
Get 41.
Forty-one!
Down set!
Hike!
Middle, middle, middle!
Touchdown!
Get out there, boys.
You silence them, Nathan.
Nathan, you silence them.
You get out there, and you shut them up.
Come on, get it done.
Come on!
That's just football, boys.
Little bit of rain.
Power C Waggle left on one.
On one.
Ready, break.
Hike!
Get up, son.
Hey, Danny!
You stop him right here.
You hear me?
You make 'em pay, son.
Right here!
He's still on his feet.
He's in the 20, the 15,
working his way through
the defense toward the end zone.
He's willing his way forward.
He scores.
Touchdown, Woodlawn.
Break it up!
Break it up!
Atta boy, atta boy, atta boy, atta boy.
Hey, that flag don't hurt me.
That flag don't hurt me.
Doc!
Coach, think we'll be taking
a big risk to let him play.
Nathan, we win with you.
We cannot win without you.
You understand?
Tony!
Adversity is a crucible of greatness.
Yes, sir.
Can you do this?
Yes, sir.
Okay, let's do it.
Come on.
Nathan!
Let's go.
Hey, Coach, has it rained harder?
Them angels is crying!
Them angels is crying!
I just wanna say that
I am proud of all of you.
I'm proud of each and every one of you, for the game that you played tonight and the men that you have become this season. Hank, come on, just... you say something. Hey, hey, come here. Come here, come here, come here. Why didn't you play me? You know what is more important than winning football games? You are. You are. You are. Jesus says to love our enemies. We have to love those that oppose us. We have to love those that are against us, to do good to those that persecute us. This is the kind of love that isn't easy, but if we do it, we will see change like we have never seen before. Because here's the question. If you only love those that love you back, what kind of love is that? Amen! Think about it, church. Think about it. I can do pork chops. I'm gonna fry 'em up in some flour. Ha-ha-ha-ha! What in the world? That's Bear Bryant. Hello, son. I'm Coach Bryant. I know. Junior, get the baby. Did you always wanna be a coach? My mama wanted me to be a preacher, but I told her that coaching and preaching is pretty much the same thing.
We both serve something greater than ourselves.
She went for it.
Oh, I could eat that whole thing.
You know, a great team shares the same heartbeat.
That's what I believe.
Amen.
If there is one thing that has helped me as a coach, Louise, it's my ability to recognize winners, or good people who can become winners.
And that's what I see when I look at you, Tony.
And I'm talking about winning in the larger sense.
I'm talking about character.
Now, you have a strong family.
That's a great advantage.
And you're coached by a special coach.
Thank you, sir.
So, you coming'?
Where?
'Bama.
My coach, he played at Auburn.
Son...
don't you want one of these?
Sure do.
Louise, he ain't gonna get one at Auburn.
I feel sorry for those boys.
How many black players you got?
Well, we got Wilber Jackson, and he's a stud.
But I don't have white players and black players.
I have football players.
That's how I see it.
But in answer to your question, not nearly enough.
So, why do you see that changing?
Because it's time.
Are you gonna help me?
Football just hurts me
and everybody around me.
Nobody's forcing you to play football.
You know that, right?
You can walk away right now
and let the world pass on by.
But this is bigger
than football, ain't it?
Yes, sir.
Some kinda great power
been given to you, son.
I can see it in them kids' faces.
I know what they're thinking.
"A black star like you
at a white high school?
If he can do it, so can I."
That is your gift.
This is your time to do as you choose.
And that's a lot to carry.
So tell me what to do, and I'll do it.
The Good Book says
"When there is no vision,
the people perish."
That means people
can't live without hope.
They need it like they need air.
I say...
go give it to 'em.
Tony.
You all know Tony Nathan.
He set this up.
Thanks Jeff.
This is Hank.
He's got something to say.
Thank you very much, Mr. Rutledge.
We found something at Woodlawn.
Something that's bigger than winning.
It's bigger than football.
It's why we're here.
It's bigger than this rivalry.
We wanna share it with you.
We wanna schedule a meeting with
your entire team and your coach.
You think this school'll understand
what we're doing here?
They won't understand, and that's okay.
Boys.
Coach!
Shorty, Hank, what's this all about?
We finally had our first meeting,
that tent revival thing.
Jeff set it up over at the church.
I went to shut it down anyway,
'cause I thought Jesus
would make my boys weak.
Next thing you know,
I'm the first one walking down the aisle,
crying like a child,
my whole team behind me.
My whole team.
How does that happen?
You gotta see it with your own eyes.
Unbelievable.
I'm a changed man...
and I'm sorry.
Fine.
I will take it.
Ha-ha-ha-ha!
I'm glad that's over.
We are gonna do camp
a little different this year.
Yeah, just a little bit different.
You wanna do something wild,
something truly rebellious?
I like that.
I want you to do something
that's never been done before.
At least, not to my knowledge.
Prepare yourself,
you know it's a must
Gotta have a friend in Jesus
So you know that...
Wouldn't be very Christian if you stole
my playbook now, Tandy, would it?
Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!
No, it would not.
You know, I've always wanted
two things professionally:
to win a championship,
and to coach a truly great player.
You've done both, so which is better?
Rings collect dust.
That right there, that lasts forever.
Two rivals, Banks and Woodlawn,
had their fall camp together.
Both credit a spiritual
experience as the cause
for the public show of unity.
The trouble is they can't
both enter the playoffs
because they're in the same district.
Many say this rule
is unfortunate, unfair,
and should change.
Mom, I got it.
Hello, son.
I'm not leaving here until
you decide to come to Alabama.
Excuse me.
Momma!
Dear Lord, we thank you for this food
and for your provisions.
Strengthen us with it
so that we might serve you.
Amen.
And may I add, God in heaven,
help Tony see the light, Amen.
I do love corn.
Not me!
You don't like nothing!
Tony.
We all do what we do in life.
Go our different ways.
The idea of molding men,
well, that means a lot to me.
And I want you to know
that I'm here to help
no matter what choice you make.
And I think you can feel that.
Now, your momma...
showed me this.
Said it was taped to a brick
thrown into this house.
At my little brother.
He didn't do nothing.
That was all because of me.
Tony, when I was coming up here,
I passed a football field full of kids.
I saw a young black boy wearin' number 22, his head held high.
That's also because of you.
And I wanna say something, son.
You know the difference between you and these people?
They're cowards, and you ain't.
Here comes the senior tailback in his rst game of the year.
Of course, expectations are high.
Dozens of college scouts and coaches are here watching.
And, folks, the atmosphere is electric.
They all want to see what this kid can do.
Do you feel unstoppable when you run?
No, I just wanna give Jesus Christ all the glory for giving us another victory.
What do you think about Jeff Rutledge?
Best QB in the state.
Fifteen second leeway, Alabama with one time out remaining
Rutledge on a roll.
Looks down the middle, and it is...
Caught!
Touchdown!
So, Jeff, what do you think of Touchdown Tony?
I think Tony Nathan's the best running back in the country.
You've got a big game next week.
What do you say to those calling it Nathan vs. Rutledge?
Just two great teams.
Gonna be a great game.
Good luck, Tony.
Thank you.
Hey, what paper'd you say you're with? "Sports Illustrated."
The question, what happens when an unstoppable force meets an immoveable object? We're gonna find out on Friday. This is the game we've all been waiting for. The top two teams in the state facing off in a clash of titans. Both are undefeated. Both have one of the most highly ranked athletes in the nation. And because of the expected crowds, the game has been moved to the heart of Birmingham:

It's Nathan vs. Rutledge. Get those knees up. You spying out the battlefield like me, huh? How many people you think? I don't know. Heard it could be close to 20,000. Ain't never seen that many people in my life. You see the "Sports Illustrated"? Nah, man. "Faces in the Crowd," you're in there. I'm sure the Bear came and saw you, gave you the ring speech. Yeah. "You ain't gonna get one over there." Yeah, he did. You decided? Man, I don't even know. I've never made this big of a decision before in my life. Me too. Well, go where you feel like you can make the most difference. That's what I'm gonna do. It's crazy, all these people coming to see us.
What's so special about us?
We're a symbol.
We give them hope.
I ain't seen you in school.
I got suspended.
Why?
Because I wanted to.
Ain't nobody gonna
bus me to that prison.
That's the only way
I saw out, that's all.
Who's been doing this to you?
You need to leave.
Right now, please.
Go.
Touchdown Tony Nathan.
What you doing here,
digging in the trash?
Tony!
That might be your daughter,
but that's the woman I love.
Did you actually read through this?
Come on.
Parents are calling it
abrasive and overreaching.
I didn't force anyone to do anything.
You know what this is.
It's retribution.
Yes, I know, but I am
compelled to deal with it.
Look at the changes to these boys, Owen.
It is amazing to see.
It is.
But this is a public high school.
Mr. Whitehurst.
And you are?
I'm Linda, sir.
I'm a teacher.
And what is this?
It's a prayer meeting.
Prayer meeting?
The kids started it themselves Friday night
and it just hasn't stopped.
God, thank you for the change
that you've brought upon this city.
Thank you for the change that
you've brought upon this school.
Thank you for the change that
you have brought upon my life.
Are you leading this?
No, sir.
I was an atheist last week.
The kids, they're leading me.
It's spreading all over the school.
There's even a rally
tonight at Legion Field
if you want to come.
Coach is setting it up.
I just wanna thank Coach Gerelds
and his team for putting this together.
Thank you, Coach.
Would you look at this?
I mean, take a look around.
Can you believe it?
This is what happens when God shows up.
Now, a couple years back,
I went to this thing called
"The Explo '72" in Dallas.
I joined a hundred thousand
other people just like us.
Up until that point in my life,
I guess I kinda felt insignificant.
I felt like my life doesn't matter.
Then the last night of the week,
there in the big Cotton Bowl,
they shut off the lights.
And in that darkness,
Reverend Graham lit a candle.
A single candle.
I was standing in the very
back of the stadium,
but I could see that light.
And I realized that my
life is not insignificant.
My life matters.
One light became two and two became ten
and ten became a hundred thousand.
Well, people in Dallas started
calling the re department
and the police department,
saying,
"The Cotton Bowl's on fire!"
Well, you know what?
They were right.
A hundred thousand candles
burning as one.
"Time Magazine" said
that the Jesus revolution...
that's what they called us...
has a symbol.
This is our symbol.
Because there is one way.
We're not gathered here united tonight
because of the name
of our teams or of our schools,
but because of the name above all names:
Jesus.
Jesus.
One person alone in the dark,
willing to speak the truth
when it's not popular,
one person willing to speak
the truth when it is not safe,
when there is much at stake.
Look around you.
We're not alone.
This is what happens when God shows up.
Well, here he comes.
Coach, so glad you could join us.
I believe you know everybody here.
This is Brenda Halley,
lawyer from Montgomery.
Ma'am.
Why don't you take your seat
and let us get started.
Go right ahead.
Did you have an evangelist of some sort
speak to the team this year and last?
Yes.
Was this activity school sponsored?
Was it required?
Well, it just sorta happened.
It wasn't required, at least not the way that I saw.
Last year, did you recite the Lord's Prayer before and after each game?
Yes, we did.
Did you dismiss players because they didn't wanna be a part of this?
Yes, he did.
That is in outright lie.
Your son quit.
Coach, are you aware of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling on this issue?
Because you're in clear violation of it.
And whether you like it or not, you are breaking the law.
See, I think this has more to do with the color of my tailback than God.
I want you to stop all religious activities until this board has taken this matter under full review.
You mean on school property?
I mean all activities, otherwise you will be removed as coach from Woodlawn High School.
Which may already be the case after this matter has been fully reviewed by the board.
Can I come in?
You know, I had my rst coaching job when I was 22 years old.
This is the only job that I have ever had.
It's all I know how to do.
What can I do for you?
That's what I wanted to ask you.
How do you mean?
I don't like it when my teammates get hit.
Same goes for my coach.
Thank you, Tony.
I think I'm gonna get hit no matter what I do.
I got some tough decisions to make.
You once told me
that winning solves everything.
I don't know if I believe that anymore.
They do.
So, let me help you carry this.
How are you gonna do that?
By winning you a championship.
All right.
All right.
Let's go beat Banks.
Do-do-do-do do do do do
do-do-do-do do do do do
do-do-do-do do do do do
Jesus is just alright with me
Jesus is just alright, oh, yeah
Jesus is just alright with me
Jesus is just alright
I don't care what they may say
I don't care what they may do
I don't care what they may say
Jesus is just alright, oh, yeah
Jesus is just alright
You hear that, boys?
That's for you.
Use it.
Use that sound.
We need another half-hour coach.
Another half-hour?
We're getting 'em in as quick as we can.
How many people are out there?
A lot.
Coach.
Can I have a moment with my son?
There's a lot of people out there, Dad.
I know.
But they ain't here
to see Woodlawn vs. Banks.
They're here to see you.
You've given a lot of people
hope, and I'm proud of you.
Look at me.
I'm proud of you.
Win or lose, you're my son.
How do you feel?
Nervous.
Don't be.
How many people are out there?
Tony, come on.
You'll see.
We're gonna do this one way.
All right, let's do this, come on.
Tony! Tony! Tony! Tony!
All right, here we go.
Here we go.
Tony! Tony! Tony! Tony!
Tony! Tony! Tony!
One way, boys!
Let's do this!
Welcome to Legion Field
in Birmingham, Alabama,
where history is being made
here tonight.
Never before and perhaps
never again have there been
so many people to see
a high school football game.
And they're not here
just to see two teams.
They are here to see players,
and one just entered the stadium.
Number 22, Touchdown Tony.
And you can hear the cheers
for this young man.
They are deafening.
And the Banks Jets have just landed.
Here they come, led by senior
superstar quarterback,
Jeff Rutledge.
Legion Field is all
but full to capacity.
There is a line of cars still outside,
stretching as far as the eye can see,
and this crowd is continuing to build.
As a matter of fact, I've
already seen seven SEC coaches
in attendance here today.
Auburn.
They'll let anybody in.
O'er the land of the free
And the home of the brave I
Let's go, Hank.
Where we going?
To do something wild and rebellious.
Shorty!
Pray for us, Hank.
Really?
Pray for us.
What are we doing?
Giving credit where credit is due.
Let's pray.
Will you pray with me?
Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done...
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory.
For ever and ever.
Amen.
One way!
Amen.
Good luck, Coach.
Amen.
Take a look around, y'all.
Take this all in.
This is something special.
Let's go do what we do, all right?
Spider 2-Y Banana on one.
Spider 2-Y Banana on one, ready?
Hike!
Pass! Pass!
There you go!
You all right?
Good hit.
You gotta release the ball quicker.
You're holding onto it too much.
Go, go, go, go, go.
You got this.
Both teams are at a standstill,
neither one able to break through.
Rutledge drops back to pass.
Looks right, lets it fly.
A perfect spiral, a beautiful throw...
And is caught!
Finds its target at the ten-yard line,
into the end zone.
Banks is first on the board.
Touchdown!
The master of offense, Shorty White,
has willed his team through
and into the end zone.
That's okay.
Let's get it back.
Let's get it back.
Don't turn over the ball.
Positive yardage, okay?
We can break one.
You can break one in.
Halftime, and the score
remains the same.
Banks has been the only team to
find the end zone here tonight.
Coach, I know what you're thinking,
but we gotta do something.
This ain't working.
Hey, time out.
Boys, just take a breath, okay?
Just breathe.
Look around you.
Savor this moment.
Okay, Mum, I Right 25 Blast, okay?
Let's go do it.
Nathan...
What do you feel but you can't say, huh?
What do you want to say
to all of these people?
You say it when you run, Tony.
You say it when you run.
Now, this is your moment.
This is your time.
Yes, sir.
So, you go and take it.
You go and take it!
Yes, sir!
Hike!
It's to Nathan.
Nothing doing on the right side.
He'll change direction.
Shakes off the tackle.
Finds a hole.
And he's brought down
after a gain of five.
He's still up!
He's still on his feet!
He breaks another tackle.
He's moving up the head of steam.
He's past midfield.
He leaps over the linebacker
like Superman.
Heading to the far corner,
he's got one man to beat.
There he goes.
He's gone!
Touchdown, Woodlawn!
Touchdown, Tony Nathan!
Tony! Tony! Tony! Tony!
Tony! Tony! Tony! Tony!
It was amazing.
You could feel it in
the stadium all over.
Forty-two thousand fans at
a high school football game.
Not even the play-offs.
I mean, none of the tickets
were pre-purchased.
They had to send home 20,000 people.
You know,
a "National Geographic" reporter
who was coming through
even wrote about it
and he said it was undeniably spiritual.
Supernatural even.
It was life-changing for me.
It was unbelievable.
So?
So, what?
Did you win?
No, we did not.
Look, I'll have these policies ready for you first thing in the morning.
So, what's the answer?
Do you believe in miracles?
Yes, I do.
I am one.
Well, thanks for the story.
Hi! Honey!
Where in the world have you been?
You are late, mister.
The game's already started.
I just wanted to walk.
It's such a beautiful day.
All right, well, there you go, honey.
Just not today.
Okay.
Penn State and Alabama in the Super Dome in New Orleans in this ABC Sports exclusive.
Alabama...
There he is.
Ah, there he is!
There's Tony, Todd!
They call him Touchdown Tony Nathan.
He's home-grown, right in Birmingham, and he can break the long run almost anywhere at any time.
Tony Nathan.
Here comes Alabama.
Here is the offensive back field for the Crimson Tide of Alabama.
The quarterback, Major Ogilvie, is the other halfback, and Steve Whitman is the full back.
Allyson!
Did I miss anything?
Oftentimes he's the money man in this call.
Now that is Alabama football.
That was the last play of the ball game.  
It is over.  
Alabama has defeated Penn State  
by a score of 14 to 7.  
Alabama has won six times  
in the Sugar Bowl.  
The Bear goes for a ride.  
Hello?  
Hey Coach, I told you  
I'd win you a championship.  
Tony.  
Did you see it?  
I would not have  
missed it for the world.  
I am so proud of you.  
- All right, Tony!  
- Tony, you won us a big one.  
I don't have much time,  
but I wanted to tell you something.  
I'm gonna ask Johnnie  
to marry me after graduation.  
That's just great, Tony.  
Congratulations.  
How's the team this year?  
I'm not coaching anymore.  
I needed some time away from it.  
I'm selling insurance right  
across the street from Woodlawn.  
Just gives me some  
more time with my family.  
All right, I respect that.  
They're calling for me, I gotta go.  
I love you, Coach.  
I love you, too, son.  
I don't know what kind  
of insurance salesman you are,  
but you were born to be a coach.  
One of the best I've ever had.  
Someone once told me  
we all have a purpose.  
Maybe it's time to start  
living yours again.  
Gotta go.  
Look around you.
We're not alone.
This is what happens when God shows up.
We are one in the Spirit
We are one in the Lord
We are one in the Spirit
We are one in the Lord
And we pray that all unity
may one day be restored
And they'll know we are
Christians by our love
By our love
Yes, they'll know we are
Christians by our love
We will walk with each other
We will walk hand in hand
We will walk with each other
We will walk hand in hand
And together we'll spread the news
that God is in our land
And they'll know we are
Christians by our love
By our love
Yes, they'll know we are
Christians by our love
They'll know us by our love
Tonight, we're asking you,
in a moment or two
to light a candle to symbolize
that we are going to go
out of this place to proclaim a gospel
that could bring peace to our world,
that could change
all the social injustice,
and a gospel that can
transform the lives
of millions of people
on every continent.
And we're challenging
you tonight to do it.
They'll know us by our love
They will know we are
Christians by our love
By our love
Yes, they'll know we are
Christians by our love