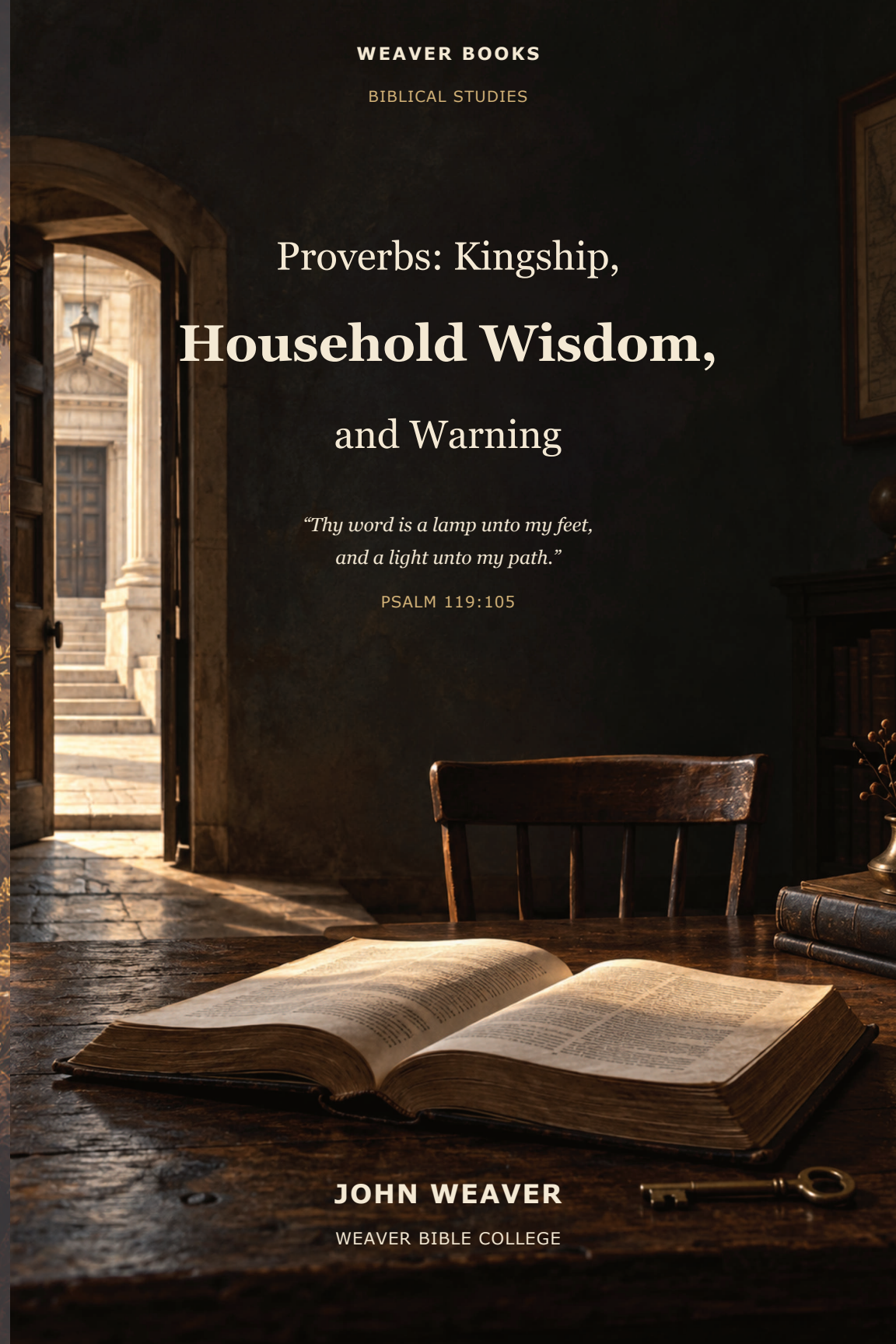


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BIBLICAL STUDIES

Proverbs: Kingship, Household Wisdom, and Warning

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105

JOHN WEAVER

WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE





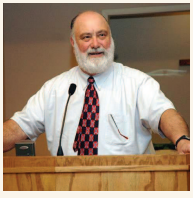
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.

PROVERBS 1:7, EXCERPT

Wisdom must govern both personal conduct and public responsibility. This Proverbs-related collection includes sermons on rulers, prayer, deception, the discipline of the mind, and decisions made under pressure. John Weaver connects these subjects with the wider testimony of Scripture, asking what attentive, discerning obedience looks like in practice.

"Without the fear of God, there is no love of the truth."

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.

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Old Testament Studies

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Proverbs: Kingship, Household Wisdom, and Warning

John Weaver

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Edited from the sermon corpus of John Weaver.

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CHAPTER 1

What Manner of People Should We Be?

June 13, 2004

Introduction: The Question of Manner

2 Peter 3:11 asks, “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?”

Think of all the principles that I have taught you over these years, and all the historical truths that I have taught you. Think also of the ancestors from whom you are descended and the heritage that has been bequeathed to us. In light of those truths, here is the question: What manner of people should we be?

Many years ago there was a preacher named Francis Schaeffer, and he wrote a book entitled How Should We Then Live? The title of that book and the truth of that book are just as applicable today as they were back then. I hope you understand that truth should make a genuine change in our lives. Truth is absolutely useless to us unless we apply it to our lives. It is not enough to believe the truth; we must

obey the truth. That is, we must actually bring our lives into conformity to the Word of God.

Our Lord asked the question in Luke 6:46: “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say unto you?” Remember, the word Lord means boss, owner, master, and sovereign. So our Lord is saying, Why are you calling me your boss, your master, and your sovereign if you are not going to obey me? Peter asks basically the same question in 2 Peter 3:11.

What manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness?

Southern people have long been erroneously characterized as lazy, slothful, ignorant, and shiftless. Yankee caricatures have stuck with us down through the years. It was William Tecumseh Sherman, General Sherman, who said, "The young bloods of the South, sons of the planters, lawyers of out towns, good billiard players and sportsmen, men who never did any work and never will." That was his caricature of the South: men who were lazy, shiftless, and worthless. It was also General Sherman who coined the phrase, "The only good Indian is a dead Indian," because he killed so many of them. Maybe it was also General Sherman who came up with the first redneck joke. I do not know. But one thing is sure: General Sherman and many Northerners castigated and despised the South. Certainly, not all Northerners did so, but General Sherman and his ilk did. All the redneck jokes, of course, are always pointed at the South.

Yet Europe recognized the greatness of the South in many ways, even during the War of Northern Aggression. The London Times wrote an article concerning the South in 1862:

"The people of the Confederate States have made themselves famous. If renown of brilliant courage, stern devotion to a cause, and military achievements, almost without parallel, can compensate men for the toil and privations of the hour, then the countrymen of Lee and Jackson may be consoled amid their sufferings. From all parts of Europe, from their enemies as well as their friends, from those who condemn their acts as well as those who sympathize with them, comes the tribute of admiration. When the history of this war is

written, the admiration will doubtless become deeper and stronger, for the veil which has covered the South will be drawn away and disclose a picture of patriotism, of unanimous sacrifice, of wise and firm administration, which we can now only see indistinctly.

"The details of extraordinary national effort which has led to the repulse and almost to the destruction of invading force of more than a half million men will become known to the world. And whatever may be the fate of the new nationality or its subsequent claims to the respect of mankind, it will assuredly begin its career with a reputation for genius and valor which the most famous nations may envy."

Thus, the London Times was giving an accurate assessment of the condition of the men and women of the South.

The question is asked in 2 Peter 3:11: “What manner of people should we be?” The word manner is very important. He says, “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be?” The word manner is the Greek word potapos, used by way of admiration or singular excellency. It refers to singular excellency not only in persons, but in things. This same Greek word is used in reference to our Lord in Matthew 8:27 when His disciples, after He stilled the waves of the wind, exclaimed, “What manner of man is this?”

Here is an excellent attribute, an excellent person displaying majestic power. The word conveys the idea of how prudent, accurate, diligent, zealous, and, in every way, excellent we should be.

Manner of Conviction

As Southerners, and especially as Christian Southerners, we should live our lives in a manner that removes all doubt as to our character and our stand. We should always be men, and men of our word. As our forefathers, our word must be our bond.

What manner of people should we be? First of all, our manner must be one of conviction. Like our forefathers, we must learn to be men and women of principle. We must hold tenaciously to that which we know is right. We cannot and must not sell our birthright.

We must place morality over money, principle over prosperity, virtue over vice, and conviction over compromise.

Over and over in the Word of God, we are admonished to stand fast. First Corinthians 16:13 says, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong.” Notice: stand fast in the faith. Quit ye like men. Be strong. Philippians 4:1 tells us simply to stand fast in the Lord.

It is impossible to stand fast and hold to your convictions if you are wavering, double-minded, unsure, or uncertain of truth. I remember when I was a boy, one of my favorite programs was Davy Crockett, played by Fess Parker. Old Davy Crockett used to say, “Be sure you're right and then go ahead.” It did not matter about the circumstances or anything else; make sure you are right and go ahead. The Bible says in James 1:8, “A double minded man is unstable in all of his ways.”

Our forefathers did not hesitate, back down, waver, quake, or falter. They faced sin and wickedness, and their enemies, head-on, knowing that they were right. Let me give you a couple of historical illustrations.

When the War of Northern Aggression was breaking out, Governor Brown was governor of Georgia. In 1862, he said, "If it is ascertained that the black Republicans have triumphed over us, I recommend the call of a convention of the people of the state at an early date, and I will cordially unite with the General Assembly in any action which in their judgment may be necessary to the protection of the rights and the preservation of the liberties of the people of Georgia against the further aggressions of an enemy which, when flushed with victory, will be insolent in the hour of triumph. For the purpose of putting this state in a defensive condition as fast as possible and preparing for an emergency which must be met sooner or later, I recommend that the sum of one million dollars be immediately appropriated as a military fund for the ensuing year."

"Millions for defense, but not a cent for tribute should be the future motto of the Southern states. To every demand for further concession or compromise to our rights, the reply ought to be, the argument is exhausted and we now stand by our arms."

Governor Brown said he would unite with the General Assembly for the preservation of our rights and the protection of our liberties. He said we should be willing to give millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute. When was the last time you heard a politician talk about preserving our rights, liberties, and freedoms? If there is any further argument, simply say, the argument is exhausted; we stand by our arms. That is, we will defend our rights, liberties, freedom, and heritage.

Francis S. Bartow, a congressman from Savannah, replied to a man's arguments in favor of a compromise that would favor Georgia. Concerning the commerce of Savannah, he said, "Let desolation come, if it must upon Savannah.

“Let every ship line poured in rot. Let commerce go to ruin for a season. That he, Francis Bartow, would never give a vote that compromised the dignity or the fair fame and the honor of Georgia.” You can tell he was not a member of the Chamber of Commerce. He was willing for everything to rot before he would compromise. These men understood the truth of Proverbs 23:23: “Buy the truth, and sell it not.”

How could men like Francis Bartow, Governor Brown, and other men of that period stand so staunchly? They were men of conviction, and situations and circumstances did not matter. They simply stood for what they knew was right.

One of my favorite stories is about General Leonidas Polk, known as the Fighting Parson. He was an Episcopalian pastor, and in those days Episcopalians believed the Bible. He was at Stone’s River, the Battle of Stone’s River, with General Cheatham. As the battle was about to ensue, General Cheatham, encouraging his men to fight, gave a rousing oration to the soldiers. He ended with these words: “Give them hell, boys.”

Then it was General Polk’s time to say something to the men. He was so convicted that he should not use anything that might be construed as profanity in any way whatsoever, or slain. He merely looked at his men and said, “Boys, give them what General Cheatham says.” Where are the men like that?

Let me show you the difference between the culture of the 1860s and the culture of today. General Richard Taylor tells this story about himself. He was sent to Stonewall Jackson to help Jackson in a battle. The Yankees had their cannon up on the mountain, pointing down, and the Confederates were being slaughtered. Stonewall Jackson told General Taylor, “General Taylor, get your men up there and silence those guns.” Taylor took his men to the base of the mountain so they could climb it and silence the guns.

General Taylor was not a Christian, but rather a pagan man. When the Yankees saw his men, they moved the cannon down and tried to shoot them. The angle was such that both the cannon fire and rifle fire went over Taylor’s men. Still, the fire was so profuse that his men began dodging behind rocks and taking cover. General Taylor, out of anger, shouted, “Get up and get up that mountain.”

He said, "If you don't obey me this instant, I'll make you stay a whole hour under this damn withering fire." General Taylor sensed someone by him. He turned and looked, and there sat General Jackson on his horse right beside him. General Jackson reached over, put his hand on Taylor's shoulder, and said, "General Taylor, I'm afraid you're a very wicked man." Then he turned around and rode off.

People use that type of language today and think nothing of it. But General Jackson looked at General Taylor and said, "I'm afraid you're a very wicked man." Why would Jackson say that? Because he had convictions.

Where in the world are men and women who live by convictions? The trouble with us today is that we are such a feeling-oriented people that we live by our feelings. We don't live by convictions or principles. To demonstrate that, the average person will change his mind a hundred times a day. If you're not governed by convictions or principles, you're governed by circumstances.

No wonder everyone's up and down, up and down, up and down. Principles do not change; circumstances do. How can you stand for that which is right if you don't even recognize that which is right? But if you recognize that which is right, you have an obligation to stand and fight for it. Our forefathers understood that there are

some things, some truths, not only worth fighting for, but also worth dying for.

They were willing to die. President Jefferson Davis said, "The principle for which we contend is bound to reassert itself, though it may be at another time in another form." He was saying that they fought the war over principle, and that principle would reassert itself in a different time and form. The principles for which the South fought from 1861 to 1865 have been reasserting themselves over and over.

The question is, where are our convictions to fight for them? Do you realize that the same exact problems we are having today were the same problems the South was having before 1860 and through 1865? Our political, economic, governmental, and theological problems are exactly the same. The problems in our society today stem from the fact that these very principles for which the South fought in 1861 to 1865 are reasserting themselves today.

Might does not make right, and an issue settled by force of arms is still an unsettled issue. If we were men of conviction, we would recognize that we now have an opportunity to stand for the same principles for which our forefathers stood. The difference is that they were willing to fight and die. They were a people of conviction. May God help us to have those kinds of convictions. May we buy the truth and sell it not.

Manner of Courage

Secondly, what manner of people should we be? Our manner must be one of courage. Why are so many people fainthearted and cowardly? In Christianity, everyone seems afraid of offending someone. Yet Scripture tells us there is indeed an offense to the truth. Consider how our Lord handled this. In Matthew 15, beginning with verse 12, some people were offended by what He said. Of course, what He said was true. His disciples said unto Him, "Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying?" They were upset, mad, hurt, and offended. What did our Lord say? "But he answered and said, Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up. Let them alone.

“They be blind, leaders of the blind. And the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” When our Lord’s disciples came and said, “Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended?” our Lord’s attitude was tough stuff. They ought to be willing to submit to the truth. If they are unwilling to listen to the truth, they are going to fall into the ditch. They are blind leading the blind. I am not going to change the truth because somebody did not like it. That does not mean we should be purposely insulting. But if people are offended over truth, that is their problem, not the one who is giving the truth.

Why is it that we have no courage to stand and speak for the truth? We live today in a day of political correctness. Have you ever noticed that it is only Christianity and truth that is offensive to everybody else? They can tolerate the sodomites. They can tolerate the communists. They can tolerate the liberals. They can tolerate anybody but a Christian.

We need to learn to have courage like our forefathers. They stood for the truth even in front of their enemies and regardless of their enemies. The multitude and the magnitude did not matter. If we simply had a smattering of the courage of our forefathers, we could change this situation in America.

General Nathan Bedford Forrest had twenty-nine horses shot out from under him during the war—one of them with a cannonball. He was so far ahead of his men, chasing enemies who were fleeing left and right, that some had gotten far enough ahead to set up a cannon. When the enemies saw the cannon, they parted so it could shoot, and General Forrest came head-on into it very quickly. He turned his horse just as the cannon fired. The cannonball came right behind the saddle and literally cut his horse in two. He disentangled himself from the saddle and the fallen horse, then fought on the ground until some of his men came and rescued him.

At another time, in the Battle of Chattanooga, General Forrest was leading a charge on horseback when a bullet struck the horse in the neck and severed an artery. Blood began spurting everywhere, even into General Forrest's face. He wiped the blood from his eyes, saw what had happened, reached over with his finger, plugged the hole, and finished the charge. When he finished, he got off the horse,

removed his finger from the wound, and the horse lay down and died.

We are talking about somebody who knew how to fight and possessed a little courage. General Stonewall Jackson displayed the same quality at the Battle of Malvern Hill. Henry Kyd Douglas, the youngest staff officer on Jackson's staff, wrote about the incident in I Rode With Stonewall. Jackson had taken a liking to Douglas, and they often rode together. During the battle, they were out reconnoitering the situation when Jackson discovered a large blackberry patch full of luscious blackberries. They stopped, tied the horse, got down, and began eating. Bullets were whizzing by as thick as hornets, while Jackson calmly ate the berries.

Douglas said that finally Jackson took a large blackberry and poised it between his finger and thumb. Before putting it in his mouth, Jackson asked, “Well, if you were to be shot, what part of your body do you prefer to be shot in?” Then he ate the berry. Douglas replied, “Well, if I have a choice, I'd rather be shot in my clothes. But if it's any part of my body, I'd rather be shot anywhere except my face or a joint.” Jackson answered, as he finished the berry, “Well, I have that old fashioned horror of being shot in the back. So great is my prejudice on the subject that I often find myself turning to face the enemy's fire.”

At that moment, a bullet cut a limb in two, and one of the tied horses began dancing around. Jackson looked at Douglas and said, “Well, we probably better move on before one of the horses gets hit.” Douglas said that, looking him out at his horse, he rode off gladly, and he did not give a loving or a glancing look back.

He was just happy to be out of that blackberry patch. How could General Stonewall Jackson stand calmly and eat blackberries with bullets whizzing all around him? I will answer that in just a minute. I am showing you the courage these men had. You would be amazed to find the poetry written, and available on the internet, about some of these Southern men and their courage.

One of them was Jim O'Meara, a Confederate private. There is a wonderful poem about Jim O'Meara, though I am not going to quote it. It was May 6, 1864, the second day of fighting in the Wilderness at

Spotsylvania. General Jeb Stuart was wondering whether a line of earthworks in front of him, previously occupied by the Federals, was still occupied.

He had heard nothing from them and did not know whether they had retreated. So he asked Major Dangerfield to choose a brave man to check the earthworks. Major Dangerfield selected Private Jim O'Meara, who reported to General Stuart, came up, and saluted him.

General Stuart said, "You see that line of earthworks? What I want to know is if that line is manned or not. I want you to ride within 70 yards of it, turn, and ride along beside it. If it is manned, they will shoot at you. If you ride fast, they will shoot behind you. But I want to know if that earthwork is manned." Jim O'Meara merely replied, "All right, General, know it."

He jumped on his horse, rode within 70 yards of the earthwork, turned, and started riding parallel with it. Yankee guns began blazing left and right, and he rode very rapidly. When he was about halfway through the earthworks, a bullet hit his horse just above the nose, making only a flesh wound. Jim O'Meara liked that horse and became aggravated. He stopped, unslung his carbine, and deliberately shot at the man who had shot his horse. Then he slung his carbine back, finished riding all the way by the earthworks, turned around, and returned to General Stuart. After saluting, he said, "They're there yet, General. They're there yet."

Can you imagine someone doing that today? These men had courage. I tried to find this illustration, which I read so long ago in one of my books, but I could not find it. I am going to tell you.

There was a young boy from Georgia who wanted to join the war. His father had a good friend who was a captain in the cavalry. The boy was only about seventeen, so his father gave him the best horse on the farm. The boy’s father also raised chickens, and Dominicker chickens are known for their cowardice. They will not fight. When he gave the boy the horse, he looked at his captain and said, “Captain, I didn’t want my boy to go. He is young. But, Captain, he is determined to go, and I am going to let him go. If he ever shows the Dominicker—that is, if he ever acts as part of a coward—don’t send him back home.”

The boy stayed with the captain, who taught him all he could. Then came the time of the great cavalry charge. The captain was leading, far ahead of his men, while the enemy came head-on. Suddenly, that seventeen-year-old boy passed him like a flash of lightning, riding at the fast speed of the horse his father had given him. As he passed his captain with a saber in his hand, he shouted, “Tell Pa, I ain’t no Dominicker.”

After the battle, the captain found the young boy shot, slashed through, and dead. But he sent word to the father: He died a man. “Tell Pa, I ain’t no Dominicker.”

At First Manassas, when General Jackson received a painful wound in his hand, he still sat upon his horse, calm, cool, and collected, deliberately commanding his men. A few days after the battle, Captain John Imboden asked him, “How is it, sir, that during the battle you appeared so calm and so cool, utterly insensitive to danger, as shells burst all around you and bullets whizzed by, when you were in so much pain?”

Jackson replied, “Captain, my religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has ordained the time of my death. I do not concern myself about it, but to always be ready whenever it may overtake me.” He paused, then added, “Captain, that is the way all men should live. And then all would be equally brave.”

Did you hear what he said? “My religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has ordained the time of my death.”

"I'm not concerned about that. What I'm concerned about is to always be ready whenever that day overtakes me." It was courage like this that made these men admired by their countrymen and feared by their enemies. But where is our courage? Why do we not stand? Why do we compromise and capitulate? Why are we so fearful? Why do we tremble and quake? One reason: because we have no convictions. Our material possessions mean more to us than does the truth. The average American, the average Southerner, the average Southern Christian is more afraid of the IRS than he is of God. We are more afraid of losing our subsidies, our government subsidies, than we are of losing our freedom. We are more afraid of missing a meal or missing a paycheck than we are of missing our

rights and our liberties. When fear dominates people, there cannot be any convictions and there cannot be any courage.

Character, Conviction, and Courage

2 Timothy 1:7 spells out the plain truth: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." If God has not given us the spirit of fear, where did it come from? It might have come from the world, the devil, or the flesh, but it surely did not come from God. God does not give us a spirit of fear; God gives us a spirit of power, love, and a sound mind.

The reason we have no courage is because we have no convictions. If we had some convictions, we would have some courage.

Manner of Character

Thirdly, our manner must be one of character. What men or people should we be? Not only men and women of conviction and courage, but men and women of character. Do you realize it was their character that gave our forefathers their convictions and their courage? If you have studied history, especially the history of those who lived in the mid-1800s, one of the most prominent aspects of their lives is their character.

To me, it looks as if they had saw logs for backbones, nerves of steel, and stomachs of brass. Those people had real convictions about tyranny, despotism, and usurpation. They had real conviction concerning the denial of their rights, and the courage and character to stand against those who were trying to enslave and dominate them. These were people who would not sell their birthright for a mess of governmental pottage.

You remember the message I brought on the death of Sam Davis. Here was a young man, twenty-one years old, who would rather be hanged than betray a friend. Today, the average church member would sell out his own pastor—not necessarily for money, but from an abnormal and servile fear of government and peer pressure.

I would encourage you to read about the Scottish Covenanters. When the king kicked them out of their churches, they began to meet in the fields. Those meetings were unlawful because they did not

have a government license. So the king sent his dragoons, and many times the pastor would be murdered. When those dragoons came, oftentimes, when they asked for the pastor, one of the men would step forward and confess to being the pastor, knowing that he was going to get shot. He would do so to protect his pastor, so his pastor could keep on preaching.

Today, children are being taught to betray their parents. Husbands and wives frequently violate their covenantal oath to each other. Men and women will not keep their word, pay their bills, or honor their parents. Where in the world is the character to do that which is right regardless of the circumstances? Character is what a man is in the dark. You tell me what you would do if you knew that no one would ever find out about it, and I will tell you exactly what you are. The test of your character is what it takes to stop you. It just does not take much to stop the average person today—the average Christian.

All we have to do is talk about somebody, and they will get upset and say, "Well, that's the way you feel about it. I'll just quit." And they do. The test of your character is what it takes to stop you. Circumstances never make or break a man; they just reveal him. The battle does not make a man a hero. He was already a hero before he went into battle. The battle just revealed him. The battle does not make a man a coward. He was already a coward before he went into battle. The battle just revealed him.

What about our women? Where are our Southern women? Let me ask a question, and I will explain it. Where are the women of the homespun dress? When I say the women of the homespun dress, I am not talking about only women, but about women of character. I remember one of the first times I heard that song, "The Homespun Dress." I wept. I remember where I was.

I was riding down the road, and I wept because I saw such a disparity between the women in the 1860s and the women of today. Let me give you several stanzas of that song:

“Oh, yes, I am a Southern girl and glory in the name, and boast it with far greater pride than glittering wealth or fame. We envy not the

Northern girl, her robes of beauty rare, though diamonds grace her snowy neck and pearls bedeck her hair."

Remember what the South went through and suffered, and how they had to do without. The Southern women said, "We don't envy the Northern girl, her robes of beauty rare, though diamonds grace her snowy neck and pearls bedeck her hair." The chorus says, "Hurrah, hurrah for the sunny South so dear. Three cheers for the homespun dress that Southern ladies wear."

"The homespun dress is plain, I know, my hat's palmetto too. But then it shows what Southern girls for Southern rights will do. We send the bravest of our land to battle with the foe, and we will lend a helping hand. We love the South, you know. Hurrah, hurrah for the sunny South, so dear. Three cheers for the homespun dress that Southern ladies wear."

"The Southern land's a glorious land and has a glorious cause. Then cheer, three cheers for Southern rights and for the Southern boys. We scorn to wear a bit of silk, a bit of Northern lace, but make our homespun dresses up and wear them with a grace."

That song is saying that the women of the South would rather have a homespun dress and be plain and simple than compromise and have the lace and pearls available in the North. Women back then were gracious, loving, faithful, sacrificing, and willing to do that which was right at all times.

I have a pastor friend from Kentucky who always said Kentucky used to be known for its fast horses and beautiful women. Now it's known for its fast women and beautiful horses. You see what I'm saying about character? Where is the character of a Miriam Forrest, the mother of General Nathan Bedford Forrest?

She had several sons, and the youngest was named Jeffrey. When he was eighteen, he was still at home, but he joined the Confederate States of America Army. He came back home in his uniform, went upstairs to his room, and went to bed. Miriam Forrest always rose around four o'clock. By five, she had finished her devotions and coffee, and she sent one of the servants upstairs to get Jeffrey out of bed and tell him to take some corn to the mill to be ground. Jeffrey told the servant, "You go back down and tell mother she might as

well send one of the servants to the mill. I'm not going. I am now in the Confederate States Army." When the servant reported this, Mrs. Forrest finished her coffee, went outside, broke a good stout limb, went upstairs, and whipped the living daylights out of her eighteen-year-old son.

She said, "No son of mine will talk back to me or disobey me in my own house." Confederate soldier or no Confederate soldier, Jeffrey took the corn to the mill. We are so destitute of character today that we will not even discipline or teach our own children. Where in the world is the fatherly headship in the home? Do you realize that our homes today are usually run by the women or by the children—mostly by the children? It seems today that the average Christian cannot get anything right.

We murmur, complain, and whine, but nothing ever changes. Why? Because of the lack of old-fashioned character. We simply do not have it. When General Robert E. Lee's second daughter, Annie, died unexpectedly, Lee had been away and had not seen his family or daughters for a long time. When he received word that Annie had died, he wrote a letter to his wife.

He said, "I cannot express the anguish I feel at the death of my sweet Annie. To know that I shall never see her again on earth and that her place in our circle, which I've always hoped one day to enjoy, is forever vacant, is agonizing in the extreme. But God in this, as in all things, has mingled mercy with the blow in selecting the one best prepared to leave us."

"May you be able to join me in saying, 'His will be done.'" There was no bitterness or resentment that he could not get to his own daughter's funeral, that he was not there when she died. There was no complaining against divine providence. He just said, "God has been merciful. He chose the one best prepared. May you be able to join with me in saying, 'His will be done.'" How could Lee have that kind of attitude? The answer is because of a godly character that's made evidence in all of his words and his actions.

Manner of Christianity

Fourthly, what manner of people ought we to be? Our manner must be one of Christianity. In 2 Peter 3 and verse 11, he says, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" That phrase "in all holy conversation and godliness" is very informative. The word actually is plural in number: "what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversations." What is meant is that every part of our conduct should be holy and that every part of godliness should be attended to—in every part a holy life and in every act of godliness. We are not to be holy in part and pious in part, but attend to every branch of duty toward God and every branch of duty toward man.

Why did Lee, Jackson, Stuart, Ewell, and others shine so brightly? The answer is because of their Christianity: Christianity applied to every area, every sphere, every avenue of life. You know what we've lost in this country? We have lost the theology of applied Christianity. People come to church regularly and listen, but they never apply; they never make application. Our Lord said in John 13 and verse 17, "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them." Not happy are you if you remember them, but happy are you if you do them. You must apply them.

It was the Christianity of our forefathers that gave them their conviction, their courage, and their character. We will never recover our culture until we learn to apply biblical Christianity. We will never recover our heritage until we go back to the very foundation upon which our heritage was based. What was our heritage based upon? It was based upon Christianity. Some people may resent that statement, but I think it can be very easily proved.

Do you know why we cannot help India, that is, the country of India, on a permanent basis? Do you know why we cannot help Africa? Do you know why we cannot help Iraq? You cannot give those countries Christian values apart from Christianity. We are trying to give them a Western culture based upon Christianity—a Christian culture. Without Christianity, it will not work. Look at the millions and millions of dollars of food sent to India.

That has gone to absolute waste. Why? Because they will store that food and let the rats eat it. They will let the cows walk in, eat what they want, and defecate on the rest of it. They believe that rat or that cow is their ancestor. They believe in reincarnation and will worship those rats and cows at their own expense and to their own detriment.

You are never, ever going to change the culture of India until you change the theology of India. You will never change the culture of Iraq. We pull out of there tomorrow, and they will still be killing each other. You cannot change their culture unless you change their theology. Likewise, you will never change the culture of pagan America until you change the theology of pagan America.

We must go back to our foundation. If you desire a change in our culture, you must also have a corresponding change in theology. The reason our culture has changed is that we have left the theology of our fathers. If you want to bring back a Christian heritage, you must learn to be a godly, obedient Christian. How many changes have you seen in culture since you were a child? Unbelievable!

Our society is falling apart before our very eyes. Our civilization is drowning in sin and rebellion, and we sit back and wonder why. Then we have the gall to piously sing and say, "God bless America." May I ask you, in light of our open, blatant, ungodly, reprobate acts, individually, familially, ecclesiastically, and nationally, why in the world should God ever bless America? If we desire the blessings of God, we must learn to be an obedient, God-honoring people. We cannot be that while we are in rebellion to His Word.

Robert E. Lee said, "The Bible is the book of books. A book which supplies the place of all others and cannot be replaced." A little later on, he said, "There are many things in that old book that I may never be able to explain, but I accept them as the infallible word of God and receive its teaching as inspired by the Holy Ghost. I prefer the Bible to any other book. There is enough in that to satisfy the most ardent thirst for knowledge, to open the way to true wisdom, and teach the only road to salvation and eternal happiness."

He believed the Bible. It was the faith of our fathers—their faith in Christ and in His Word—that gave them their convictions, their

courage, and their character. Without Christianity, without the Word of God, we can never restore our heritage. The Bible says in Galatians 5 and verse 1, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.” If we have liberty, we are to stand fast in it.

Conclusion: A Call to Return

In Psalm 44, beginning in verse 1, the psalmist says, “We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days and times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thine hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arms save them, but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them. Thou art my king, O God.”

“Command deliverances for Jacob. Through thee we will push down our enemies. Through thy name we will tread them under that rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us. In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name forever.”

Go back very quickly to verse 1. Look what the psalmist said: “We have heard with our ears, O God. Our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days and times of old.” He was passed down how God parted the Red Sea, destroyed the Egyptians, and drove out the Amorites, the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Perizzites, and all the other ites. They had heard the mighty miracles and the mighty wonderings of God.

Verse 2: “How thou,” that is, how God, “didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them,” that is, Israel; “how thou didst afflict the people,” that is, the wicked, “and cast them out.” Israel “got not the land in possession by their own sword,” and “neither did their own arms save them.” Why did Israel possess that land? “But thy right hand,” God’s hand and arm, “and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.”

Now look at verse 4: “Thou art my king, O God. Command deliverances for Jacob.” God, You have done it in times past. Do it again. Lord, You are the same God; You have the same power. We have heard of all Your mighty miracles, wonders, and marvels. As You have done it for our fathers in times past, do it again for us. If we want God to do it again, we must come back to Him, His Word, in obedience and submission.

What manner of people should we be? A people of conviction, a people of courage, a people of character, and a people who preeminently demonstrate applied Christianity.

Let us pray. Father, we do ask for Your help and Your grace. Lord, as we think of our forefathers, what they went through, what they stood for, and how weak, sickly, and anemic we are, all we can ask for is mercy. Give us grace, Lord, that we may stand fast in the faith and quit ourselves like men.

May each of us determine here today that we will live by convictions. We will not give in to feelings or circumstances. We will have the courage to stand for those convictions and the character they demand, because we base each and every one upon the word of Jesus. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 2

How Not To Live Out Your Remaining Days

June 26, 2005

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Kings 20:1-19 (KJV)

In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death, and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, came to him and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed unto the Lord, saying, I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. And it came to pass, before Isaiah was gone out of the middle of the court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again and tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer. I have seen thy tears. Behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up to the house of the Lord. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years.

And I will deliver thee in this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for mine own sake and for my

> servant David's sake. And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs. And they took it and laid it on the boil, and he recovered. And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the Lord the third day? And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that he has spoken.
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> Shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees. And Isaiah the prophet cried unto the Lord, and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward, by which he had gone down on the dial of Ahaz. At that time, Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and showed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armor, and all that was found in his treasures. There was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not. Then came Isaiah the prophet unto King Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men, and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon.

And he said, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All the things that are in mine house have they seen. There is nothing among my treasures that I have not showed them. And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the Lord. Behold, the days come that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store to this day, shall be carried into Babylon. Nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee which thou shalt beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken. And he said, Is it not good if peace and truth be in my days?

Introduction: The Question of How to Live

The message I am going to bring today is entitled “How Not to Live Out Your Remaining Days.” It is a negative message, but it is undergirded with a positive. If I tell you how not to live out the remaining of your days, I am sure that you will recognize how you should live out the remaining of your days.

Look in your Bibles to the book of Ezekiel, chapter 33, particularly verse 10, and notice the question that is asked. Francis Schaeffer, who is now dead, wrote a book with this title: “How Then Should We Live?” In Ezekiel 33:10, God says through Ezekiel, “Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel. Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?”

Very obviously, if you are pining away in your transgressions, sins, and iniquities, that is not the way that you should live. The question is, how then should we live if we are not going to live in sin and disobedience? Living in sin and disobedience is not really living. It is dying. That is exactly what this verse teaches.

Almost, I would say, the people who hear this message, even those who hear it on tape—and certainly none of our people here—are not murderers or whoremongers or thieves. Yet the truth is, we all have our sins, and we all need to repent. It is amazing that, as we age, our sins become different. I heard the story about an old man who was ninety-two years old. He looked at one of the younger men and said, “Praise God. I haven’t had a desire to go dancing in years.” I can understand why he had not had a desire to go dancing in years at age ninety-two. He could not have if he wanted to. But you understand what I am saying. It is no longer the sins of youth, sometimes, that affect older people. It is the sin of pride and complacency and contentment. As we age, many times our sins differ, but they are still sins. We still have pride and comfort and even harshness.

Let me explain what I am trying to show you by the life of King Hezekiah. As you turn back to 2 Kings chapter 20, understand that, first of all, it is always bad when your country is under attack from outsiders. But it is even worse when the leader and captain of your

people, who is supposedly leading in the defense of your country, is not only sick but dying.

Hezekiah's Sickness and Prayer for Healing

What could possibly complicate matters worse? To have a prophet of God, or a preacher of God, go to the leader of the people and say, "Thus saith the Lord, you shall die. And you are certainly not going to live. Therefore, set your house in order."

Undoubtedly, Hezekiah had been sick for a little while. Like most of us, whenever we get sick, the very first thing we long for is to get well, to recover, and to get over it. How do you think it would make you feel if you were lying in your bed suffering and thinking, "I am in pain, I am in agony," and all of a sudden you were told, "You do not have to worry about this. You are going to die. You are not going to make it"? That would shatter your hopes, dreams, and plans. It would also destroy any previous encouragement you had already received.

How would you respond to such news? Just think about that. Suppose I walked up to you and said, "Thus saith the Lord. You shall die and not live. Therefore, set your house in order."

I am not Isaiah the prophet, but if you knew that I had received a message from God for you, and you knew for certain that you were going to die, how would you respond?

While it would be a blessing to know shortly before we die that death is coming, because it would give us time to get our house in order, in all probability it would also fill us with consternation. What must it be like to know and realize that your death is imminent, that you are going to die? This is not like a doctor telling you that you are going to die, because doctors can be wrong. I have known plenty of individuals whom the doctor sent home to die, yet they lived for years. This message is not coming from a doctor who could be wrong. It is coming from God Himself, who, the Bible says, holds our soul and our life in His hand.

Let me ask you another question. If you knew that you were going to die in the next two weeks, how would you live? Suppose, like Hezekiah, God gave you an additional fifteen years, and you knew

you had fifteen years. How would you use them? Would you throw them away? Would you party them away and then try to repent at the very last and prepare for death? Would you sow to the flesh and hope to reap in the spirit, which is absolutely contrary to the laws of nature and of Scripture?

If you knew that your death was imminent, would it make any difference in how you listened to the preaching of the Word of God? Would it make any difference in how you applied the Word of God to your life and conduct? God sent Isaiah to Hezekiah with this message.

"You're going to die and you're not going to live." I want you to remember something. Hezekiah was a good and godly king. He had ruled well and lived long enough to see a tremendous awakening in the land. There was a wonderful revival during the reign of Hezekiah. But good and godly men have to die just like everyone else. And God said, "You're going to die."

What did Hezekiah do? He did what any normal individual would do. He turned himself to the Lord and said, "I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I've walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart and have done that which is good in thy sight." And Hezekiah wept sore. He was praying, "Lord, basically, I don't want to die. I want to live." If I told you that you were going to die and you knew that I was right, you'd still want to live.

That's the natural instinct of self-preservation. All of us want to live. I knew of one young woman who thought she wanted to commit suicide. She drank rat poison, but after drinking it, she regretted it and told her parents. They rushed her to the hospital and pumped her stomach out, but it was too late. She died in the emergency room screaming, "I want to live. I want to live. I want to live." That is a normal, natural instinct. When Hezekiah, as good and godly as he was, found out he was going to die, he turned his face and began to pray, saying, "Lord, I want to live."

God answered his prayer quickly. "It came to pass before Isaiah had gone out of the middle of the court." He did not even get out of the building before the word of the Lord came unto him: "Turn again and tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people, Thus saith the Lord, the

God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears. Behold, I will heal thee, and on the third day thou shalt go up to the house of the Lord." Before Isaiah got out of the building, God sent him back to tell Hezekiah that he was going to live.

On top of the fact that Hezekiah now has a reprieve, God gives him additional good news. In verse 6, He says, “And I will add unto thy days fifteen years, and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for mine own sake and for my servant David’s sake.”

God's Gracious Benefits to Hezekiah

Isaiah then said, “Take a lump of figs.” They took it and laid it on the boil, and Hezekiah recovered.

Here is the additional good news: not only will Hezekiah live, but God will give him fifteen additional years. On top of that, God will destroy the Assyrians invading the land. He will defeat them, and they will leave Judah and Jerusalem alone. All Hezekiah was praying for was to live. God said, “I’m not only going to let you live; I’m going to give you fifteen years, and I’m going to get rid of these soldiers attacking you. I’ll destroy them as well.”

Turn to Isaiah 38. Verse 9 gives "The writing of Hezekiah, king of Judah, when he had been sick and recovered of his disease." This is Hezekiah rejoicing and giving the Lord praise for His goodness and mercy. But the passage I wanted is in Isaiah 37, where God speaks concerning the Assyrian army.

He says, "But I know thy abode, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy rage against me. Because thy rage is come against me, and thy tumult is come up into mine ears. Therefore will I put a hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way that thou camest. And this shall be a sign unto thee, Ye shall eat this year such as groweth of itself, and the second year that which springeth of the same, and the third year sow ye and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat fruit thereof. And the remnant that has escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward."

Then, in verse 33: "Therefore, thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, the same shall he return. He shall not come into this city, saith the Lord, for I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake and for my servant David's sake."

Now watch: "Then the angel of the Lord went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand, and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." One angel, in one night and one stroke of the sword, killed 185,000 Assyrians. When the survivors awoke, they found the majority of their army dead. What did God do?

God said, "I'm not only going to deliver you, Hezekiah, and give you 15 years, I'm going to get rid of the Assyrian army." Now go back to 2 Kings chapter 20, because God is going to give Hezekiah a sign, and it is a miraculous sign.

“And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me and that I shall go up into the house of the Lord the third day? And Isaiah said, The sign thou shalt have of the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing that he had spoken, shall the shadow go forward ten degrees or backward ten degrees? Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees.” It could get hotter, easier year and summertime, etc. So he said, “No, no, let the shadow return back ten degrees. Let the daylight go back and not forward.” And Isaiah the prophet cried to the Lord, and he brought the shadow ten degrees backward by which it had gone down on the dial of Ahaz.

God has confirmed Hezekiah. He is going to give him fifteen additional years. God has confirmed Hezekiah. He is going to deliver him from the Assyrians. And he did so.

How do you think Hezekiah used those fifteen additional years that were given to him in grace and mercy? How would you have used an additional fifteen years that had been given to you? How do you even know you have fifteen years left?

The Bible declares, in Job 14, verses 4 and 5: “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.” No man can purify himself.

No man can better himself in his own self. But listen to the rest: “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee. Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass.”

God has not only ordained the day of our birth; He has ordained the day of our death. He has appointed us the number of our months. He has given us a boundary that we cannot pass over. The Bible in Job 7 and verse 1 asks the same question concerning man: “Is there not an appointed time to man upon the earth?”

"Are not his days also like the days of a hireling?" Certainly there is an appointed time for man upon the earth. Everyone in this room knows that you are not going to live forever. You know that you are going to die, but you do not know when. In Psalm 68:20, the Bible says concerning God, "He that is our God is the God of salvation, and unto God our Lord belong the issues from death." So unto God alone belong the issues from death.

The mere fact that you and I are allowed to live another day, another week, or another year is due only to the grace, mercy, and compassions of God. When we assume that we are going to live to a ripe old age, in reality we are presuming upon the mercies of God. Lamentations 3:22–23 says, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we're not consumed, because His compassions, they fail not. They're new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness." Why is it that you live through the night? Only because of the mercies and compassions of God. Had His mercies, His compassions, and His faithfulness not been there, you would never have made it through the night.

That is why to assume that we are going to live to a ripe old age is really to presume upon His mercy. The question is, how would you and I respond to the graciousness of God in allowing us to live another day, another week, another month, or even another year?

The title of this message was "How Not to Live Out the Remainder of Our Days." Do you know how Hezekiah responded to God giving him an additional fifteen years? God was gracious to Hezekiah. He said, "Lord, I don't want to die, I want to live." God said, "Okay, I'm going to let you live. I'm going to give you fifteen more years. Plus, I'm going to get rid of the Assyrians for you."

Hezekiah's Prideful Response

That should be enough to cause rejoicing constantly and continually. But look at what the Bible says in 2 Chronicles 32, beginning with verse 24: “In those days, Hezekiah was sick to the death and prayed unto the Lord, and he spake unto him, and he gave him a sign. But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him, for his heart was lifted up, therefore was wrath upon him and upon Judah and Jerusalem.”

Look at verse 25 again: “But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him.” God was gracious, kind, and merciful to Hezekiah. What did Hezekiah do? He repaid God’s graciousness and kindness with sin and disobedience. That is absolutely phenomenal.

I like the word “benefit.” Whenever I read it, I cannot help but think of Psalm 103:1, where David said, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, and forget not all his benefits.” One of those benefits, listed in verse 3, is “who forgiveth all thy sins and healeth all thy diseases.” Good health is indeed a benefit from God. Deliverance from death is a benefit from God.

Now, I want to make something extremely plain. Hezekiah did not become a whoremonger, murderer, or thief. All he did was lift his heart up in pride—not only over what God had given him and done for him, but also because of the attention the world was going to give him.

Look at 2 Chronicles 32, beginning with verse 27, which shows his pride over his possessions: “And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honor, and he made himself treasuries for silver and for gold and for precious stones and for spices and for shields and for all manner of pleasant jewels. Storehouses also for the increase of the corn and wine and oil, stalls for the manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks. Moreover he provided him cities and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance, for God had given him substance very much. The same Hezekiah also stopped the upper watercourse of Gihon and brought it straight down in the west side of the city of David, and Hezekiah prospered in all his works.” Here was a man

who had an exceedingly abundance of wealth, all kinds of works, and all kinds of things in which he could rejoice.

And that's exactly what he did, but he did so in a proud, arrogant way rather than a humble way. Look back in verse 25 again. "But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him." And here's his sin: "for his heart was lifted up." Now, here's the sentence: "Therefore, there was wrath upon him and upon Judah and Jerusalem." Let me ask you a question. I don't know if this thought has hit you yet. Why would wrath be upon Judah and Jerusalem for the sin of pride in Hezekiah's life? That's a good answer. He was a leader, but it was more than you can imagine. Let me explain it to you.

Look in verse 26. The Bible has already told us that Hezekiah did not render to the Lord for the benefit that God had given him: "Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah."

Hezekiah had lifted himself up in pride. Judah and Jerusalem did as well, and they repented of their sin. Here is the important point: repentance does not negate reaping the consequences of your sin. Hezekiah repented, but the sin had already been committed. The damage had already been done. The seed had already been sown. Remember in 2 Samuel chapter 24, when David committed a sin in numbering the people? Did David repent? Yes. But 70,000 soldiers still died.

Let me give you a sound illustration or two. This is a very important point. I want you to listen carefully. Suppose Ed Wolfe and I went out together, went into a bar, and got drunk. Then we got mad at each other and got into a fight. In the fight, I knocked out his eye, and he knocked out two of my teeth. Would God forgive us for getting drunk? Yes. Would God forgive us for getting into a fight and getting mad with each other? Yes. Does that mean his eye is replaced or my teeth are replaced? No. We still have to reap and carry the consequences of our sins. Just because God forgives us does not necessarily mean that we do not reap the consequences of our sin.

The truth of the matter is this: most people want and desire repentance. But what they really want is not merely forgiveness and turning from their sin; they want God to save them from reaping the consequences of their sin. That is not going to happen, for he that sins must suffer. What does the Bible teach us? The way of the transgressor is hard. Certainly, we are not going to be reaping eternal judgment. That is not what I am talking about. I am talking about simply reaping what we have sown in this life.

You and I cannot do wrong, cannot sow to the flesh, and expect to reap in the spirit. Forgiveness does not cancel out the consequences of our actions. Do you not remember that? God may forgive you; you may repent and never do it again. But Ed still lost his eye, and I still lost my teeth, even though God's forgiveness.

Now let me ask you: in what area did Hezekiah allow pride to come into his life and become his downfall? It was in the matter of the Babylonians, who were seeking a political alliance with Hezekiah. The Bible specifically says that this was a test for Hezekiah. Look in your Bibles at 2 Chronicles 32:31. What has God graciously done? He has graciously healed him and given him fifteen more years.

The Test of the Babylonian Ambassadors

God had graciously taken care of the Assyrians who were storming the city. But notice what the Bible says in 2 Chronicles 32:31: “Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon who sent unto him to inquire the wonder that was done in the land, God left him to try him that he might know all that was in his heart.”

The word “try” literally means to test, to try, or to prove. God was testing the sincerity of Hezekiah’s desire to live, serve, honor, and obey Him. “Oren Hezekiah, you've turned yourself to me. You have told me that you want to live and that you want to serve me and to honor me and you want to be obedient. Well, here's the matter of these Babylonian ambassadors. I'll just test the sincerity of your desires and the sincerity of your obedience.”

The king of Babylon had sent a letter and presents to Hezekiah, and those presents were undoubtedly of great value, not some insignificant trifle. Second Kings 20:12 says, “At that time, Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick.” If the king of Babylon and Hezekiah had not previously been friends, the king of Babylon obviously wanted to be friends with him now. He had heard not only of Hezekiah’s sickness and healing, and of the sun going backward ten degrees on the dial of Ahaz, but also of the Assyrians’ defeat.

When the Babylonian ambassadors came, “Hezekiah hearkened unto them.” He listened to them. In Isaiah 39:2, describing the same ambassadors, the Bible says Hezekiah “was glad of them.” He was happy not merely to receive the present, but to have the ambassadors themselves. Attention was being lavished upon him; he was the center of attention—a man miraculously cured, given a supernatural sign, and delivered from an invading army. Why, then, would the king of Babylon want a friendship or alliance with Hezekiah?

There were three reasons for the Babylonians’ interest in Hezekiah. First, there was a religious reason. The Babylonians worshiped the sun. When the sun went backward ten degrees on Hezekiah’s dial, what did they assume? Their god had done a great honor to King Hezekiah, and therefore they intended to honor Hezekiah themselves.

Would you not want to be friends with someone whom you perceived to be a favorite of heaven, or a favorite of the gods? Of course you would. If David had every one of his prayers answered instantly and immediately, he could not get rid of me. I would be buddy-buddying with him everywhere, wanting him to pray for me in many areas. That is normal selfishness. When the Babylonians saw what they perceived as the blessing of heaven from their god upon Hezekiah, they wanted his friendship.

Secondly, there was a civil reason. The king of Babylon was in the process of revolting from the king of Assyria. At this time, the Babylonians were under Assyrian dominion as well; you can read about that in 2 Kings 17:24. Remember, it was at this time that God

smote the Assyrians—the passage read earlier from Isaiah 37—and killed 185,000 of them in one night. It was in the best interest of the king of Babylon to have a civil agreement with Hezekiah. Hezekiah was not only the favorite of heaven, but his prayer had been answered against the Assyrian forces.

The king of Babylon was thinking, "I could not have a more powerful ally than that." Thirdly, there was a military reason. The letters Hezekiah received undoubtedly contained congratulations for his healing and for deliverance from the Assyrian armies. In all probability, they also proposed a military alliance. The Babylonians were revolting from the Assyrians and did not want to face them alone. If Hezekiah's God had already defeated them once, He would certainly be a good ally.

But remember: it was not Hezekiah who defeated the Assyrians. It was God. God said, "I'm going to put my hook in his mouth. I'm going to take him back the same way that he came. He will not shoot an arrow against Jerusalem. He will not cast a mount against Jerusalem. I will destroy him."

What did Hezekiah do? He showed the Babylonians everything: all of his treasures, all of his armory, all of his warlike stores. His motive evidently was that the Babylonian ambassadors might be more induced to prize his friendship, value his arms, and esteem him as a powerful ally. Have you stopped to think about this? Undoubtedly, it was in the best interest of the king of Babylon to be friends with Hezekiah, but it was not in Hezekiah's best interest to be friends with the king of Babylon. Why would you want friendship with the king of Babylon, who was a heathen idolater, when you already had friendship with the sovereign King of heaven and earth? What possible good could the Babylonian king do for Judah and Jerusalem and Hezekiah? None.

2 Kings 20:13 says, "And Hezekiah hearkened unto them and showed them all the house of his precious things, the silver and the gold and the spices and the precious ointment and all the house of his armor and all that was found in his treasures. There was nothing in his house or in all his dominion that Hezekiah showed them not." Hezekiah was courteous to a fault. It was his duty to be civil to them and his responsibility to receive them with the respect due to

ambassadors. I understand that. But his pride and ambition drove him to be courteous and revealing to a fault.

Certainly he knew that they were idolaters, and yet he became intimate with them. He desired a confederacy with them, granted them all that they came for, and was more open and free with them than he should have been. He did not stand at all upon his own guard. Can you even conceive of this? Why would I, if I had millions, show everything I had to people I did not know—especially when I knew they were heathen and idolaters and might try to steal from me? Why would I be so insane as to do something like that? Pride. You do not think they are going to steal from you. You think they are simply going to value your friendship and value you for what you are and for what you have. Now, let me emphasize something.

Do you realize that Hezekiah did what most of us do all too often? He said too much, talked too much, showed too much, and divulged too much. I have been in airports and so many other places and gotten into conversation with perfect strangers. It is unbelievable the personal, private information that they share openly and willingly with you, though you do not know them from Adam's house cat.

People do that all the time. It really is nobody's business but yours what God has given to you or what God has done for you. You may praise Him and be thankful, but you have to use common sense and guard yourselves. In this day and age, when you are so vulnerable to persecution, especially from bureaucracies, remember the three rules for dealing with a bureaucrat: shut up, shut up, and shut up.

We hang ourselves so many times with our own mouth. That is exactly what Hezekiah did. He either showed them everything, or he had everything shown to them. James 1:19 says, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath." Weigh your words, and do not speak unless you need to.

Why would Hezekiah desire to have a covenant relationship with a heathen prince when he was already in a covenant relationship with the Sovereign of the Universe? What honor or dignity could this heathen prince add to Hezekiah? The answer is absolutely nothing and absolutely none. Yet, in his pride and arrogance, Hezekiah

showed them his palace, his treasures, his armory, and everything they wanted to see, so that they might report to their master what a great king he was and tell him that he was worthy of all the honor and esteem they were giving him.

That is pride. That is arrogance.

Now, let me tell you what is not said. It is not said that he showed them the temple. He may have, but the Bible does not say it does—or that he did. It is not said that he showed them the temple, the book of the law, or the manner of worship he gave to the one true and living God, in order that he might witness to them and convert them to the true religion.

Isaiah's Rebuke and Judgment

Hezekiah had a perfect opportunity to introduce the Babylonians to Isaiah, who was his greatest treasure. In fact, Isaiah had to come to the king and ask, “Who were these men, and what have they shown them?” Hezekiah did not show them the worship, the law, the temple, or the prophet Isaiah, lest he offend them or give them an affront. After all, they were heathen and idolaters. He was trying to gain the pride, applause, and recognition of men instead of giving praise and honor to God. It became a sin to him, just as it does to us, when we prefer the favor of men to the favor of God.

In 2 Kings 20, beginning in verse 14, Isaiah gives him a very strong review: “Then came Isaiah the prophet unto King Hezekiah, and said unto him, What said these men, and from whence came they unto thee? And Hezekiah said, They are come from a far country, even from Babylon. And he said, What have they seen in thy house?” What an interesting question: “What have they seen in thy house?” Hezekiah answered, “There is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown.”

Let us ask that question: What have they seen in your house? Everything except what they should have seen. They did not see a godly, obedient, humble servant of the one true living God who wanted to honor and glorify Him above everything else. In his pride, Hezekiah showed them everything he had, and his judgment was

that everything he had would be taken from him and given to Babylon, even his sons.

Do you realize that pride causes most of us to lose our own children and possessions? It is amazing how we will not repent, even toward our own family. We will not apologize or do what is right. Why? Pride. No wonder the Bible says, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” Proverbs 29:23 says, “A man's pride shall bring him low.” How much more can you lose than to have your family destroyed and your possessions stolen and taken away from you?

Hezekiah's selfishness reaches its apex in 2 Kings 20. Isaiah tells him, “And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.” That means his line is going to cease. Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, “Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken.” That is, I will submit to it. That is good. But look at what else he said: “Is it not good if peace and truth be in my days?” What about peace and truth in the days of his children? What about peace and truth in the days of his grandchildren? Who was Hezekiah interested in? Only himself. Selfish, prideful. Do you realize this is precisely the trouble with America today?

We do not think far enough ahead to prepare ourselves for anything. We are not dominion oriented or future oriented people. We live for the here and now. Let our kids grow up for themselves. Let our grandkids be slaves. We do not care, just so we have our six-pack, our clown TV, and our boat. Is it not good that there is not peace? Is it not good that I am comfortable? Do not worry about my children.

They may be made eunuchs. They may be heathen idolaters. It does not matter about them. That is the attitude of the average American and, unhappily, the average professing American Christian. I am telling you, folks. Hezekiah did not render to the Lord for the benefit which he received. This lesson is definitely how not to live out your days. You do not live them in pride and selfishness and disobedience and sin and rebellion.

Application: Living Prepared for Death

What if God revealed to you that you only had a short time to live? Two weeks? Two months? Even a year? Would it make any difference as to how you listened to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God? Would it make any difference as to how you applied the Word of God faithfully? Would it make any difference as to how you changed your life? Let me give you the impetus for this message. Here is what started me thinking about 2 Kings chapter 20.

Alice and I were recently in a meeting in another state. And I saw a friend whom I had not seen in years. And it was a wonderful opportunity to fellowship again, to reminisce, to think about things, and we had a wonderful time doing that. But during that meeting, and I remember particularly the messages that I preached, they were pointed, they were powerful, and they were plain. And two weeks after the meeting, I got a phone call that my friend had died with a massive heart problem.

And the thought hit me: If he had known that he was going to die, would he have listened more intently? Would he have been more attentive to the Word of God? Would he have said, "I really need to apply that to my life and apply that to my life right now"? In two weeks, he was dead. How many weeks do you have left? The truth is, you do not know. You may not even have two weeks. The Scripture says in Hebrews 9:27, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that the judgment."

The truth is, everyone sitting in this room is going to die. God has fixed the date of your death exactly as He fixed the date of your birth, and you cannot escape your date with death. The question is, how will you use the remaining time that God has given you? It does not matter whether you have two hours, two days, two weeks, two years, or twenty years. I do not know how much longer time I have, nor do I know how much longer time you have.

If God gives us one more day, we ought to use it for Him and not be proud, arrogant, boastful, and disobedient. None of us knows when. Therefore, it is best to always be prepared to die.

Practical Exhortations and Conclusion

Now let me make some applications. The first is this: Do you realize that in Scripture we are not only commanded to take heed what we hear? Mark 4:24. We are also commanded to take heed how we hear. Luke 8:18. God says, take heed what you hear, but He also says, take heed how you hear. If you are listening to His Word with your mind wandering, laughing and playing, and nothing is filtering in, what is He saying? You had better take heed how you hear.

Throughout the New Testament, our Lord says, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Here is my question: Do you really, genuinely listen attentively to the Word of God? Do you make application of the Word of God to your heart each time it is read and expounded? What would you change today about the way you listen, the way you heard, and the way you applied the Word of God if you knew that you were going to die in two days?

We need to take heed not only what we hear, but how we hear. We also need to watch our own spirits, especially when we are showing our friends our possessions and declaring what we have gotten, that we be not proud of them in the sense that we attribute them to our own efforts and work. When we look upon our possessions and enjoyments, we must do so with humble acknowledgement of our own unworthiness and thankfulness to God, who in His grace and mercy put us in the position to have them, gave us the ability to work for them, and the discipline to keep them.

It is a great weakness, and I might add a great sin, for men to value themselves more highly than they ought. In Romans 12 and verse 3, the Apostle Paul wrote: "For I say through the grace of God, given to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God has dealt every man the measure of faith." What did he get out of his mouth? Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. If you are going to think of yourself, think soberly—that is, think accurately.

How vain and useless would it be for me to advertise, "Come hear John Weaver in concert. I'll be singing songs of the past and songs of the present." I know you are laughing because you know I cannot

sing. But I have known plenty of people who could not sing who thought they could. I know plenty of people who think they can do a lot of things when, in reality, they cannot do one thing.

It should satisfy us to have the favor and blessing of heaven upon us. We do not need the praise and adulation of the world. If we are not content with God's blessing upon us, certainly we are not going to be content with man's blessing upon us. I would much rather have favor with God than favor with man.

We must always expect to be called into account for the workings of our pride, even though it is a secret pride. Do you realize that over and over Scripture says you are to do this lest your heart be lifted up?

Deuteronomy chapter 8, beginning with verse 17, says, "And thou say in thy heart, My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth." But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers as it is this day.

If you have something, I have news for you: God gave it to you. We cannot pretend that everything we have is the product of our own hands. You may say, "But Brother Weaver, I worked faithfully and earnestly." I know that. But if God did not bless that work, you would never have prospered. And if God did not give you that work ethic, you would never have done it to begin with.

You know what the Bible says in Micah 6 and verse 8? "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God." To walk humbly with thy God means recognizing that he is the Creator and you are the creature; he is the Father, and you are the child; he is the Master, and you are the servant; he is the Lord, and you are the slave.

One last point is this: What did Isaiah tell Hezekiah? "Thou shalt die and not live. Set thine house in order." The truth is, we know we are going to die. Our houses should be set in order spiritually, financially, emotionally, mentally, and physically. In other words, we must make preparations to die so that, when we do so, it will be

pleasing and honoring to the Lord. Some of you do not have a will. You do not have a trust. Let me tell you something, folks.

What little bit I have, I do not want the state to have. I do not want a probate judge telling my family where things are to go. I want to make sure whatever God gives me continues in the ministry for His honor and His glory, and in my family.

I am just saying, folks, we have got to understand that we are going to die. No one is prepared to live until he is prepared to die. We cannot live out the remainder of our days in disobedience and sin, pride and rebellion. I hope God gives me a long life; I pray so, but I do not really want a long life. I want life with quality. Whether God lets me live to be ninety, lets me live to be one hundred, or takes me next week, I still want to be ready. If God allows me to live to be ninety, I want to be just as prepared tomorrow as I would be then if I knew I was going to live to ninety.

You can never be prepared to die until you come to Jesus Christ in faith and repentance. Jesus Christ is not only salvation; He is the only salvation. There is none other than Him.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask that You help us and teach us and speak to our hearts. Help us to see how not to live out the remaining of our days. May we not be full of pride, selfishness, wickedness, and disobedience. But may we walk humbly with Thee, recognizing that every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from the Father above, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

Help us, Lord, to consider this message, that we do not know how much longer we have and that we must be holy, obedient, and godly now, and that we must come face to face with Jesus Christ now. As Scripture does say, “Behold, now is the day of salvation.” Lord, I pray that You will speak to our hearts. Make us holy and godly. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Thinking of the LORD

Part One

December 31, 2006

Introduction: The Importance of Thinking About the Lord

Open your Bibles, if you would please, today to the book of Malachi, Malachi chapter 3, verses 16 and 17. Let me tell you in advance that this is going to be a two-part message. Not necessarily that I will be dealing with this same text next week—I will be dealing with a different text—but it is two parts in the sense that today the subject is thinking of the Lord, and next Lord's Day it will be the Lord thinking of me. So I want you to look closely now in Malachi chapter 3, verses 16 and 17. Scripture says, "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels. And I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

Let me begin today by asking you several questions. The first one is simply this: Do you ever think about the Lord? If not, may I ask, why not? And if you do think about him, the question that automatically arises is, how often do you think about him? Another question that could be asked is, what do you think about him? And do you think about him in biblical terms?

It is true that we have lost the art of meditation. I probably need some time to bring just a study on the doctrine of meditation. By meditation I am not referring to the unbiblical and ungodly Eastern meditation where one simply sits cross-legged and concentrates on his navel. That is not what I am talking about at all. I heard one person say that he tried that one time, and all he found was lint. But that is not meditation.

The word meditation in the Bible actually means to roll the Word of God over and over in your mind. The word actually means to choose the good, just like a cow when she ruminates: she brings back up what she has eaten earlier, then chews that cud and tosses it over and over in her mouth. Likewise, that is what we are to do with the Word of God. We are to think and meditate upon our Heavenly Father.

Biblical Meditation Defined and Contrasted

There is another word for meditation. It has the force, literally, of musing. You will find the word muse in the Bible. The word muse literally means to think, to meditate, to contemplate, to analyze, and to consider.

When you put an alpha, or an A, in front of the word muse—and, by the way, in front of most Greek words and some Hebrew words—the alpha negates the word. Muse means to think, analyze, and consider. When you put the alpha in front of it, you have amuse, which means not to think, not to consider, and not to analyze.

Now you understand why television, the theater, and amusement parks, or fun parks, are referred to as amusement: they require no intellectual powers to attend them. You are not thinking, musing, considering, or analyzing. You are amusing yourself.

There are a number of Scriptures in the Bible that deal with meditation. In Psalm 5 and verse 1, David said, "Give ear, O Lord, and consider my meditation." In other words, Lord, listen to me and consider my meditation. In Psalm 19 and verse 4, David said, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer." Note what he said: let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, or my mind, be acceptable in thy sight. Again, in Psalm 104 and verse 34, David said, "My meditation of him, of the Lord, shall be sweet. I will be glad in the Lord." David is thinking of the Lord. He says, My meditation of him shall be sweet.

The questions I asked at the very beginning of this message are important. In light of these verses on meditation, do you think of the Lord? How often do you think of the Lord? And what do you think of the Lord when you think of the Lord? These are important questions. Let me show you another reason why they are important: consider the opposite of what is true concerning the unconverted. Now watch this.

The Contrast Between the Godly and the Wicked

In Psalm 119, verse 97, David says, “O how love I thy law! It is my meditation day and night.” Here is David, a child of God, a Christian, saying, “Oh, how love I thy law. It is my meditation day and night.” He is saying, I am thinking of you; I am thinking of your word; I am thinking of your Lord, of your law.

But in Psalm 10, verse 4, where God condemns the wicked, He says, “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God. God is not in all his thoughts.” Here is David on the one hand, saying, “O how love I thy law, it is my meditation day and night,” and on the other hand, the wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek God. God condemns him and says, “God is not in all of his thoughts.”

There is quite a contrast between the godly and the ungodly. One attribute of the godly is that he thinks upon the Lord; one attribute of the ungodly is that he refuses to think upon the Lord.

In Psalm 14, verse 1, and Psalm 53, verse 1, many of you could quote the verse: "The fool in his heart says there is no God." But this is not necessarily a statement of atheism. It is not simply that the fool is saying there is no God. The force of the passage is: No God for me. I do not want Him. I do not recognize Him. I do not need Him. I will not have Him. No God for me. I am my own lord.

Whatever God condemns in the wicked—"God is not in all of his thoughts"—the opposite is commended for the saints: God should be in all of our thoughts.

God in All Our Thoughts: Practical Integration

A multitude of Christians might say, "Wait a minute, pastor. I can't think of God twenty-four hours a day. I've got work to do, things to do, and a schedule to keep. It's impossible for me to think of God twenty-four hours a day." By the way, it is impossible. You could not sit down and concentrate on the Lord twenty-four hours a day. That is true. But that does not mean God cannot be in all of your thoughts. Scripture is not necessarily teaching that we must sit and think about God twenty-four hours a day. It teaches that God is to be in all our thoughts. What does that mean?

Remember 2 Corinthians 10:5: "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Every thought is to be brought into obedience to Jesus Christ.

What that means is simply this: God is to be in all our thoughts. You may ask, "Brother Weaver, I don't understand this. How can you say that it is impossible for a man to sit down and concentrate on God twenty-four hours a day, and yet say God can be in all our thoughts?" It is simple. Whenever you get a glass of water and drink it, could you not also think of Christ, who is the living water, and thank Him for being the true water of life? Whenever you eat a piece of bread, can you not think that Jesus Christ is indeed the true bread of life, according to John chapter 6?

It was Stonewall Jackson who said, "I never put a glass of water to my lips without thanking him who is the living water." He also said, "I never send a letter without asking God to bless the one who

receives the letter." Isn't that amazing? In other words, all God is saying is that He can be in our thoughts.

Thinking of the Lord does not require us to sit down and concentrate upon Him twenty-four hours a day. There are a multitude of things that we have to think about: work, our mates, our children, and all the things that we have to do. Yet we can think about those things in terms of the Lord and scriptural truth. Whether we or our loved ones are sick, we can still think about those things in light of the Lord.

The Danger of Forgetting God in Prosperity

Alice can tell you that there was a doctor in a neighboring county—I'm not going to say which county—who was basically a good doctor. He really was. But he was very arrogant and very lost. He walked into the room where prayer was being made for a woman about to undergo surgery. We asked the Lord for protection and blessing upon her, and the doctor said, "You ought to be praying to me. I'm the one doing the surgery." A short while later, that forty-something-year-old doctor dropped dead. You can think about the Lord. You can think about our need of Him.

Whether it is surgery, sickness, finances, or family, it does not matter. God said in Jeremiah 22 and verse 21, "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity. But thou saidest, I will not hear. This has been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyest not my voice." God spoke to them in their prosperity, but they said, "I will not hear."

If we are unwilling to hear God, and unwilling to think of Him in times of prosperity, ease, and comfort, God can arrange circumstances so that we have to think about Him in times of persecution, distress, oppression, and tyranny. He can work it out where we will really have to call upon Him. He can arrange the adversity that we need just to force us to think upon Him.

Turn your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 12 and look at verse 5. This is a very powerful verse. Look what God asks: "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou

trustest, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of the Jordan?"

God says, if you are trying to run with footmen—that is, you are running with other men who are running—and those footmen weary you, so that you cannot hold up, hold out, or keep up, what in the world is going to happen to you when the horses come along? Then He says, if in the land of peace, where you trust, they weary you—in other words, if you become weary when you have peace, comfort, and safety—then how will you do in the swelling of the Jordan? The swelling of the Jordan speaks of flood time, when a lot of things are destroyed. So God says, What are you going to do then?

The easy thing is to learn to think about God in times of prosperity, in times of peace and comfort and security. If we are not used to thinking about Him in those times, and He brings on persecution and war, what are we going to do? If He has to force us to think about Him, He can arrange those things in order to force us to think about Him.

Now I want you to go back to Malachi chapter 3, because that is our text, and I am going to show you two points from this wonderful text. But I want you to see the context. Let us look first at verses 16 and 17 and read them again. Malachi 3:16.

Context of Malachi 3:16-17: Judgment and Apostasy

“Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another. And the Lord hearkened and heard it and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, said the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels. And I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”

Remember that you must always consider the context when you look at a text. You must understand the context in which those verses appear. To get the immediate context, begin in verse 5. God says to Israel, “And I will come near to you to judgment.” What is God about to do? He is going to judge the people.

“I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against the false swearers, and against those that

oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts." What is God promising? Judgment—judgment upon those who violate His law. He says, "For I am the Lord, I change not."

"Therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed. Even from the days of your fathers," Israel had gone away from His ordinances and had not kept them. Yet God says, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts." But they said, "We will not return." Then He asks, "Will a man rob God?" They had robbed Him in tithes and offerings. They were cursed with a curse, even the whole nation. God commanded, "Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts."

He promised that, if they obeyed, He would open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing that there would not be room enough to receive it. He would rebuke the devourer, preserve the fruits of their ground, and keep their vines from casting their fruit before its time. "And all nations shall call you blessed," if they obeyed Him, turned, and repented; they would be a delightsome land. Yet the Lord continued, "Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord."

Yet you say, "What have we spoken so much against thee?" You have said, "It is vain to serve God. And what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered. Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another.

I want you to notice this. In the context of verses 16 and 17, you have the context of judgment against people who despise God. They refuse to obey Him, honor Him, and acknowledge Him. By the way, I am not preaching on tithes today, but do you realize tithing is an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty? It is saying, "God, I recognize that You have given me everything I have." But these people were saying, "It is useless to serve God. It is vain to get up early to serve Him. God is of no importance to us." Because of their rebellion, wickedness, and sins, God was bringing judgment against them.

Now understand the question: In light of apostasy, contempt of God, and disregard for His worship, service, and ministry, what can the faithful do? James 4:8 says, “Draw nigh to God, and he'll draw nigh to you.” But the opposite is also true. If you forsake the Lord, the Lord will forsake you. Scripture says this over and over. You sin against Him, rebel against Him, and do wickedly; then God will judge you. But “draw nigh to God, and he'll draw nigh to you” is exemplified in Malachi 3:16-17.

The Reaction of the Saints: Speaking Often and Thinking on His Name

I want you to think about this. There are two points I want you to see today. The first is the reaction of the saints. When you look at verses 5 through 15, all you see is apostasy, tyranny, oppression, wickedness, and the judgment of God falling upon a disobedient people and a rebellious country. You know, that almost rings true to today, doesn't it?

In light of the circumstances in which we live today, what are we to do? What is to be our reaction to what is going on around us? Verse 16 gives us the reaction of the saints: “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another. And the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.”

Note two things in this verse. In light of widespread rebellion, apostasy, and tyranny, there was still a remnant, a group of people who feared the Lord. They saw the rebellion of the land and concluded that God's vengeance must fall upon the land and upon those people. Therefore, as corruption increased, they cleaved more closely to the Lord.

They did not forsake Him, join the wicked, or grow cold. They drew closer to the Lord. In times of persecution, trouble, apostasy, and judgment, the safest place to be is as close as possible to the Lord. You know what a wolf does? A wolf always goes after the weakest, the sickliest, and the stragglers. They are easy pickings. The world, the flesh, and the devil know that. If you begin straggling and become spiritually anemic, you are wolf bait. It is just that simple.

These saints did not throw in the towel. They did not quit, give up, give out, or lag behind. For the true child of God, persecution, oppression, tyranny, and problems will always drive the true Christian closer to the Lord. They will not drive him away; they will drive him closer. Anyone driven away because of persecution has never been a real Christian anyhow, based upon 1 John chapter 2. A real saint of God will always draw closer to the Lord.

The message I am preaching today is not a pietistic message. By a pietistic message, I mean this: I am not advocating that in times of persecution, danger, or trouble, all we do is withdraw and meditate. That is not what I am saying. I am saying that there must be meditation and careful thought, and those thoughts must be based upon biblical truth. We do have other duties and responsibilities, and we must fulfill them, but we cannot fulfill those duties and responsibilities without meditation and without thought.

They that fear the LORD speak often one with another. Why were they speaking one with another? There were undoubtedly a multitude of reasons. They were encouraging each other in the Lord, but they were also giving and receiving counsel. Most of us have never, ever understood the importance of biblical counsel. Proverbs 11:14 says, “Where there is no counsel, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.”

I do not care how hard I try; I cannot think about everything. I cannot. Even if I have one problem, I still cannot think everything about that one problem. I have to have help in my thinking. I have to have someone who has been through that problem, someone who is going through that problem, someone who knows about that problem, or someone who knows more than I do about that problem.

Therefore, in the multitude of counsellors there is safety. Proverbs 15:22 says, “Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.” If you want to be disappointed in your plans, do all your planning yourself, without help in thinking. No, you must have counsel. Proverbs 20:18 hits the nail on the head: “Every purpose is established by counsel: and with good advice make war.” Every purpose is established by counsel, and with good advice you make war.

You do not run off half-cocked or simply act on whatever you want to think. No, God says that with good advice, or good counsel, you make war. You do what you are supposed to do, but based upon biblical counsel. It is exceedingly unwise in times of danger and persecution to act without thinking and without counsel. In fact, it is unwise to act at any time without thinking and without counsel.

How many of you have backed your car out of the driveway and realized you did not even look? You were not thinking. There have been times in my life when I have gone from one point to another with something on my mind. I do not remember stopping at red lights or stop signs, or looking at railroad tracks. I did, in all probability, but I do not remember doing it. I was thinking about something else, but I was not thinking about what I was doing.

You know what the Bible says in Proverbs 21:2: “Every way of man is right in his own eyes.” Nick could determine to do something, he says, that is right. It is in his own eyes; he thought about it, and it has to be right. That is the way we think. Then someone comes along and says, “Whoa, what are you doing? That is not right. Have you considered this? Have you thought about that?” No. The Bible says in Proverbs 12:15, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes. But he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.”

So God is saying, look, they spake one to another. What in the world were they doing? They were seeking counsel and trying to encourage each other. In light of apostasy, persecution, danger, and oppression, Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is. But exhorting one another and so much the more as ye see the day approaching.”

What are we to do? We are to exhort each other, and we are to do it more frequently. As times are more dangerous and the day draws near—the judgment or the coming of the Lord, whatever—God says we are to exhort each other in the Lord.

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another and so much the more as you see the day approaching." Let us consider one another to do what? To provoke unto love and good works. You know what most of

us do as Christians? We only do half of verse 24. We provoke each other, but we do not provoke unto love and good works, and so much the more as we see the day approaching.

So what are they doing when they are speaking together? They are looking at Doc and saying, "Don't give up, don't give out, hang in there. God is going to grant us victory, God is going to deliver us. Do right!" That is encouragement. That is provoking unto love and good works.

"Yes, I would do this based upon what you have told me, based upon what I know from the Bible. It is scriptural. Let us do it." That is counsel, good advice, and provoking unto love and good works.

It is interesting, as you read through the New Testament—I can give you several examples, but Acts 4 and Acts 12 are just two of them. Read through the book of Acts. Whenever the apostles were captured, brought before the Sanhedrin, sometimes beaten, and told not to speak anymore in His name, find the first thing they did when they were released. You know what they did?

They went to the other brethren and reported all that was done. What were they doing? They were saying, "Here's what has happened. Let me encourage you. God brought us through it. He's going to bring you through it." Over and over, they did that. God is able to deliver. That's what they were saying. So they spake one to another. I believe this speaking together was not only mutual exhortation and mutual biblical provocation. They were strengthening each other's hands, and they were receiving help, direction, and guidance.

So he says that in times of persecution and apostasy, we need to speak together more frequently. Notice, if you would, back in Malachi chapter 3 and verse 16. Under the reaction of the saints, the Bible said that they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His name. They not only spoke to each other; the second thing they did was think upon His name.

Doubtless, thinking upon the Lord's name is a rare virtue, because each of us can testify how easily forgetfulness creeps over us. We

forget to pray. We forget to thank the Lord for what He has done for us—for life and breath and health and happiness. I am thankful for the life God has given me and the life God has given my wife. Yet it is amazing when someone who has been married perhaps fifty or sixty years loses a mate. I have seen people so distraught, disturbed, and distressed. I understand that; you have been together so long, it is like dying yourself. But we have forgotten to thank the Lord: "God, You let me have my mate for fifty-six years. What a blessing." Most people do not have a mate that long. While grieving, we forget to be thankful. We forget the good things and good times and concentrate only on what is happening right now.

They thought upon His name. Forgetfulness easily creeps over us, and sometimes when we forget God, we begin to think that we can sin with impunity. Go back and read Psalm 10. What do the wicked say? God does not see, or God will never know. The forgetting of God always leads to sin, rebellion, and wickedness. Once we learn to remember the Lord and think about Him in everything that we do, we will find that this is a bridle sufficient to restrain most of our lusts. They thought upon His name.

Now, what does that mean? The word for name is the word Shem. It occurs 864 times in the Bible. Adam named the animals. When Adam named the animals, he was scientifically classifying them, reading in those animals the very nature that God had given them and created them with. When he named them, he saw their nature and their attributes. He knew why they had been made.

When the Bible says they think upon the name of the Lord, it does not mean that we simply think His name may be Yahweh or Jehovah. It means that we think upon His name—His reputation, His fame, His glory, and His attributes. He is a memorial to us. When we think of the name of the Lord, we are thinking of His character, His attributes, His will, His way, and His word. We are thinking that He is the Creator, the Sustainer, the Preserver, the Provider, the Redeemer, and the Lord of Glory. We think about His will for our lives, His law, His word, and the direction He gives us.

When we think about His name, we are saying that His name is sacred to us, recognizing Him as the only true and living God. He is the sovereign God, and He has the authority to tell us what to think

and how to act. That is remembering God. The name of God is God Himself; it is thinking who God is. Thinking upon His name is vitally important because the more we think about Him, the more we perceive His character, His attributes, and His will for our lives. In the time of apostasy, corruption, and tyranny, how did the saints react?

They spake more frequently one with another, and they thought upon His name. They wanted to make sure that they had His will, His Word, and His way in their lives and whatever they did. They were not pietists withdrawing to a cave somewhere and sitting down meditating, doing nothing. They were fulfilling their responsibilities, but they were making sure they fulfilled them biblically and scripturally.

The Response of the Sovereign: Encouragement, Assurance, Affection, Protection

You have seen the reaction of the saints. Now look at the response of the Sovereign. “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it. And a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels. And I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”

There are several responses that God gives to the reaction of the saints. The first is a response of encouragement. See how the Lord treats those who speak often to one another as saints and think upon His name. The Bible says that the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him. He hearkened to their conversations, heard the meditation of their hearts, and approved, to the extent that a book of remembrance was kept before Him.

This allusion is to the books that earthly kings used to keep. One is mentioned in Ezra chapter 4, Esther chapter 2, and Esther chapter 6. King Ahasuerus could not sleep, so he called for the book to be read before him. There he found that Mordecai had reported the conspiracy of the two men who intended to kill him. He asked, “Has

anything been done for Mordecai?" Kings kept books of remembrance.

The Lord is condescending in this verse to give us an allusion after the manner of men, so that we will understand that the Lord does indeed hearken, hear, and remember. He heard when we spoke of Him and thought of Him. He fully understood and observed it; therefore, a registry was kept before Him.

What does this teach us? It teaches us that the Lord is not going to forget, but shall remember every good man, every good work, every good word, and every good thought of him and for him. They are entered under His eye. He knows them, and we should be assured that there will be a comfortable blessing and reward for those who so think about Him.

Why is the Scripture so specific when the Bible says that the Lord hearkened and heard and a book of remembrance was written? Why does God say the same thing three times? He could say, "The Lord hearkened," or, "The Lord heard," or, "A book of remembrance was written," but God says each one three times. You must understand that there is no forgetfulness in God. He bears in His own eternal mind a remembrance of all persons, thoughts, words, and actions of His people. According to Romans 2 and verse 16, even the secret thoughts of man will be revealed in that day. God is omniscient. God sees all. God knows all. God does not forget.

He does not have the afflictions of mankind. He does not come down with Alzheimer's. Why, then, does the Scripture say three times that the Lord hearkened, the Lord heard, and a book of remembrance was written? The answer is, for our encouragement.

Hebrews 6:10 says, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love which you have showed toward his name and that you minister to the saints and do minister." Notice it carefully: God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labor of love, which we showed toward His name and have ministered to the saints and do minister. If God is not going to forget our work and our labor of love, very obviously, God is not going to forget our thoughts, because it is our thoughts that motivate us to do the work and the labor.

You have to think of those things before you do them. So God is not unrighteous to forget the work, and God is certainly not unrighteous to forget the thoughts. Do you not remember those verses in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, that speak of our Lord? For instance, in Matthew 9:4 and Matthew 12:24, the Bible says, Jesus, knowing their thoughts. In Luke 6:8, the Bible says He knew their thoughts. He is not going to forget those thoughts.

Many times in the Bible, the thought is accepted for the deed. You say, What in the world are you thinking about? The thought is accepted for the deed. In the context of 2 Corinthians chapter 8, the believers were taking up a collection for the poor brethren. Have you ever wanted to give to some great need, but you did not have the money to give? It has been my lot in life many times. But look what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 8:12: "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."

What does that mean? If I see a need, and I say, Lord, I would like to give $200 for this, but all I have is $20. I do not have $200, but I will give the $20. You know what God does? He marks me down for giving $200. If there is first a willing mind, then the thought is accepted for the deed.

So God knows our thoughts. He hearkens and He hears. Therefore, we are encouraged to know that not even our thoughts are going to be forgotten before Him. Those that think upon His name: He hearkened, He heard, and a book of remembrance was there.

Then, if you look back in Malachi chapter 3, verse 17, there is not only a response of encouragement; there is also a response of assurance: "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts." I like that. They shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts. What is He declaring? He is declaring, I am going to acknowledge them. I am going to assure them that they are My people, My subjects, and My followers, and I am going to acknowledge them specifically in the day when I judge the wicked.

Hebrews 13:5 gives this promise: "For He had said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." No matter how severe the judgment

that falls on this country, or any country, God is not going to forget or forsake His people. Period. He said, “I want to acknowledge you. You are going to be mine.” The assurance becomes even clearer in just a few moments. Our Lord's words deserve attention. In Matthew 10, He said, “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father who is in heaven. But whoso shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven.” This is similar to what God is saying in Malachi 3:17, when He said, “They shall be mine, saith the Lord.” Notice what our Lord is saying: He will acknowledge those who confess Him before men, and He will deny those who deny Him before men. What is our Lord saying?

In the day of judgment, you know what I'm going to say of you? You're mine. You're mine. I'm going to acknowledge you. What assurance! God is not going to forget His people. We are His; we belong to Him. If you look in your Bibles to Deuteronomy chapter 7, let me show you why. Deuteronomy chapter 7 and verses 7 and 8. Do you know why God loved us? Here's why.

Because He chose to love us. There's nothing good in us. And here's what He says in Deuteronomy chapter 7 verse 7: “The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people. For you were the fewest of all people, but because the Lord loved you.” Why did the Lord love you? Because the Lord loved you. He just loved you because he chose to love you. And what's he saying?

He is not going to forget us. “They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts.” You remember what he said in 2 Corinthians 6, verse 18: “And I will be a father unto them, and they shall be my children.” So God responds, not only with a response of encouragement, but a response of assurance. And then go back to Malachi 3, verse 17. Here also is a response of affection. Notice what he said in verse 17: “And they shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels.”

Now, I want you to stop and think about this. My wife has some jewelry, and she keeps it separate from anything else. Why would she do that? Because she values it. It's counted her peculiar treasure. All of you women have jewelry. You do the same thing. You have

your jewelry box or your drawer, some place where you keep that jewelry. And if you men ever happen to have anything fashionable, you keep it somewhere else too. You keep it somewhere special. I want to show you what the Lord's treasure is. Look in your Bibles.

Look in your Bibles to the book of Exodus chapter 19. Exodus chapter 19. You've got to remember that God created the world and everything therein. All the cattle on a thousand hills belong to Him; the gold, the silver, everything else belongs to Him. But in Exodus chapter 19, if you look at verses 5 and 6, you'll find out what His peculiar treasure really is. Exodus 19, verse 5. Our Lord tells His people, “Now therefore, if you will obey My voice indeed and keep My covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people.

“For all the earth is Mine, and you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which I shall speak unto the children of Israel.” What does God say? You shall be My peculiar people. God said, “They shall be mine in the day when I make up my jewels.”

Think about how unworthy we are. Before our conversion and, unhappily, sometimes after our conversion, we have sinned grievously against the Lord. Think about how prayerless we are, how praiseless we are, how unthankful we are, how impatient we are, and how easily we give up and give out. Think how many times we fail. Yet God said, “They shall be mine in that day when I make up my jewels.” God still values us. He treasures us. He acknowledges us.

We have to confess that it is only Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone, who makes us worthy to be our Father's jewels. This is a response of affection: “You'll be my peculiar treasure when I make up my jewels.” But look at the fourth one, a response of protection. He says in verse 17, “And I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” And I will spare them.

Please remember the context of these verses: judgment. God is judging a sinning, rebelling, wicked, corrupt nation. But God said that, in all that corruption, He had some who feared Him, who spoke frequently to each other, and who thought upon His name. “And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts.” He would make them

His jewels in that day when He gathered His peculiar and particular treasure.

Then He said, “And I will spare them.” This is what many saints have waited and wanted to hear. Consider the corruption of our government, our country, our money, and our people. Abortion, socialism, sodomy, and fornication are wicked, wrong, and ungodly, and we want no part of them. We know the judgment of God is going to fall. But God says to His people, “I'll spare you.”

That does not mean that we will never have to suffer, but it does mean that we are going to be spared. This is important. Consider 2 Peter 2:9.

I am thankful that God knows this truth. 2 Peter 2:9 says, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust for the day of judgment to be punished." God knows how to deliver us out of temptations and, at the same time, reserve the unjust for punishment and chastisement. He is saying, "I want to spare my people. I know how to do that. I know how to deliver you and judge them at the same time."

God said, "And I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." I want to impress upon you how great this honor really is. In 2 Peter 2:4, God did not spare the angels that sinned against Him. In verse 5, God did not spare the old world. In verse 6, He did not spare Sodom and Gomorrah. In Matthew 24, He did not spare the Jews nor Jerusalem, but He destroyed them. Romans 8:32 says, "For He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things?" God did not spare the old world, the angels, Sodom and Gomorrah, or Jerusalem. He did not even spare His own Son. But He will spare His people. It is only because He spared not His own Son that He will spare us.

The Scripture is vouchsafing us as His special people. Our lives are spared. We are called by His grace. Though sometimes we are afflicted and chastised, it is always done gently, in love, for our good, and for His glory. Our services are accepted; even the imperfections of our services are overlooked. Our sins are pardoned, and we will find mercy on the Day of Judgment. We will hear our Lord say,

"Father, I confess Him before You. For He confessed Me before men." And we will hear our Father say, "He's mine. He's my precious treasure and my precious jewel."

Applications: Learning to Think Biblically and Commit Works to the Lord

Those who are redeemed in Jesus Christ will have all the honor and glory given to them that was purchased and earned by the suffering and work of Jesus Christ. We will be the vessels of pleasure, while the ungodly will be the vessels of wrath, in whom God has no pleasure. Our Lord said in John 10:28-29, "And I give unto them eternal life. And they shall never perish. Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." They shall be mine.

Scripture says that these saints spake often one to another and thought upon his name. By nature, we do not know the thoughts of the Lord. We must learn to think as God thinks. He said in Isaiah 55:8, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, saith the Lord.” In Micah 4:12, he says, “But they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither do they understand his counsel.” If we are going to think right thoughts of Him, we must submit our minds to His Word and learn to think scripturally and biblically.

I want to show you the opposite. You say, “But I don’t have time to study my Bible. I don’t have time to research. I don’t have time to think.” You better take time. You know what God said in Isaiah 65:2? “I’ve spread out my hands all the day unto rebellious people who walketh in a way that was not good after their own thoughts.” What does God call walking after your own thoughts? Rebellion. What is walking after His thoughts? Obedience. If we are going to think upon the Lord, we have to learn to think biblically.

The second application is this: We have to learn the principle of Proverbs 16:3: “Commit thy works unto the Lord and thy thoughts shall be established.” Whatever we start to do, we have to say, “Lord, I want to do what’s right. I want to honor You. I may not necessarily know everything that’s right in this area right now, but I want You to teach me, because I want this to be honoring to Your name and for Your glory.”

Doing so, we will find that our thoughts are established in the right way. We will also find comfort and delight. David said in Psalm 94:19, “In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul.” Why could David say that? Because he had learned to think scripturally.

God said, “They shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” Our responsibility is to speak often one to another and to think upon the Lord. The rougher the times become, the more frequently we are to fellowship with, encourage, and counsel one another, and the more frequently we should think upon the Lord. We should also thank Him for giving us His Word and His Son, who gave us eternal life.

Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ that You would teach and help us to think upon Thee and upon Thy name, Thy character, Thy attributes, Thy greatness, Thy mercy, and Thy works. Make us holy and godly, we pray. Help us to live for Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Ahithophel and the Destruction of the Nation

January 27, 2012

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Samuel 15:31-37; 16:15-21 (KJV)

And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O Lord, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.

And it came to pass that when David was come to the top of the mount where he worshipped God, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent and earth upon his head. And unto whom David said, If thou passest on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me. But if thou return to the city and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king, as I have been thy father's servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant. Then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.

And hast thou not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the priests? Therefore it shall be that what things soever they shall hear out of the king's house, thou shalt tell it unto Zadok and

Abiathar the priests. Behold, they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, and Jonathan, Abiathar's son. And by them you shall send unto me everything that you can hear. So Hushai, David's friend, came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.

And Absalom and all the people of the men of Israel came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him. And it came to pass when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, was come to Absalom, that Hushai said unto Absalom, God save the king, God save the king. And Absalom said unto Hushai, Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Why wentest thou not with thy friend? And Hushai said unto Absalom, Nay, but whom the Lord and this people and all the men of Israel choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide. And again, whom should I serve? Should I not serve in the presence of his son, as I have served in his father's presence? So will I be in thy presence. Then said Absalom to Ahithophel, Give counsel, I pray you, what we shall do. And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house, and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father.

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Samuel 16:22-23; 17:1-12 (KJV)

Then shall the hands of all them that are with thee be strong. So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house. And Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God. So was all the counsel of Ahithophel, both with David and with Absalom. Moreover, Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night. And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak-handed, and will make him afraid, and all the people that are with him shall flee, and I will smite the king only. And I will bring back all the people unto thee: the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned; so all the people shall be in peace. And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel.

> Then said Absalom, Call now Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear likewise what he saith. And when Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spake unto him saying, Ahithophel hath spoken after this manner: Shall we do after his saying? If not, speak thou. And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time. For said Hushai, Thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field, and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people. Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some other place, and it will come to pass, when some of the people be overthrown at first, that whosoever heareth it will say, There is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom. And he also that is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, shall utterly melt. For all Israel knoweth that thy father is a mighty man, and they which be with him are valiant men. Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude, and that thou go to battle in thine own person.

Hushai proposed that they come upon David in some place where he could be found and light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground, leaving not so much as one man. If he had gotten into a city, all Israel would bring ropes to that city and draw it into the river, until there was not one small stone found there. Absalom and all the men of Israel said, “The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel.” For the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom.

When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, arose, and got him home to his house, to his city. He put his household in order, hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father.

Introduction to Ahithophel

Ahithophel is not a very well-known name, and sometimes it is not easily pronounced. Yet Ahithophel is known as the Judas of the Old Testament. As Judas in the New Testament betrayed his master and

went out and hanged himself, so Ahithophel betrayed his master, David, and then went out and hanged himself.

Ahithophel is a very complex character, perplexing in and of himself. On the one hand, he was a man of wisdom; on the other hand, he was also a man of absolute foolishness. He personified common sense, rationality, and stability on one hand, while on the other hand he was absolutely unstable, wicked, and rebellious. He was truly an enigma in Scripture until the full light is brought upon him.

The Setting: Absalom's Rebellion

The setting for this account is found in 2 Samuel chapter 15, in the backdrop of Absalom's rebellion, when Absalom ran his father David off the throne and sought to kill him. "And it came to pass after this that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom rose up early and stood beside the way of the gate. And it was so that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him and said, Of what city art thou?"

And he said, "Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel." And Absalom said unto him, "See, thy matters are good and right, but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee." Absalom said moreover, "O that I were made judge in the land, that every man which had any suit or cause might come to me, and I would do him justice." While Absalom was saying, "O that I were judge," and claiming that he would do justice for anyone who came to him with a problem, he was doing an injustice to his father, his family, and the nation. When any man came near to Absalom to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, took him, and kissed him.

He was a consummate politician. In this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. After forty years, Absalom said unto the king, "I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I vowed unto the Lord in Hebron." He said that he had vowed this while dwelling in Geshur in Syria: "If the Lord shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord." The king said unto him, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent spies

throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, “As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron.” With Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem who were called, and they went in their simplicity, knowing nothing. Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counselor, from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. The conspiracy was strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom.

And there came a messenger to David, saying, “The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom.” And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, “Arise, and let us flee, for we shall not else escape from Absalom. Make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword.”

I find it absolutely amazing, not only that Absalom rebelled against his father, but exceedingly strange that, in his rebellion, he sent for Ahithophel. Ahithophel is specifically called David’s counselor. Why in the world would Absalom call for his father’s counselor? Why would Absalom even assume that Ahithophel would join him in the conspiracy? The interesting thing is that, when you read the story, you find that Ahithophel was not only willing to join Absalom, but eager and ready to join him. He wanted the conspiracy to succeed. In fact, the conspiracy became so strong that David and his household had to flee from Jerusalem.

David certainly was a mighty man of war. Why, then, did David flee? Why did he not fight it out there in Jerusalem? It could be that David was not prepared to fight it out, or that he was not willing to fight with his son Absalom. Later, in 2 Samuel chapter 18, when Joab and the other captains fought Absalom, David gave them specific orders that Absalom was not to be harmed. Yet Joab found Absalom hanging from an oak tree by the hair of his head, and stuck three darts through his heart and killed him. When word reached David that Absalom was dead, the Bible tells us that David said, “O my son, Absalom, O my son, Absalom, would to God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son.” In all probability, David did not fight because he simply did not want to fight with his own son.

David's Response: Prayer and Strategy

At any rate, the conspiracy was so strong that David and his entire household had to flee. As David fled, he did two very important things. In 2 Samuel 15:31 we read, “And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O Lord, I pray Thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.” So David, when he found out that Ahithophel was with Absalom, took the time to pray, asking the Lord to confound Ahithophel, or at least turn his counsel into absolute foolishness.

The second thing David did that was vitally important is found in the latter part of 2 Samuel 15. When Hushai the Archite, David’s friend, came to go with him, David said, “Look, if you pass on with me, you’re just going to be a burden. You go back to the palace. You pretend to serve Absalom.” David also had the high priest there, Zadok and Abiathar. They were priests, and he instructed them that anything they found out should be told to them. They had two sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan. Whatever the priests found out, they could tell their sons, and the sons could come tell David.

Hushai would do David more good if he stayed, heard what went on, and relayed the information to him. So Hushai, David’s friend, did indeed stay. When Hushai and Absalom came into Jerusalem, Absalom asked him, “Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Why wentest thou not with thy friend?” Absalom wanted to know what in the world was going on and why Hushai had not gone with David. Hushai did not tell him the truth; he pretended to serve Absalom. Then, in 2 Samuel 16:23, we read, “And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God, so was all the counsel of Ahithophel, both with David and with Absalom.”

You could ask yourself this question: Why in the world would Absalom want Ahithophel with him? The answer is that Ahithophel was very sagacious. He was very wise; he understood what was going on. There was not, in one sense of the word, a greater compliment that could be given a man than the one given to Ahithophel in verse 23, when the Bible says that the counsel he gave was as if one inquired at the oracle of God. When Ahithophel spoke, he spoke with knowledge and authority, as if God himself had spoken. Absalom

certainly wanted Ahithophel with him. Absalom and Ahithophel and his men then came to Jerusalem.

Ahithophel's Counsel and Its Purpose

After they got to Jerusalem, Absalom said to Ahithophel, “Give counsel among you what we should do.” Ahithophel said, “Look, I’ll tell you what to do. You spread a tent on top of the house. Here are the concubines that your father left to keep the palace. You go in unto them.” Then he made this astounding statement: “And then shall the hands of all them that are with thee be strong.”

Now, you say, wait a minute. We just read where the counsel of Ahithophel was as if one inquired of the oracle of God. Why in the world would Ahithophel give Absalom counsel like this? Although what Ahithophel counseled was wicked and wrong, contrary to the seventh commandment and contrary to the tenth commandment, yet it was good counsel to accomplish a specific goal. What Absalom did accomplished the goal that he wanted to accomplish.

When Absalom went in to his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel, here is what was happening: Absalom was the king’s son; this was an insurrection and a conspiracy, and people’s lives were on the line. The king was always going to be very forgiving toward his own son, and all the people were thinking, “This thing is going to fail, and Absalom is going to be received back, and they are going to kill us.” But when Absalom went in to his father’s concubines, it was not only wicked, wrong, and immoral; it was the greatest insult that he could give his father. When he did that, everyone knew that the ties with his father had been severed.

In other words, it came down to this: Absalom was going to kill his father, or his father was going to kill him. There was no backing up and no reversing the situation. That is why Ahithophel said, “You go in, and then shall all the hands of those that are with you be strong.” They would be strengthened and know that Absalom meant business—that he was going to kill David.

What Absalom did was part and parcel of David’s punishment for his adultery with Bathsheba. In 2 Samuel 12:9, God says, “Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord to do evil in his

sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart out of thine house, because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife."

Then the Lord says, "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with them in the sight of the sun. For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun." What Absalom did was part and punishment of David's sin. David was reaping what he had sown, and now Absalom had taken this final step. He had gone in unto them, and all the ties were now severed. There was no turning back.

Now Absalom asked counsel from Ahithophel: What should they do? Ahithophel said, "Let me now choose out 12,000 men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night." He would come upon David while he was weary and weak-handed, make him afraid, cause all who were with him to flee, smite the king only, and bring all the people back. "The man whom thou seekest is as if all returned, so the people shall be in peace." The saying pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel. Here was Ahithophel's counsel: Let us strike right now.

The Competing Counsels of Ahithophel and Hushai

Get David before he has time to regroup, before he has time to gather instruments of war, before he has time to gather food. You get him right now. Now's the time to kill David. But you remember, David sent Hushai back into the capital. He sent Hushai back to the palace. You remember that David prayed, O Lord, defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. He knew that Ahithophel gave good counsel. Now, look in your Bibles, if you would, to 2 Samuel 17, and look at the counsel that Hushai gives. Verse 7. In fact, they ask in verse 5, let's begin there. Then said Absalom, Call now Hushai the Archite, and let us hear likewise what he saith. And when Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spake unto him, saying, Ahithophel hath spoken after this manner. Shall we do after his saying? If not, speak thou.

And notice how wise Hushai was. And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time. In other words, he did not try to tear Ahithophel apart.

He didn't say the counsel is wicked and worthless and sordid. No, he said, it's good counsel, it's just not good at this time. And now he explains it. He says in verse 8, For Hushai said, Thou knowest that thy father and his men, they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field. And your father is a man of war.

He's not going to lodge with the people. And he says, behold, now he's in some pit or in some other place. And it's going to come to pass when there's a fight, what's going to happen? Some of your people are going to get killed. And then he says there's going to be a rumor there's a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom. Here's what he goes on to say. He says, I'll tell you what let's do. Let's gather all of Israel from Dan to Beersheba. Now, Dan was the northernmost tribe. Beersheba was the southernmost city. Can you imagine how long it's going to take all the time to gather all the men from the northern part to the southern part of the land to get them together for a great vast army? He says, you gather them together and I tell you what Absalom, you march off at the head of that army. And I tell you what we'll do. We will fall upon David and those men as the dew falls upon the earth.

We'll completely cover him. And if they get in some city, don't worry about that. We'll take the ropes. We'll pull down every stone. There'll be nothing left. We will kill every one of them.

Hushai's advice was wrong in every respect. Ahithophel's advice was the good advice. But Hushai's counsel appealed to Absalom's pride. Absalom could see himself leading and marching at the head of a vast army, going forth to conquer and to conquer. What Hushai was doing, however, was buying time for David and those men. He knew they needed to regroup, weapons, food, and everything else. Thus David had time to plan for the battle.

Ahithophel's Suicide and Its Motivation

When all the men said, “The counsel that Hushai has given is better than the counsel of Ahithophel,” look what Ahithophel did. Verse 23 of 2 Samuel chapter 17 says: “And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass and arose and got him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order and hanged himself and died and was buried in the sepulchre of his father.”

There is wisdom on one hand: he set his house in order. There is foolishness on the other hand: he went out and hanged himself. On the one hand, he was rational; on the other hand, he was irrational. Ask yourself this question: Why in the world did Ahithophel go out and hang himself? When he realized that his counsel was not being followed, he knew that it was all over. The cause was going to be lost, Absalom was going to be defeated, and when David came back into the city, Ahithophel knew he was going to be hanged as a traitor.

But why would Ahithophel go out and hang himself then? All Israel had not even been gathered together. Let us say it would take a month to get the men together, two weeks to get them to the battlefield, and then there would be the battle—a six-week time period. If you know you are going to be killed, hanged as a traitor by David, and there is possibly a six-week time span before that happens, why would you go ahead and hang yourself? Why would you kill yourself rather than use those six weeks to enjoy yourself and your family? Why hurry up and take your own life?

Something else about Ahithophel is very, very disturbing. You have to remember something about Ahithophel. He was a counselor, a diplomat, and a politician, kind of like our congressman. He could sit around and tell everybody what to do. Look back in your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 17, verse 1.

Now this is really amazing. Moreover, Ahithophel said unto Absalom, “Let me now choose out 12,000 men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night. And I will come upon him while he's weary and weak-handed, and will make him afraid. And all the people that are with him shall flee, and I will smite the king only.”

Why is a diplomat, why is a counselor, willing to lead a guerrilla force at night? Why is he willing to personally kill David? Here is a man who would be a man of the office. He is not a man of the field. He is not a warrior; he is a diplomat. And yet he says, “I personally will lead this force. I'll do it at night. I'll make sure that only David is killed, and I'll make sure that I kill him myself.”

Ask yourself this question: Why was Ahithophel so eager, so willing, and so ready to join with Absalom? And why now was Ahithophel so eager, willing, and ready to lead this force by night and personally kill David? What motivated him? What pushed him? What drove him? I want to show you what really pushed Ahithophel.

The Root of Ahithophel's Hatred: Bathsheba

First of all, look at 2 Samuel chapter 23, verse 34. This chapter lists David's mighty men. These were warriors who fought with David. Verse 34 names Eliphelet, the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite. And secondly, there is Eliam, the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite. So now we know that Ahithophel had a son named Eliam, and we know that Eliam was one of David's mighty men.

Someone may say, “I already know why Ahithophel is so angry, upset, and mad. Probably because Eliam was killed in battle, and Ahithophel has it in for David.” No, no. Everybody knows that men die in battle. One dies just as well as another. There is more to it than that. What is it? Go back in your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 11.

What drove Ahithophel? Why was he so revengeful, so bitter, and hateful toward David? He hated David so much that he would rather die by his own hand than let David kill him. He was willing to kill David, but he was not willing for David to kill him.

Look at 2 Samuel chapter 11, verse 1: “And it came to pass after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel, and they destroyed the children of Ammon and besieged Rabbah, but David tarried still at Jerusalem. And it came to pass in the evening, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon.”

Everyone knows the story of David and Bathsheba. But look at verse 3: “And David sent and inquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” Bathsheba was Ahithophel's granddaughter. David seduced her, committed adultery, murdered her husband, and destroyed her life and family, according to Ahithophel.

Why did Ahithophel hate David so much? There were some things that were right about Ahithophel. He viewed any crime or sin against his family as a sin against himself. And that is true.

If you came to me and said, “Pastor Weaver, I love you, but I don’t like your wife at all,” I would say, “I’m sorry, you don’t really love me.” My wife and I are one, and she is part of me. If you said, “Pastor, we love you and your wife, but we don’t love your children at all,” I would say, “I’m sorry. Those are my children.” They are an extension of me and an extension of my wife. In one sense, Ahithophel was right because he viewed any sin against his family as a sin against himself.

I had four daughters, and all my girls hunted. I took them deer hunting. Oftentimes, we would go down in the swamp. Each one had her rifle and tree climber. I would put one up a tree, walk a hundred or two hundred yards, and put another one up a tree. Sometimes I ended up four or five hundred yards from my girls while they were hunting.

I always gave them express counsel: “Now, girls, if a man comes along here and tries to bother or harm you, and I can’t get to you, here is what I want you to do: You shoot him. When I get there, I’ll question him and find out what his motives were.” I was not teasing. I meant that. I did not want my girls hurt.

A preacher friend told me years ago, “Brother, you love your children, but you don’t know what love is until you get grandchildren.” I did not understand it. When we got our first granddaughter, she was about two or two and a half years old. I was riding a horse with her on the saddle in front of me. After we had been silent for ten or fifteen minutes, she looked up at me and said, “Papa, you’re my very best friend.” That little girl is twenty years old today.

I call my granddaughter on the phone, and when she sees my number, she says, “This is your very best friend answering.” If I leave a message, I say, “Your very best friend called.” You talk about wrapping somebody around her little finger! I could stand here all night and tell you about my grandchildren. Do you not think, as beautiful as Bathsheba was, that she was the heartstrings of her grandfather?

Ahithophel's Errors: Unforgiveness and Vengeance

And now all of a sudden, all of that had been destroyed by David. So Ahithophel was right in that sense of the word: he viewed any sin against his family as a sin against himself. You know, the Bible says, “Children’s children are the glory of an old man.” And that is true.

But secondly, let me point out this. Here is where Ahithophel began to go wrong. Ahithophel would not accept, accede to, or bow to God’s pardon and forgiveness of David. If you look back in your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 12, David deserved to die. He deserved to die, first, because he was an adulterer. The wages for adultery in the Bible was death, so the death penalty was passed upon him for his adultery. Moreover, he deserved to die because he was a murderer. He said to Joab, “You put Uriah in the forefront of the battle, and retire from him, that he may die.” God charged David with killing Uriah with the sword of the children of Ammon.

Although David did not take the sword and stick it through Uriah’s heart, he made it possible for Uriah to die, and God charged him with the murder. Murderers are to be put to death. Thus there were two counts on which David was supposed to be put to death. The only reason he was not put to death was because God sovereignly pardoned him. God said, “For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before Israel and before the sun.” And David said unto Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.” Nathan said unto David, “The Lord hath also put away thy sin. Thou shalt not die, howbeit because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. The child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.” Notice that the only thing that saved David from the death penalty was that God sovereignly pardoned him. Mark it down: David deserved to die.

He merited the death penalty, but God sovereignly pardoned him. Now let me show you something. Here is where you and I go wrong. You and I have sinned against God. Everyone in this room has sinned against God, some far more grievously than the other. If I were to ask you, "How many sins does it take to merit death?" What is the answer? One. The wages of sin is death.

I do not care if you are an adulterer, a murderer, a whoremonger, or a thief. If you sin against God, you deserve the death penalty. When we sin, guess what? We come to God and say, "O God, have mercy upon us. O God, forgive us. O God, please, please, Lord, have mercy upon us." We plead with God for mercy. We want forgiveness. But is it not strange when people sin against us and hurt us? We do not want them forgiven. We want them dead. We want God to kill them. We want God to take them out of the world. We are willing to have mercy for ourselves, and we are willing for God to show mercy to us, but we are not willing for God to show mercy to those who have sinned against us. So Ahithophel certainly was willing to have mercy himself, but he was not willing for God to forgive David. He wanted David dead, and he wanted to be able to kill him himself.

Let me point out something. Thirdly, Ahithophel was wrong in the sense that he was not content with God's judgment upon David. It is true that David committed adultery. It is true that David committed murder. It is true that David deserved to die. It is also true that God pardoned him. But simply because God pardoned him did not mean that he got away with his sin. What did God tell David?

Because you have done this thing, the sword shall never depart out of your house. In other words, you are going to continually reap what you sow. You have sown sin, and you are going to reap it, David. You are going to reap the consequences of it.

And so here is Ahithophel. It did not faze him or bother him that the child David had sired through Bathsheba died. Although he hated David, Bathsheba was his granddaughter; that was still her child as well. It was not sufficient for him that the child died. It was not sufficient that later Amnon, one of David's own sons, turned and raped his own sister Tamar. No, that did not satisfy him. Later, Absalom murdered his own brother Amnon for raping Tamar. Now Absalom has raised an insurrection and a conspiracy, run David off

the throne, and is trying to kill him. That still does not satisfy Ahithophel. He wants David dead, and he wants to be the one to kill him himself.

So many times we do not think that God has judged our enemies sufficiently. We want to add to it. Fourthly, Ahithophel's unwillingness to forgive David led to his bitterness, resentfulness, hatred, anger, and ill will. Now you can see why Ahithophel was willing to kill David, but was not willing to be killed by David. He would rather hang himself. He hated David so much that he was not going to give David the opportunity to hang him. It is our cold, hard, unforgiving hearts that always lead to bitterness and resentment.

Romans 12:17 says, “Recompense no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men, if it be possible. As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Then: “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink. For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” If somebody does you wrong, you do not have to take it upon yourself to get them back or to get revenge. Why?

God says, “Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay.” Do you know why we do not see God's vengeance upon our enemies the way we should? I'll tell you why: because God is absolutely just. Oftentimes, what we do is want to take vengeance upon them ourselves. We can't wait. Since God is just, He is not going to execute vengeance twice. If we take it, why should He take it? What we have done, as I will point out a little bit later, is steal God's authority. We have stolen God's throne. God can clean our enemy's plow a whole lot better than we can and a whole lot quicker than we can. But God said, if you want Me to take vengeance, you do not harbor vengeance, bitterness, or resentment in your heart.

If somebody treats you wrong, you treat them right. “Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.” He said, “If thine enemy hunger, feed him. If he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head.” That means he can't stand being treated rightly and righteously.

One of my favorite stories is about the woman who came to the pastor complaining about her husband. “Oh, he didn't do this, and he didn't do that, and he did this, and he did that.” She went on for thirty minutes talking about her husband. Finally, the pastor kind of smiled and said, “Well, have you tried heaping coals of fire upon his head?” Of course, he meant treating him well when he treated her badly. She said, “No, but I tried hot water, and that don't work either.” We missed the point. God says, “Don't render evil for evil, but render good for evil.”

Now, let me tell you what our problem is. Listen carefully. You know what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 7:1? The Bible says, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” I do not imagine we have too many whoremongers in this room tonight. I do not imagine we have too many murderers. I do not imagine we have too many thieves. We may have one or two, but not many. But that which kills God's people is not adultery and whoremongering, because we do not do that. It is not murdering, because we do not do that. It is not thieving, because we do not do that. That which kills us are the sins of the spirit. What did He say? Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves not only from all filthiness of the flesh, but of the spirit.

The bitterness, the anger, the ill will, and the unforgiving attitude—we harbor those in our hearts. We are doing exactly what Ahithophel did.

Fifthly, because Ahithophel was unwilling to forgive David and unwilling to accept God's chastisement of David, he took it upon himself to punish David as he desired. Ahithophel could care less what God wanted. Ahithophel wanted what he wanted. We get into trouble when we try to play God, assuming God's role as vindicator and avenger.

You know what the Bible says in Hebrews 10:30? “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord,” and again, “The Lord shall judge his people.” Even Christians get chastened. If I were to come to your house, and your children were acting ugly, and you went to discipline them, I might say, “Now, brother, I wouldn't do that if I

were you." You would look at me and say, "Wait a minute, Brother Weaver. These are my children. I am raising them the way I believe God would have me to. I will discipline them the way God would have me." You would be very upset if I tried to tell you how to discipline your own children. Do you not think it affects God when you tell Him how you want Him to discipline His children? Of course.

God knows exactly what it takes to break our rebellious wills, our hard hearts, and our stiff necks. That is exactly what God is going to do. He will not take our advice and go beyond that, nor will He take our advice and do less than that. We cannot assume His throne rights. Vengeance is His, and He punishes His children as He sees fit.

Ahithophel's revenge, bitterness, and resentment led to his own destruction, to the destruction of his family, and to the destruction of the nation. I preached on Sunday morning on the purpose of Scripture, then what is coming to Christ, then the primacy of preaching, and then why God does not hear most of our prayers. This was the last message in that series on keeping the heart. How can this message tonight fit in with a missions conference? Are you listening?

The Destructive Consequences of Bitterness

The Bible teaches in Romans 14:7 that no man lives to himself and no man dies to himself. Whatever you do affects others. It affects not only your family, but also your church, your nation, and missions.

The Bible says in 1 Timothy chapter 5 that he who does not take care of his own house is worse than an infidel; he has denied the faith. If you will not do what is right toward your own people, how can you do right toward those who are outside and away from you? If you will not give your brothers and sisters in this congregation, and your pastor in this congregation, the respect and Christian attitude that each one deserves, how in the world are you going to deal with those who are outside this congregation?

Consider what Ahithophel's sin did to his family. He went out and hanged himself. How do you think Mrs. Ahithophel felt after her

husband hanged himself? How do you think Bathsheba felt? How do you think any other children might have felt?

I know one thing for sure: it affected not only him, but also his family, because no man lives to himself and no man dies to himself. But I want to show you how many were killed because of him. In 2 Samuel chapter 18, the battle has now taken place. Absalom and all his troops have been defeated.

Look in verse 7: “Wherefore the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was a great slaughter that day of 20,000 men.” Not only had 20,000 men been slain, but verse 8 says, “For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the earth, and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.” I do not know if the 20,000 includes verse 8. It may or may not. If it does not, over 40,000 were killed. Why? Because one man had a wicked, unforgiving, hateful, hard heart, full of ill will, bitterness, and resentment. Probably over 40,000 men died because Ahithophel hated David so much.

Application: Personal Holiness and National Blessing

We live in a dying society, in a dying world. Not everybody in this room can go to the mission field, and not everybody can spend thousands of dollars supporting ministries overseas. But everybody in this room can, by God's grace, keep his heart right.

Do you remember Genesis chapters 18 and 19, when our Lord came with His angels to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah? Abraham pleaded with the Lord: “Lord, if I find 50 righteous, would you spare it?” God said yes. Abraham continued, asking whether He would spare it for 40, then 20. Finally, Abraham got Him down to ten, and the Lord said He would spare Sodom and Gomorrah for ten. Have you ever wondered why Abraham stopped at ten? There was Lot, his wife, his daughters, and his sons-in-law. If he had only two daughters, that would be four; two sons-in-law would make six, plus the children. Lot probably had a minimum of ten in his family, so Abraham stopped at ten. Yet there were not ten righteous people in Sodom and Gomorrah. There are more than ten people in this room.

It is vitally important that you learn to keep your heart and not be bitter, resentful, hateful, haughty, high-minded, proud, or arrogant. If you want God to have mercy upon this ministry, this state, this country, and missionaries everywhere else, the least you can do, by God's grace, is live biblically and righteously. I want to show you one verse. Look in your Bibles to Proverbs 28 and verse 4.

You say, “I can’t do much.” I can tell you what you can do, and I’ll show it to you from Scripture. Proverbs 28:4 says, “They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them.”

When you violate God’s Word and go contrary to Scripture, you are praising the wicked. The word contend means to fight against. God says that when you keep His Word and bring your life into obedience to it, you are fighting against the wicked. If you want to fight against wickedness, learn to obey God. If you want to honor God, bring your life into conformity to His Word.

Here is the question: Are you an Ahithophel? Are you the one who would destroy the work of God and the people of God just so you could have your own revenge and keep your own bitterness and resentment?

Don’t be an Ahithophel. Serve God, obey Him, and be as holy and godly as you can by the grace of God. Bring your life into conformity to His Word.

Let’s pray. Father, help us, speak to our hearts, build us up in the most holy faith, make us holy, godly, and righteous. May we never be an Ahithophel. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Does This Make You Want to Pray

August 20, 2017

Psalm 12 begins, “Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth. For the faithful fail from among the children of men. They speak vanity every one with his neighbor. With flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips and the tongue that speaketh proud things. Who have said with our tongue will we prevail? Our lips are our own. Who is Lord over us? For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, Now will I arise, saith the Lord, I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.”

“The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in the furnace of the earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever. The wicked walk on every side when the vilest men are exalted.”

Most of us pray, but I am sure that each one of us would probably admit that we do not pray as we should. It is indeed possible to be in an attitude of prayer even when we cannot be on our knees in prayer.

The truth of the matter is that we oftentimes miss many opportunities to pray.

It is possible to pray before you sleep on your bed. It is possible to pray as soon as you awake, and David did so; he used every opportunity to pray. For instance, in Psalm 63:6 he said, “When I remember thee upon my bed and meditate upon thee in the night watches.” So whenever David laid down, the first thing he did was remember God and pray and meditate on Him during the night watches.

He said in Psalm 119:148, “Mine eyes prevent or precede the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.” Usually, while he was lying in bed, he would meditate on the Word of God. Early morning, even before we get out of bed, is another time to pray and to seek the Lord as we simply lie there. We should start our day with the Lord. Psalm 63:1 records David saying, “O God, my God, early will I seek Thee.”

My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is. Isaiah, in Isaiah 26:9, said, “With my soul have I desired thee in the night, yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early. For when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” So David certainly had stated times of prayer.

The Bible tells us in Psalm 55:17, “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.” David not only prayed as he lay upon his bed, early morning and at night, but also three times a day. Look in Psalm 32, at verses 5 and 6. This is another one of those penitential psalms. David said, “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.”

Notice several things about this passage. First, David said that everyone who is godly will acknowledge and confess his sins. Second, he said that the prayer of the godly would be in a time when God could be found. The implication is very clear: there are times

when God may not be found or cannot be found. Many individuals falsely and erroneously think and assume that their access to God is always going to be unhindered and unfettered. They are wrong.

Thirdly, note what he said in verse 6: “Surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto thee.” In other words, the floods of great waters indicate times of great calamity. During these times of great calamity, you will be filled with stress, distress, anguish, sickness, and sometimes even death, that will prevent people from coming unto the Lord.

Oftentimes, when you and I are hurting or when there is something very grievous unto us, the only thing we can think about is that which is hurting and grieving us. You remember that Stonewall Jackson was wounded at Chancellorsville. As he was being rushed to the rear on a litter, Lieutenant Smith's foot got caught in a vine, and he tripped. Stonewall Jackson fell on that already mangled arm and let out one little piteous groan. Lieutenant Smith asked him, “Are you all right?” He said, “Lieutenant Smith, don't concern yourself about me.”

Later, when his arm was amputated and he was recovering, he said it was a very precious thing to him to find that he had been brought face to face with death and was able to concentrate upon the Lord. He thought he was going to die when he fell from that litter. He also said that a man converted by the grace of God can concentrate on God and spiritual things, but someone who had never been converted, under so much pain, anguish, and stress, could not focus his mind upon the Lord. That's exactly what David is talking about: “Surely in the times of great waters, they will not come nigh unto thee.”

Undoubtedly, many prayed during the time of Noah's flood, but it was too late. Probably some prayed as the fire and brimstone fell in Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain, but it was really too late. Some probably even prayed as the tower of Siloam fell when eighteen were killed, but it was too late.

The Bible says in Isaiah 55 and verse 6, “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.” Obviously, there is a time when he may not be found and a time when he is not near.

What God is telling us, and what David is telling us, is that our prayers need to be timely, and oftentimes they need to be urgent as well.

As you look at Psalm 12, I do want you to look at Psalm 12 with me tonight. Psalm 12 reveals an example of when our prayers should not only be urgent, but also timely. It is a time when the wicked are in control, when they are prospering, and when they are spreading universal corruption; a time of arrogance, haughtiness, and pride; a time when the righteous are persecuted and in grave bodily danger; a time of faithlessness, idolatry, blasphemy, and ridicule. I want you to see some of these things in Psalm 12.

A Passionate Petition (Psalm 12:1)

First of all, note in verse 1 a passionate petition. David says, "Help, Lord! For the godly man ceaseth, and the faithful fail from among the children of men." I like the way David begins his prayer. It is full of urgency and passion. He does not waste time or breath on formality because he does not have time to do so. The situation is extremely dangerous, and all he says is, "Help, Lord!"

Have you ever been in a situation when that was all you could say, all you could do? This petition reminds me of Peter's prayer as he began to sink beneath the waves in Matthew 14:30. When he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid, and he began to sink; he cried, saying, "Lord, save me!" Peter did not have time to say, "Now, our Father, we come to Thee," and continue with formal words.

There is nothing wrong with that. But here was a time of urgency. Peter understood that if the Lord Jesus Christ did not save him and catch him instantly, he was a goner. It is the same thing here in Psalm 12. David understands that he needs help urgently, and he cries out in extreme passion, "Help, Lord." The word help is actually the same word for save. David is not simply crying out for God's help; he is also crying out for God's salvation. The word help is largely used for all manner of saving, helping, delivering, and preserving. David realizes the desperate situation in which he is living, and he cries out to God.

One of the problems we have today is that we truly do not realize the times in which we are living. We do not perceive the danger in which we are. Some of these riots and demonstrations are beginning to open people's eyes. We are beginning to see that we are not in control of situations. Anything can happen just about any time.

The problem is that we do not see the world falling apart all around us. We live in our little cubicle, in our own little world, and everything is hunky-dory there, but we do not notice what is happening around us. We do not perceive the danger that we are in, or the danger in which we are faced.

When David cried, "Help, Lord," he understood that no human help would be sufficient. No government could help him. The only help, the only salvation, would come from God. That help was needed now; it was urgently needed. If God did not help him, all hope was gone. His very cry indicates that only God can take care of the situation. So he begins his prayer: "Help, Lord."

What was it that disturbed David so greatly? What made him petition God so passionately? There are answers to that question. If you look in verse one, you will find one of them: "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men."

Let me ask you a question. Has the deterioration of the church ever really bothered you? Have you ever been concerned about how few real biblical preachers there are? Has it ever upset you that most churches know nothing of biblical standards, God's law, or how to live holily and godly? They know nothing about obedience and submission. Has it ever upset you that faithful men and godly men—not just preachers—are few and hard to find in our day and time? I understand there are some, but they are few and far between.

Have you ever contemplated that when upstanding, righteous, and godly men perish, no one rises up to take their place? David saw that godly and faithful men were ceasing. That is, they were failing; they were coming to an end in his society. Men of principle, character, integrity, and faith were becoming less and less.

Why? One answer is surely that some were dying. But hold Psalm 12 and look in your Bibles to Isaiah, chapter 57, and verse 1. It is not

merely that godly men were dying; the point is, why were they dying? Isaiah 57:1 gives one answer: “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart. And merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.” Isn’t that amazing? The righteous man perishes, and no man lays it to heart. No one thinks about godly men disappearing. Merciful men are taken away, and they do not even consider that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Kings 22:18-20 (KJV)

> In other words, God sovereignly, graciously, and mercifully removes some of His choicest servants, so they will not face the evil that is to come. There was a great revival under Josiah, and God gave Josiah this promise:
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> “But to the king of Judah which sent you to inquire of the Lord, thus shall you send him. Thus said the Lord God of Israel, as touching the words which thou hast heard, Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me, I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold, therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered unto thy grave in peace, and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place.”
>
> And they brought the king word again. Isn’t that amazing? The righteous man perishes and no man lays it to heart.

“Merciful men are taken away, and none consider that the righteous is taken from the evil that is to come.” Sometimes God simply removes the righteous so they will not see what is coming down the pike. Secondly, when God removes righteous, godly, and faithful men, evil cannot help but come, because there are now fewer to expose it, fight against it, and decry it. Society usually becomes more corrupt when righteous men are taken away. Without righteous men, there cannot possibly be a righteous influence.

This is why David is so moved: “Help, Lord. The godly man ceaseth, and the faithful fail from among the children of men.” The

Bible says in Proverbs 11:8, “The righteous is delivered out of his trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead.” It is good that the righteous is delivered out of trouble, but when wicked men fall into trouble, they usually cause more trouble. They are corrupt, act corruptly, and will do whatever is necessary to get themselves out of trouble.

Proverbs 28:12 says, “When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory. But when the wicked rise, a man is hidden.” The rise of the wicked always causes mourning among the righteous. Proverbs 29:2 says, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice. But when the wicked bear rule, the people mourn.”

Look in Atlanta, Georgia; Montgomery, Alabama; and Washington, D.C., and endeavor to find righteous men with character, integrity, honor, faith, and a willingness to stand for biblical truth and the principles laid out in the Word of God. Where are they? We can name one, or perhaps two, but where are the rest? Look in the business world and the church world. I do not care where you look. Unhappily, some of the worst individuals are preachers.

When godliness goes, faithfulness inevitably follows. Without the fear of God, there is no love of the truth. Common honesty is no longer common, and common irreligion always leads to universal godlessness and corruption. The effects and the loss of godly men are clearly revealed to us in the Bible.

Micah says, “Woe is me, for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage. There is no cluster to eat. My soul desire the first ripe fruit, but there's nothing around.” Then he says, “The good man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men. They all lie and wait for blood, they hunt every man his brother with a net, that they may do evil with both hands earnestly. The prince asketh, and the judge asketh for reward, and the great man, he utters his mischievous desire, so they wrap it up.

“The best of them is a briar. The most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge. The day of thy watchman and thy visitation cometh. Now shall be there perplexity. Trust ye not in a friend, put you not

confidence in a guide. Keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. For the son dishonoreth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, and the daughter-in-law is against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies are the men of his own house."

What is he talking about? He is talking about a time in society where there is no character and no honesty. In other words, he is talking about the same thing that David is: "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, and the faithful fail from among the children of men."

It is something that should make us cry out urgently and passionately. It is kind of like our Lord says, "Pray ye that the Lord will send laborers into the harvest." But they have to be His laborers, and they have to be men in whom you can place trust. We, like David, should be crying, "Help, Lord!" Because the godly man ceaseth and the faithful fail from among the children of men, that is a good reason to pray.

A Proud Populace

A Proud Populace (Psalm 12:2-4)

A second reason David was crying out so passionately is the presence of a proud populace, found in verses 2 through 4: "They speak vanity every one with his neighbour, with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things: who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us."

These verses clearly demonstrate the result of the loss of godly and faithful men. Where godliness declines, corruption and wickedness rise. Where there is no fear of God, there will be no regard for man.

Luke 18 says that men ought always to pray and not to faint. The Lord spoke of a judge in a certain city who feared not God, neither regarded man. When the widow came to that judge, saying, "Avenge me of mine adversary," he finally said, "Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." He cared nothing about

God and nothing about man—not even about the widow. The only thing he was concerned about was himself: “Get her off my back.”

Where there is no fear of God, there is no regard for man. Verse 2 says, “They speak vanity every one with his neighbour.” That is lying. “With flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.” When godly and faithful men fail, truth and honesty fail, and lies, dishonesty, and a double heart arise. Literally, the Hebrew is “a heart and a heart,” someone with two hearts.

A double heart is when someone says one thing but means something else, or says one thing and does something totally different. Man is full of insincerity, falsehood, and hypocrisy, both in regard to himself and in regard to others. The Bible gives numerous illustrations of this.

You must remember that which Cain did to Abel, what Joab did to Amasa and to Abner, what the Herodians did to Christ, what Judas did to his master, what false teachers do to the simple, and what hypocrites do to God. What is the hypocrite? He is one who says one thing and then lives another. Dishonest? Yes. Verse 2 also reveals a connection between flattery and treachery: “They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.” Flattery and a double heart always equal treachery.

Jeremiah 9:4 says, “Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. And they will deceive every one his neighbour, and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies, and weary themselves to commit iniquity.” The flatterer has one heart to give utterance to the words which he uses toward his neighbor, and another that conceals his real intent, purpose, and design.

Therefore, no confidence can be placed in such persons. They actually believe that they can flatter, deceive, and lie themselves out of any situation or circumstance. Verse 3 says, “The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things.” Flattering lips are lying lips, treacherous lips, wicked lips, and arrogant lips. Such lips are unafraid to challenge man or to challenge God.

Asaph had a problem in Psalm 73; he was envious of the wicked. He describes them: “They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.” These wicked, deceitful flatterers, who trust in their own lips, are not afraid to curse God or curse. It does not matter to them.

No wonder the Apostle Jude called them “raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame.” David said, “The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things.” Have you ever noticed that James was correct when he said the tongue no man can tame? Men cannot tame the tongues, especially the tongues of such boastful flatterers. The Lord’s remedy for such is sharp, but it is sure.

It is an unanswerable answer. He will cut off those that speak proud things. The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips and those that speak proud things. God said, “I’ll just remove them. I’ll take them out.” Let me show you the height of their arrogance. Look in verse four: “Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail? Our lips are our own: who is Lord over us?”

Now, this does not mean that they had formally announced open defiance to God. They did not need to do so, because their lives evidenced that rebellious conduct and defiance. They acted as if they were the real principle on which they framed their lives, and that everything else existed around them. They used their tongues as they pleased. “With our tongue will we prevail?” In other words, it was by their tongue that they expected to accomplish all their purposes.

It was not with direct power particularly, nor by violence particularly, but by the power of speech. Here is what they said: “We will do mightily. We can talk anyone into anything. We can get people to do exactly what we want them to do. We will simply use our tongue, the power of our speech. We will influence others.” By the way, if you do not think the wicked are doing this, just turn on CNN or any media today. Pick up any newspaper.

Go to any government school. We are churning out little humanists left and right. Their attitude is, “Our lips are our own.” We can say what we want to say. No one has the right to control what

we think, what we say, and what we do. Since they claim their lips are their own, the next question is very logical: "Who is Lord over us?"

We are our own gods. We say what we want to say and do what we want to do. Like Pharaoh, they refused to recognize God's absolute sovereignty and His rule over them. When Moses came to Pharaoh in Exodus chapter five and said, "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me," Pharaoh responded in verse two, "Who is the Lord?"

"Who is the Lord that I should obey him? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." Notice what he said: "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?" I do not know Him. I do not recognize Him.

You have to remember that those plagues in Egypt were against the false gods of Egypt, and Pharaoh himself claimed to be a god. That is why his firstborn died too, because he could not even protect his own child. He could not protect anyone's child.

A wicked, corrupt, and godless populace refuses to acknowledge God. They attempt to control their own lives, and they attempt to control the lives of others. On the one hand, they are saying, "God is not sovereign. God has no right over my lips. God has no right over my life." At the same time, they are saying, "But I have rights over everyone else's lives, and I can lie, flatter, deceive, and do whatever I want to influence them and get them to live the way I want them to live." Obviously, they are playing God.

Look what happens in verse 8: "The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted." You let these men get into positions of power and leadership, and the wicked walk on every side.

For the child of God, we have to remember that everything we are and everything we have belongs to the Lord. You remember what the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20? "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God? Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price. Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

To whom do your lips belong? God. To whom does your tongue belong? God. Everything you are and everything you have belongs to Him.

The wicked may say, “Our tongues are our own, our lips are our own; who is lord over us?” But that does not mean they actually have control over their own lips and lives. No, God does. Let me ask you this: David had this passionate petition, “Help, Lord,” for the godly man ceases and the faithful fail from among the children of men.

A Persecuted People (Psalm 12:5)

Then he discusses this proud populace. Everybody is so arrogant. What would be the consequence of having a society like that? You find it in verse 5: “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.” When the wicked reign, persecution and oppression are inevitable. The Hebrew word translated “oppression” here is also translated spoil, destruction, desolation, robbery, wasting, and oppression. It speaks of havoc, violence, ruin, destruction, and devastation. The pride and haughtiness in verses 2 through 4 always lead to the persecution of the poor and needy.

When we think about poor people, we think of someone with an insufficient amount of money. That is not what Scripture is talking about here. The Hebrew word for poor is translated in our Bibles as poor, afflicted, weak, lowly, humble, and needy. It is not merely someone without money who is persecuted, but someone who is weak, lowly, humble, and needy. The wicked, who think their lips are their own and are full of pride, arrogance, and haughtiness, persecute, prosecute, and oppress anyone who is helpless—anyone without the power or ability to fight back.

I've talked to so many people who've been so wrongly acted upon by the powers that be. I would ask, Why do you not fight? The answer always comes back, I don't have the money or the time to do this. It costs money to hire attorneys. They know that.

When he says in verse 5, “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy,” the word sighing indicates crying and groaning. It speaks of real lamentation and woe. The persecution

and oppression are real and genuine. The needy are those who are in want, in need, who need deliverance and help from trouble, those who need to be delivered by God. So he says, “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord.” Then he says, “I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.”

Those individuals who think that their lips and tongue are their own, who speak proudly and arrogantly and end up persecuting the poor and needy, God says, “I'm going to rise and set the poor and needy in safety from him that puffeth at him.” The word puffeth means to puff, to blow, and to snort. All the wicked are doing is blowing hot air. God says, “I'm going to take care of that.” They really cannot accomplish their desire. They can persecute and oppress, but they cannot accomplish their desire. In Psalm 64:1, David prayed, “Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer. Preserve my life from the enemy.”

Here is an interesting verse, and I would encourage you to memorize it and pray it: Psalm 79:11. “Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee, according to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die.” I pray that prayer frequently, especially for the brethren who have been wrongly imprisoned and imprisoned for the faith's sake, those who rid those Islamic countries. God said, “Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee. According to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die.”

You have a persecuted populace whenever you have the disappearance of godly, faithful men. Then proud, arrogant individuals rise, and, of course, they persecute.

A Preserved Prosperity

A Preserved Prosperity (Psalm 12:6-7)

This is why I preached this message: I had to preach these verses to get to verses 6 and 7. The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in the furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation forever.

If this does not make you want to pray, I really do not know what will.

Having declared that His words were pure words, as silver tried in the furnace of the earth, purified seven times, which is the absolute height of perfection, he then makes this astonishing statement: "Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, Thou shalt preserve them from this generation forever."

What is to be kept and preserved from this generation? In the remote context of Psalm 12, we might say that which is going to be preserved and protected is God's people, the poor, and the needy. They have already been mentioned in this psalm, and that is true. Psalm 72 states this plainly: "Yea, all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight."

Certainly, God is going to protect and preserve His own. That is in the remote context. However, in the immediate context, we need to see exactly what he is saying. "The words of the Lord"—that is what we are talking about. His Word. "The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of the earth, purified seven times." Now look at what he says: "Thou shalt keep them." Them what? Those words. "Thou shalt keep thy words, O Lord. Thou shalt preserve them from this generation forever." What? God is going to keep His words from this evil, wicked, depraved generation. They despise Him. They deny Him. They denigrate Him.

Why should He speak to them? They have just said, "Our lips are our own. Who is Lord over us?" They do not recognize Him. They are their own god; they do what they think and what they need to do. If God commands us in Matthew 7:6, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you," do you think God is going to violate that principle Himself? Do you think He will throw His words, which are holy and pure, to the dogs and swine?

Remember that Samuel was raised up because of Eli and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. You can read how wicked and vile they were, especially Hophni and Phinehas. They were the priests of the Lord. God dealt with Eli because he restrained them not. Listen to what God said to Eli in 1 Samuel 2:30: "Wherefore the Lord God of Israel said, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

What did He tell Eli? "You have dishonored Me. Your sons have dishonored Me. In fact, you despised Me, and now you will be lightly esteemed," in light of that principle. Is it any wonder, then, that 1 Samuel 3:1 says, "And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days"? There was no open vision.

If I had an hour, I would take you through the Bible and show you what an open vision was. It has nothing to do with dreams or trances. The Word of the Lord was precious in those days because there was no open preaching, no public preaching. How could there be? Eli and his sons were wicked and wrong. There was no public preaching because of corruption in the priesthood and the rebellion of the people. God was not going to give His Word to people who despised His Word. Turn to Amos chapter 8. I know you know this passage, but I want you to see it in light of what I am preaching. Hosea, Joel, Amos. Look in Amos chapter 8.

Amos 8:11 says, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread nor thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. And they shall wander from sea to sea and from the north even to the east, and they shall run to and fro and seek the word of the Lord and shall not find it." God said there is going to be a famine—a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord. Why would God give His Word to people who do not want His Word?

The Bible says in Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Proverbs 13:13 says, "Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed:

but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded." Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed.

Isaiah 30:9 says, "That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord, which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits: Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." Therefore, thus saith the Holy One of Israel, "Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon: Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant. And he shall break it as the breaking of the potters' vessel that is broken in pieces; he shall not spare; so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pit."

They said, "We don't care one thing about the Word of God. Turn Him away from us. Get out of the way. We don't want to hear this stuff." Is it any wonder there is so little real and true preaching and exposition of the Word of God, especially in this corrupt and rebellious generation?

After describing the wickedness of this society and nation, David says in verse 7, "Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation forever." Everyone knows that the Bible contains sixty-six books: thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. Between them was a period of four hundred years known as the four hundred silent years. God did not speak during those years. He had spoken through the Old Testament, but there was no new revelation until Jesus Christ came. When Scripture says, "Thou shalt keep them, O Lord, thou shalt preserve them from this generation," what generation does it mean? The generation David was describing—the wicked generation of his society and nation. God would preserve them from that generation forever.

The Danger of God Withholding His Word

If the Word of God is kept and preserved from a people, there will generally be no reviving, no revival, no repentance, no faith, and very

few conversions. Yes, I believe there will be a little, because God is faithful. God is not going to leave Himself without witness. He will always have the 7,000 who have never bowed the knee to Baal. But generally speaking, if God withholds His Word, everything will be lost in every area and in every sphere.

Where there is no truth, only lies and perversions will prevail. Where there is no righteousness, only evil will prevail. Where there is no godliness, only corruption will prevail. Think about this: God does not need to send fire from heaven and brimstone to destroy us as He did Sodom and Gomorrah, a flood as He did in Noah's day, or the Russian army or the Chinese army. If God desires to destroy us, all He has to do is withhold His Word and His grace, and we will destroy ourselves.

I cannot fathom what it would be like to live where the Word of God is not. Yet look at societies, cultures, and nations that still do not have the Word of God: their backwardness, the murder, the rape, and the pillage.

Applications: Urgent Prayer for Help

The first application is this: We need to learn to cry and pray urgently, desperately, and readily for God to help and save. We are in more trouble in this country than you can shake a stick at. You do not realize it yet. But if God, in His sovereign providence, grace, and mercy, does not do something, you talk about anarchy. You do not have civil war again.

Look at the people who say, "Our lips are our own. Who is Lord over us?" We say and do what we want. When the godly cease from a society, when the faithful fail from a society, the only thing left is corruption, unfaithfulness, and ungodliness. We need to learn to cry like David: "Help, Lord. Help, Lord. Help, Lord! Help, Lord!" Only God can straighten us out. It should alarm us—truly terrify us—that God could withhold His Word from us. If He simply withholds and preserves His Word, we are goners.

When God judged Israel in the days of Elijah, Elijah stood and said to Ahab, "As the Lord liveth, wherewith I stand, there shall not be rain nor dew these years, but low according to my word." God

took Elijah and sent him out of the land to a widow woman's house in Zarephath. The drought was a physical picture of a spiritual reality: the drought of water signified the drought of the Word of God, because the prophet of God was not even in the country. Ahab and Jezebel had killed most of them, except those whom Obadiah hid in a cave. When God starts moving His preachers out of a country, you better pay attention. He does not even have to drive us out of the country. In Jeremiah's case, God left him in the country, but told him, "Pray not for this people." Kneel, lift up, and cry for this people, for I will not hear thee. All God did to Jeremiah was shut his mouth.

This is why David began his prayer with, "Help, Lord." We are in such a desperate strait; only God can straighten us out. I believe that God is going to give us victory in time and in history, but that does not mean we will not see His hand of judgment upon a wicked nation and a wicked people who hate and despise His Word. Consider that God could withhold His Word from a society, a culture, or a people. It should make you want to pray: "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, and the faithful fail from among the children of men."

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee. We thank You for Your Word, Your truth, and Your warnings. Thou art holy and just, and we do not deserve the least of Thy mercies. How little we value Thy Word and the preaching of Thy Gospel; we take it for granted. O Lord, help us to love Thee, to love Thy Word, and to love the preaching of the Gospel. Teach us to pray, "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth, and the faithful fail from among the children of men." Only You can change that. Grant repentance, faith, and mercy. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. Amen.

CHAPTER 6

Common Sins of Rulers

February 2, 2012

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Samuel 13:1-12 (KJV)

Introduction and Context

Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, Saul chose him three thousand men of Israel; whereof two thousand were with Saul in Michmash, and in mount Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin: and the rest of the people he sent every man to his tent.

And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear. And all Israel heard say that Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines. And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal. And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude.

> And they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Beth-aven. When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits. And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering. And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.

Common Sins of Rulers

"And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee."

First Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 13 says, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." None of us ever face superhuman temptations. Everything that Doc faces, I face; everything that I face, Ernie faces. Our temptations are common. I can tell you what goes on in your life because I know what goes on in mine, and I can tell you what you are going through because I go through the same thing.

Not only are there common sins, tests, and trials for individuals, but each group or class has its own common sins. Preachers have common sins, just as politicians and business people have common sins. There are sins usually common to a collective or specific group.

When we speak of the common sins of rulers, we recall the old saying, "A politician is a politician is a politician," and the joke, "How can you tell if a politician is lying?" The answer is, "You watch his lips. If they move, he's lying."

How is it that those elected to office usually have a horrible reputation and are known to be liars, thieves, immoral, corrupt, and oftentimes perverts? Rulers down through the ages have committed the same sins over and over. It seems that not only men, but civil rulers, never learn.

The Bible says plainly in Galatians 6:7-8, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." That is true of individuals, civil rulers, and everyone. In spite of scriptural testimony, historical proof, and individual testimony, men and civil rulers fall into the same sins repeatedly.

Today I am primarily speaking of civil rulers. However, we must remember that there are family rulers according to Ephesians chapter 6 and ecclesiastical rulers according to Hebrews chapter 13. Although our text deals primarily with civil rulers, that is what we will primarily consider today.

Israel's Rejection of God as King

Now let me give you the background and let you know what has happened. Israel desired a man to rule over her rather than having God Himself rule over them. God was the King in Israel. If you look back to 1 Samuel 8, verses 7 and 8, when the children of Israel came to Samuel and asked for a man to be king over them, it grieved him, and he went to the Lord in prayer. We read, “But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.”

"According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee." Notice what God says to him: They have not rejected thee; they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.

If you look in 1 Samuel 12 and verse 12, note that it was Samuel who singled out this particular sin of Israel: "And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king." When they asked for Saul, or for a man, they were in essence rejecting the kingship of God.

The rejection of God as civil ruler and the establishment of man as civil ruler brought with it the seeds of corruption, confiscation, and tyranny. Now go back to 1 Samuel 8 and notice carefully what God tells Samuel: "Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them." Samuel told all the words of the LORD unto the people that asked of him a king. This is where God lays out for them the manner of the king that would reign over them.

Listen to what Samuel is saying: this is what man as king, man as civil ruler, is going to be like. Verse 11: "And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers."

"And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants."

“And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the LORD will not hear you in that day.” In light of all this, look at verse 19: “Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.”

According to 1 Kings chapter 8, the penalty for rejecting the kingship of God was and is oppression, confiscation, taxation, loss of liberty, and judgment. Is it any wonder, in this day and age, that we cannot find a man who will rule biblically, scripturally, and justly? Should we expect anything else than 1 Samuel chapter 8, verses 11 through 20, from ungodly, wicked, depraved, and fallen men? I can assure you: without the grace of God, without the law of God, and without the mercy of God in the lives of men, they are not fit to rule. Period.

Common Sins of Rulers

The Necessity of Ruling in the Fear of God

Proverbs 28:28 says, "When the wicked rise, men hide themselves: but when they perish, the righteous increase." When the wicked rise, men hide themselves because they know there will be oppression, confiscation, loss of lives, and loss of liberty. But when the wicked perish, the righteous increase. Proverbs 29:2 further states, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn." It is true that wicked men cannot and will not rule justly or scripturally.

In 2 Samuel 23, especially verses 2 and 3, David claims inspiration four times for one simple statement: "The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God." The Bible tells us clearly that if a man is going to be a ruler, he has to rule in the fear of God. You cannot rule justly unless you are ruling in the fear of God. In order to rule in the fear of God, one must be regenerated, converted, and in submission to the Word of God.

From the life of King Saul, consider some of the common sins of rulers, making application to our present-day situation. Everything observed in the life of King Saul can be made applicable in this day and time. What are the common sins of rulers? One of the most common sins of civil rulers is usurpation of authority, not only in the civil realm but in the spiritual realm as well.

In 1 Samuel chapter 13, the Philistines had gathered against King Saul. Saul had reigned one year, and then a second year over Israel, and war was brewing between the Israelites and the Philistines. The people were trembling and afraid, and many of them were hiding themselves.

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Samuel 13:19-22 (KJV)

Sin 1: Usurpation of Authority

> Let me show you one reason why. In 1 Samuel chapter 13, the Philistines had a gun control law—not guns, but a sword control law. Beginning with verse 19:
>
> "Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears: But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his axe, and his mattock. Yet they had a file for the mattocks, and for the coulters, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads.
>
> "So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found."
>
> In other words, Saul and Jonathan were the only two who had a sword or spear. None of the other people had them.

They did not have any weapons. They may have had sticks or ox goads, but they had no real weapons. The Israelites faced a humongous horde of Philistines who were well armed and greatly outnumbered them, and they became afraid. First Samuel 13:5 says, "And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and

people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude: and they came up, and pitched in Michmash, eastward from Beth-aven. When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait, (for the people were distressed,) then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits."

"And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling." Most of the Israelites were getting out of Dodge. They knew they were outnumbered, outgunned, and outmanned. Saul saw his army dissipating before his eyes, and so he forced himself to offer a sacrifice.

Samuel had appointed a time to be there. Samuel was the prophet of God and the man of God; Samuel was to offer the sacrifice. But verse 8 says, "And he," that is Saul, "tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering."

"And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. And Samuel said, What hast thou done?" When Samuel did not appear when Saul thought he should, Saul ordered the burnt offering and the peace offerings. His excuse was that it was an emergency situation. There was a crisis at hand. He did not want to do it, but he forced himself. By way of exigency, he intruded into the prophetic and priestly office: something had to be done, someone had to act, and therefore he took control. Saul was a normal politician. He could not wait upon God or Samuel; he said he had to act immediately.

Samuel said to Saul, "Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee." Saul's usurpation cost

him his kingdom. God rejected Saul because Saul had rejected God, refusing to abide by His commandments.

Many rulers arrogantly assume that they have authority over the church, its mission, its message, and its ministers. They assume they can waltz into the church and run it, telling the church, the preachers, and the people what to do, what to say, and what not to say simply because they are civil authorities.

Remember King Uzziah, a good king of Judah, who ruled, I think, for fifty-two years. One day he decided to go into the temple and offer incense. He took the incense and waltzed into the temple. Azariah the priest asked, "What are you doing in here? Get out of here. This is not going to be for your honor and your glory." Uzziah was angry. While he held the incense, God smote him with leprosy in the forehead. When he saw the leprosy, the Bible says he hastened to get out. An 85 priest forced him out, basically, but he himself was willing to leave after God smote him. The Bible says he remained a leper the rest of his life.

Here was a man who thought he could waltz into the temple and take authority that he did not have. When civil rulers endeavor to take over the church, they are usurping the authority of the Son of God. Jesus Christ is King of the church and the head of the church. More than that, Jesus Christ is head of everything: the state, civil government, and the family, because He is King of kings and Lord of lords. When a civil ruler comes into the temple or church, he is saying, "Christ has no authority over me."

"I don't listen to Him. I'm not bound by His limitations. I'm not bound by His definitions. I'm not bound by His control. No, no, no. I may do whatever I please. I do not recognize Jesus Christ as King." It is like that verse in Hosea 5 and verse 11: "The princes of Judah were like them that remove the bound: therefore I will pour out my wrath upon them like water." The princes of Judah did not like the boundaries God placed upon them, so they removed those boundaries and usurped and stole authority they did not have. God then poured out His wrath upon them like water.

King Saul did not create this crisis. It was a real, genuine threat. The Philistines were there; he was outnumbered and outgunned. It

was a real, genuine crisis. He did not create it, but he used it. Rahm Emanuel said, “Never waste a good crisis. Never waste a good crisis.” What we have today is that, when there is a real crisis, it is used against us, the people, normally. If there is no crisis, they create one, so that at the same time they may abuse their office, steal the liberty and freedom of the people, and implement their predetermined solutions.

I hope you are familiar with the Marxist paradigm of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. They set forth a proposition or problem, then set forth its opposite, and combine them to make a synthesis to further their own party or program. In other words, everything is basically predetermined. I forget who it was that said, “There are no accidents in politics.”

Why do civil rulers desire to control the church, the world, and everything and everyone else? Here is the answer: fallen man likes to play God. If he claims to be a god, then, in order to prove his claim and his godhood, he must order and control everyone else. He must exercise complete control because God is sovereign, and he wants to play God. You must remember that God and God alone is sovereign.

Consider Matthew 21:38 and Mark 12:7, two passages referring to the parable of the vineyard. Without reading the entire parable, you remember how the man owned the vineyard and sent servant after servant after servant to collect the fruits of the vineyard; they beat some, and they killed the others.

Finally, the owner of the vineyard said, “I will send my son, for they will reverence him.” The owner of the vineyard is God the Father, the Son is Jesus Christ, and the vineyard is Israel. Matthew 21:38 says, “But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.” Mark 12:7 says it somewhat differently: “But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.”

What is it that fallen man wants? The inheritance that belongs to Jesus Christ. They want the world. They desire to control the world, and they are willing to attack and crucify the Son of God to obtain their desire. He is the true ruler of the world. This inheritance

belongs to Him. They wish to steal His throne and His inheritance. Therefore, you have the language of Psalm 2, verses 2 and 3: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.”

In other words, they say, “We’re not going to listen to God. We’ll usurp and steal authority that God never gave us.” Civil rulers commonly, regularly, consistently, and constantly usurp and steal power and authority. They take it to themselves when it is not rightly theirs.

Even the Declaration of Independence says this plainly: to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. If there is no consent, it is not a just power; it is an unjust power, usurped and stolen. Power is power according to fallen man, and fallen man will steal it from God or man. It does not matter to him.

Sin 2: Disobedience to God and His Law

The very first common sin of rulers is usurpation of authority, both in the civil realm and in the spiritual realm. The second is disobedience to God and His law. You find that in 1 Samuel chapter 15. “Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel: now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.”

The Second Common Sin: Disobedience

Look at verses 8 through 10: “And he,” that is, King Saul, “took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly.”

The second common sin of civil rulers is disobedience to God and His law. I find it absolutely astounding that those few civil rulers who do claim to be Christians never do anything Christian. In fact, they do everything contrary to the Word of God.

Years ago, when Jimmy Carter was running for president, he granted an interview to Playboy magazine. Many Christians were upset that a professing Christian would do so. Carter has shown his colors in many ways. Last I read, he even said the Apostle Paul was a male chauvinist pig, and he did not like what Paul said about women. He is entitled to his opinion, but the Scripture is still right. What upset me was not his interview with Playboy magazine, but what he said in it.

They asked him specifically about adultery, sodomy, and a number of other sins, and Jimmy Carter said that he was not to judge. You do not have to judge. God has already done the judging. God has said they are wicked, wrong, and sinful. I am not picking on Carter. All professing Christian politicians are like this today.

What Jimmy Carter was saying is, “I’m not going to allow my Christianity to get in the way of my politics.” They will always put politics, party, and re-election before God and His Word. What does that mean? It means they are guilty of violating the first commandment: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” Therefore, they are idolaters.

Now Saul was sent on a mission by God. Look back at 1 Samuel 15: “Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel.”

"Now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." There is no way to misunderstand what God commanded in verse 3. God said, kill everybody and kill everything; spare them not. What did Saul do? He spared Agag the king, and the best of the sheep and oxen, while everything that was vile and refuse he utterly destroyed.

He could not bring himself to obey God because he did not think that what was good needed to be destroyed. Yet his responsibility was to obey God. Now who made Saul king?

Look in verse 1: “Samuel also said unto Saul, The LORD sent me to anoint thee to be king over his people, over Israel.” “Now therefore hearken thou unto the voice of the words of the LORD.” What did Samuel tell Saul? God made you king. You are responsible and accountable to Him. You must hear His Word. He is the one who instituted you as a civil ruler.

By the way, God is the one who institutes anyone as a civil ruler. You know what the Bible says in Psalm 75, verses 6 and 7? “For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.” God puts up, and God takes down. Daniel, in Daniel chapter 2 and verse 21, tells us this about God: “And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings.” Who gives man authority? It is God.

Nebuchadnezzar was a proud, arrogant, haughty monarch, and he was a wicked man. But God was the one who put him there. Daniel said to him, “Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory.” If God had not given him that, he would not have had it. When Nebuchadnezzar began to display his pride and arrogance, God decreed to cut him down to size. For years he was driven insane and lived like an animal. Daniel 4:17 says, “This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.”

What does that mean? God is in control. Anyone who has authority received it from God. God is sovereign. The only authority that comes from God is delegated authority. My authority as a pastor is delegated, coming from God through His Word, and limited by the Word. My authority as a husband and father comes from God and is limited to and through His Word. The civil ruler’s authority also comes from God and is limited to and through His Word. That is why the Bible says, in Romans 13, “there is no power but of God.”

"The powers that be are ordained of God." You cannot have any power apart from God. Therefore, whether you are a family ruler, a church ruler, or a civil ruler, you are still answerable and accountable to God. You are duty-bound to obey God, for He created those institutions and delegated that authority.

But what has happened in our land is that we have transgressed so much and advanced so far in our sins and rebellion that our civil rulers not only refuse to recognize and obey the sovereign God of heaven and earth; they delight in ignoring and rejecting Him, His Word, and His people. They not only dishonor Him; they fight against Him. They pass laws that are unbiblical, immoral, unethical, and unrighteous. I would not be far off if I said—and I know there are a few exceptions—that, as a whole, the majority of our modern-day politicians have the morals of an alley cat and the manners of a Tasmanian devil.

Let us be honest. They are proud, arrogant, haughty, and stiff-necked. They refuse to listen to God, His Word, His people, and even their own constituents.

But I will tell you what God says. Hold 1 Samuel 15, and turn to Psalm 82. Psalm 82 is directed against civil rulers, especially judges. In verse 1, the Bible says, "God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods."

That does not mean there are other gods. In Scripture, those placed in positions of responsibility, especially judges, are referred to as gods. Our Lord Himself referred to this verse in John 10, saying, When he's quoting this verse and he said, God called your rulers judges. I mean, God called your rulers and judges gods. Then how is it that you're condemning me when I say that I'm the son of God?

Notice what God says. Here is the dividing line. Beginning in verse 5, concerning these rulers, God says, "They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course."

"I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes. Arise, O God, judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations." One of the

common sins of civil rulers is disobeying God and God's law. They may think they are above God and God's law, but the dividing line is when they come to die like men. They will find they are not God. They are not infallible. They are not immortal. They may be immoral, but not immortal. They will die like men.

Sin 3: Arrogance and Greed

One of the common sins is usurpation of authority. Another common sin is disobeying God and God's law. The third common sin is arrogance and greed. Look at 1 Samuel 15, verses 17 and 19. I want you to look at what God says to King Saul through the prophet Samuel: "And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel? And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD?"

Arrogance is especially significant in its relationship to greed. Samuel said to Saul, when you were little in your own eyesight, God made you king. He was referring to when Samuel first told Saul that God had chosen him to rule over His people. Saul answered in 1 Samuel 9:21, "Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?"

In other words, he said, How can this be? I am of the smallest tribe, and my family is the least in Israel. Why would you make me a king? When it came time to anoint Saul king, in 1 Samuel 10:22, they could not even find Saul.

And God told Samuel, “He hideth himself among the stuff.” Samuel had to go find Saul. Saul had hidden himself because he did not think he was worthy to be made a king. Samuel said, “Look, when you were little in your own eyesight, when you were humble, God made you king.” Do you realize that, in all probability, King Saul started out the way most rulers do? He was fairly humble, depended upon God and the people, and probably had a real desire to serve

God and serve the people. But it did not take long for all of that to change.

Suddenly, the power of his position turned him, and he became corrupt. He saw the wealth that could be obtained, the money that could be made, and the influence that he could wield. The wealth that he could possess, he could lord over all of his subjects.

Do you realize that God required every king, every civil ruler, to have his own personal copy of the law of God? Deuteronomy 17:18–20 says, “And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them: That his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel.”

God said that the king, or civil ruler, was to have his own personal copy of the law of God and read therein all the days of his life, that he might learn to fear the Lord God, obeying Him constantly and consistently, and that his heart would not be lifted up above his brethren. If he did not read the Bible and keep God’s law, he would arrogantly elevate himself above his brethren. The civil ruler who disobeys God and God’s Word no longer considers himself one of us. He considers us, His sheep, to be fleeced. We are his subjects. The arrogant mentality is, “us against them.”

And He's one of the us, and we're the them. One of the most perfect illustrations of what I'm trying to tell you is found in George Orwell's book, The Animal Farm. I love that book. You remember when Napoleon and Snowball, the two hogs, after they got rid of the farmer and his wife, had posted all the rules. The first rule was this: all animals were equal. But after the farmer and his wife were gone, Napoleon and Snowball moved into the farmer's house. They took it, while all the other animals had to stay out in the barn. The other animals began thinking, “I don't think that was our rule. Why aren't we in the house, too?”

Then they went back and read it. It said, “All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.” That is exactly what an arrogant attitude will do. It leads to a superiority complex: “We're superior. We're no longer your servants. We are your masters.”

Samuel charged King Saul with arrogance and greed. In his arrogance, Saul disobeyed God; in his greed, he flew upon the spoil. Look at verse 19: “Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD?”

This phrase, “fly upon the spoil,” is illustrated by birds of prey. I have seen red-tailed hawks and some owls. I have only seen eagles do it in pictures, but I have seen a hawk swoop down out of nowhere, catch a rabbit, and be gone instantly. He is usually on target, and it is very swift. Samuel was saying, “Wherefore didst thou fly upon the spoil?” In other words, Saul rushed into it greedily.

David uses the same illustration in Psalm 17:12, though he likens it to a lion: “Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.” Here are birds of prey and animals, and that is what Saul is being compared to—an animal that arrogantly and greedily flies upon the spoil.

Note Saul's arrogance. In his arrogance he disobeyed God: “Who is God? Why should I obey Him? I am the King.” That arrogant attitude was demonstrated by his flying upon the spoil. He believed that he was entitled to anything and everything he could get.

Is that a modern-day politician? Why do they openly talk about the spoils of office? Once you get in, you greedily take. It has always amazed me that people would spend millions of dollars to get a job paying $300,000 a year. You know, as well as I do, they are going to make far more than they ever spent on a campaign.

So King Saul, in his arrogance and greed, flew upon the spoil. He believed he had a right to it. He did not care what God said. He was the ruler; he could do whatever he pleased. David, although he was a man after God's own heart, displayed this same arrogant and greedy attitude when he took Bathsheba: "I'm the king. I can take her." Arrogance does not distinguish between God and man. It will take

from either one easily, readily, and quickly. Arrogance believes that anything and everything belongs to it. Period.

There are two Proverbs I want you to listen to carefully. Proverbs 1:19 says, "So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof." Proverbs 15:27 says, "He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house; but he that hateth gifts shall live." He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house.

Consider Proverbs 1:19 and ask yourself this question. There have been men like Idi Amin, Mussolini, Stalin, and Mao Zedong. Those fellows killed millions. We still have modern-day politicians who have not killed their millions yet, but some of it may be in plans, I don't know. I can assure you some of it is indeed guilty of a number of deaths. I have read of people who ended up taking their own lives simply because they were being persecuted wrongfully and unjustly and could not handle it. The ones pushing the unjust persecution and prosecution are just as guilty of murder as the man who took his own life, because had they not done that, he would not have been pushed into that corner.

The Bible says, "So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof." A greedy, arrogant person does not care about life. He cares only about gain, whether it is political gain, economic gain, or party gain. It does not matter. All he is concerned about is gain.

Blame Shifting and Failure to Assume Responsibility

Modern-day governments, not only in this land but in other lands, can arrogantly and insolently allow their people to die because they are concerned more about gain than anything else. One common sin is not simply usurpation of power, nor simply disobeying God and His law. It is also arrogance and greed.

A fourth common sin of rulers is blame shifting and failure to assume responsibility for their own office and actions. Look in 1 Samuel 15. When Samuel confronted King Saul, Saul said, “Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD.” Samuel answered, “What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” Saul

replied, “They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.”

Sin 4: Blame Shifting and Failure to Assume Responsibility

As sinners, we are all guilty of blame shifting and failure to assume responsibility for our actions. But this is exceedingly common among civil rulers. Whenever anything goes wrong in this country, it is never the fault of a politician or a party. It is never the result of anything they have done. The fault is never theirs; they are not to blame.

Notice Saul’s words: “They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best.” Yet he adds, “and the rest we have utterly destroyed.” Saul included himself in the destroying: that was what he had been told to do. But it was they—the people—who had spared the animals. There is something thoroughly wicked, vile, and contemptible in Saul’s attempt to shift responsibility from his own kingly shoulders to those of the people. Every word he utters indicates a breakdown of his moral character.

He shows that he was not worthy to rule in any manner. He was weak, contemptible, and irresponsible. In verse 21 he says it again: “But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal.” Who was the ruler of the people?

Who was the director of the war? The king was. God told King Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites—man, woman, child, ox, suckling, ass, camel; he was to kill everything.

The people may have spared the best, but who was responsible to see that everything was killed and that nothing was spared? It was King Saul. God did not give these directions to the people; He gave them to King Saul. Saul attempted to shift responsibility to the people and say, “But I obeyed.”

He did that which he thought was right, but God said he had not obeyed and had not done that which was right. Saul was responsible

and accountable. In the end, his lack of responsibility and his disobedience led to the destruction of his own kingdom.

Every war that we have been in as a country that is unjust and wicked and vile—those men who pushed it, initiated it, wanted it, or profited from it—will answer to God for the men and women killed in that war. You can try to shift responsibility all you want to, but God holds those in authority responsible.

Sin 5: Fearing Man and Failure to Fear God

A common sin of rulers is blame shifting. The fifth common sin of rulers is fearing man and failing to fear God. Look at Saul's lame excuse in 1 Samuel 15:24: "And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice." In verse 30 he says it again: "Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God."

Saul's statement that he feared the people was probably an empty excuse. Saul was the king, the sovereign prince; the people were to stand in awe of him. First Samuel 9:2 tells us that King Saul stood head and shoulders above all the people. The average Israelite probably came just about to his shoulder. He was a big man and a strong man.

On the other hand, let us suppose that he did fear the people. Had he feared God more, he would have had no need to fear the people. Jeb Stuart said, "Let us fear God, and we'll have no need to fear any man." Proverbs 29:25 tells us, "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe."

Do our modern-day politicians fear the people? There is a possibility they may fear being voted out of office, but since almost all voting is now done electronically, they really have no fear of that. If you do not understand what I am saying, read the book Vote Scam. Even in our last election, I read of individuals who voted for one man, yet the X went to another man right in front of the voter's eyes. They recast the ballot, and it went to the other man again. After it

happened three times, they called the poll worker over, and the poll worker observed it as well.

I do not trust electronic voting machines. If it is not in black and white, it cannot be verified. You can control a computer from a thousand miles away. In one sense, the lowliest politicians might get voted out, but those in higher offices have no concern. When you have the choice of voting for two people, socialist A or socialist B, they do not care who gets in. You are still getting socialism.

Usually, the CFR and some of the other groups sponsor both candidates. But there is another sense in which rulers might fear the people: they might fear that we will wise up, see the light, and rise up against them. In this country, we used to tar and feather politicians and ride them out of town on a rail. That used to happen, literally. It surely did.

So to keep that from happening in this day and time, there is a little bread and a little circus given for us. That little bread and little circus goes a long way distracting our minds and keeping us from being concerned. I would really like to know, outside of a few people, who gave a flip over the funeral of Michael Jackson. I did not watch it. Can you imagine the hour after hour on television concerning that funeral? Who cares about Professor Gates? Can you imagine the hour after hour given to Gates, the police officer, and Obama sitting down having a beer? Who cares? Let us find out what is happening, what the news really is, and what people are doing behind the scenes and behind the back. That is what they do not want us to see.

The reason we have bread and circus and entertainment is to keep us distracted. The reason they do what they do is because there is no fear of God before their eyes. Any man who says he fears God will demonstrate that he fears God by obeying God. If you do not obey God, I do not care what your talk is: you do not fear God.

Look at verse 30 again. Saul said, "Then he said, I have sinned: yet honour me now, I pray thee, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD thy God." Saul was more concerned with the praise and recognition of man than with the praise and recognition of God. He wanted the people to look up to him, respect him, and honor him. He did not

wish to be humiliated before them by their understanding that the kingdom had been taken from him. He wanted to pretend that everything was all right. Saul was a normal, everyday politician. Most politicians are more concerned with their legacies and their libraries than with the honor of God and obeying God. Saul still wanted the people to look up to him. Our Lord said in John 5:44, "How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" Do you realize that the desire for the praise and recognition of man makes faith impossible? Everywhere you turn in our modern-day civil realm, men want the praise and recognition of other men far more than they want praise and recognition from God.

King Saul said, “I have sinned. I have sinned.” Notice verse 24: “And Saul said unto Samuel, I have sinned.” Saul admitted that he had sinned, yet he was not sorry for his sin. He was sorry that he had been caught and had lost the kingdom. Second Corinthians 7:10 tells us, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” There is a difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Saul’s repentance and confession resulted from alarm at the rejection of himself and his kingdom; he gave no evidence of genuine consciousness of sin.

He was not grieved that he had sinned against God and violated His law. He was concerned about incurring public disgrace. Saul confessed his sin twice, yet he was not forgiven or reconciled. David, who committed a far greater sin, confessed his sin and was forgiven. What was the difference? Saul shrank from the punishment of sin; David shrank in abhorrence of the sin itself. Saul said, “I have sinned, yet honour me now before the elders of my people.” David said, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.” There is a great difference. No civil ruler will ever rule justly or rightly until he fears God and obeys Him. If he fears God, he will have no need to fear the people. These are common sins.

Applications and Conclusion

Common sins have always been common and always will be, especially as they relate to civil rulers. Every sin that Saul committed

can be easily detected, seen, and demonstrated in the lives of our modern-day civil rulers and politicians. Like Saul, they too will face the judgment of God. They must understand that they are men, and according to Psalm 82:7, they will die like men. They will not live forever or retain their power; they will stand before God and give an account.

The second application concerns 1 Timothy 2, a passage so often misused. We are repeatedly told that we are to pray for our civil rulers. We are exhorted to pray for them, yet no one notices exactly why or how we are to pray. When I ask why we should pray for our civil rulers, I have received this answer: We should pray for them in order that they might be saved.

According to the Bible, they have no right to be in a position of rulership unless they were already saved. Period. God demands saved men to be rulers, not unsaved men. Why, then, should we pray for them? Look in 1 Timothy 2:1. The apostle writes, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority;" Why should we pray for these men? Here is why: "That we," that is, God's people, "may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour."

Our prayer for civil rulers is not for their salvation. It is that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life. We pray for them so that God's people may live in peace, godliness, and honesty.

It is not for their benefit. It is for our benefit. We pray for them that they will leave us alone, that we may do what we should do and live the way we should live before God.

Civil rulers are not only limited by the Word of God, but in our land they are also limited by the Constitution. If they are not held down, as Thomas Jefferson said, and chained down by the Constitution, they will dominate every area of our lives. So Jefferson said, “Bind them down with the chains of the Constitution.”

We should pray for them, yes, but pray that God will either judge them or remove them, and meanwhile that they will leave us alone so that we can have the liberty and freedom to obey God and do that

which is right and holy before Him. Common sins. Everybody has them. Every group has them, even civil rulers.

Let us pray. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask You to help us, Lord, to love Thee and serve Thee, and to be aware of all these sins so that we may avoid some of their consequences. The Bible says, “The prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.” Lord, we pray for wisdom, insight, instruction, and help to obey Thee. We pray for each person on the prayer list, asking that You would undertake for them, help them, and give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 7

Are You Concerned?

December 3, 2012

Introduction: The Question of Concern

The title of the message today is in the form of a question: Are you concerned?

"And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army, for his camp is very great, for he is strong that executeth his word, for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible, and who can abide it? Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn you even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning, and rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent and leave a blessing behind him, even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the Lord your God."

The question is, and you shall hear it several times today: Are you concerned?

Probably most people, even most Christians, have never seriously considered or ever really truly been concerned about the judgment of

God. We do not even like to entertain such thoughts, and we are uncomfortable with the concept of suffering, death, and judgment. The truth is, we prefer to live in absolute ignorance. If the old saying is true, ignorance is bliss, Christians should be the happiest people on the earth, for most of us are totally ignorant when it comes to the Word of God and the principles of God. Our ignorance, however, does not change facts, nor does it change reality. Simply because we do not want to see something, hear something, or understand something, that does not change anything.

God is a God of Judgment

It only ensures our loss. Proverbs 22:3 says, “The prudent man foreseeth the evil and hideth himself, but the wicked, or the foolish, or the simple pass on, and are punished.” Scripture tells us that God is a God of judgment. He is known by His judgments, and justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne.

Deuteronomy 32:4 says concerning God, “He is the rock, His work is perfect, for all of His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.” Isaiah 30:18 says, “Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him.” Psalm 9:16 tells us that “the Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth.” The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. Psalm 89:14 says, “Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne.”

This simple statement—that God is a God of judgment, that He is known by His judgments, and that justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne—is a complete summary of the truth that God does indeed judge. The Bible also teaches us that God is immutable, that He is unchangeable. He said in Malachi 3:6, “I, the Lord, change not.” The immutability of God assures us that His righteous judgments do not change or become altered with time. Cultures may change. Circumstances may change. But principles never change.

The sins that merited and brought forth God’s judgments thousands of years ago are the same sins that merit and bring forth

God's judgments today. Have you considered that the plagues, famines, droughts, and floods frequent and ubiquitous today are the same judgments God brought against Judah and Jerusalem to awaken them to the fact that they were sinning against God?

Are you concerned when everything that is happening—especially when it appears to be exactly the same judgments that fell against Judah and Jerusalem—is happening in America today and befalling us?

The Book of Joel: Present and Coming Judgment

The book of Joel is a very unique book. Joel was a prophet warning the people of God of God's judgments. If you read the book of Joel, you will find that the people were already under judgment, but the most severe judgment had not yet come. Joel is saying, "Open your eyes. Look around. You see what is happening, but you haven't seen anything yet." In other words, it is like the old adage: you can't see the forest for the trees. We look around in our land today and say, "Yes, there are some things that are wrong, and there are some things that are happening." We understand that they are not good, but we do not look any further than that, and we never look at the appointed end.

Look in the book of Joel, beginning with chapter 1, verse 4, and see that God had sent a very severe judgment upon the land: "That which the palmerworm hath left hath the locust eaten, and that which the locust hath left the cankerworm hath eaten, and that which the cankerworm hath left hath the caterpillar eaten."

"Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and howl, you drinkers of wine, because of the new wine, for it is cut off from your mouth. For a nation has come up upon my land, strong and without number, whose teeth are like the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion."

The nation being discussed there, of course, would be the nation of insects. However, I believe there is a double prophecy here. Certainly a greater nation is going to come: the Babylonians against Judah and Jerusalem, and the Assyrians against the ten northern kingdoms. But here he is talking about all of these insects.

Agricultural failures, economic failures, weather disturbances, and marital and physical failures are all part and parcel of God's judgments. Even the loss of joy and happiness is part and parcel of God's judgment, as well as the loss of liberty and freedom. When God's judgment and God's curse come upon us, literally everything falls apart.

I was talking to Frank Kersey last night, and he told me that his wife, Kathy, had seen a bumper sticker on a car. All the bumper sticker asked was, “Now where are we going in a handbasket?” This is the point: everything basically falls apart.

Joel describes God's judgments agriculturally: “The field is wasted, the land mourneth, for the corn is wasted, the new wine is dried up, the oil languisheth. Be ye ashamed, O you husbandmen! Howl, O you vinedressers, for the wheat and for the barley, because the harvest of the field is perished. The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth. The pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field are withered, because joy is withered away from the sons of men.” Do you understand that even joy, and the loss of joy and happiness, is connected with God's judgment?

Pastor Bob McCurry always had a word for those who came to him, especially when they came unrepentant, yet disillusioned, disheartened, and discouraged. After listening to them very patiently, he would look them right in the eye and say, “God's preparing you for something worse.” Perhaps he got that saying from the book of Joel, because that is exactly what Joel is telling the people here: it is bad now, but cheer up, God's preparing you for something worse. It is not Murphy's law; it is God's law.

A Severe Warning: The Lord's Army

Joel 2:11 gives us a severe warning: “And the Lord shall utter His voice before His army, for His camp is very great, for He is strong that executeth His word, for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible, and who can abide it?” The Lord has an army. One of the titles of God is that He is the Lord of hosts, literally, the Lord of the armies. Have you ever stopped to think about all the armies God has

at His disposal? Certainly He has an army of angels, and Israel was considered one of His armies.

But there were others. He used the Assyrian army, the Babylonian army, and many heathen armies to chastise His sinful and disobedient people. In Isaiah 13:3, He referred to the Medes and the Persians as “My sanctified ones” or “My mighty ones.” In Matthew 22:7, He referred to the Roman army as His army. It may surprise you to learn that God even has armies of insects and animals.

I want you to hold your oil too, but turn right back to Psalm 105, and let's begin reading there with verse 34. Notice what the Bible says. In fact, this is one of God's armies: “He spake, and the locusts came, and caterpillers, and that without number, and did eat up all the herbs in their land, and devoured the fruit of their ground.” He spake, and the locusts came.

Years ago, Alice and I were up in Pennsylvania while I was preaching, and I could not figure out what was happening to all the trees. There were dead limbs on about every tree. It was just constant and consistent. We found out that it was the year the locusts came out of the ground, and they were literally devouring the trees. Over in the Middle East, they say that often the locusts black out the sun.

We cannot even think of such a plague. Years ago, I was listening to a Christian radio station, and there was a program on whose title I remember as “Mama Was a Missionary.” The husband and wife had gone over there, the husband died, and Mama stayed there. That particular story was about the fact that when the locusts came and devoured everything—their garden, their fields, their vines, everything—Mama had all of her babies out there catching locusts and putting them in jars and cans, because that was what they would be living on after the locusts had devoured everything. The Scripture tells us here that God spake, and all of these locusts basically came.

Whenever God utters His voice to His army, and to whichever army He utters that voice, that army obeys instantly. In Joel 2:11, He says, “And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army.” Joel is describing the coming of God's judgments as a mighty army. He represents God as commanding His army, ordering them, gathering

them, marshalling them, directing them, giving them the word; and when they get that word, they pour themselves out upon those against whom God sends them. In other words, their presence was a token of God's presence. God's army neither anticipates His command nor lingers at His command. Once He gives it, they obey instantly. Do you understand that God's judgments always come at God's precise, appointed time? Many people think that simply because God's judgments do not come instantly, they will not come at all.

But that's certainly not true. God's judgments always come in God's time, and they always come on time. God does not move upon the timetable of His enemies. Neither does He move upon the timetable of His friends. He moves upon His own timetable.

In Deuteronomy, chapter 32 and verse 41, here is what God said: “If I wet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold upon judgment, I will render vengeance to mine adversaries, and will reward them that hate me.” The word wet means to sharpen. Notice what He said: “If mine hand take hold upon judgment.” Whenever God issues the order, whenever God wets His sword, whenever God sends His army and sends His judgment, devastation and destruction will always fall upon the land. If God wets His glittering sword and takes hold upon judgment, He will render vengeance to His adversaries and reward them that hate Him.

Now notice what the Bible says in Joel 2, verse 11, about the Lord uttering His voice: “And the Lord shall utter His voice before His army. The Lord shall utter His voice.” This is precisely connected with 1 Samuel chapter 2, verse 10: “The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces.”

“Out of heaven shall He thunder upon them. The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth, and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.” God thunders out of heaven. He utters His voice, and when God speaks, the army that He sends obeys.

If you look back to verse 11 of Joel chapter 2, you will see a threefold terror. First, the Bible says, “And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army,” and then, “For his camp is very great.” This

phrase signifies a very numerous and strong army. In other words, Joel is describing an army almost beyond belief.

Threefold Terror of God's Judgment

Many times in Scripture, the Bible speaks of the wicked coming against Israel as the sand by the seashore, the stars without number, or as grasshoppers. Yet here God simply says that it is a very great camp. When God gathers His hosts together, it is an exceedingly great army. It could be an army of insects, an army of animals, or an army of men. God used all of those things against Judah and Jerusalem.

Turn back to Isaiah chapter 7, beginning with verse 18, to see that it could be animals or men. The passage says, “And the Lord shall bring upon thee and upon thy people, upon thy father's house, days that have not come from the day that Ephraim departed.” It speaks of days coming upon Judah even to the king of Assyria. Then verse 18 says, “And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.”

“And they shall come and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all the thorns and upon all the bushes.” God is simply going to hiss, and they are going to come. Here is an army of insects.

Isaiah goes on in the next verse to speak of the Assyrians. Turn to Isaiah chapter 10, beginning with verse 5, when God sent the Assyrian army against the ten northern kingdoms: “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation.” Thus it could be animals or men.

“I will send him against the hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither does his heart think so, but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations, not a few.”

God said the Assyrians were the rod of His anger; the staff in their hand was His indignation. They did not mean to obey God, but they did. All they wanted was to kill, plunder, pillage, and steal. But God

sent them. They were His army. This is a truth in the book of Joel: Joel is warning that God has at His command all the instruments necessary to punish sin, wickedness, and rebellion.

In Judges 5:20, when Sisera was fighting against Israel, the Bible says that even the stars in their places fought against Sisera. God even used the stars. Isaiah 40:26 says, "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold, who hath created these things, that bringeth out their hosts by number," speaking of the stars; "he calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might, for he is strong in power, not one of them faileth."

Whatever God calls—whether an insect, a man, an animal, or a star—they are all great in power; not one of them faileth. You say, "Well, a star doesn't bother me." Let it crash into the area where you live, and we will see whether it bothers you or not. Or let it withhold its light, and we can see.

God is saying that He has a very great camp and a very great army. He is very capable of using that army against His enemies and against those who displease Him, and not one of them will fail.

Are you concerned? Look back in Joel 2, because here is the second terror. I told you it was a threefold terror. Joel 2:11 says, "And the Lord shall utter His voice before His army, for His camp is very great." That is the first terror. Here is the second: "For He is strong that executeth His word." God does not have a weak army or a weak warrior. All are strong, and not one of them can be turned away.

Did you know that one of God's warriors could handle a thousand men, and two could handle ten thousand? Hold Joel 2 and turn back to Deuteronomy 32:30. Here is the question that is asked: How could the enemy be so successful? "How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up?"

In other words, when the Lord is against you, one warrior can handle a thousand, and two can chase ten thousand. Why? Because the Lord destroys your power and fights against you.

Now turn to Jeremiah 21. Jeremiah is the weeping prophet, warning Judah and Jerusalem many times. Through Jeremiah, God

told Judah and Jerusalem not to fight against the king of Babylon—not to fight against Nebuchadnezzar—but to submit to him. He told the other countries this as well, because He said, "Unto his hand have I given all these countries."

Jeremiah 21:3 says, "Then said Jeremiah unto them, Thus shall ye say to Zedekiah"—and Zedekiah was the king—"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel; Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon, and against the Chaldees, which besiege you without the walls, and I will assemble them in the midst of the city. And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand, and with a strong arm, even in anger, and in fury, and great wrath."

"And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast. They shall die of a great pestilence." Look what God said. I will not only send him, but if you try to fight against him, I will turn the weapons back against you—your own weapons. Moreover, says God, I will personally fight against you myself. So the question is, does God's judgment bother you, and are you concerned?

If you will go back to Joel 2:11, here is the third terror: "And the Lord shall utter His voice before His army, for the camp is very great." That is the first one. "For a strong that executed His word." That is the second one. Now here is the third: "For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible, and who can abide it?" God's judgment is not a Sunday school picnic. What Joel is trying to impress upon Judah and Jerusalem is the severity and destructiveness of God's judgment.

The prophet Nahum sought to do the same thing. In Nahum 1:5–6, talking about God, Nahum said, "The mountains quake at Him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at His presence, yea, the world and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before His indignation? And who can abide the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him." Who can abide that? Who can abide the earthquakes, the lightnings, and the volcanic eruptions? No. The day of the Lord is great and very terrible.

It is great because great things and great acts are done in it. We call evil days and evil times that because evil is prominent. The Bible speaks of an acceptable time, meaning there is a time when we may be accepted by God. But here Scripture speaks of a great and very terrible time, signifying that whatever happens will be great and extremely terrible. Who can abide it? It is like Deuteronomy 4:24: "God is a consuming fire." This judgment will reduce Judah and Jerusalem to absolutely nothing.

A Solemn Witness: Call to Genuine Repentance

If you are going to repent, now is the time, because once you turn another deaf ear to God, the judgment is about to fall. He will punish you for your perverseness. I believe that we could probably make the same application to our country today. So the question is, Are you concerned?

Not only do you have a severe warning in verse 11, but look at verses 12 and 13, because here is a solemn witness: "Therefore now also saith the Lord, turn you even to me with all your heart and with fasting and with weeping and with mourning and rend your heart and not your garments. And turn to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil."

Look very carefully at verse 12: "Therefore also now." Literally, that means, in light of these truths—in light of what I have just told you in verse 11. Since all this is so, there is no way to escape except through true repentance. My judgment is about to fall; in light of that, now is the time to turn.

Repentance involves turning from sin to the Lord. It is true that some people repent of their sin, but they never turn to the Lord. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9, the Apostle Paul said, "For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God." Notice: you turn to God from idols, to serve the living and true God. It is not enough just to turn from idols. You must turn to God from idols.

Repentance and faith are the two sides of one coin. If you have true, genuine repentance, you also have true faith. If you have true

faith, you also have true, genuine repentance. It is impossible to have a biblical repentance without faith. It is impossible to have a biblical faith without repentance.

In Acts 20 and verse 21, the Apostle Paul said this concerning his ministry: "Testifying both to the Jews and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." Both are absolutely indispensable. That is why he said in Acts 26 and verse 20: "But he showed first to them of Damascus, and then at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance."

Now, what is he saying in verse 12? Therefore, in light of all this, the Lord says, "Turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning, and rend your heart, and not your garments." Repentance is to be evidenced by a real and genuine turning to the Lord with all the heart. It can be with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.

Worldly Sorrow vs. Godly Sorrow

The soul that is genuinely repentant is genuinely sorry for his sin. There is a difference between a worldly sorrow and a godly sorrow. Second Corinthians 7:10 says, "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of, but the sorrow of this world worketh death." Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation, not to be repented of, but the sorrow of this world worketh death.

There is a difference between being sorrowful that you have been caught in your sins, that your sins have been exposed, and that others have found out about your sins, so that you are simply embarrassed, and godly sorrow. A godly sorrow really does not care who finds out about the sin. A godly sorrow is sorrowful over the fact that one has sinned against God, violated His law, dishonored Him, and broken His commandments. That is why godly sorrow works repentance unto salvation, but the sorrow of this world works death. There are plenty of people who have had a worldly sorrow.

If I were to ask you who was the most wicked and vile king in the northern kingdom, I hope you would say Ahab, for that is who it was.

1 Kings 21:25 says, “But there was none like unto Ahab, who did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.” Manasseh was in the southern kingdom, but Ahab took top honors in the northern kingdom for being wicked and vile.

After Ahab had killed Naboth and his sons and gone down to possess that garden, God sent Elijah. When Ahab saw Elijah, he asked, “Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?” Elijah said, “I have. Thus saith the Lord.” Paraphrasing, Elijah told him that God was going to kill him, because he was a wicked reprobate.

1 Kings 21:27 says, “And it came to pass, when Ahab heard those words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly.” What did he do? He took off his royal garments and rent his garments, but his heart was never rent. He was still lost and undone. He never turned to the Lord in repentance and faith. He rent his garments, but that is not what the Lord is ultimately seeking in Joel chapter 2: “…and rent your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord.”

Did you know that Judas, the betrayer of our Lord, repented? That is what the Scripture says. Matthew 27:3 says, “Then Judas, who had betrayed him when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.” Of course, he threw them on the floor. He repented himself, but he never turned to the Lord. There was a worldly sorrow, but he was still just as lost as before.

The point is simple: multitudes are in the same position as Ahab and Judas. They have performed a religious act, yet they have never truly turned to the Lord in repentance and faith to serve Him.

They may have walked down an aisle. They may have joined a church. They may have been baptized. They may even have been chosen as a teacher, a deacon, or perhaps a preacher. Yet their heart has never been rent. There is no godly sorrow for their sin and no real, genuine turning to the Lord. Many people wish to be free from the penalty of their sins, but they do not wish to be free from the power of their sins. What they really want is to be free from the penalty of their sins so that they may enjoy the pleasure of their sins.

David sinned, and Psalm 51 is one of David's penitential Psalms, in which he asks God for forgiveness. David says to God, “Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.” Then he says, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.”

In verse 10, he says, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” David understands that he must be cleansed and purged; it must be internal, and his heart must be rent. He continues, “For thou desirest not sacrifice, else I would give it. Thou delightest not in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou will not despise.”

God requires a rent heart, a broken heart. So the question is, are you concerned as to whether or not your heart has been rent? Do you have a broken and contrite heart? Are you concerned as to whether or not your repentance is real and genuine? Have you examined your life in light of the Word of God? You know what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 13:5: “Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith.”

“Prove your own selves. Know you're not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except you be reprobate.” What is he saying? Examine your life according to the Word of God. Determine whether or not you have a real, genuine salvation experience. Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith. Prove your own heart. You have to see what Scripture demands: Has my experience, is my life, is my understanding in light and in agreement with the Word of God? So are you concerned?

The Wonder of Divine Mercy

Look very quickly back to Joel chapter 2, verses 13 and 14. Notice what he says: “For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.” Watch verse 14: “For who knoweth if he will return and repent and leave a blessing behind him, even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the Lord your God?” Go back to verse 13: “And rend your heart and not your

garments, and turn to the Lord your God." Here it is: "For he is gracious and merciful and slow to anger and of great kindness and repenteth him of evil."

My first question is this: Can you possibly imagine, could you possibly conceive of a holy, righteous, just Judge who is willing to be gracious and merciful and kind, willing to turn from His anger and His indignation?

Stop and think about this. We can imagine God being merciful, gracious, and kind to other people because we do not know their sins. But we know our sins and the wickedness of our own hearts in some degree. When we think about our sins, the only thing you can say, and the only thing I can say, is that it is a wonder, a marvelous thing, that we have not been consumed already. It is a wonder that God has not already struck us down. I am so thankful that I am not God, because if I was, I would have killed me and a whole lot more a long time ago.

But can you imagine it? The wonder of wonders is this: God has not only refrained from striking us down, but He has offered to be gracious, merciful, and kind to those who have sinned so grievously against Him. He has invited us to Himself. He has told us to repent. And if we turn from our sins, He will turn from His anger.

Here is a verse I quote almost every day: Lamentations 3:22–23: "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." The only reason you and I are alive to this hour is because of God's compassions and graciousness. The Bible says in Psalm 130:4, "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."

Some time ago I read a story about Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He had announced that the following Sunday he would preach from Romans 9:13: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." After the service, a lady came to him and said, "Mr. Spurgeon, I am so thankful that you are going to preach from that text, because it has troubled and bothered me for some time." Spurgeon replied that he was thankful to hear her say that, because the text had troubled him as well, and he wanted to clarify some things in that area.

The woman said, “I just cannot figure out how God could hate Esau.” Spurgeon answered, “That is not the part that bothers me. I understand how God could hate Esau. I just cannot understand how He could love that conniving, sinful, despicable, and treacherous worm Jacob. That is the part that bothers me.”

Until you realize that our hearts should leap for joy at the prospect of divine forgiveness, we can understand why God should judge and destroy us. We can understand how even God should damn us. But the grace that would save us and bring us to Himself is a startling wonder. That is why, in Romans 9:29, the Apostle Paul, quoting Isaiah, said, “Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a remnant, we should have been made like unto Sodom and like unto Gomorrha.” The Scripture says in Psalm 86:15, “But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.” Psalm 103:8 says, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.” It is a wonder and a blessing to experience what Peter said in 1 Peter 2:3: “If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.” And He is.

“And rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God. For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil.” One old scholar, commenting on these verses, said: “The strict judge cannot be overcome, for he is omnipotent. He cannot be deceived, for He is wisdom. He cannot be corrupted, for He is justice. He cannot be sustained, for He is eternal. He cannot be avoided, for He is omnipresent.

“Yet He can be entreated, because He is mercy. He can be appeased, because He is goodness. He can cleanse, because He is the fountain of grace. He can satisfy, because He is the bread of life. He can soothe because He is the unction from above. He can beautify because He is fullness. He can bless because He is bliss. Turn from Him, then in fearing His justice, turn you to Him and flee to His mercy. Flee from Himself to Himself from the rigor of justice to the bosom of mercy. The Lord who is to be feared saith it, He who is truth enjoins us in that which is just, profitable and good when He says, Turn ye to Me. Turn ye to Me.”

Temporal Judgments and the Law of Sowing and Reaping

Verse 14 is a strange verse in light of our text: “Who knoweth if He will return and repent and leave a blessing behind Him, even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the Lord your God?” To understand it, remember that, looking back to Joel 1, the land was under judgment. Famine was stalking the land. All these insects had devoured all the crops; there was absolutely nothing left. I believe verse 14 applies to the possibility of lifting the temporal judgment upon the land.

God says, turn to Him and He’ll turn to us. There is no doubt about God’s forgiveness. If we genuinely, truly, turn to Him in repentance and faith, He genuinely and really and truly forgives us of our sins and receives us to Himself. But there is another problem, and that problem is not with salvation, not with reconciliation, but with what you and I would call temporal judgments. For instance, in Zephaniah 2:3: “Seek ye the Lord, O ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment. Seek righteousness, seek meekness.”

It may be that you shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. It may happen, or it may not, but it probably will. David committed adultery and murder. Did God forgive him? Yes, there is no question about that. But did his child die? Yes. Did David reap what he had sown? Yes. There is no question that he was forgiven, but that temporal judgment remained.

If Ron and I got into a fight, perhaps after getting drunk, and I knocked out his eye while he knocked out my teeth, would God forgive us for fighting? Yes. Would He forgive us for getting drunk? Yes. But would that replace his eye or my teeth? No.

We reap what we sow. Temporal judgments may or may not be lifted in light of the consequences of our sin, because there is a law in Scripture called the law of sowing and reaping. Here is what Joel is saying in verse 14: If you turn unto the Lord, who knoweth if He will return and repent and leave a blessing behind Him, even a meat or meal offering and a drink offering, unto the Lord your God? God may be pleased to leave us enough food to live on, and enough food that we can sacrifice and worship to Him. In other words, if we turn,

it may not only stop the coming judgment, but God's grace and mercy may even lift some of the temporal judgment.

As we look around at our land today and see the multitude of sins, disobedience, and rebellions apparent on every hand, are you concerned? If you know that God is just, holy, righteous, and immutable—He does not change—how can you not be concerned?

Applications: Godly Concern in Action

There is a difference between a godly concern and a humanistic or worldly concern. A godly concern is always demonstrated by biblical attitude and biblical actions. It is demonstrated in evidence manifested by faith and obedience. A humanistic or worldly concern is always fretful, unbelieving, agitated, and, at the same time, not knowing which way to turn or what to do.

A godly concern will always examine things in light of God's Word. God has said in the book of Zechariah, chapter 1 and verse 3, “Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord.” If we have turned to Him in repentance and faith, we know that He has turned unto us. A godly concern will always respond in faith and obedience. A godly concern will do whatever is necessary to prepare oneself against temporal judgment.

If we have been saved by the grace of God, are we going to face God's eternal judgment? The answer is no. But we are living in a land full of sin, disobedience, and rebellion, and we must understand that we cannot sin against God and get by with it. Sooner or later, the sins of our country, nation, and people will catch up with us.

If we know that God's judgment is upon our economic system—and it is, because it is an unbiblical, unjust, and ungodly economic system—what shall we do? Shall we continue to place our hopes and finances in paper and digits? If we know that God's judgment is upon our agricultural system, and it is, what shall we do? Shall we continue to eat food and fruit full of herbicides and pesticides, grown from depleted soil with chemicals? If we are genuinely concerned, there need to be some things thought through.

If God's judgment is against our governmental system, to whose governmental system will we turn, and to whose law will we obey? We are living in a land that cannot escape the judgment of God in certain areas. What do we do? Are you concerned?

Let me again quote Proverbs 22:3: “The prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.” There is nothing wrong with a godly concern, as long as it is followed and filled with godly faith, godly obedience, and godly preparation. Joel was telling the people that it was time to be concerned.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your love, mercy, and truth. We pray that You would indeed give us a godly concern, followed with godly faith and godly obedience. In Thy name we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 8

Captain Jonathan Davis "A Combat Mentality"

May 19, 2013

A Combat Mentality

Introduction: The Need for Men

I want to bring a message today which not only you never heard, you probably have never heard about this individual. You probably have never really realized how the truth of what I am going to bring you is replete throughout the Scriptures. I am bringing a message on Captain Jonathan Davis and a combat mentality. Watch this: it is in the Scripture.

1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 13 says, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong.” The message deals with Captain Jonathan Davis and a combat mentality. Let me begin with a simple question—not to be answered out loud: Where are the men?

How is it that in America today we have sired a generation of pansies, a generation of spineless, gutless wimps who are absolutely

afraid to stand for truth, righteousness, holiness, and principle? Where are the men ready and willing to fight for their lives, their families, and the principles of right?

I certainly do not endorse, nor do I agree with Arnold Schwarzenegger on most points. However, a few years ago he made a statement with which I wholeheartedly agree. He talked about “girly men,” which I think is very appropriate for today’s arena. Such girly men are everywhere today. Men would rather play than work, be protected than be protectors, and be pacifistic rather than indulge in martial training. In fact, they would rather be amused than think, study, and pray.

Recently, Alice and I were at an airport in, I think, Denver, Colorado, where we saw a nineteen- to twenty-one-year-old couple. The man was playing a video game, and the woman was coloring in a Charlie Brown coloring book. Neither one was mentally challenged, or at least not by appearance, and yet here they were, a married couple basically refusing to grow up. Years ago, I remember seeing a young married couple in a drugstore sitting down and reading comic books.

I knew both of them because I'd gone to school with them. I made the statement, how can they spend all this time sitting there reading comic books? The person to whom I made that statement said, well, they come in here every day and spend several hours a day just reading comic books. It was a married couple. I think there's something wrong when a 40-year-old father is better at computer and video games than his 12-year-old son. It's absolutely amazing that everywhere I go, I see grown men and grown women playing computer games. If we do not have girly men today, then we're swamped with grown adult children that refuse to mature.

There is only one area in which we as adults and mature Christians should be immature. You say, what is that? In 1 Corinthians chapter 14, verse 20, the apostle Paul says, "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men." He tells us that we cannot be children in understanding, but we could be children when it comes to malice.

You understand exactly what he is talking about. Little children playing together can get upset and angry with each other. They can run and tell their parents, crying, saying, so-and-so hit me, or so-and-so hurt me, or so-and-so said something about me. And you say, there, there. The next thing you know, within two minutes, they're out playing together. Everything's gone, everything's forgotten, everything's over with, and they're the best of friends again. So the apostle Paul said, in malice you can be children. Don't hold grudges, don't be bitter, don't be resentful; get on with your life.

But he said, in understanding, you must be men. In 1 Corinthians 16 and verse 13, he says, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, and be strong."

The Biblical Command: 1 Corinthians 16:13

Our text is a clear clarion call for a combat mentality. This text is decidedly a military text, demonstrating awareness, courage, boldness, and strength. Interestingly, when we look at verse 13, where he says, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men," the word "men" is a very special word. In fact, it is known as a hapax legomenon, which means that it is a word that occurs only one time in Scripture. The word for "men" here is andrizomai, and it literally means to be a man, to make brave, or to show oneself a man, or to show oneself as brave. The connotation is that we are always to render ourselves manly and brave. We are to show ourselves to be men. We are not to be cowards, timid, or alarmed at our enemies, but always bold and brave.

We use similar phrases when we tell people, "Be brave," "Show yourself a man," or "Act like a man." When we say those words, we mean, "Do not act cowardly, do not act fearful, do not be effeminate, do not run and hide; you fight and do whatever is necessary." So stop and think: what does the phrase "quit ye like men" imply? It implies that when you are attacked in any way whatsoever—physically, spiritually, or mentally—you do not flinch, run, or hide. Rather, you maintain your ground, resist, press forward, strike home, and keep fighting until you conquer. When he says, "quit ye like men," he literally means this: you fight, and you fight hard, and you fight to win. Your attitude is that you are either going to win, or you are

going to die trying. When He says, "quit yourselves like men," He says that we act like men; we do not act like children who are easily frightened and easily intimidated.

God says in 1 Corinthians 16 and verse 13, "be strong." When God tells us to be strong, it means that we are to put forth all the vigor, all the energy, and all the strength which God has given us. We are not to give in, give up, or give out.

Military Imagery in Scripture

This verse is decidedly a military verse. In fact, all the terms in this verse are military terms. God says in verse 13, "watch ye, watch ye." What does that imply? What does it teach us? It teaches us that we are to be constantly and continually on our guard, lest we be surprised by our enemies.

In other words, we must keep our scouts out and post our sentries and sentinels, lest the enemy surprise us. We must see that at all times we are properly defended and protected, always on a constant lookout for our enemies. So he says, “Watch ye.” Make sure that you observe what is happening and know what is going on. Then he says, in verse 13, “Stand fast in the faith.” Not only are we required to watch, but we are required to stand fast in the faith. What does that mean? It means that we keep our ranks, that we are not disorderly, and that we do not break and run.

It is like the Spartans at Thermopylae. We keep our ranks unbroken and close together. Our preservation depends upon our unity. If the enemy succeeds in breaking our ranks or dividing us, then a rout is inevitable. This ploy has been used successfully many times and in many ways. For instance, when the police want to break two people—even a husband and wife—they separate them. They tell the wife that her husband said something or accused her of something, though he had not said a word; then they tell the husband that his wife said something or caused something, though she had not said a word.

They are trying to divide and conquer. That is the way the serpent operates. That is how he gets into churches and homes: divide and conquer. So God says in verse 13 that we are to stand fast in the faith.

Historical Example: The Spartans at Thermopylae

I've already mentioned the Spartans at Thermopylae. You must remember the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 B.C., an alliance of Greek states fighting an invading Persian army under Xerxes I. The Greeks were vastly outnumbered. King Leonidas had his 300 Spartans and about 7,000 other men who joined him, and they were facing probably at least a minimum of a million Persians.

Leonidas and his Spartans got into one pass to hold it, because Xerxes and his men would have to come through that pass to attack Greece. When they attacked, the Spartans kept their ranks closed, fought, and destroyed the Persians, cutting them down one after the other. After the first day of fighting, the Persians had lost greatly; after the second day, they still had lost greatly. When someone revealed a back way around them, King Leonidas stayed with his bodyguard of 300 Spartans and 700 Thespian men and released the rest of the army so it could be saved and fight another day.

They stood and fought the Persians although they knew it would be absolute death. The performance of these defenders of Thermopylae is often used as an example of the advantages of training, good equipment, and using terrain to maximize potential, and always as a symbol of courage against extremely overwhelming odds.

When Xerxes reached Thermopylae, he sent emissaries to the Greek forces and asked King Leonidas to come over to his side. He offered to make Leonidas king over all Greece if he would simply join Xerxes and not fight him. Leonidas answered, "If you knew what is good in life, you would abstain from wishing for foreign things. For me, it is better to die for Greece than to be monarch over my compatriots."

Finally, Xerxes sent his emissaries back and said, "throw down your arms." Leonidas responded, "come and get them." They defended that pass and held the Persians off for nearly a week, setting up their defeat. They were defeated in a naval battle as well, and he was defeated the second time he came. So, when God says, "stand fast in the faith," it literally means that you keep your ranks.

You don't let anything come in. “Stand fast in the faith” means exactly what it states: do not give up and do not give in. The Apostle Paul said it very plainly. In Ephesians 6:13, he says, “Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” What did he say? “Take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” So when he says in verse 13, “stand fast in the faith,” that means you stand fast.

Then he says we're to be strong. Again, this implies and signifies that we're not to give in to weakness, despair, or discouragement. We're to maintain our courage, sustain and help one another, and have no fear, for our great Captain, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the victor in every battle. We've got to understand that the Apostle Paul told Timothy, in 2 Timothy 2:3, “Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” Our Lord told us that although we stand, it will not necessarily always be easy.

But when He says, “Be strong,” this is exactly what God told Joshua. Consider how clearly and distinctly God spoke to him in Joshua 1:6: “Be strong and of a good courage. For unto this people thou shalt divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.” Note that He said, “Be strong and of a good courage.”

In 2 Samuel 10, Joab, who was David's captain, found himself surrounded. He had the Ammonites in front of him and the Syrians behind him. When the front of the battle was against him before and behind, he chose out all the choice men of Israel and put them in array against the Syrians. The rest of the people he delivered into the hand of Abishai his brother, that he might put them in array against the children of Ammon. And he said, “If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee.”

Joab said, "Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the Lord do that which seemeth him good." When God tells us that we are to be strong, it means that we are not to behave like children, before whom the least opposition will terrify us and throw us down. We are to be strong like men, with spiritual courage and fortitude.

We are living in dismal times, in times of trouble and persecution. It is in times like these that real men always manifest themselves in their attitudes and actions. We have been given examples not only from the Bible, but also from history, of what I would call a combat mentality that is clearly and plainly taught in 1 Corinthians 16 and verse 13.

One historical example is Captain Jonathan R. Davis, who, with two pistols and a Bowie knife, killed eleven outlaws in one fight. He killed more in one fight than any other Western incident that took place on the frontier. He was outnumbered, outgunned, and taken by surprise, yet he won the battle.

Captain Jonathan R. Davis: A Combat Mentality in Action

Jonathan R. Davis was born in Monticello, South Carolina, in 1816. Following his education at the University of South Carolina, he enlisted in the Palmetto Regiment of Volunteers and was quickly promoted to lieutenant. He fought with distinction during the Mexican War and was wounded at Churubusco in 1847, along with 1,100 other American casualties. In those days, merely surviving one's wounds was miraculous, because infections were prominent; those who did not have a deadly or mortal wound would often die from infection. Jonathan Davis proved to be a very tough man indeed.

Davis mustered out of the army in 1848 with the honorary rank of captain. Along with hundreds of other veterans, he did not know what he was going to do, but since the gold rush was taking place in California, he went there with many others. His soldierly demeanor, skills with arms, and unblemished character earned him respect among his fellow prospectors. He was known even then as a superior marksman and was described by a friend as second to none in the state as a fencer. He could use not only his pistols but also a knife or sword, and it was said that Jonathan Davis was never seen without his two Colts and a big Bowie knife.

The gold rush brought many people to the gold fields. Unhappily, many who went there did not want to work for gold. Work was too hard for them, and they thought it easier to allow other people to do

the work and then simply come in and steal what had been worked for. Work was hard; stealing was easy. But there was a drawback to stealing, because most men did not want their gold stolen, and so they would fight back. Usually, all the prospectors were armed as well.

Therefore, if you were going to rob someone when you knew he would fight back, you wanted to be a member of a gang, outnumbering your victims and ambushing them. Most of these outlaws joined together because gangs were safer. Even the prospectors went around armed, and when they knew gangs were nearby, they themselves traveled safely in numbers. The gangs depended not only upon their numbers but also upon the ambush.

Very seldom were prospectors prepared for an ambush or prepared to be outnumbered. The gang would pick its targets, set an ambush, and then murder and steal. One such gang was made up of two Americans, five Australians, two Britons, four Mexicans, and a Frenchman. Just two days previous to December the 19th, 1854, this gang had robbed and murdered six Chinese and four Americans.

Let me point something out, and I hope you understand this: to the lawless, life is cheap. When I tell you the amount of gold found on these thieves, and you understand that six lives had been taken to get it, it is absolutely unbelievable. But to the lawless, life is cheap, and they think nothing of taking lives in order to satisfy their wants and desires.

The prospectors, of course, had friends. They not only went around armed, but when they thought danger was near, they traveled in groups as well. On this particular occasion, three friends were traveling. Captain Jonathan Davis was accompanied by his good friend Dr. Bolivar Sparks and by James McDonald. Ambushing three men in a lonely canyon probably seemed easy enough for fourteen desperados. However, they had not counted on someone like Jonathan Davis. He was different.

They did not know him. They did not know his skills in combat or his combat mentality. Yet they were going to learn, and they were going to learn the hard way. There is a wonderful truth that I always enjoy emphasizing: every bully, every evil person, and every criminal

eventually runs into the wrong person. They meet someone they cannot antagonize, terrify, or bully. That individual stands his ground and teaches them a real biblical principle, found in Proverbs 13:15: “The way of the transgressor is hard.” The gang that intended to prey upon Captain Jonathan Davis and his two friends learned that truth very quickly. In fact, they had not only met their match; they had met their maker as well.

What happened on December 19, 1854, is what historian John Bossenecker calls the single most extraordinary feat of self-defense by an American civilian in the annals of frontier history. It was cold in California’s Sierra Nevada Mountains. Three prospectors traversed a rough trail aptly known as Rocky Canyon, in El Dorado County near the North Fork of the American River. Unknown to these three men—Captain Davis, Dr. Sparks, and James McDonald—fourteen outlaws were hidden, waiting for them. Neither the outlaws nor Captain Davis and his friends knew that, on another hilltop not far away, three miners were watching and observing everything that happened.

Captain Davis, his good friend Dr. Sparks, and James McDonald walked slowly along the trail, oblivious to the danger ahead. All of a sudden, fourteen bandits leaped from cover and opened fire. James McDonald was killed instantly and never had an opportunity to present his weapon. Dr. Sparks drew his pistol and got two shots off before he was felled. Evidently, both shots went wild and did not hit one of the bandits.

With one friend dead and the other badly wounded and gravely injured, Captain Jonathan Davis stood alone in a hail of gunfire. He did not hesitate. He did not cower. He did not run away in hide. He responded quickly, effectively, efficiently, and with deadly force. Captain Davis later described himself as being, in his words, “in a fever of excitement at the time.” Unfazed, he stood his ground, drew both pistols, and fired a barrage at the outlaws charging him. When he emptied his two Colt pistols—though it is unknown whether any bullets missed—seven of the fourteen attackers lay dead. By this time, the outlaws had emptied their revolvers as well.

But the fight was not over. Four of the bandits then charged Captain Davis, one with a short sword or saber and the other three

with knives. When Captain Davis saw that, he very quickly drew out his Bowie knife.

One man with a good knife who knows how to use it can be very deadly. If you know anything about the Tueller drill, or the twenty-one-foot rule, a man with a knife can usually get to a man with a pistol and kill him. The man can never draw the pistol and shoot unless he knows how to move, if the man is within twenty-one feet.

Four of these outlaws attacked Davis: one with a short sword and three with knives. Davis whipped out his Bowie knife and quickly warded off the thrusts of two of the bandits. He stabbed one of the bandits to death, then disarmed another by knocking the knife from his grasp and slicing off his nose and one finger of the right hand. Two of the attackers had been wounded in a previous attack in which they had successfully killed the other people, yet they foolishly charged Davis with their knives drawn. In that instant, Captain Davis slashed with his heavy Bowie knife and killed them both.

Seven of the robbers he had shot dead. Three now desperately wounded he had killed or were lay dying. One had his nose cut off and a finger cut off, laying on the ground helpless, and the three remaining bandits fled for their lives. In seconds, he had killed three with his Bowie and grievously wounded the gang's leader by cutting off his nose and a finger.

Without hesitating, he ripped off his shirt and went to his friend Dr. Sparks and began to bind up his wounds. After binding up Dr. Sparks' wounds, since he was the victor and mercy was now at his disposal, he went to the three grievously wounded bandits and attempted to bind up their wounds as well.

When the three witnesses came running down the trail and Davis saw them, he very quickly leaped to McDonald's body, where his unfired pistol was, grabbed the pistol, pointed it at the three miners, and commanded them to halt. The miners were John Webster, Isaac Hart, and P. S. Robertson. They identified themselves and said they had been out hunting game. From a peak, or hilltop, they had seen the fight and had come to assist him in taking care of the wounded, which they did.

Aftermath and Vindication

They went back to their camps and brought fifteen other men, not only to witness the bloody scene but also to help dig the graves. As the sun went down, three of the wounded bandits died. The noseless leader confessed to his gang's ten murders on the seventeenth and eighteenth. He died the following day from his injuries. The bandits' bodies yielded $491 in gold and silver coins. They killed ten people for $491. I know those were gold and silver dollars, and I know that would be worth more than $491 today. I understand that: $491 for ten bodies. They had nine watches, two silver and seven gold, and four ounces of gold dust.

Dr. Sparks was barely clinging to life. Captain Davis explained to these men that Dr. Sparks not only had a home but a family back in Coloma, and he urged that their ill-gotten gain should go to Dr. Sparks' family. They all agreed, since they had no idea whom it was taken from, and gave the money to Dr. Sparks and his family.

After the battle was over, the next day all the dead were buried. Being law-abiding men, the group formed a coroner's jury, wrote out a report of the incident citing all the evidence, including witnesses' statements, and concluded that Davis and his party acted in self-defense. Seventeen of the miners signed it, and it was sent to Placerville, the county seat.

Davis took his friend, Dr. Sparks, to his home in Coloma, where the doctor passed away on December the 26th. One witness stated in his letter that, although they counted twenty-eight bullet holes through Captain Davis's hat and clothes—seventeen through his hat and eleven through his coat and shirt—he received but two very slight flesh wounds.

In the months following, many people began to express doubt concerning Captain Davis' deed and his action, and some even said it was a wild exaggeration. Davis neither sought publicity nor notoriety, but he was stung by the challenges to his honor and by the disrespect he believed was being shown to his friends. Finally, Captain Davis and the witnesses appeared before Judge R. M. Anderson and the Court of Inquiry, where detailed depositions were

taken and comparisons of statements set the matter at rest once and for all.

Jonathan Davis said, "I did only what hundreds of others might have done under similar circumstances and attached no particular credit to myself for it." But the question is, would the hundreds of others have done it as well? What did Captain Jonathan R. Davis possess that the average man does not possess?

It was not just good weaponry. He had trained with those weapons. He not only had good weapons and good training; he also had a combat mentality. He refused to be a victim. He was determined to fight and determined to win. There is a 50% rule stating that a person is half as good under pressure as on his best day at the range. If Captain Davis fought and shot so well under pressure, how good would he have been without the pressure? I can think of only a few biblical examples that can rival what Jonathan R. Davis did.

Biblical Parallels: David's Mighty Men

In 2 Samuel 23, we have the listing of David's mighty men. Look at verse 8: "These be the names of the mighty men whom David had."

"The Tachmonite that sat in the seat, chief among the captains; the same was Adino the Eznite: he lift up his spear against eight hundred, whom he slew at one time." Can you imagine fighting and killing eight hundred men at one time with a spear?

"And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines that were there gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel were gone away: He arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto his sword."

"And the Lord wrought a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to spoil." When it says his hand clave unto his sword, it means that when the battle was over, someone had to help him release his fingers and remove the grip from his hand. He had held and fought so well.

Look at verse 11: "And after him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered together into a troop,

where was a piece of ground full of lentils: and the people fled from the Philistines. But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines: and the Lord wrought a great victory."

You can read the rest of that chapter and find out all that David's mighty men had done. All I am trying to tell you is that here were men who may have bested Jonathan R. Davis, but they were fighting with the blessing and power of God. Undoubtedly, Jonathan R. Davis had the blessing and power of God upon him, for killing eleven out of the fourteen outlaws.

Applications: Training, Mentality, and Spiritual Warfare

Now let me make a couple of applications. First, you must comprehend and understand the value of martial training. Most have never trained, most do not desire to train, and they will never train. I have heard all kinds of excuses: "I don't have the time." I understand that, but everybody has twenty-four hours a day. Nobody has any more time than that. I have also heard, "Ammo now is so expensive." I understand.

And how about this one? Super pious: "Well, the Lord will protect me." I know God is sovereign, and I believe in God's protection. But you're going to find out something: God is not going to do for you what He demands that you do for yourself. I'd much rather have the training and never need it than need it and not have it.

Someone has aptly pointed out that needing a gun and knowing how to use it is like needing a parachute and knowing how to use it. If you need one and don't have one, you'll never need another one again, because you will simply die. And you've got to remember this, folks: martial skills are perishable skills. Alice and I used to take karate from a fellow, and I saw him recently—old, short, and fat. I guarantee you he could not do one-tenth of what he used to be able to do. Why? Because all of that requires muscle memory and muscle strength; if you don't use it, you lose it. It's just that simple.

Where are the men who are ready, willing, and able to defend themselves, their families, and their communities? One does not

necessarily need to be a member of the armed forces to possess a combat mentality. If you do not determine to fight, you will lose. If you do not determine that you're going to be the victor, you will be the victim. If you do not determine that you're going home alive, you will not go home. You'll be left on the street dead.

I want to show you how important this combat mentality is. It's not just a physical thing. We have family and friends who have cancer; some are afflicted with other diseases and sicknesses. In order to overcome those diseases, you have to fight and have a combat mentality saying, “I will not give in, I will not give up, I will not do this; I will do whatever is necessary to win and to beat this.” If you don't have a combat mentality even in relation to disease, you're going to die. It's just that simple. You have to determine to live and determine to fight.

You think this has no application to spiritual things? You're greatly mistaken. Everyone is aware of this passage, but I want you to look in Ephesians chapter 6. Let's begin reading over verse 10. What conclusion could you come to after reading this?

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

We have to have a combat mentality. We have to be armed and fight to keep our minds biblical, our motives glorifying and honoring to God, and the flesh in line. What did Paul say? "I die" daily. It is a

fight. If you do not have a combat mentality in spiritual things, you will lose; if you do not have one in physical things, you will lose.

Thirdly, we must trust in the Lord and use every means He places at our disposal. If we do not have a gun, we can use the jawbone of an ass as Samson did. If we do not have that, we can pick up a stick or a stone. We cannot simply lie down and expect the Lord to save us while violating the sixth commandment. It says, "thou shalt not kill," or "thou shalt not murder." The positive is that we shall preserve life. You have a duty, responsibility, and obligation to preserve your life and the lives of others. We would much rather kill than be killed.

I know that God is sovereign, but I also know that He has ordained means for our protection. God is not going to fulfill our responsibilities for us. That is our duty and responsibility.

Fourthly, in light of the tyranny, as well as the lawlessness that is prevalent in our society, it should motivate us to study and prepare ourselves for the danger that lies ahead. Remember Proverbs 22 and verse 3: “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.” What did God say? He said, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, act like brave men, be strong.”

In order to be that way, we must have a combat mentality in every area of our lives. We must learn to fight and fight to win.

Let’s pray. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for your grace and your mercy. We ask, dear Lord, that you would help us to have a mentality that’s pleasing unto thee, and that we would determine our hearts, that we would fight against evil and wickedness and sin and stand for that which is right and holy and godly. Give us grace, Lord, that we may be men and stand and do that which is right and holy. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 9

How Far Are You Willing To Go

August 28, 2022

Introduction: The Question of How Far We Will Go

Following the theme of this conference, we must deal with the intentionality of advancing God's social order and God's kingdom here. The title of this message is simply this: How far are you willing to go?

Acts 24:27 says, "But after two years, Porcius Festus came into Felix's room, and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound." Acts 25:9 says, "But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me."

The Connection Between Holiness and Wickedness

How far are you willing to go? That is indeed a very serious question. We must ask it for ourselves and for others as well. While it is important for other people to know our positions, our stances, and

our convictions, it is even more important that we know our own positions, our stances, and our convictions. We must know how far we are willing to go in upholding truth, righteousness, and justice.

This question can be asked in a good sense, and it can also be asked in an evil sense. How far are you willing to go in that which is right, holy, and godly? And how far are you willing to go in that which is evil and wicked? The truth is that those two questions are intricately connected. Why? Because the one determines how far you are going to go in the other. If you are not going to go very far in holiness, righteousness, and obedience, you are going to go even further in wickedness and evil. If you are not going to go any further in wickedness and evil, then you are going to go further in obedience and holiness.

There is indeed a connection. Even as saved individuals, the truth is that we are still sinners. Our flesh still desires certain things that we know are unbiblical and ungodly, because we are not yet glorified and therefore not yet perfected. So the question is this: How far are we willing to go to satisfy the lust and desires of our flesh? Or how far are we willing to go in refusing to satisfy them?

Most people understand that sin is scintillating, exciting, and pleasurable to the flesh. Most people truly want to engage in sin, but only so much and so far. In other words, they want to engage in sin just enough to be satisfied, but not so much as to bring the judgment and wrath of God down upon them. To put it plainly, most people want to enjoy the pleasures of sin, but they want to escape the punishment of sin.

Likewise, this is true in every social issue that you can imagine. Look at the average church and the average Christian, and the truth of the matter is this: generally speaking, we all want to enjoy the benefits of a socialistic society, but we do not want to be involved with the issues of the day. As far as governmental subsidies are concerned, everybody wants to benefit from them. Everybody wants to take his or her “fair share.” On the other hand, they do not want to be stolen from by the government. They want their goods confiscated and given to others as well. So we are only willing to go so far. We are willing to take, but we are not willing to give, and we are not willing to suffer.

Here is another question that is intimately connected: What is our standard that determines how far we are willing to go? What is our standard in determining how far we are willing to go in righteousness, justice, and holiness? And what is our standard in determining how far we are willing to go in sin, rebellion, and wickedness?

Our Standard Determines Our Direction

Obviously, when you talk about a standard, you have to understand that there is God's objective standard, which is His law. Then there is our subjective standard, which happens to be our lusts and desires. It is your standard, whichever one you have, that will determine how far you go in righteousness, justice, and holiness, or in sin, rebellion, and evil.

Principle 1: God Forbids the Sin and Everything Leading to It

So let me lay out a couple of principles this morning. The first one is really and truly very simple. I would encourage you, if you cannot remember this, to write it down. Listen carefully. When God forbids any sin, at the same time, He forbids any and everything that would lead up to that sin. So, for instance, when God forbids adultery in the seventh commandment, at the same time, He also forbids looking, lusting, thinking, and entertaining thoughts that would lead to adultery.

Pornography of all sorts would be forbidden and condemned, along with anything that would lead to that. Likewise, if you do not wish to commit the sin, you do not engage in those things that would lead up to that sin. Someone says, "I want to be pure and holy." Well, how about all of those Hollywood movies that you watch that teach immorality and impurity? What about all the sites on the Internet that are very questionable and certainly easily attained? What about the television programs?

I have been amazed at Christians who would never, ever go downtown to a movie theater to watch a certain movie. But when it comes home on their television sets, they sit there and watch it. The

principle is this: David said, “I'll set no wicked thing before my eyes.” So if it is wicked, you do not want to set it before your eyes.

When God forbids any sin, at the same time He forbids any and everything that leads up to that sin. Consider the eighth commandment: “Thou shalt not steal.” When God says, “Thou shalt not steal,” at the same time, He forbids laziness. He also forbids covetousness, desiring, planning, and anything that would lead up to the sin of theft. It also means that we abstain from incremental thoughts and desires that would lead up to the sin of theft and deceit.

The question, then, is how far you are willing to go in being honest and not stealing. In other words, are you willing to be honest? Are you willing to be frank? Are you willing to be just? Are you willing to suffer and do without so that God might be honored and you would make sure that His law is not violated?

The Temporary Pleasures of Sin vs. Suffering with God's People

Scriptures are very plain when they state that there are indeed pleasures in sin. But the Bible also tells you that pleasures in sin are temporary; they are simply for a season. You and I must understand that we must deny our flesh those temporary pleasures if we are going to be holy and godly, because we do not want to sin against God.

Moses understood this concept. Hebrews 11:25 says concerning Moses, "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Moses took for his part the afflictions of the people of God. Since Moses was the adopted son of Pharaoh and Pharaoh's daughter raised him, Moses undoubtedly would have been in line to be the king of Egypt.

Can you imagine all of the pleasures that he could have enjoyed being the king of Egypt? Everything would have been at his disposal. Nothing would have been denied him. He would have been in a position to have whatever he desired. And yet the Bible says he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God. When you consider what he could have had, it is absolutely mind-boggling. Yet he

understood that even the greatest sinful pleasures were only temporary, and they only brought forth destruction and death.

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself taught that it was the pleasures of this life that choke the Word and make us unfruitful. He said in Luke 8:14, "And that which fell among thorns are they," speaking of the seed, "and they which fell among thorns are they, which when they have heard, they go forth and are choked with the cares and the riches and the pleasures of this life, and bring forth no fruit to perfection." They are choked with the pleasures of this life. The word pleasures is the Greek word hedoneis, from which we get our English word hedonist. A hedonist is someone who lives for pleasure, loves pleasure, and wants the greatest pleasure. Turn in your Bibles to Titus, chapter 3, and look at verse 3, because here is an interesting thing.

Before our conversion, before the Lord regenerated and converted us, each of us was a personal hedonist. We lived for pleasure. Titus chapter 3, verse 3, says, “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” The word pleasures is the word hedone. That is what we were before we were converted: living for ourselves and according to our own pleasures. It is that simple.

Two Pressing Questions: Pleasing God or Pleasing Self

With this understanding in mind, there are two pressing questions that you must answer. How far are you willing to go to please God? And how far are you willing to go to please yourself?

The Bible teaches us that, as Christians, it is our duty, responsibility, and obligation, as well as our privilege, to please our Heavenly Father. Colossians chapter 1, verse 10, says, “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Note the expression, “that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.”

Then, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verse 1, Paul says, “Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.” Paul taught them how to walk and how to please God. The Bible also says in 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 4, “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.”

The Bible speaks about pleasing the Lord, and everyone in this room can probably quote Hebrews 11, verse 6: “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

But consider 1 John chapter 3, verse 22. Each of us wants our prayers answered and the blessing of God in our lives. It tells us, “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” Why do we receive what we ask? Because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.

Even the answers to our prayers are connected with obedience. If you study the Scripture, you will find that blessings always follow obedience and curses always follow disobedience. So how far are you willing to go to walk pleasing to the Lord?

Our Lord, in Luke 9:23, said to them all, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." He also said in Luke 14:27, "And whosoever does not bear his cross and come after me, he cannot be my disciple."

Let me give you another principle. The first is this: When God forbids any sin, at the same time He forbids anything and everything that leads up to that sin. The second principle is this: You cannot please your flesh and please God at the same time. It is impossible. So how far are you willing to go to deny your flesh? How far are you willing to go to obey God?

Principle 2: You Cannot Please Flesh and God Simultaneously

The Bible says in Galatians 5:16-17, "I say then, walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and they are contrary the one to the other, so that you cannot do the things that you would."

What did he just say? Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. If you do not want to sin against God, walk in the Spirit. That is one way. How does the Spirit of God lead us?

He always leads us in obedience to His Word. Always. So walk in the Spirit and you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. And then he says this, that the Spirit fighteth against the flesh and the flesh fights against the Spirit, so that you cannot do the things that you would. In other words, when you and I do what we normally would do and naturally would do, we usually end up sinning against God. Because we're going to do that which is satisfying and pleasing to ourselves and to our flesh.

So, how far are you willing to go? The flesh does indeed lust against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and they're contrary one to the other. How far are you willing to go to retain pride, position, prestige, power, and popularity? How far are you willing to go to retain all of those things? Would you go so far as to identify with everything that is wicked today and vile and ungodly? Would you do so just to identify with the political process or the political powers? Or how about the canceled culture? Or how about blacklisting anyone who disagrees with you? How far are you willing to go? Stop and think about this.

Felix and Festus: Willing to Please the Jewish Ruling Elite

In Acts chapter 24 and verse 27, the Bible says, "But after two years, Porcius Festus came into Felix's room, and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound."

Who was Felix willing to please? The Jews. He wanted to do them a pleasure.

This may surprise you; it surprised me. I looked up the word pleasure. It is the word charis, which is the word for grace. It's translated grace 130 times in our Bibles, but also it's translated as favor six times and pleasure two times. So actually, the Bible says that Felix was willing to show the Jews a pleasure, or a grace, or a favor. In context, it means that he was willing to show them a favor. He was willing to show them deference. He was willing to give a benefit to them. He was willing to sow a blessing upon them. Why? In order to retain favor with them.

Here is a good question. I am repeating something I just told you, but I am asking it for a reason. To whom was he willing to show this favor? The answer was, to the Jews. So here is another question: Who were these Jews? Most people never really take the time to do any research. They know what they have been told all their lives, but they never study, never look at words, and simply assume that they understand what those words mean. The Hebrew word for Jews is Yehudi.

Literally, it means a Judahite, or a descendant of the tribe of Judah. This word is used in the Bible, listen carefully, to describe a person or persons from the tribe of Judah. It is also used to describe the kingdom of Judah, the land of Judah or Judea, the nation of Judah, the house of Judah, anyone belonging to the tribe of Judah, or the land, nation, and people of that tribe. A person from Judah could also be called a Judahite, and that is how the term is usually used in the New Testament. However, it can also refer to the religion of Judaism. In the Greek New Testament, Ioudaios is the Greek word, meaning a Judean. In simple terms, it means a Judean in the sense of a country, a land, or someone from that country.

Now, let me make a statement, and do not jump up and throw rotten tomatoes at me. Not every Israelite was a Jew. How can I say that? You must remember that there was a Northern Kingdom and a Southern Kingdom. Only those in the Southern Kingdom were referred to as Judahites and, later, as Jews.

The tribe of Judah was naturally in the Southern Kingdom, but did you know that two other tribes were in the land of Judah as well? They were the tribes of Benjamin and Simeon. Both had their inheritance in the land of Judea. Therefore, the king over the

Southern Kingdom would be king over all the Judeans, including those of the tribe of Judah, the tribe of Benjamin, and the tribe of Simeon as well. I am going to show this to you from the Scripture.

Do you know the very first time the word Jews is used in the Bible? Turn to 2 Kings chapter 16, verse 6. Here is the first time this word is mentioned: "At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drave the Jews from Elath. And the Syrians came to Elath and dwelt there unto this day."

If you read 2 Kings chapter 16, you find that there was a war between Judah, Israel, and Syria. Israel and Syria had joined together against the tribe of Judah, the Judahites, or the southern kingdom.

Elath was a port on the Red Sea that formerly belonged to Edom. David captured it, and Judah held it until the time of Joram, when Edom revolted against him. It was then recaptured by Amaziah, and his son Azariah rebuilt Elath in 2 Kings chapter 14, verses 21 and 22: "And all the people of Judah took Azariah, which was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. And he built Elath, and restored it to Judah. After that, the kings slept with their fathers."

The Syrians fought against the southern kingdom, the Jews, defeated them, and recovered Elath for themselves. Therefore, when you read the word Jews in 2 Kings 16:6, it refers to anyone who lived in that southern kingdom. They were Judahites: the tribe of Judah, the tribe of Benjamin, and the tribe of Simeon. All these people were what we would call Judahites, and that is what the Bible means when it says they drove the Jews out.

John Gill, the great Baptist commentator, said, "and they were called Jews, but from the time that the ten tribes were carried captive and not before." The word Jews is used in several ways in the Bible, and sometimes it refers only to the Jews' religion. Our Lord was a Judahite, from the tribe of Judah, but He certainly did not embrace the Jews' religion; therefore, they crucified Him.

There is another way that the word or term "the Jews" is used in the New Testament, and it is important that we understand it. In Acts chapter 23, beginning at verse 12, we read: "And when it was

day, a certain of the Jews banded themselves together and bound themselves under curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul." Of course, Paul had already been captured and was being held.

There were about forty who had made this conspiracy. "And they came to the priests and the elders." Who these forty were, I do not know. The Bible does not say. I do not know if they were related to the priests and the elders. But they came to the priests and the elders and said, "we have bound ourselves under a great curse that will eat nothing until we have slain Paul."

They then said, "Now therefore, you with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow as though you would inquire something more perfectly concerning him, and we or ever he come near, are ready to kill him." Paul's nephew heard this and told Paul. Paul sent him to tell the chief captain. After the chief captain took the nephew aside, he said, "The Jews have agreed to desire thee, that thou wouldst bring down Paul tomorrow unto the council, as though they would inquire something of him more perfectly."

The warning continued: "But do not yield thou unto them, for there lie in wait of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, looking for a promise from thee."

Now, who are "the Jews"? Verse 20 says, "The Jews have agreed to desire thee, that thou wouldst bring them up." If we go back to verse 14, "And they came to the chief priests and the elders." They were the ones who had the authority to ask the chief captain to bring Paul to them. In this case, the term "the Jews" refers to the chief priests or the elders. Let me go farther: it refers to a ruling elite. It refers to a cabal. Now look in Acts chapter 24, verse 1.

"And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders and with a certain orator named Tertullus who informed the governor against Paul." Who came down? The high priest with the elders and a certain orator.

Acts 24:27 says, “But after two years, Porcius Festus came into Felix's room, and Felix went and showed the Jews a pleasure left all bound.” What Jews was he willing to show a pleasure to? Verse 1 identifies them as Ananias the high priest, the elders, and Tertullus. In other words, the Jews in this passage were the ruling elite. They were the cabal.

They were the ones who were dead set on having Paul killed. Acts 25:1–2 says, “Now when Festus was coming to the province after three days, he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem and the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul and besought him and desired favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying in wait in the way to kill him.” Now, who are the Jews? They are the high priest and the chief of the Jews.

Verse 7 says, “And when he came down, or when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem, stood round about him, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.” What Jews are we talking about? Going back to verse 2, it is the high priest and the chief of the Jews. Again, these were the ruling elite, the cabal. Then Festus said, “But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?” Paul appealed to Caesar because he knew, obviously and clearly, they were going to kill him. Paul was accused of the Jews. Reading back through Acts 24 and Acts 25, you find that the Jews are the ruling elite, the cabal. Now look in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 14 through 16.

The Corrupt Elite Then and Now

In 1 Thessalonians 2:14, Paul says, “For you, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus. For you also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews.” He then identifies the Jews: “Who both kill the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us, and they please not God, and are contrary to all men.”

Did every Jew crucify Jesus Christ? Did every Jew murder the prophets? Did every Jew forbid the preaching of the gospel? The answer is no. The passage is not speaking of every Jew, but

identifying those particular leaders who had authority, murdered their own prophets, and called for Christ's death. Who murdered the Lord Jesus Christ? It was the chief priests, the elders, and the rulers. Who killed the prophets? It was those who had the authority to do so. According to the Bible, they are clearly identified in this passage because they murdered their own prophets and called for the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were the ones responsible in this account.

In Matthew 26:59, note who is calling for the death penalty: "Now the chief priests and elders and all the council sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death." Look also at Matthew 27:17: "Therefore, when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom of you did I release unto you, Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called Christ?"

"For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man? For I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. The chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas and destroy Jesus."

So the question has to be asked: Who is demanding the death penalty? Who wants Christ put to death? Who wanted Paul put to death? Who wanted the prophets put to death? It was the cabal, the elite, the leaders, the ones with the power and authority.

Felix and Festus were willing to do the Jews a favor. They were willing to do the Jews a pleasure at the expense of a completely innocent man. Pilate was willing to do the Jews a pleasure and condemn the Lord Jesus Christ, although he personally knew that for envy they had delivered Him and that Jesus Christ was completely innocent.

Why are you being told all this? Do you see how far some people are willing to go to violate the law of God? Do you see how far they are willing to go to make sure that there is no justice and that righteousness is not done? Do you see how far they are willing to go to cooperate with wickedness?

Look at how far people are willing to go in the realm of politics and social issues: those willing to go along with political correctness, cancel culture, blacklisting, and seeking to destroy others simply because of their views.

So the question has to be asked: Are we willing to sit quietly by while unrighteousness and injustice reign, knowing for a truth that it is not the majority of the people, but the elite who are in control, trying to destroy everything that you and I hold sacred and accomplish? How far are you willing to go to see that God's justice is done? How far are you willing to go to see that God's righteousness is upheld? How far are you willing to go to stand for truth and righteousness? How far are you willing to go in suffering that the Kingdom of Jesus Christ might be advanced?

What, then, do the episodes in the life of Paul and the Lord Jesus Christ have to do with us today? I just showed you where the elite were after them. What does that have to do with us? Principles do not change. Principles do not die. Principles do not have funerals. The same principles that were true in our Lord's day are equally true today as well. The truth of the matter is this: We have a corrupt elite, just like there was a corrupt elite in our Lord's day.

Look in your Bibles, if you would please, to Psalm 94. Let me show you this. Let's begin reading there in verse 20. Let this sink in. Here is the question: "Shall the throne of iniquity... Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee which frameth mischief by law?"

Note, first of all, that it is speaking about a throne. A throne is government. It is power. It is authority. Now it is called a throne of iniquity because it is a wicked civil government. So the question is: Shall a wicked civil government have fellowship with God when that wicked civil government frames mischief by law? Mischief in the Bible is another word for sin. So let me put this in a sentence or a question so that you can answer it: Shall a wicked civil government have fellowship with God when that wicked civil government makes sin legal?

What is the answer? Now look at verse 21. In verse 21, he says this: "They gathered themselves together." Who in the world are the

they? They are the wicked civil rulers back in verse 20: "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee which frameth mischief by law. They, that is they who are in authority, they who have the power, they who are the wicked cabal, they gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous and condemn the innocent blood."

That is exactly what he is talking about. In other words, what the Bible is telling us is that we must stand against wickedness, stand against evil, and stand against tyranny. We must not only expose it and denounce it; we must pray that God would bring judgment upon it and destroy it.

Our Duty to Cry Out and Stand Against Wickedness

Do you remember that passage in Luke chapter 18? The Lord was teaching His disciples to pray again, and that we should pray without ceasing. He gave the illustration of the widow and the unrighteous judge. The widow kept coming to that judge and said, “Avenge me my adversary.” He would not for a while. But afterward he thought within himself, “Well, I think I’m going to avenge this widow, lest by her continual coming she weary me.” Our Lord said, “Hear what the unjust judge said.” Now listen to this: “Shall not God avenge His own elect which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear wrong with Him? Then I tell you that He will avenge them speedily.”

And shall not God avenge His own elect? Do you think that God is like that unjust judge? Do you think that God has to be prompted and prompted and prompted, and begged and begged and begged, just to do what is right and holy and righteous? No! He said, “And shall not God avenge His own elect who cry day and night in Him?” The problem is not with God. The problem is with us. We’re not crying day and night. We’re not crying against the wickedness in this land. We’re not crying against the corruption in government.

You need to read about Daniel. You need to read about Jeremiah. You need to read about Isaiah. You need to read about Ezra. These men not only confessed their own sins, but the sins of their nation, and they grieved over those sins. So how far are we willing to go in crying to God? How far are we willing to go in denying ourselves and

saying, “Lord, this is pressing upon us”? It may not be pressing that much upon me. Why?

Well, I’ll tell you why. I’m nearly seventy-eight. Next week I will be. I don’t have much longer on this life, anyhow, in all probability. But think of my children. Think of my grandchildren. Think of my great-grandchildren. Think of your grandchildren and great-grandchildren. How far are you willing to go? I want you to turn in your Bible, since you’re in the book of Psalms. Turn to Proverbs 24. Watch this. Look in Proverbs 24.

“If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small. If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain, if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not, Doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? And he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? And shall not he render to every man according to his works?”

What? If you feign in the day of adversity, your strength is small? If you forbear to deliver them? If you say, “We didn’t know anything about this”? He says, “I know better than that.” So here is the question: How do we know what pleases the Lord and what displeases the Lord? We know what pleases Him because He has given us His law. It is His law. It is His Word. It is His directives for our personal life.

Look to the book of Hebrews, chapter 13. How far are you willing to go? Are you willing to go this far? “Wherefore Jesus also that he might sanctify the people with his own blood suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp bearing his reproach.” He suffered without the gate. He bore the reproach of our sins. And now God says He is without the gate. That is where you and I should be as well.

Stop and think about this. May I remind you about the sin of aborticide—the murder of babies? Usually, we sit silently by and say nothing and do nothing. May I remind you about all the children being traded in the sex-slave business and trafficked? We are doing absolutely nothing. We say nothing. May I remind you also about the political prisoners we have in this country, men and women in prison who have done absolutely nothing wrong except stand up

against wickedness and unrighteousness? May I remind you of the deterioration of our society and our educational institutions? May I remind you of the pride, the drag queens, and the transgenderism being pushed upon children in the first grade? We sit by, do nothing, and say nothing.

The Cost of Rebuking Wickedness and the Call to Decision

So the question is, how far are you willing to go? If you say, "Lord, I'm willing to go all the way with Thee," I want you to understand what you're going to get into. In Amos chapter 5, beginning with verse 10, here's the truth: "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate."

The city's business was taken care of in the gate. It was the city council meeting, the county council meeting, the state house. Look at it again: "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly, forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and you take from him burdens of wheat, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them. You have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins. They afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time, for it is an evil time."

Note what he said back in verse 10: "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate. They abhor him that speaketh right." You start rebuking sin, wickedness, political correctness, and civil rulers, and they'll hate you, despise you, and do everything they can to destroy you. That's the truth.

There are organizations in this land today that do nothing but attack Christians, Southerners, conservatives, and constitutionalists. I'm simply saying you need to make up your mind how far you're willing to go. You need to understand that there is no middle ground and no neutral ground. Our Lord said, "If you're not with me, you're against me. He that gathereth not, scattereth abroad." We can't sit back and say, "Well, it'll all work out." No, it's not going to all work out.

I know that God is in control, and I understand that God is absolutely sovereign. But God has not only ordained the end; He has also ordained the means to the end. And He asks, “Who will stand up for me against the wicked and the unrighteous? Who will stand up for me? Who’s going to stand against the workers of iniquity?” So we have to ask ourselves this question: How far are you willing to go?

It might be one thing for me to rebuke someone who is my equal. I can get by with that pretty easily. But when I start rebuking someone who believes and thinks that they are above me and have power over me, that is quite a horse of a different color. So how are we going to advance the kingdom of God if we are silent? How are we going to advance the kingdom of God in society? How are we going to advance biblical, social truth without speaking out and teaching the word of God?

So, how far are you willing to go? You are going to tell me, “I just don’t want to get involved.” Our Lord said, “And unto the angel of the church of Laodiceans write, These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would that thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.” Our Lord would rather have someone out and out against Him or out and out for Him; He does not want anyone straddling the fence. How far are you willing to go? How far are you willing to fight? How much are you willing to suffer? To what degree will you actively seek to implement the law of God, the word of God, and the will of God in your life, your family, your church, your society, your community, and your state? How far are you willing to go is an important question, one that you must answer.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We know, Lord, that we live in a corrupt and wicked society, and that our political leaders, as a whole, are corrupt and wicked. We see the fabric of our society coming apart at the seams—economically, politically, religiously, educationally, and in every way whatsoever. At least we can cry unto Thee day and night, asking You would avenge Thy people, avenge Thy truth, and avenge the principles of righteousness. May we ask ourselves seriously how far we are willing

to go in obedience, holiness, and righteousness. Give us Thy grace and mercy, we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

CHAPTER 10

The Sovereignty Of God And Prayer

September 22, 2017

Introduction: The Question of Prayer in Light of God's Sovereignty

Chapter 42 and verse 2. Job 42 and verse 2, right before the book of Psalms, the book of Job. The title of the message is "The Sovereignty of God and Prayer." Job 42. And notice, if you would please, beginning there with verse 2, the Word of God says in reference to God—in fact, we will read verse 1: "Then Job answered the Lord and said, I know that thou canst do everything, and no thought can be withholden from thee." Since God is sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and immutable, the question that is most frequently asked in light of God's sovereignty: why pray? God has certainly declared in Isaiah 46 and verse 10, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." So if God's counsel is going to absolutely stand and God is going to do all of His pleasure, the question is, why pray? Clearly stated in the book of Daniel chapter 4 and verse 35: "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as

nothing, and He, that is God, doeth according to His will in the armies of heaven, and in the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him,

What doest thou?" So if God's will is going to be accomplished in heaven and in earth, and none can stay His hand, none can thwart Him, none can hinder Him, none can stop Him, the question is, why pray? So look in verse 2 again where Job says, "I know that thou canst do everything." Well now, since God can do everything, why pray? The Scripture teaches us that God has clearly ordained the end from the beginning. For instance, in Acts chapter 15 and verse 18, the Bible says, "Known unto God are all of His works from the beginning of the world." So from the beginning of the world, God absolutely knew and ordained everything that He is going to do.

God's Eternal Decree and Human Responsibility

So history is nothing less than God's eternal decree coming to pass in time. I've said this before and I will say it again: the world is not governed by luck, chance, fate, or fortune. It is governed by the sovereign, righteous, immutable God of heaven and earth. So let me give you an illustration. If you will turn in your Bibles to the book of Acts chapter 4, this illustration is in reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice Acts chapter 4, and let's begin reading there with verse 26. Acts chapter 4 and verse 26. Notice what the Scripture says, Acts 4 verse 26: "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ.

“For of a truth against the holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” Everything about the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ was decreed before the world ever began. Everything done to Christ during His period of humiliation was ordained by God before the world ever began.

Yet the ordination of everything that happened to Jesus Christ does not excuse or alleviate the sin and guilt of the rulers and the people. They did not do to Jesus Christ what they did in obedience to God or out of honor to God. No. They did it because they hated Him, despised Him, and were in rebellion against God. Everything they

did to Jesus Christ was based upon their envy, malice, and hatred. They were responsible and accountable to God for their attitude and actions.

Luke 23:25 demonstrates this clearly. Pilate was going to release one at the feast and asked, “Whom then shall I release, Barabbas or Christ?” Barabbas was a murderer and a seditionist. The priests began to cry, “Barabbas, Barabbas, we want Barabbas.” When Pilate asked, “What am I going to do with Christ?” they cried, “Crucify him, crucify him.” The Bible says, “And he, that is Pilate, released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.”

What did they do to Jesus Christ? Whatever they willed. They were pleased. It was not in obedience to God, but in rebellion against God. They desired a murderer over the Son of God; they preferred to free a murderer and murder the holy and harmless Son of God.

Why Pray?

The Bible tells us in Psalm 76 and verse 10, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise the Lord, and the remainder of wrath shall he restrain.” Whatever was done to Jesus Christ ultimately redounds to God’s honor and glory. Whatever evil is done in the world will somehow ultimately redound to God’s honor and glory; and what will not, He will restrain.

So the question has to be asked: if God’s will is being accomplished, why pray? If God is absolutely sovereign and is going to bring His will to pass, why pray? Let me give you several biblical answers. First, we must pray simply because God, who is sovereign, has commanded us to pray. Moreover, He has given us the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

First Reason: God Commands Us to Pray

The Bible commands us in 1 Thessalonians 5 and verse 17 to pray without ceasing. God did not say, “Get on your knees and stay there for 24 hours.” No, that is impossible. But He did say to pray without ceasing. You can always be in an attitude of prayer, and you can always pray about everything. In Luke 18 and verse 1, the Bible says,

"Then he spake a parable unto them unto this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint." Obviously, our Lord is teaching that we must pray.

Moreover, He has given us an example in prayer. In Matthew 14 and verse 23, "And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray. And when the evening was come, he was there alone." In Luke 6 and verse 12, "And it came to pass in those days that he went out into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God." Very few people have ever continued in prayer all night. In Luke 9 and verse 28, "And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter, James, and John and went up into a mountain to pray." Now John 17 is the high priestly prayer of our Lord.

He prayed to His Heavenly Father, and therefore we should as well. If our Lord did not intend for us to pray, the question has to be asked: Why did He teach us to pray in Luke chapter 11? If someone wants to argue, "Well, if God is sovereign, if God is going to do His will, why in the world must we pray?" the answer is simply because He commanded us to pray. Every father and every mother has given this answer to a child. When the child asks, "Why must I do this?" the answer is, "Because I said so." And that is exactly right. God has commanded us. He has said so.

But secondly, we have to understand the purpose of prayer. So many people say, "I need to tell God what I need and what I want and what my desires are." May I tell you something? Prayer is not simply to make your requests known unto God. We are certainly encouraged to do so in the Bible, but our Heavenly Father knows what we need before we ever ask.

The Purpose of Prayer Is Not to Inform or Change God

In Matthew chapter 6, beginning with verse 7, our Lord says: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him." So God is omniscient. He knows exactly what we need before we ever ask Him. Does the fact that He

knows what we need before we ask mean that it is wrong to ask and request our needs, wants, and desires in our petitions? The answer is no, absolutely not. We are encouraged in Scripture to do so. But the purpose of prayer is not simply to make our requests known unto God.

I knew that my children and grandchildren needed food, clothing, and other necessities. But it was always delightful to me when I could do something special and provide for them. When my oldest grandson was, I would say, from five to eight, occasionally I would get a call from him. He would begin like this: “Papa, I need”—not “I want,” but “I need.” Then he would tell me whatever he needed.

My next question would be, “Well, have you asked your parents?” He would say, “Yes, sir. They told me to call you.” Translated, that meant either they did not have the money or did not have the time, but they knew that Papa would get it for him. Of course, I usually did, and it was something delightful to me.

Listen to what the Bible says. In Proverbs 15:8, the Bible says, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.” Isn’t that amazing? The prayer of the upright is His delight.

In other words, God delights to hear from us, our requests and petitions. Proverbs 15:29 says, “The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous.” Since He hears and delights in our prayers, it should be obvious that we may speak openly, freely, and personally with Him, and confide in Him our desires and requests.

In fact, Scripture commands us to do that. The Apostle Paul, praying for the Philippians, said in chapter 1 and verse 4, “Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy.” Paul was requesting certain things of God for the Philippians. Then Philippians 4:6 says, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” So, in everything, by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God.

Our Lord says, "Ask, and it shall be given you." You remember that passage in James chapter 4, where our Lord says, "You have

not, because you ask not." He says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

Then He gives this illustration: "Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? Watch: you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?" Obviously, we are being prompted to ask our Heavenly Father for whatever we need and whatever our desires are. If we ask, it will be given; if we seek, we will find; and if we knock, it will be opened unto us.

Every one of us who has children knows that when they ask us for food, we have never picked up a rock and handed it to them, nor have we given them a serpent. If we, in our evil and depraved state, know how to give good things to our children, how much more does our Heavenly Father know how to give good things to each of us?

There are numerous verses in the Bible that encourage us to pray. For instance, Psalm 65:2 says, "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come." God is designated as the One who hears prayer. Psalm 145:18 says, "The Lord is nigh unto all of them that call upon Him, that call upon Him in truth."

Based upon these Scriptures, it should be evident that while we are encouraged to pray and make our requests known unto our Father, the purpose of prayer is not to inform God. God already knows; He is omniscient. Yet the Bible tells us that He absolutely delights in hearing us and in giving and granting our petitions. When you think about the purpose of prayer, you must remember the constituent parts, or the different things, that make up prayer.

Usually when we think about praying, we think about petitioning, supplicating, or asking. But prayer includes adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, praise, and intercession. It also includes communion and fellowship. Someone has rightly pointed out that one of the missing parts of prayer is often silence. By silence, I mean what the Scripture means: once we pray and speak to God, why do

we not wait silently and ask Him to speak to us, either in His Word or by opening our eyes that we may see and understand?

For instance, Psalm 4:4 says, "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." When someone stands speechless, what do we normally say? He is awestruck. He cannot say anything; he is silent. So God says, "Stand in awe, and sin not. Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I'll be exalted in the earth."

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said it like this: "Man is at his greatest and highest when upon his knees he comes face to face with God." The purpose of prayer is not simply to inform God or to make our requests known. We may freely do that, but that is not the purpose of prayer. He already knows our hearts, thoughts, desires, and needs. The purpose of prayer is not to change the mind or will of God. You have heard the old adage, "Prayer changes things." No, it does not. It may change people, but it does not necessarily change things, because prayer is designed to accomplish the will of God. You are certainly not going to change God, His mind, or His will, because God is immutable.

SCRIPTURE READING - Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4 (KJV)

That is, He is unchangeable. That is what He said in Malachi 3 and verse 6: "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." Obviously, if God changed, He would not be God. So when someone attempts to instruct God, to teach God, or to try to change God, he not only has a monumental task; he has an absolutely impossible task. And when you stop and think, there is really and truly no need to try to change the will of God, for the all-sufficient reason that the purpose of God was framed under the influence of perfect goodness and unerring wisdom. God's counsels, God's ordinations, and God's appointments are, like Himself, perfect and unchangeable.

The True Purpose of Prayer: Glorifying God as Father, King, and Master

> If the purpose of prayer is not to inform God, and if the purpose of prayer is not to change the mind or the will of God, what is the purpose of prayer? Let us consider two passages. In Matthew chapter 6, verses 9 through 13, our Lord says, "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."
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> In Luke chapter 11, beginning with verse 1: "And it came to pass, that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples. And he said unto them, When you pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us day by day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." And then He gives us another wonderful illustration of that particular point.

So many people look at Matthew 6 and Luke 11 and say, "This is the Lord's Prayer." No, it is not the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is found in John 17. You might call Matthew 6 and Luke 11 a model prayer, but our Lord was not teaching His disciples a prayer. He was teaching them to pray. Look in Luke 11: "And it came to pass, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray." He did not say, Teach us a prayer, but, Teach us to pray. That is what our Lord is doing in Matthew chapter 6 and Luke chapter 11. He is teaching us to pray.

As we look at this prayer that our Lord has given us and is teaching us to pray, it is easily divided and expresses itself Godward and manward. The first three petitions deal with God's glory. The second three petitions deal with man's need.

Here are the first three, dealing with God's glory: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done." There is God's glory. Here is the second set, dealing with man's need. Verse 11 says, "Give us this day our daily bread." Verse 12 says, "Forgive us our debts." And verse 13 says, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Prayer is designed to honor God and to place God in His rightful place. Everything begins and ends with God. Everything flows from Him. All prayer is to begin with the character and the person of God: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." In other words, in prayer we must give God His rightful place. His rightful place is as the Sovereign Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth. Prayer recognizes that God is first.

Romans 11:36 says, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." "For of him"—that is, originally—"and through him"—that is, providentially—"and to him"—ultimately—"are all things." Everything comes from God, everything flows through God, and everything ends with God.

When we begin like this, we have to begin by recognizing His sovereignty and His supremacy. What, then, is the purpose of prayer according to Matthew 6 and Luke 11? First, it is to hallow the name of God. Second, it is indeed to bring His kingdom in. Thirdly, it is to do His will.

That would be the purpose of prayer. Here is a good question: How many have ever come to our Heavenly Father in prayer and said, “Lord, I’m coming to you today that your name might be hallowed, that your kingdom might come, and that your will would be done not only in the earth but in my life”? The first three requests relate to God; the next three relate to man.

Look in verse 11: “Give us this day our daily bread.” When He supplies our daily bread, that is provision. Then verse 12: “And forgive us our debts”—that is, pardon. Thirdly, He supplies our need by not leading us into temptation; He protects us. He said, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” So God provides, pardons, and protects. As He does so, He is exalted in His glory, in His kingdom, and in His will.

Let us tie these things together. In verse 9 He says, “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.” He gives us the role of God first as a Father. In verse 10, “Thy kingdom come.” Now God is presented in the role of a King. Then, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” Now He is a Master.

As a Father, He gives us our daily bread. As a King, He forgives and pardons our sins. As a Master, He leads us not into temptation but delivers us from evil. The point is this: His glory is the issue. When we pray, we are not informing God, nor trying to change God or His will. We are not bargaining with God, badgering God, forcing God, irritating God, or provoking God. When we come to Him, we come to submit to Him as a Father, as a King, and as a Master.

You’re submitting to His sovereignty. This prayer begins in verse 9: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” The prayer begins with adoring God. In verse 13 it ends: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.” It ends with adoring God, and in the middle everything is about God. In actuality, the real purpose of prayer is to glorify God in His relationships to His children. It is to hallow, honor, praise, and glorify Him as Father, King, and Master.

When we recognize Him as our Father, we come to Him as His children: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.” Scripture tells us, not only in Exodus chapter 20 but also in Ephesians chapter 6, “Honor thy father and thy mother.” If God requires us to honor our father and mother on earth, how much more does He require us to honor our Heavenly Father?

As a boy—and I still do so—I would never say “yeah” to my daddy, but “Yes, sir” and “No, sir.” I would never refer to my mother as “my old lady” or “my ma.” She was my mother. When we come to God as our Father, we come to Him as His children, honoring Him. When we come to Him as King, we come as His subjects, in submission to Him. When we come to Him as our Master, we come as His students and disciples, sitting at His feet and learning from Him.

This is real fellowship and communion when we understand the purpose of prayer. This is not only the purpose of prayer; this is eternal life. Eternal life is not simply living forever. If you define it that way, the unsaved would have it, because they would live forever in punishment. Moreover, you do not get eternal life when you die. If you do not already possess eternal life now, you will not have it at death. I am surprised at so many people who think they can live like the world and like the devil in the flesh, enjoy the lust of their flesh now, and somehow that all of

Prayer as a Means of Experiencing Eternal Life

When they die, they are not suddenly, instantaneously, and miraculously going to love holiness, truth, and righteousness. It does not work like that. You do not know what eternal life is. Look in your Bible to John 17, verses 2 and 3. Jesus Christ is praying; this is His high priestly prayer. He said, "As thou hast given him, that is Jesus Christ, power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." Here is the definition: "And this is life eternal, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

What is eternal life? It is knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. The word "know" refers to a personal, intimate relationship. Eternal life is knowing God, knowing something about Him, and communing and fellowshipping with Him through the Lord Jesus Christ. Eternity will simply perfect this relationship. It will perfect my relationship with God as my Father, as my King, and as my Master.

Prayer, then, is a means of experiencing eternal life, since it involves knowing God and communing with Him. This is why, if you do not enjoy and possess eternal life now, you are certainly not going to get it instantaneously when you are dead. No. Eternal life is a personal, intimate relationship with God the Father through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Why pray? Not only because God has commanded us to pray, but also because we recognize the purpose of God in prayer: to honor God and submit to Him as our Father, our King, and our Master.

Second Reason: God Ordains the Means as Well as the End

Third, we must pray because we believe that God, who has appointed the end, has also appointed the means to reach that end. Predestination is absolutely true. Moreover, God is in absolute control. He will accomplish all of His purpose; His counsel shall stand. Nothing is going to change the eternal purpose of God. God has ordained the beginning and the end, and His sovereignty extends over everyone and everything. But we have to understand that the very same God who decreed the end has also decreed the means to reach that end.

Let me give you two simple illustrations. The first is taken from the life and death of King Ahab. Ahab was the most wicked ruler in Israel. He was trying to get Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, to go with him to battle in Ramoth Gilead, in 2 Kings chapter 22. He had all these false prophets saying, "Go up and prosper, go up and prosper." Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not a prophet of the Lord here that we may inquire of him?" Ahab said, "Yeah, there's one left, but I hate him. He never prophesied anything good concerning me but evil." Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so." So they sent for Micaiah.

When they acquired Micaiah, they said, "All the prophets are saying good things. Let your voice be like theirs." Micaiah said, "I can only say what God tells me." When he got there, Micaiah said, in verse 17, "And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep that have not a shepherd. And the Lord said, These have no master: let them return every man to his own place." God was going to kill Ahab at Ramoth Gilead. He was going to die there. Micaiah went on to tell him that God had sent a lying spirit in the mouths of his prophets, and they were lying to him.

The king Ahab, in verse 27, said, "Thus said the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, until I return in peace." Then, in verse 28, Micaiah said, "If thou return at all in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me." Ahab was not coming back; he was going to die. Sure enough, he disguised himself and went into battle.

The Bible says in verses 34 and 35: “And a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness: wherefore he said unto the driver of his chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host; for I am wounded. And the battle increased that day, and the king was stayed up in his chariot against the Syrians, and died at even: and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot.”

Notice that the Bible said a certain man drew a bow at a venture. Here was a soldier who drew an arrow back in that bow and let it go. He did not see the king. The king was disguised. He had no idea where that arrow was going. Yet it went into the very place where Ahab was not protected, at the joints of the harness where it came together. One little opening, one little hole, and the arrow sank into his chest. God directed that arrow into the heart of Ahab.

God had ordained his end. He was going to die. Then God ordained the means to that end. The arrow pierced his heart. Do you understand? This is very simple. Everyone understands that we are going to die. Sooner or later, each one of us will die. That is the end of our earthly life. But God has also ordained the means to reach that end. We may die of disease, old age, or in a car wreck. There are numerous ways, but whatever means bring us to that end will certainly come, just as surely as God directed that arrow to Ahab’s heart. The God who ordained the end ordains the means to reach that end.

When did God choose us unto salvation, and when did God give us grace in Christ Jesus? The answer to both questions is that God chose us and gave us grace in Christ Jesus before the world began. We had done nothing good or bad; we were not even in existence except in the mind and purpose of God. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 3, says: “Blessed be God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”

“According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good purpose of His will.” God chose us in Jesus Christ unto salvation before the foundation of the world.

Paul tells Timothy, “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.” He continues: “Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

The Bible tells us that God chose us, predestinated us, and ordained us for Himself. But God also ordained the means to bring us to Himself. He ordained Jesus Christ to be our Lord, our Savior, and our Mediator. First Peter 3:18 says, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” The purpose of our Lord coming, suffering, and dying was that He might bring us to God.

Here is what God has done: He “has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our own works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: whereunto I am appointed a preacher, an apostle, and teacher of the Gentiles.” God gave us grace in Christ before the world ever began. Then He sent His Son to accomplish the means. As Galatians 4:4-5 says, “But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

Turn to Titus 1:1–3. Remember, God has ordained the end, but He has also ordained the means to reach that end. Paul writes: “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.”

To whom did He promise it? Primarily to Jesus Christ, because we were in Him, and thus we received that promise as well. He gave us the promise of eternal life before the world began. But verse 3 says, “But hath in due times manifested His Word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior.”

God gave us this promise before the world began, and since then He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to accomplish the means to that end. Now the Gospel is committed unto the Apostle Paul. So did God lay out an eternal purpose in Jesus Christ? The answer is yes. Ephesians 3:11 says, "According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." There was an eternal purpose, something established well before the foundation of the world.

Now turn to 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14. The Apostle Paul puts it together plainly: "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord. Because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation." That is the end: He has chosen us to salvation. Here is the means to the end: "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

God ordained the salvation of His elect, but He did not only ordain the end; He ordained the means to that end. He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He sent men to preach the Gospel. He sent His Spirit to sanctify us, open our eyes, convict us, give us faith and repentance, and draw us unto Himself.

When God ordained the end, He always ordained the means to reach that end as well. Therefore, prayer must be considered a means to accomplish the will of God. When God determines to grant a blessing, He also gives us a spirit of supplication—that is, the desire to pray and ask God for it.

An excellent illustration is the Great Awakening under Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. Everyone knows that Jonathan Edwards preached the famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." What many people do not know is that Edwards had such bad eyesight that he did not preach as I or somebody else might. He had to hold his notes in front of his face and read his sermon. But his deacons and some other men had spent the entire night in the basement praying and asking God for a blessing. God had decreed and determined to send that great awakening. He also moved upon people and gave them a spirit of supplication to pray toward that end. When God is determined to grant a blessing, He will always give a spirit of supplication; then He prepares the way for

that blessing to be received by moving in hearts and directing the means to that particular end.

Prayer is a means to accomplish the will of God, a means that God has ordained to bring His will to pass in His providence, in time and history. If you believe that God has ordained the end, you must believe that He has ordained the means to reach that end.

Applications: Sovereignty as the Foundation for Prayer and Missions

The sovereignty of God does not nullify or abrogate the need for prayer; it is the foundation for prayer. If I did not believe that God was sovereign and omnipotent, why in the world would I pray to Him? If I did not believe that God could accomplish whatever He desired, why would I pray to Him?

The truth of the matter is this: Do you realize that only a sovereign, omnipotent God can work out Romans 8:28? “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.” Only a sovereign God can do that. Thus, the sovereignty of God is the foundation for prayer.

Second application: Why would I be interested in mission work if I did not believe that God had ordained a people unto Himself and a means to bring those people to Himself? When you read the lives of William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor, and missionaries, their mainstay was the absolute sovereignty of God. They knew that God had a people, and they were sent to call that people out of darkness into light.

Someone says, “Well, if God’s sovereign, He’s going to save His people somehow.” God does not save His people somehow or anyhow. God saves His people His how.

And His how is through repentance and faith, by the work of the Spirit of God, and by hearing the preaching of the gospel. God always uses the means He has ordained. Our last application is this: We must not separate what God has shown together: the end and the means to reach that end. Understanding this encourages prayer, for God's sovereignty is prayer's foundation. Without it, if God were not

sovereign, there would be no need to pray; He could not work out anything or everything. He must be sovereign to hear and answer our prayers.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word, truth, righteousness, and sovereignty, that Thou art omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, immutable, majestic, and glorious. We are thankful that Thou art a God who hears prayer and delights in the prayer of Your children. Help us, Lord, to see Thee as our Father, King, and Master, and come to Thee as Thy child, subject, and disciple. Help us honor Thee in all things. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 11

Seeking Jesus Christ

July 4, 2021

Introduction: The Command and Urgency to Seek the Lord

In John chapter 6, we read: “After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His miracles, which He did on them which were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there He sat with His disciples. And the Passover feast of the Jews was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up his eyes and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?”

Of course, this is going to be the feeding of the 5,000. Let me begin by saying that seeking Jesus Christ is a very important truth. In fact, it is a life-and-death situation in the strictest sense of the word. Many seek Him, but never find Him, because they seek Him in the wrong way and at the wrong time. However, there are others who seek Him, find Him, love Him, and serve Him.

Seeking Jesus Christ should be the priority of everyone's life, since He alone is salvation. The truth of the matter is that we are commanded to seek the Lord. For instance, in Hosea chapter 10 and verse 12, the Bible says, “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and reign righteousness upon you.”

Listen carefully to that again: “Sow to yourself in righteousness, reap in mercy,” and, “Break up your fallow ground, it is time to seek the Lord.” Then there is the passage everyone knows in Isaiah 55, verses 6 and 7. Let me give you some implications very quickly from these two verses. The first one is this.

We are commanded to seek the Lord. It is a direct order from God: “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found.” There should be urgency, and we should understand the absolute necessity of seeking the Lord, because the Bible says there is a time when He cannot be found and a time when He is not near. That is why it says, “Seek ye the Lord while he is near. Call upon him.” In other words, if we are not going to seek the Lord in His time, then it is certainly not going to be in our time.

The Danger of Presuming Upon God's Timing

Many people tend to think that they can seek the Lord anytime they want, in any way they choose, which is not true. Hosea 5:6 says, “They shall go with their flock and their herds to seek the Lord, but they shall not find him, he hath withdrawn himself from them.” Notice that they are going with their flocks and herds prepared to sacrifice. Yet God said they would seek Him and not find Him, because He had withdrawn Himself.

Here is the same truth again in Proverbs 1. This is why there should be urgency in seeking the Lord: “Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out My hand and no man regarded. But you have said it not, all My counsel, and would none of my reproof.” God continues: “I will also laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh, when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer, and they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. Why? For

that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsel. They despised all my reproof."

"Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices." So here again in Proverbs chapter 1, God says there is a time when people will seek Him, but they certainly will not find Him. In Micah chapter 3 and verse 4, the Bible says, "Then shall they cry unto the Lord, but He will not hear them. He will even hide His face from them at that time as they have behaved themselves ill in their doing." That is why in Isaiah 55 He said, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, and call ye upon Him while He is near." Many presume upon the Lord.

Many think that salvation is somehow in their own hands and that they can be saved whenever they need or want to be. But that is not true. Scripture tells us that there is a time to seek God and plead with Him, but there is also a time when it is too late to call and too late to seek Him. Some think they will wait until they are almost on their deathbed and then turn to the Lord before they die. Yet sometimes they will find that they are not in a condition to call upon the Lord. It is like people who plan to be saved at twelve midnight but die at 11:30. We simply presume upon the Lord.

Seeking the Lord Requires Repentance and Faith

Here is a third implication. When the Bible says, "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near," it also says, "Let the wicked man forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts." In other words, when we seek the Lord, we must seek Him in repentance and faith. We cannot expect God to have mercy upon an unrighteous, rebellious, belligerent, unrepentant, and unbelieving sinner. He is not going to do so.

That is why Hosea 10 and verse 12 says, "Break up your fallow ground. It is time to seek the Lord till He come and reign righteousness upon you." Notice what he said: "Sow to yourself in mercy, reap in righteousness, break up your fallow ground." Everyone knows that if a garden is to be planted, the ground must first be broken up. Seed falling on hard-packed ground will not do anything. Our Lord is implying that there must be a breaking up, a

confessing of our sins, and a breaking of our hardened heart. A seed that falls on hard-packed ground will not flourish.

The truth so far that I have tried to enunciate must go together. There is a proper time to seek the Lord, and there is a proper way to seek Him. There must be a proper time and a proper approach.

Have you ever wondered why some people seek the Lord? Some seek Him for the wrong reasons, and they are rebuffed. You remember, just reading the New Testament, the stripes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees and Herodians sought Him only to accuse, entrap, betray, and ultimately kill Him. Then, of course, King Herod in Matthew 2:13 sought Jesus, but the only reason he sought Him was so that he could murder Him. Clearly, when you read a passage like Mark 1:37, which says, "All men seek for Him," it indicates that not all men are seeking Him for salvation. Not all men are seeking Him for the right reasons. Many times people seek Jesus Christ for purely fleshly and selfish reasons.

Wrong Reasons for Seeking: Excitement and Miracles

If hell is as awful as it is described in the Bible, and punishment is eternal, why would anyone want to go there? Any sane person would abhor such an idea. Yet many who do not wish to end up in eternal punishment do not wish to turn from that which will send them there.

You can find tracts everywhere you turn that say, "Do you want to be saved from hell?" Who does not want to be saved from hell if hell is as real as it is expressed in the Bible? And it is. But the question is not, "Do you want to be saved from hell?" The question is, "Do you want to be saved from that which sends you to hell or sends you to judgment?" What is that? That is sins.

The angel Gabriel appeared to Mary in Matthew 1 and said, "Thou shalt have a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." Salvation is basically from sin. Being saved from eternal punishment is a byproduct of being saved from your sins, which would send you to that punishment. Many, then, are only seeking Jesus Christ as a far escape. They do not wish to perish, but they do not really want to repent of their sins either. They

want to have their sins, enjoy their sins, and then not suffer the consequences of their sins, which is an absolute impossibility, because God has decreed that we are going to reap exactly that which we have sown, and He is going to judge the unsaved by their works.

Since this message is on seeking Jesus Christ, I want to show you from the book of John, chapter 6, particularly, why some folks sought Him. I hope that you can find out the totally inappropriate reasons. In John chapter 6, verses 1 and 2, we read: "After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias, and a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased." Note that a great multitude followed Him. Why? Because they saw His miracles.

Would you not have liked to have seen Jesus Christ perform a miracle? Of course; who would not? But why would you want to see Jesus Christ perform a miracle? Think about that question. If you were alive during John chapter 6 and were unsaved, would you want to see Jesus Christ perform a miracle as a display of the greatness of His power, and as evidence and manifestation that He was indeed the Son of God, sent by the Father? Would that be the reason? For most people in John chapter 6, the answer would be no.

Would you love to have seen a miracle of Jesus Christ, especially among the diseased, when they were instantly and miraculously healed, and then to see the joy, rejoicing, and blessedness in their lives as they glorified God and gave Him all the praise? You would say yes. But would those people back then want to see that miracle for that reason? The answer would be no. I am going to show you why.

SCRIPTURE READING - Mark 2:3-12 (KJV)

The Bible says, "This crowd followed him because they saw his miracles." There are several things that we need to see concerning this crowd that followed him because of the miracles.

"And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was born of Thor. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was. And when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of

> the palsy lay. When Jesus saw their faith, He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.
>
> "But there were certain of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, Why does this man speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only? And immediately when Jesus perceived in His Spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, He said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether it is easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or say, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk. But that you may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, He said to the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee, arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up his bed, and went forth before them all, insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion."

Look at verse 12 again, the latter part: "insomuch that they were all amazed." Jesus Christ had just healed the man with the palsy. They were all amazed, and then they said, "We never saw it on this fashion."

The word amazed comes from the Greek word ek, istemi. It literally means to be amazed, to be astonished, to be thrown into wonderment, to be thrown out of one's mind, and to be beside oneself. When you look at the last word, fashion, the Greek word is hutos, which literally means in this manner, on this wise, or in this fashion. Literally, they were saying, "We have just never seen anything like this."

Let me put this in a phrase everyone can understand: They were literally blown out of their minds when they saw this miracle. In fact, we could say it like this: all our Lord's miracles were merely mind-blowing. He was working miracles that had never been seen before, never done before, and they were definitely extraordinary.

When our Lord healed the blind man in John chapter 9, the man had been born blind. Do you remember verse 22? The Bible says this. Here was a supernatural miracle: Our Lord opened the eyes of a

man who had never seen in his entire life. He was born blind. These people were literally blown away, so to speak, by our Lord's miracles.

Now turn to Luke chapter 5, verse 26. It is the same story as you found in Mark, the same miracle, but Luke uses different words and gives us, in one sense, a better explanation, or at least helps us understand a little better what was going on. Luke 5:26 says, "And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things today." The word amazed is a very interesting word.

It is from the Greek word ekstasis. If that sounds familiar, it is where we get our English word ecstasy. Listen to the definitions found in a Greek lexicon of this word. Number one: any casting down of a thing from its proper place or state, displacement. Again, it was mind-blowing. Number two: a throwing of the mind out of its normal state, alienation of the mind, whether such as makes a lunatic, or that of a man who by sudden emotion is transported, as it were, out of himself, so that in rapt attention, although he is awake, his mind is drawn off from all the surrounding objects and wholly fixed on other things. Number three: amazement, the state of one who, either owing to the importance or the novelty of an event, is thrown into a state of blended fear and wonderment.

So when you look at verse 26, "and they were all amazed," they were thrown out of their minds in wonderment and fear. In that verse they also said, "We have seen strange things today." The word strange is from the Greek word paradoxes. Yes, we get our English word paradox from that Greek word. Paradox means that which is incredible, uncommon, unexpected, and wonderful. Literally, they were blown away, in wonderment and fear, and perplexed because they had seen something absolutely incredible.

Wrong Reasons for Seeking: Material Gain

They could not really comprehend it. Can you imagine the excitement, exhilaration, and experience of seeing Jesus Christ perform these miracles? Even His disciples, those closest to Him, were astonished at His power. When they were on the sea during a tremendous storm, the Lord was asleep, and they said, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" He arose and rebuked the wind and

the sea, and there was a great calm. Mark 4:41 says that His disciples "feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" It was mind-blowing. In one sense of the word, things have not really changed.

Some men, some people, want to see Christ merely for excitement, exhilaration, or an experience. They are not really interested in the person of Jesus Christ; they are interested in themselves. They want an experience at any cost. This perhaps explains why many of our churches have turned into entertainment centers, because entertainment centers produce excitement, exhilaration, and experience.

I have talked to thousands of people over the years about church, and I have heard various comments when discussing the Word of God with them: "We had a good time." "It was fun." "Boy, what a ride." "What a really great experience." My response would always be, "Really? Let me ask you, did you worship the Lord Jesus Christ? Did you worship in spirit and in truth? Did you hear the Word of God expounded, explained, and applied? Did you hear anything that would enable you to bring your life into greater conformity to the Word of God?"

This statement may be absolutely astounding to some people, but it is true: Worship is not about you. It is not about your feelings, emotions, experience, or even having a good time. Worship is giving the one true and living God the glory and praise due unto His name through the Lord Jesus Christ for His so great salvation. Worship is bowing before Him, acknowledging Him, submitting to Him, and praising Him for His forgiveness and His great, great sacrifice in giving His only begotten Son.

If you are seeking Jesus Christ merely for an experience, excitement, or exhilaration, you are seeking Him for the wrong reasons, and you are not going to find Him. You may find an imitation Christ and an imitation gospel, but you will not find the real one. Even the Apostle Paul talked about a counterfeit gospel and a counterfeit Jesus Christ. Those who want an experience and excitement truly do not want Jesus Christ.

Let me ask you a question. You may not know the answer, but I am going to ask you anyhow. Do you know the only man in the entire New Testament to whom the Lord Jesus Christ would not even speak? He would not speak to him. The man was a king. The reason our Lord would not even speak to him was because he wanted an experience. Let me show you.

Jesus Christ had been standing before Pilate. When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether Jesus was a Galilean. As soon as he knew that Jesus belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who was also at Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad, for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him, and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him. Herod questioned Jesus with many words, but Jesus answered him nothing.

Our Lord would not even speak to him. All Herod wanted was an experience, a little excitement. He wanted to see Jesus Christ do something. Isn't that astounding? If you want entertainment, excitement, an experience, special feelings, emotions, sensations, or wonder, then you are seeking Jesus Christ for the wrong reasons. You will not find Him.

Our Lord said to the Jews in John 8: "I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and ye shall die in your sins; whither I go, ye cannot come." Then said the Jews, "Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come." And He said unto them, "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." Notice that He said, "Ye shall seek me," but they would die in their sins. Not everybody who seeks Christ seeks Him aright.

As marvelous, wonderful, miraculous, and great as our Lord's miracles were, here is an astounding truth: miracles in and of themselves will not save anyone. John 12:37 says, "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him." The miracles did not produce faith.

The miracle certainly demonstrated who He was. But unless you come to Jesus Christ, and come to Jesus Christ right, no matter how

many miracles you see, it does not mean that you are a true believer in Jesus Christ.

It is pretty crass and pretty bad in itself simply to follow Jesus in order to be entertained, to have an experience, to be excited, or to see something you have never seen before. But it really gets worse than that in John chapter 6. Look at verse 24; I will explain who these people were momentarily and fill in the details a little later. When the people saw that Jesus was not there, neither His disciples, "they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus."

When they found Him on the other side of the sea, they said, "Rabbi, when camest thou hither?" Jesus answered them and said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." Here were people now seeking Him, not because of the miracles, but because they had received a free meal. What is really, really interesting is that these people "took shipping."

That is, they incurred a little expense and expended a little energy to find our Lord. Then they asked, "Rabbi, listen to this, when camest thou hither?" I like to paraphrase it this way: "Are you trying to get away from us? When did you come here?" Of course, our Lord was not fooled. They may have expended a little money and a little energy, but He knew their hearts.

They were not seeking a spiritual blessing; they were seeking a temporal blessing. This is evidence that they did not even understand His miracles. These were the same people who had originally followed Him because of the miracles. Now they followed Him because they had received a free meal. They were not interested in giving to Him, but in getting from Him. They were not interested in giving Him glory, but only in what they could get.

In John chapter 6, you have the feeding of the 5,000—5,000 men, not counting the women and the children. Andrew tells our Lord in verse 9, "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?" And Jesus said, "Make the men sit down." Now there was much grass in the place, so the men sat down in number about five thousand. Jesus took the

loaves, and when He had given thanks, He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down, and likewise to the fishes as much as they would.

When they were filled, He said unto His disciples, “Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” Therefore they gathered them together and filled twelve baskets of the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, “This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.” When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take Him by force to make Him a king, He departed again into a mountain Himself, alone.

Think about this: if Jesus Christ can take two fish and five loaves—probably small little things—and feed 5,000 men, not counting women and children, you are probably talking about 10,000 to 20,000 people. If He can do that one day, He can do that every day. If we make Him king, these people are thinking, why would we even have to work? He can simply provide for us over and over and over.

They were reversing what our Lord taught in Matthew 6:33: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” What they wanted was the things. They did not care about the kingdom of God or about Him; they simply wanted the things. That is exactly where most people are today. Most people really do not care about Jesus Christ. We care about church buildings, stained-glass windows, deep-throated organs, and all those things, but we do not really care about Jesus Christ. More people seem interested in what they can get from Him than in what they can give to Him.

Jesus as the True Bread of Life

These people exposed not only their fleshliness and foolishness, but also their hypocrisy. In verse 27, our Lord told them, “Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.”

This statement must be understood comparatively. When He says, “Labor not for the meat that perisheth,” He is not saying, “Do not work.” Obviously, God has commanded us to work and to earn our living by the sweat of our brow. He is saying that we need to put the emphasis on that which is spiritual, and not on that which is physical. The word labor means that which is intensive, costly, and exhausting. We should give our main emphasis and strength to that which is permanent, found only in Him, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is where the intensity of our labor should be. The meat that Jesus Christ gives is eternal. It is real life.

All other food is what you and I would call temporal and transitory. In verse 31, after our Lord tells them to labor not for the meat which perisheth, they say, “Our fathers did eat manna in the desert. As it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” Then Jesus said unto them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.” Then said they unto Him, “Lord, evermore give us this bread.” And Jesus said unto them, “I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”

“But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and he that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”

Our Lord said, “I am the bread of life.” The manna given in the Old Testament was not the real bread. The Father sends the real bread, and that is Christ. In order to obtain the bread of life, people must not only come to Him personally; they must believe in Him, understand that He was sent by the Father, and know that He came to do the Father's will. He was obedient to the Father and obeyed the law of God perfectly. Therefore, He is the true bread of life because He is salvation, and there is no salvation in any other. He is our nourishment.

Many think that they truly want and desire the bread of life, but in reality they do not want it. It is like years ago, when a concert pianist came to our church and gave a concert. He was a missionary. He sat

down at the piano and, for an hour, played without a sheet of music in front of him; he simply played. It looked as though the music were flowing out of his fingers. When the concert was over, I walked up to him and said, “David, I would give anything to be able to play the piano like that.” He said, “Really?”

I practice eight hours a day, six days a week. All of a sudden, I did not want to be a concert pianist anymore. I am simply pointing out that many people think, “I would really like to have this bread of life.” Well, no, not really. They think that until Jesus tells them who He is.

When He said that He was the bread of life and came down from heaven, the Jews murmured at Him: “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it, then, that he saith, I came down from heaven?” Jesus answered, “Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him, and I will raise him up in the last day.”

How could He be the bread of life? How could He come down from the Father in heaven? “We know His Father. We know His Mother. We know His brethren.” Why? He is one of us, just a common, everyday man. That is what many people think. It is true that Jesus Christ is a man, but He is more than a man. He is a perfect man. And He is more than a perfect man. He is the God-man.

The Bible says in 1 Timothy 3:16, “And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, seen of angels, preached on in the world, believed on by the Gentiles, and received up in glory.” This is the same truth as John 1:14: “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Jesus Christ is not simply man. He is indeed the God-man, and consequently He is indeed life. Many want to follow Jesus Christ as a good example, as a moral individual, but they do not want to bow before Him as God incarnate. Consequently, they really and truly do not want Him.

Some followed Jesus for the miracles; some followed Him for the food and for what they could get from Him. But listen to what our

Lord tells them: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread, talking about Himself, which cometh down from heaven, that if a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever. And the bread that I will give him is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

“The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven. None of your fathers did eat manna, and are dead. He that eateth of this bread shall live forever.” These things said He in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum.

Many therefore of His disciples, when they heard this, said, “This is a hard saying; who can hear it?”

Our Lord said, “I am the bread of life.” He said, “You have to eat my flesh, you have to drink my blood.” Eating His flesh and drinking His blood has nothing to do with cannibalism, and it has absolutely nothing to do with communion. Look back at verse 56: “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.” Then verse 57 says, “As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.” In other words, here is what our Lord is saying.

If we come to Him savingly and seek Him savingly, we consume Him and He consumes us in the sense that the same thing happens when we eat food and drink liquid. When we eat our food and drink our liquid, it permeates every part of our body; it goes to every cell. So our Lord is saying, whoever comes to Him and really partakes of Him, His life is now in them, and He permeates every aspect of the heart and mind and life and soul.

The Response: Many Disciples Turn Away

It should be said of us, just like it was said by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” What did he say? “I'm crucified with Christ. I'm dead. Nevertheless, I live, yet not I, but it is Christ who liveth in me.”

That's what he's talking about in John chapter 6. In other words, when we come to Him and seek Him savingly, when we seek Him the way that we understand that He is the bread of life, we consume Him, He consumes us, spiritually speaking, symbolically speaking, and then He permeates every aspect of our life. So whatever we do, in word or deed or thought, it is all about the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you're seeking Him for experience, exhilaration, or excitement, if you're seeking Him just for what you can get out of Him or from Him, you're seeking Him for wrong reasons and you will never ever find Him. But if you come to the Lord Jesus Christ in repentance and faith, seeking to have Him in your life and you in Him, then you will find Him. The one who really seeks Jesus Christ savingly is the one who comes to Him and desires to live in Him and through Him and by Him and for Him.

That is exactly what He's saying. Now, when many of the disciples heard what He said, “I am the bread of life,” they said, “This is a hard saying. Who can hear it? Who can put up with this?” If you're seeking Him for miracles, you can't put up with it. If you're seeking Him for what you get out of Him, you can't put up with it. But if you want Him, you can certainly put up with it.

In John 6:63, our Lord said, “It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not.” Notice that “some” is more than one. Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not and who should be trained. He not only knew who Judas was; He knew the people who followed Him for the miracles and those who followed Him just for the food. He knew they were not true believers.

Therefore He said, “That no man can come unto me, except it were given him of my Father.” From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him. Then Jesus said unto the twelve, “Will ye go away also?” Simon Peter answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”

Without bread and water, we die physically. Without Jesus Christ being our bread of life, we die eternally. The true Christian—and what Christianity is all about—is Jesus Christ living in us, through us, and from us. As He said, “As I live by the Father, so he that eateth me shall live by me.”

Conclusion: True Seeking Means Living in Christ

Our union and communion with the Son of God should be expressed in every area and sphere of our lives. There are many who seek, but for wrong reasons. That is why, in Matthew 7, He said, “Many in that day shall say to me, Lord, Lord, have we not done many things in Your name? Have we not cast out devils? Have we not done this? Have we not done that? Then shall I say to them, Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity. I never knew you.”

Miracles do not interest us, nor what we can get. We should be interested in the Lord Jesus Christ being exalted, honored, and glorified in all our lives.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Word and truth. Above all, we thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ and His so great salvation. Help us, Lord, even as Christians, to have Christ’s life more evident in us. May we live in Him and He in us. As He lived by the Father, may we live by Him. Give us grace to serve Thee acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 12

Beware

June 27, 2023

Introduction to 'Beware'

In Matthew 16, verse 5, we read: "And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, neither remember, the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up? Neither the seven loaves and the four thousand, and how many baskets you took up? How is it then that ye do not understand, that I speak it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?" Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

The word beware means to be cautious, wary, on our toes, observant, and ready to defend ourselves if necessary. We see

beware signs all of the time: "Beware of the dog," "Beware of falling rocks," "Beware of the bears," "Beware of snakes," "Beware of vacant buildings," and a host of other beware signs. Alice has a sign that she keeps on her little buggy, and it says, "Beware of the crazy chicken lady." She does love her chickens, and she can be dangerous, that's for sure. But the one that I like best is a sign that said, "Beware the dog," then under it said, "Forget the dog, beware the owner." Each beware sign in reality is a sign of warning.

Greek Words for 'Beware'

Likewise, all of the beware statements in Scripture are warnings—divine warnings. As we look at different texts, each time we will observe the word beware. Three main Greek words are translated by these words. The first is prosecho, meaning literally beware, to give heed, to give attention to, and to apply oneself in carefulness. The second is blepo, which literally means "I see," but also means to see, to behold, to take heed, to beware, to discern, to observe, and to consider and discover. The third is phulasso, meaning to listen carefully, to take heed, beware, observe, to be on guard, and to be ready to save oneself lest one suffer violence.

These three words together are usually words of danger, and sometimes words of extreme danger. Before getting to our text, let us look quickly at several passages and see how this word, or these three words, are used repeatedly in Scripture.

In Matthew 7:15, our Lord said, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Here is a false prophet, someone teaching things other than the Word of God. He comes in sheep's clothing, but is indeed a ravening wolf, seeking to deceive and destroy. Our Lord therefore tells us, "beware." Clearly, it is a word of warning and danger.

Survey of 'Beware' Passages

Then, in Matthew 10:17-18, our Lord says, "But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to the councils and they will scourge you in their synagogues. And you shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles."

Certainly, you have to beware. That is a fact, because many are traitors and many are informers. It is kind of like that January 6th thing. Most of the people who were encouraging violence and encouraging you to go into the White House were government agents. So you have to beware of men. That is exactly what our Lord is saying.

Philippians chapter 3 and verse 2 says, “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.” The word “beware” is used three times there. When he says “beware of dogs,” obviously that is not the four-legged kind but the two-legged kind. There are individuals in Scripture that God does indeed refer to as dogs, and He tells us to beware of those. “Beware of evil workers” means those who not only perpetrate evil, but plan evil and delight in evil. When he says “beware of the concision,” it is literally “beware of the circumcision,” which would be beware of the Jews.

Another one to consider is Colossians chapter 2 and verse 8. It also is a “beware” verse. In fact, someone could probably preach for a year or so just on the “beware” verses in Scripture. The Word of God says it like this: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”

You may not understand the importance of the word “philosophy,” but I want to spell it out for you. The Greek word is basically “philosophia.” That is philosophy, and that is where we get our English word “philosophy.” It is made up of two Greek words: “philos” and “sophia.” “Philos” is the Greek word which means “love,” and “sophia” is the Greek word for “wisdom.” Thus, a philosopher simply means a lover of wisdom. Of course, God is indeed the chief philosopher, because He is indeed wisdom incarnate, that is for sure.

The warning in Colossians 2 and verse 8 is between the philosophy of the world and the philosophy of the Word of God. In other words, one is humanistic, and the other is biblical. You may say, “I am not a philosopher. I do not follow Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, or Kant.” You may not use the word “philosophy,” but you have a philosophy. You have a worldview, a view in which you see things, and a philosophy by which you understand them. If your

philosophy or worldview is not biblical, if it is not scriptural, then you are a follower of the tradition of men, the vain deceits, and the rudiments of the world. It is just that simple.

You either have two choices. You may see the world and everything in it through the spectacles of Scripture, or through the spectacles of human eyes or humanism. Your philosophy, your worldview, is how you view things and how you interpret reality.

There is one more warning, found in 2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 17: "You therefore, beloved, seeing you know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness." You had better beware, lest, being led away with the error of the wicked, you fall from your own steadfastness. Sometimes it is easy to be led away. Sometimes it is very easy to be led astray. I remember learning this as a young boy.

I have always said that I am thankful I was raised on a farm. You learn so many lessons. I have always enjoyed eating quail, although I do not eat them very often. I do not care one thing for dove, but I do like quail. As a boy, I was at the edge of a field and saw a quail that looked as though she had a broken wing. She was fluttering that wing. I walked up to pick her up, but as I got close, she ran another five or ten yards and fluttered again. While I walked toward her, she ran off once more. Finally, after leading me about fifty yards, she took off. I had gotten too close to her nest. She was leading me away, deceiving me and pretending to be hurt when she was not hurt. I could not get back behind her nest, though I would not have bothered it anyhow.

She was leading me away. This is exactly what God is saying. So many people fall from their own steadfastness and faithfulness because they are led away—sometimes by their own desires, sometimes by entertainment. It is insane the way we prioritize our lives. When you stop and think about it, we hardly ever put the Lord and His Word first.

Based upon Colossians chapter 2 and verse 8 and 2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 17, let me put it to you very plainly: If you do not live your life by biblical principles, you are asking for destruction. You are asking for chaos and confusion in your life. Our Lord gives us a

multitude of warnings in the Bible, and unhappily, I believe that most Christians are like little children. All of us who have had little children know that when they come around a fire or a hot stove eye, we tell them, "Don't touch that. That'll burn you." We tell those children ten or fifteen or twenty times, and inevitably they have to touch it.

The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

Then they find out, "I should have listened to the warning." I am afraid that is the way we are when it comes to the Word of God. We simply do not listen when our Lord says that we are to beware. The passages I am dealing with today—or rather, telling you about—are repeated several times in the Bible. They are found in Matthew chapter 16, Mark chapter 8, Luke chapter 20, and also Luke chapter 12. God is repeating this thing over and over. If I were to ask you, "How many times did God have to say something to make it true and important?"

The answer is only one time. But if He repeats something over and over, we should pay attention. Go back in your Bible to Matthew chapter 16, to the text that we read, because in this passage our Lord is telling us to beware of hypocrisy and false doctrine. Here we see how easily we fail to understand the truth our Lord is teaching. The disciples did not understand. Years ago, I saw a cartoon that I have never forgotten, and it illustrates the point of Matthew chapter 16. Two men in long robes carried signs that said, "The end is near." In the next picture came the screeching of brakes, followed by a splash, repeated two or three times. Finally, one man said to the other, "Perhaps we should change our signs to read, 'The bridge's out.'"

"The end is near," most folks are just going to ignore that. But the bridge was out and the end was near, and they simply did not understand. Look in Matthew chapter 16, verse 6: "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." The disciples automatically thought of bread. Look in verse 5: "And when the disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread." They thought, We did not bring anything to eat. Our Lord warns them, and in verse 7 they reasoned among themselves, saying, "It is because we have taken no bread."

Here is the truth: our Lord not only had to correct their thinking; He had to direct their thinking. He said, “No. No, you’re thinking wrong. You need to think in another direction.” He reminded them that He was quite capable of giving them bread. Beginning in verse 8, “Which when Jesus perceived”—that is, He perceived how they were thinking—He said unto them, “O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye brought no bread? Do you not yet understand, neither remember, the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, how many baskets ye took up?”

When our Lord fed the five thousand, He took five loaves and two fishes. The five thousand were five thousand men, not counting the women and the children. I think it was twelve baskets they took up afterward. When He fed the four thousand, I think it was seven baskets. Our Lord was saying, “Look, I’m not concerned about bread. I’m quite capable of making bread and extending it and making it go as far as I want it to go. It’s just that simple.” But how plain the truth is when God opens our eyes. So our Lord asked them, when they were thinking, “Well, we just forgot to take bread,”

Our Lord said, “What's wrong with you? How is it you do not understand? How is it you do not perceive? What is going on in your minds?”

Mark, in his passage, makes this an even sterner rebuke from our Lord. The disciples reasoned among themselves, saying, “It is because we've taken no bread.” And when Jesus knew it, He said unto them, “Why reason ye because you have no bread?” Or, “What's wrong with your reasoning?” Then He asked, “Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your hearts yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? And having ears, hear ye not? And do ye not remember, when I break the five loaves among the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up?” They said unto Him, “Twelve.” “And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up?” They said, “Seven.” And He said, “How is it that ye do not understand?”

Isn't it amazing? You and I can be oblivious to a truth, and all of a sudden God opens our eyes and gives us understanding, and everything is so clear and so simple and so plain. Then we think,

“How in the world were we so ignorant and so stupid and so blind as to not see this beforehand?”

Now the warning in Matthew chapter 16 is not just against hypocrisy—it is that, which I'll show you—but it is also against false teaching and false doctrine. Do you pay attention to what you hear? Do you judge what you hear based upon the Word of God? And do you display the attitude of the Bereans?

Paul preached in Thessalonica, and they did not like what he said. But when he got to Berea and began preaching, he said in Acts 17:11, “But these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of the mind, and searched the scriptures daily, as to whether or not these things were so.”

There is a vast difference between eisegesis and exegesis. Eisegesis is from the Greek word eis, which means “into,” and exegesis is from the Greek word ek, which means “out of.” Usually, most people eisegete the Scripture; that is, they read into it what they have already been taught or what their preconceived idea is. If I believe something, whether it is true or not, I say, “Let me find a verse or two that back up what I believe,” and sure enough, I can find something. I may have to take it out of context, but I can find it. That is eisegesis. Exegesis is when you draw out of the Scripture what the Scripture actually says.

Our Lord is warning against the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Let me tell you first what the leaven of the Pharisees is. It was their teaching and their doctrine, and it can be broken down very easily under two simple heads. First, the Pharisees believed that justification was by the works of the law—and the law was their interpretation of the law. In reality, justification according to the Pharisees meant that you submitted to their demands, followed what they taught you, and received their impositions upon you. It was just that simple. They believed in justification by the law. Their interpretation of the law was very wrong. This is one reason they hated the Lord Jesus Christ: He violated not God's law, but their interpretation of the law.

If you look in your Bibles, hold Matthew 16, but turn to John chapter 5, beginning with verse 15. Our Lord had healed a man and

commanded him to take up his bed and walk. The Bible says, “The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole. And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him.” Why?

Because Jesus had done these things on the Sabbath day, He answered the Jews, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He had not only broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. Now wait a minute. Did our Lord violate the Sabbath? No. He violated their interpretation of the Sabbath. He did not violate God’s law.

Luke 13 gives a very clear illustration of their hypocrisy. Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath, and a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years was bowed together and could in no wise lift up herself. When Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said, “Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.” He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight and glorified God.

The ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, saying, “There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, but not on the Sabbath day.” The Lord answered, “Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” All His adversaries were ashamed, and all the people rejoiced for the glorious things done by Him.

These Pharisees had their own interpretation. First, they believed justification was by the works of the law, but the works of the law were determined by them. Second, they believed everyone was obligated to keep the tradition of the elders. That is why, in Mark 7 and Matthew 15, our Lord condemned them, saying, “By your tradition you make void the Word of God.” They were canceling out the law of God by their tradition.

He not only tells you to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees; He also tells you to beware of the leaven of the Sadducees. If you will turn in your Bibles to Acts chapter 23 and look at verse 8, you will see that the Pharisees were the legalists of that day, but the Sadducees were the leftists, the modernists, the liberals—individuals we would basically refer to as infidels. They denied the Scripture. Look what the Bible says about the Sadducees: "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both."

The Sadducees did not believe in a bodily resurrection. They did not believe in angels or spirit beings. Now I want you to see the absolute absurdity, in fact, when they tried to entrap Jesus. They said, "Look, you know the law says that if a man marry a woman and they have no children, then the brother is to marry the wife and raise up seed and do his brother." That was the Levirate marriage, and that had to do with the land when everything was by inheritance and everything had been divided by God.

They then described seven brothers. The first married a wife, had no child, and died. His second brother married her and died; they had no children. This continued right on down to the seventh man. Finally, the seventh man died, and they had no children. Finally, the woman died. They asked Him, "Whose wife is she going to be in the resurrection? Because seven entered a wife." Our Lord said, "Ye do err, not knowing the scripture, nor the power of God."

They did not even believe in the resurrection. Why? They were trying to show its absurdity, according to their interpretation and their denial of Scripture, of the bodily resurrection. They were trying to show that the resurrection itself was absurd. Therefore, we have to beware of individuals who either deny the Scripture or try to explain away the Scripture.

I remember when the Lord first saved me and called me to preach, I really wanted to learn. When you are first saved, you think all Christians are absolutely wonderful. You think anybody who professes to be a Christian is a Christian. I did. So I bought a book written by a woman on the Exodus, because I wanted to understand the Exodus. I read it until I came to the part where Moses was delivering the children of Israel out of Egypt. She said that Moses

knew when the tide was going to be out, and therefore took them across. Pharaoh did not know when the tide was going to be out, tried to cross, and was drowned.

The Scripture says they crossed on dry ground, not when the tide was out. I thought to myself, if Moses was an intruder in that land, and the Egyptians had lived there all their lives for hundreds and thousands of years, surely they would have known the tides. Yet she was trying to explain away Scripture. I threw the book away. I burned it, I think, if I remember.

Now, in Jude, right before Revelation, verse 3 says: "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."

The word "once" is the Greek word "hapax." It literally means once, one time, and once and for all. In other words, there was a historical, biblical truth once delivered to the saints. The word "delivered" is an aorist passive, meaning it happened one time, and you were passive in it. You did nothing except receive it. It was accomplished once, over and done with, and delivered in us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. Our Lord is warning not only against the hypocrisy and wickedness of the Pharisees, but also the hypocrisy and denial of Scripture by the Sadducees.

In Mark chapter 8 and verse 15, our Lord also includes a third group. He warns against the Herodians: “And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.” Herod was an Edomite, that is, he was of the lineage of Esau. Jacob and Esau were sons of Isaac, who was a son of Abraham.

The Leaven of Herod

John Calvin addressed Herod in these words: “I reply, he (that is Herod) was a half Jew, was mean and treacherous, and availed himself of every contrivance that was within his reach to draw the people to his side. For it is customary with all apostates to contrive some mixture for the purpose of establishing a new religion by which

the former may be abolished. It was because he was laboring craftily to subvert the principles of true and ancient piety, and thus to give currency to a religion that would be exceedingly adapted to his tyranny, or rather because he was endeavoring to introduce some new form of Judaism, that our Lord most properly charged them to beware of his leaven."

When Calvin called Herod a half Jew, he did not mean that such a thing literally exists. He meant that Herod was mean and treacherous, attempting to combine Judaism with whatever would increase his tyranny and control the people. "From the temple of God the scribes disseminated errors, and the court of Herod was another workshop of Satan in which errors of a different kind were manufactured."

You can understand Pharisaism and Sadduceeism, but here is Herodianism. Herodianism means political correctness, worship of the state: the state is God. That is what Herod was trying to do, and exactly what all tyrants try to do. That is what Jeroboam did. In 1 Kings chapter 12, he made the two golden calves and said, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Behold thy gods, O Israel,"

"Which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." And that is why, in Psalm 94, verses 20 and 21, God says that governments which make sin legal not only do not have fellowship with Him; they are actually in competition with Him. That is why He asks in Psalm 94:20, "Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by law?" Stop and think about this: Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with God, which makes sin legal? It is legal in this country to sin as long as it is politically correct. Look around and see who is favored in this country and who is disfavored.

Verse 21 says, "They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous and condemn the innocent blood." That means the government and these rulers gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous and condemn the innocent blood. Look, if you would, at who the favorite few in this country are today. It happens to be the sodomites, the transgender crowd, the politically correct crowd; it happens to be anyone and everyone except Christians, conservatives, and constitutionalists. I am simply pointing out the fact that this is exactly what Herodianism is.

These doctrines of Phariseeism, Sadduceeism, and Herodianism are all compared to leaven because leaven is sour. As the Apostle Paul said, the words of the heretics eat as a canker. Their words are destructive, and the leaven diffuses into everything and therefore corrupts everything as well.

Each of these groups held doctrines that were completely and totally contrary to the Word of God, to the law and the gospel. They vilified and changed the Word of God for their own benefit. I suppose the worst kind of tyranny is religious tyranny, and next unto it, of course, would be political tyranny as well.

Our Lord tells us that the philosophies, teachings, and doctrines of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians were nothing but hypocrisy. In Luke 12:1, He summarizes everything: “In the meantime, when there were gathered unto him an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trod one upon another, he began to say to his disciples first of all, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”

Beware of Covetousness

Their purpose was to control the people. They had no concern for the people. The same thing was true of the Sadducees and the Herodians. So He tells us to beware of hypocrisy and false doctrine.

Secondly, He tells us to beware of covetousness. In Luke 12, beginning in verse 13, one of the company said unto Him, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." He said unto him, "Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?" Then He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." He then told the parable about the rich man, but the warning remains: beware of covetousness. A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

Do you realize that the average Christian usually thinks material gain is the goal of life? Consequently, most Christians live their lives endeavoring to have gain. I remember when God first saved me and called me to preach, I had a friend whose driving desire was to be a millionaire. That was a lot of money sixty or seventy years ago. I

asked him, "Why do you want to be a millionaire?" He said, "Just so I can serve God without any encumbrance." I said, "Can you not do that now? Why do you have to be a millionaire to do something like that?"

Our Lord said we had better be concerned that we not be covetous. I have seen bumper stickers that said, "He who dies with the most wins." That is not true. He who dies with the most leaves every bit of it. You do not win anything. Such is an attitude to covetousness. Remember that in Colossians 3:5, covetousness is idolatry. We fail to believe our Lord's words in Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Read Matthew 6, and you will find that "all these things" are food, raiment, and sufficiency. If you seek Him, His kingdom, and His righteousness first, He will take care of you; everything will be added unto you.

One of the things that we are missing in our lives as Christians is contentment. We have lost the art and the grace of contentment. The Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:11 said, “Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” He could be content in being hungry or full, sick or well. Whatever state he was in, he had learned to be content.

In 1 Timothy 6:6, our Lord speaks of contentment as well: “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” Then he says, “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” “And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.” You have plenty to eat, plenty to wear, life, health, and happiness. Be content.

“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money” (not money, but the love of money) “is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.” Then, in verse 11: “But thou, O man of God, flee these things.” What things? Covetousness and the love of money. Flee those things.

I have had friends through the years try to get me into financial schemes, telling me how quickly I could become rich. I would tell them that I was not interested in being rich, and I am not. Certainly, I want to be taken care of like anyone. I want enough to eat, enough clothes to wear, and the ability to pay any bills I might incur. But outside of that, what in the world would I do with millions of dollars anyhow? Give it away.

If you do not want much, you do not need much. If you can be satisfied and content with what you have, that is wonderful. Hebrews 13:5 says, “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

Years ago, Alice came to me and said, "I just have to have some new clothes. I have to have a new dress." I said, "What?" She said, "I just got to have some." Since we're Christians, I said, we need to see what the Bible says. I turned to Hebrews 13:5: "Be content with such things as ye have." Well, it didn't work. She had to get a new dress anyhow.

But you know the truth. I know we need clothes, but you understand what I'm saying. You don't have to have everything you want. I tell everybody teasingly, Alice has two closets full of nothing to wear. But anyhow, this is what he is saying: "Be content with such things as ye have."

The wise man said, "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." He said, "I don't want to be rich. I don't want to be poor. I want that which is convenient for me, and I'll be satisfied there. I'll be taken care of."

If you're a covetous individual, you will never be satisfied, because the more you get, the more you want. It's just that simple. If you're not covetous, then you can be thankful, grateful, and appreciative of everything that you have. Whatever is given to you, whatever you receive, whatever you earn, whatever you grow, or whatever you build, you can be thankful. Why? Because you realize and

understand that God doesn't owe you anything except justice—and you don't want that. But you can be thankful.

A covetous man cannot be thankful, because he is never grateful for what he has; he always wants more. So our Lord says you had better beware of hypocrisy and false teaching. You had better beware of covetousness. One more: you had better beware of pride and the praise of man. Our Lord is warning us again, using the word "beware": "Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing,"

Beware of Pride and the Praise of Man

They love salutations in the marketplaces, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation. But note this: they were hypocrites. They like to wear the long clothing. They like to call attention to themselves. They love to be addressed as “Rabbi, Rabbi.” They love the chief seats in the synagogues and the uppermost rooms at feasts. In Luke 20:46, He says this again: “Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation.”

Do you realize that pride always seeks to draw attention to oneself? Sometimes it is clothing. Sometimes it is a lack of clothing. Sometimes it may be tattoos. I have seen people who had tattoos all over their head, their ears, their nose, their mouth, and their eyelids. Why? They want people to notice them. Certainly, you get noticed, that is for sure. But pride always seeks the approval, praise, and recognition of man. Pride loves recognition.

Pride happens to be—listen to me, I will show it to you from Scripture—the source of abuse, the condemnation of God and His truth. It is the source of arrogance, shame, contention, foolishness, and destruction. Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate,” saith the Lord. So the fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride, and arrogancy.

Psalm 10:2 says, “The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor.” Persecution comes from pride: “I can do it. I can get away with it. Look who I am.” I just heard this weekend of one man who shot and killed, murdered, another man. When he was asked why he did it, his answer was, “He disrespected me.” Really?

Who do you think you are? That was pride: “I’m to be respected. If you don’t respect me, I’ll kill you.” Scripture says: “The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined.” “For the wicked boasteth of his heart’s desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth.” “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after”

God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them." Wow, that's pride. Look in your Bibles, if you would please, to the book of Proverbs 11. Remember now, the Lord hates pride, the scripture says so. So look in Proverbs chapter 11 and notice if you would please verse 2. Here's a number of things about pride very quickly. Proverbs 11, look at verse 2: "When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom." When pride cometh, then cometh shame. Look in Proverbs 13 and verse 10, and I'm just being very selective. There are lots of verses. Proverbs 13 and verse 10: "Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom." So it doesn't matter if your husband, wife, best friends—pride always comes first. Look if you would Proverbs 14 and verse 3. He says it like this: "In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them." And then Proverbs 16 and verse 18, one that everyone probably can quote: "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." Then one more:

look in Proverbs 29 and verse 23. Proverbs 29 verse 23: We should certainly understand this one. "A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit." Do you know something? I just was selective at a number of these passages on pride. There are a multitude of others. There are good illustrations in the Bible. Goliath is a good one. He was very proud, arrogant, thought he could not be defeated. And a little boy defeated him. I'm just simply saying, in spite of all the warnings of Scripture, man's

heart is deceitful and full of pride and arrogancy, and we desire the praise and recognition of men. We want it. We'll do anything in

The world will dress immodestly, overdress, tattoo itself, put beer cans in its ears, or do something simply to get attention. If the verses I have shown you are insufficient, I want to show you one that might startle you. If there were no other reason in the world to hate pride and the desire for praise, honor, and recognition from men, I think that for the child of God this one would be sufficient. Our Lord said in John 5:44, “How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?” How can you believe? Pride and desiring the honor and praise of man make faith impossible. It is impossible to believe if all you want is the praise and recognition of man. That is what He is saying.

Applications and Final Warnings

So let me make some applications. Our Lord has warned us. Will we take heed, and will we be cautious in our lives to guard ourselves from hypocrisy, false teaching, covetousness, pride, and desiring human recognition? Each of these will destroy our testimonies, ruin our lives, and bring chaos and confusion into our families. Will we beware?

Truth unapplied is worthless. You might know the truth, but if you do not apply it, it is worthless. It is useless to you. It may still be truth, but it has to be applied.

In several passages our Lord said, “Take heed and beware.” The interesting thing is that the three Greek words given at the very beginning of this message that are translated as “beware” are also at times translated “take heed.” Thus, when our Lord said, “Take heed and beware,” it was a double warning at one time. I want to end today by showing you three “take heed” verses. The first is in Galatians chapter 5, a “take heed,” or a “beware of.”

Galatians 5:15 says, "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed"—that is, beware—"that ye be not consumed one of another." In other words, if you are going to fuss and fight, do not be surprised if you get eaten up. Better take heed; better beware.

In 1 Timothy 4:16, the Apostle Paul told Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself"—or beware unto thyself—"and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee." We are told to take heed, or beware, not only of our own person, but also of our doctrine.

Hebrews 3:12 says, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." He is not talking to the ungodly or the unsaved, but to the saved. Keep your heart; you better watch out. Beware of hypocrisy. Beware of false teaching. Beware of covetousness. Beware of pride. Beware of desiring the praise and recognition of men. Ultimately, if you are not watchful, there will be an evil heart of unbelief, and you will end up departing in one way or the other and doing that which is condemned by God.

How often do we really observe the "beware" signs? How often do we truly beware of what our Lord tells us to beware of?

You remember the passage in Proverbs, which occurs twice: "The prudent man foreseeth the evil, but the simple pass on and are punished." We can either listen to our Lord and beware, or pass on and get punished. Let us beware.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, I pray that you would help us. We are living in extremely dangerous, wicked, compromising, enticing, and seducing times. Lord, we need thee, and we need to heed thy warnings. We need to watch out for hypocrisy and false teaching in our own lives. We need to watch out for a covetous heart and attitude. We need to be on our guard. We must watch out for pride, and must not desire the praise of men, but only the praise of God, bringing our lives into obedience unto thee. Help us, Lord, to love thee, to fear thee, and to honor thee. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 13

False Flags, Propaganda and Deception

February 19, 2024

SCRIPTURE READING - Joshua 9:3-16 (KJV)

Introduction: The Question and the Text

> And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles old and rent and bound up, and old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them.
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> And all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy. And they went to Joshua into the camp at Gilgal and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country.
>
> Now therefore make ye a league with us. And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us; how shall we make a league with you? And they said unto Joshua, We are thy servants. And Joshua said unto them, Who are ye? And from whence come ye? And they said unto him, From a

> very far country thy servants are come, because of the name of the Lord thy God.
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> For we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon and Og the king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroth. Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We are your servants: therefore now make ye a league, or a covenant, with us.
>
> This our bread we took hot for our provision out of our houses on the day we came forth to go unto you; but now, behold, it is dry, it is moldy. These bottles of wine, which we filled, were new; and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of a very long journey. And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them. And it came to pass at the end of three days, after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors, and that they dwelt among them.

Have you ever been deceived? If so, do you remember how hurt you were when you realized the deception? At times, you blamed the other person or the people for deceiving you. At other times, you blamed yourself for being so stupid and gullible, and for falling for such a swindle. But interestingly, at times everybody wants to be deceived. We do not want the truth because the truth makes us uncomfortable. It holds us accountable and demands righteous action and conduct.

The Universality of Deception

The truth of the matter is this: everyone uses deception. All warfare is deception. All camouflage is deception. Smiling at folks when you are irritated with them is deception. Telling your wife that she looks lovely in an unlovely dress is deception.

I saw a cartoon years ago that I have never forgotten. The wife was looking into a mirror while her husband sat behind her in a lounge chair reading the paper. She said, “I’m old, I’m fat, I’m wrinkled, I’m sagging, and I need help.” Then she looked at her husband and said, “Say something to me that will help me.” He replied, “For a woman as old as you are, you have mighty good eyesight.” I do not imagine any husband is going to be that brave. Deception, by the way, is not evil in and of itself. It is a tool, and it may be used for good or for evil.

The truth of the matter is this: even God uses deception. In Job chapter 12 and verse 16, the Bible says, “With him is strength and wisdom,” and then it says, “the deceived and the deceiver are his.” Remember the story about Ahab and Jehoshaphat. Ahab was trying to get Jehoshaphat to go with him to Ramoth-gilead. He had all his false prophets, and they prophesied every kind of success for Ahab. Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there not here a prophet of God, a servant of God?” Ahab answered, “There’s one, but I hate him.”

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Chronicles 18:12-22 (KJV)

Biblical Examples of Deception

And so he sends for Micaiah. Micaiah is already in prison, because Micaiah is indeed a servant of God. In verse 12 of 2 Chronicles 18: "And the messenger that went to call Micaiah spake to him, saying, Behold, the words of the prophets"—and of course they're false prophets—"declare good to the king with one assent; let thy word therefore, I pray thee, be like one of theirs, and speak thou good. And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, even what my God saith, that will I speak. And when he was come to the king, the king said unto Micaiah, Shall we go to Ramoth Gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And he said, Go ye up and prosper, and they shall be delivered into thy hand." Evidently he was saying this in a very sarcastic way. Because verse 15: "And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou say nothing but the truth to me in the name of the Lord?" Then said he, "You want the truth, Ahab?"

"Here it is. I did see all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. And the Lord said, These have no master; let them return therefore every man to his house in

> peace. And the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would not prophesy good unto me, but evil? Again he said, Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting upon his throne, and all the host of heaven standing at his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth Gilead? And one spake after this manner, and another saying after that manner. Then there came out a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will entice him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the Lord said, Thou shalt entice him, and thou shalt also prevail: go out, and even do so."

"Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil against thee." Ahab had been listening to his false prophets, who told him to go up and prosper, but Micaiah told him the truth: "Look, if you go up to Ramoth Gilead, you're going to die. That's all there is to it." Ahab persuaded Jehoshaphat to go with him, disguised himself, and went into battle, while Jehoshaphat wore his kingly robes. The enemy fought against Jehoshaphat, thinking he was Ahab, until he cried out to the Lord, and the Lord called them off.

Then the Bible says that a certain man drew a bow at a venture, and the arrow smote Ahab between the shoulder blades and came out in the chest. He died later on. Notice the contrast: Ahab's lying prophets told him to go up and prosper, while Micaiah told him the truth. Ahab refused the truth. He preferred to be deceived; he preferred to believe a lie.

Let me make something exceedingly clear: If you do not believe the truth, you will believe a lie. The only alternative to the truth is a lie. Ahab believed a lie, and he was killed. Destruction and damnation always follow a lie.

In 2 Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 10, the Scripture says, "And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish." They are perishing, and they are deceived with all deceivableness of unrighteousness. Why are they perishing? "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved." Now watch.

"And for this cause"—what cause? Because they received not the love of the truth—"and for this cause God shall send them a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." We need to let this sink in: if you are not believing the truth, you are believing a lie. And if you believe a lie, you will be at your own destruction.

Our depraved nature loves a lie. We love to be deceived. In fact, the Scripture tells us that before our salvation we were disobedient and deceived. Titus 3:3 says, "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." Before our conversion, we were disobedient and deceived. It is only by the grace of God that He opens our eyes, enabling us to see the truth and turn from deception and the lie.

That is why the Apostle Paul, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, spoke of the testimony of the Thessalonians, whose sound went out through all of Macedonia and Achaia. Their conversion showed what manner of entering in Paul and his companions had unto them: they had turned to God from idols to serve the one living God and to wait for His Son Jesus Christ from heaven. In other words, they were once deceived and disobedient, but now they had been delivered. They were no longer deceived; they had turned to the one true and living God and were serving Him.

The truth is that each of us, before conversion, was deceived. Now there are two particular areas in which God warns us, as Christians—and anyone else as well—not to be deceived. First Corinthians 15:33 says, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners." That is simple and straightforward.

Warnings Against Deception for Christians

God says, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.” If you believe that you can associate intimately with wicked people and not be corrupted, then you are deceived, because God is telling you plainly that evil communications corrupt good manners.

The word “evil” means that which is bad and wicked. The word “communications” is the Greek word homilia, referring to communication, communion, intercourse, or intimate and close fellowship. It includes not only an individual, but also a company, a bunch, or a multitude. The Bible says in Exodus 23:2, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.” In other words, if you associate with them, you are simply going to end up doing that which is evil.

The word “manners” is the Greek word ethos, referring to customs, morals, or character. Thus, the Scripture says, “Evil communications corrupt good character, good morals, and good manners.” This is the truth God is putting forward for us in 1 Corinthians 15:33.

I have heard so many Christians say, “I’m close friends with this wicked person, and I’m close friends with these wicked people, because I want to lift them up and pull them up.” God says, “Don’t be deceived. You’re not pulling anybody up. They’re going to pull you down.” Evil communications corrupt good manners. You do not lift wicked people up by becoming intimate with them. This does not mean that you cannot be friends, but it does mean that you cannot associate with them and treat them as if everything is hunky-dory when in reality it is not.

The positive side of 1 Corinthians 15:33 is that we are to communicate and associate with good men who will help us and lead us. We can associate with intelligent men from whom we can gain knowledge and understanding. But if you begin to mess around, become intimate, and fellowship with the wicked, you are not going to lift them up.

They are going to pull you down. They will destroy you. Be not deceived. Evil communications corrupt good manners. Here is the second warning in which God tells you not to be deceived. You can probably quote it, but it is Galatians 6:7-8: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

When you and I think about mocking God, we think about someone standing bravely, quote-unquote, cursing God, denying

God, and doing all kinds of crazy and insane things. I remember reading about an infidel who was going to prove that God did not exist. He stood publicly and dared God to strike him dead in five minutes. Then he started counting down. When five minutes passed, he was still alive. He said, "See, there is no God." This godly woman said, "Do you think that you can exhaust the patience of an eternal almighty God in five minutes?" We would call that mocking God, but you can mock God without standing up, criticizing, condemning, and denying Him.

All you have to do is disobey Him. All you have to do is live your life as if He did not exist, as if His Word were not true. In other words, God is not mocked. Whatever you sow, that is exactly what you are going to reap. You are not going to be able to sin against God and escape His judgment. You are not going to be able to sin against God and escape His condemnation. Do not be deceived in this area. It is impossible. You cannot do this.

When we talk about deception, you have to understand that deception reigns supremely today. All you have to do to be deceived is listen to television all the time or listen to the radio. Look at how Americans are so tuned in to their games, their video games, and their television programs. Think about the fact that most Americans give their lives to nothing but circuses, fun, and recreation, that kind of thing. No one really studies, no one really thinks, and no one ever really delves into anything. Consequently, propaganda, deception, and false flags are easily forced upon the American people.

Defining False Flags and Propaganda

A false flag is usually defined as a political or military action carried out with the intention of blaming an opponent for it. Nations have often staged either a real or simulated attack on their own side, saying that an enemy did it and using it as a pretext for going to war. At times, they may actually allow an enemy to attack them so that they can retaliate with a vengeance and claim what they would call the moral high ground to destroy that individual. Stand-down orders have been given to the military and to law enforcement on many occasions. I can think of occasions in this nation, in America, where

stand-down orders were given to cops when there was a riot going on and people were killed.

I know firsthand of a situation like that, and I know the people who were involved. This is a false flag. The term came into real prominence in the sixteenth century, when pirates would take down their skull-and-bones flag and fly the friendly flag of a neighboring nation in order to get close to a merchant ship. Once they were close enough, they would throw the ropes, pull alongside, mount the ship, kill everybody, and steal everything they could. That was called a false flag because they were lying and deceiving the merchant ship, making it think they were something they were not.

When I looked this up on the internet, I found a paragraph from the Anti-Defamation League. It stated: "False flag is a term used by conspiracy theorists to suggest that various world events and crises, such as terrorist attacks or mass shootings, were actually orchestrated by governments or sinister forces in furtherance of a political or social goal, such as gun control or sowing public fear. Historically, the term has been used to refer to a military or political operation carried out with the intention of blaming an opponent for it, often as a pretext for going to war."

Here is the question that begs to be answered: What does a conspiracy theory have to do with a false flag if a false flag actually exists? What they are saying is that if you believe your government would harm you or do that which is wrong and wicked, then you have to be a conspiracy theorist. But in reality, it has been governments all over the world

Consider those guilty of what you and I would call genocide or democide. Ask Mr. Stalin how many millions he killed. Ask Pol Pot how many millions of Cambodians he killed. Ask Idi Amin how many of his own countrymen he killed. Years ago, before he died, I saw a cartoon depicting Idi Amin on the back of a Jeep with a .50 cal machine gun, smoking gunfire before him while dead Africans lay in front of him. He was on the phone, saying, "Traffic control, I will report an accident, one Jeep and 50,000 Africans." It was supposed to be satirical, but it was true: he actually murdered his own people.

You do not think our government would harm us? Ask about the Tuskegee experiment. You remember those black men from Tuskegee, Alabama, whom they purposely inoculated with syphilis? Think about all the other people who have been given all kinds of vaccine. I am simply pointing out the fact: governments, historically, are the main cause of genocide around the world.

A false flag is deception. It is impossible to have a false flag attack without deception. All war is deception. Government is deception. Things are not as they appear. Let me make a statement and prove it before I get through: seeing is not believing. Sun Tzu, in The Art of War, wrote, "All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when we are able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must appear inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe that we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe that we are near."

Again, he said, "The whole secret lies in confusing the enemy so that he cannot fathom our real intent." In deception, one must avoid direct answers to direct questions. Whenever you cannot get a straight answer, mark it down: someone is hiding something and trying to deceive you. Closely associated with false flags are deception and propaganda. All propaganda is deception; it does not matter whether it is good or bad. It is still deception.

Everyone should understand the usage of the word, especially when it is related to a political or governmental sense. Propaganda is the organized dissemination of information or allegations to assist or damage the cause of a government or movement. It is also official governmental communication to the public designed to influence opinion. The information may be true or false, but it is still propaganda because it is carefully selected for its political effect.

Notice first that propaganda is organized. It is an organized dissemination of information. If it is organized, it is not an accident; it did not simply happen, and it is not innocent. It is purposeful, deliberate, premeditated, and approved by the government. Understanding that it is an organized dissemination of information explains the latter part of the definition: official governmental communications to the public designed to influence public opinion.

That is what propaganda is. While propaganda can be termed either true or false, usually, if it is from the government, it is false.

A good, clear illustration of this is the COVID vaccine, which was touted as being safe and effective. Well, it was neither safe nor effective. It was deadly and destructive, unless, of course, you define effective as disabling and killing. In that case, it was very effective, because that is basically what it has done. The cases of myocarditis and all these other diseases are now coming from this.

This is propaganda, and it is deceptive. What about MSM, the mainstream media? They are closely connected with the federal government, especially with the CIA and the FBI. If you continue to listen to the MSM and believe what they say, you are going to be propagandized and deceived. I came to a conclusion many years ago: if you listen to the mainstream media news and believe absolutely the opposite of what they are telling you, you would probably be closer to the truth. It is like a cartoon I saw where the newsman came on and said, "Tonight we're telling you what we want you to believe." That is about the truth. It is propaganda; it is deceit. When it comes to war, propaganda and deception reign supremely. When it comes to government, propaganda and deception reign supremely.

In Joshua chapter 9, verses 3 through 5, we read: "And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they did work wilily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine bottles, old and rent and bound up, and old shoes and clouted upon their feet, and old garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and moldy."

Note what the Bible says in verse 3: "And when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard..." When you see the word "inhabitants," you automatically think of the people who live there. It would certainly include those people, but Gibeon was a great city, and so there were elders and possibly even a king.

Analysis of the Gibeonite Deception

Joshua 10:1-2 says: "Now it came to pass, when Adoni-zedek king of Jerusalem had heard how Joshua had taken Ai, and had utterly

destroyed it; as he had done to Jericho and her king, so he had done to Ai and her king; and how the inhabitants of Gibeon had made peace with Israel, and were among them; that they feared greatly: because Gibeon was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and because it was greater than Ai, and all the men thereof were mighty."

Gibeon was not just some little podunk town somewhere. It was a great city, as one of the royal cities, and its inhabitants would have included its rulers. In Joshua 9:11, speaking to Joshua and the princes, they said, "Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of our country spake to us, saying..." The people and the rulers were one in what they were doing.

You have to conclude, then, that this deception in Joshua chapter 9 was a governmentally organized and sponsored deception. A foreign, well-established government was interfering with a fledgling government that was not even really set up; Israel was still conquering the territories. They were interfering by deceiving and propagandizing. When the Bible says in Joshua 9:4, "They did work wilily,"

The Hebrew word is ormah. It means to use guile, subtlety, wisdom, prudence, shrewdness, and craftiness. In other words, they did work craftily. They worked subtly and with shrewdness. Everything they did was planned, premeditated, and purposeful. The Gibeonites did not want to be destroyed. This is why they did that. They confessed it: “We knew that God had given you this land, and we knew that God had told you to eradicate us. We didn’t want to die.” Well, I understand that.

If I had been a Gibeonite, I think I’d have probably gone along with them, with this exception. There were other nations that said, “We’re willing to bow to thee. We’re willing to bow to the one true and the living God. We’re willing to serve him.” But they were not willing to come out and say that; therefore, they used deception. It’s just that simple.

“And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country: now therefore make ye a league with us. And the men of Israel said unto the Hivites, Peradventure ye dwell among us; and how shall we make

a league with you? And they said unto Joshua, We are thy servants. And Joshua said unto them, Who are ye? and from whence come ye? And they said unto him, From a very far country thy servants are come, because of the name of the Lord thy God."

"For we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon, and Og king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroth. Wherefore our elders and all the inhabitants of the country spake to us, saying, Take victuals with you for the journey, and go to meet them, and say unto them, We are your servants: therefore now make ye a league with us. This our bread we took hot for our provision out of our houses, on the day we came forth to go unto you."

"But now, behold, it is dry, it is moldy. And these bottles of wine, which we filled, were new; and, behold, they be rent: and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the very long journey. And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord. And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them. And it came to pass at the end of three days, after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors, and that they dwelt among them."

Lessons from the Gibeonite Deception

First of all, it should be understood from our text as well as from our experience that things are not as they always appear. Appearances may be deceiving. Seeing is not necessarily believing. Everything about the Gibeonites was deceiving: their manner, their clothes, their bread, their shoes, their speech, everything was designed to deceive and to fool. It was designed to trick the Hebrews into a league or covenant with them.

I'm sure that most of you have seen artificial intelligence productions on the internet. I've seen men and women like Donald Trump or Joe Biden or some Hollywood movie star. You look there and recognize those faces, and they are speaking. You recognize their voices and hear them saying certain things, and you can't believe what they're saying. And yet there they are, and it's not them at all.

Even the lip movements match the words and the syllables; everything appears to match, but it's all fake.

You say, “Well, I saw this, I heard this.” But you may have seen wrongly, and you may have heard wrongly. It is just that simple. Because what these people did—what Joshua and the princes did—they judged by appearances. Our Lord said in John 7:24, “Judge not by appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” Seeing is not believing, because your eyes may be deceived as well. You may believe, but you may believe wrongly.

Propaganda, deception, misinformation, and false flags—everything is designed to deceive. All of these things require that you judge by appearances and by the information that you are given. They do not want you to pray about anything. They do not want you to think about anything. They do not want you to study. They do not want you to research. They do not want you to question the information that you were given. That is exactly what the Gibeonites did to Joshua and to the princes. You have to understand that just because you think you see something does not necessarily mean that you see it correctly. Men and women who were illusionists and magicians made millions of dollars deceiving people and making them think that things disappeared.

I forget who the magician was who made the Great Wall of China disappear right in front of your eyes. Not really; it was an illusion. I am simply saying that just because you see something does not mean it is absolutely true.

Here is the second thing: you must beware when you cannot get a straight answer from someone. It is interesting that twice Joshua asked, “Who are you? Where are you from?” They answered, “We be from a very far country.” Really? How far is far? And what country is that far country? How about the name of a city? How about the name of a town? Just tell me the country that you are from. Why would they not tell the country? Why would they not name a town or city? Because all of that could be verified. It may take a little time, but it could be verified. They did not want verification. No, no, no. All they wanted was for you to act upon what you were told.

Look in verse 9. After Joshua asked them, "Who are you and from whence came you?" they said unto him, "From a very far country thy servants are come, because of the name of the Lord thy God. For we have heard the fame of him, and all that he did in Egypt, and all that he did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond Jordan, to Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan, which was at Ashtaroth."

Now, wait a minute. They claimed to have come from a very, very far country, but they had heard what God had done to the Egyptians. I can understand that, because the Israelites traveled in the wilderness for forty years, and probably you could learn something in forty years. They did not have cell phones, telegraphs, or newspapers, but in forty years a camel could get pretty far.

When they mentioned Sihon and Og, however, those kings had just been defeated recently. How did they receive the news of their defeat? They were defeated while trying to get into the Promised Land, and the Israelites were only just now in the Promised Land. They had just defeated Jericho and Ai. How did people from a very, very far country get this information so quickly? That is what I would like to know.

There is another thing to watch in verse 9. You must be concerned when men appear too religious and are too quick to press positions that you already hold and believe in. Look at what they said: "From a very far country thy servants are come"—"because of the name of the Lord thy God."

Here is my question: How did they receive the personal name of God? Anytime you see the word "Lord" in all caps, it is the word Yahweh or Jehovah, as it is sometimes translated. If they were from a very far country, how did they obtain the sacred name of God? How did they know who he was?

Why are they pushing the name of the Lord? I have had bums, hobos, drifters, ex-cons, and many other people use the religious theme when they wanted money or something else. After they got what they wanted, their religion disappeared. When people are pushy about religion, you had better watch out. Someone is trying to trick or deceive you. A true believer, a true Christian, knows how to

communicate without being pushy or obnoxious. These people were pressing the fact that they knew the name of God.

Fourthly, even the wisest and the holiest may be deceived. Joshua and the princes were deceived. You may be a leader, brilliant, intelligent, or confident, but you can also be deceived. Although God has given us minds and reasoning abilities, we cannot trust them totally, solely, and completely. Proverbs chapter 3, verses 5 through 7, says, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." It continues, "Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil." Anytime we think we cannot be deceived, we are already deceived. It is just that simple.

Fifth, deception normally takes place when we abandon and refuse to seek God's counsel. Look at verse 14: "And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord." I know what a moldy piece of bread looks like. I know what old shoes look like; I have some of them. I probably do not know what an old wine bottle looks like, but I know some of these things can be very convincing. We were simply judging by appearance. They judged by appearance and refused to seek the Lord.

There are very few Christian people today who really know the principles of the Word of God. They know the precepts of the Word of God and are willing to live by those principles and precepts. You remember what our Lord told the Sadducees and Pharisees in Matthew chapter 22 and verse 29: "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." We err whenever we refuse the counsel of God given us in Scripture, or whenever we refuse to seek Him in prayer and ask for His wisdom, leadership, and direction. That is exactly what happened in this instance.

They relied upon their eyes and upon their own intellect. Here is the sixth thing: Eventually, all deception will be exposed. In this instance, according to verse 16, it took only three days: "And it came to pass at the end of three days, after they had made a league with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors and dwelt among them."

You know what our Lord said in Luke chapter 12 and verse 2? "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be made known." God says it is going to be exposed. We may become upset, and in one sense of the word we should, but the Great Society is going to be exposed. The Great Reset is going to be exposed. The New World Order is going to be exposed. Everything that is wicked and sinful is ultimately going to be exposed.

Conclusion: Relying on God's Word

What we must do as believers is not be deceived by any of these things. The only way we can not be deceived is by knowing the Word of God. What condemned Joshua, the princes, and the people? They refused to seek counsel of God. They refused his Word. It is only God and only his Word that can keep us from being deceived.

There are so many things going on today. I do not know if you have seen the hologram, the whale jumping out of the water and going in the water. It is not real, but you could put it on the wall over here and it looks real. You might think that a huge whale is on that wall, diving in and out of the water, but it is only a hologram. They have what they call Project Blue Beam, where they can shoot holograms up and you can see all kind of flying saucers. You can see the Lord returning. You can see anything that they can manufacture. The only way you are going to escape all of that deceit, wickedness, and deceivableness is by knowing the Scripture.

It is the Scripture that will reveal to us the wickedness of man and the wisdom of God. The Scriptures will tell us how we should live and how we should not be deceived. When we fail to seek counsel from God, we are deceived already, because we are trusting in our own understanding and intellect instead of relying upon the God of the universe.

“Lean not to thine own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge him.” Yes, we may use our minds and our understanding. We must think, deduce, and apply, but we must seek God at the same time, saying, “Lord, I’m human. I’m fallible. I can err. I can be deceived. I want your truth. I want your leadership. I want your power. I want your direction.”

False flags are everywhere. Propaganda or the other news, turn on your TV set—deceit every day, every minute of the hour. As our Lord said, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.”

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for your grace and mercy. We ask, Lord, that you would help us not to be deceived, but that you would indeed help us to search thy Word, seek thy counsel, and apply thy wisdom. Lord, protect us in this day and age of false flags, propaganda, and deception. Give us your grace and mercy. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 14

Jeroboam, Idolatry and Location

February 21, 2024

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Kings 12:25-33 (KJV)

Introduction: Location Matters

In this passage the Word of God says this:

"Then Jeroboam built Shechem in Mount Ephraim and dwelt therein, and went out from thence and built Penuel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David. If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their Lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and he put the other in Dan. And this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he

> made a house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah. And he offered upon the altar. So did he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. So he offered upon the altar which he had made in Bethel, even in the month which he devised of his own heart, and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel, and he offered upon the altar and burnt incense."
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> When it comes to real estate, someone has said there are three principles that you should always consider, and they are location, location, and location. And that certainly is true. You can find some wonderful buildings that are vacant today because they just were placed in the wrong location. Anyone who drives north on I-75, when you get across the Georgia line, you'll see a beautiful building on the right called Frogtown.

There was a winery there, with a great vineyard planted out front, and the building was absolutely fabulous to look at. But it had been closed down for a year or two because there was no exit anywhere nearby. You would have to go five miles up the road, I guess, to get off and then work your way back. Most people certainly were not going to do that, and now the property is sitting there absolutely vacant.

Jeroboam's Background and God's Promise

The thing that struck me as I read this passage again was when the Bible said, “and he set the one in Bethel and he put the other in Dan.” Why did he choose those two locations for the golden calves? What in the world made him choose those locations?

Jeroboam was a strange man in one sense of the word. Scripture teaches us that he was a valiant, energetic, and very hard-working man. In 1 Kings 11:28, the Bible says, “And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valor. And Solomon, seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph.” The house of Joseph consisted then of two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh. In Joshua 17:17, the Bible says, “And

Joshua spake unto the house of Joseph, even Ephraim and Manasseh, saying…" Thus Jeroboam was over these two tribes.

These tribes were very populous, strong, and valiant. Jeroboam must undoubtedly have been a very valiant and intelligent man, because he was managing these two tribes for Solomon. Moreover, Solomon chose him to supervise the engineering and works projects around Jerusalem. Yet Jeroboam, with all his abilities and intelligence, became an enemy to Solomon. Proverbs 16:7 states, "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

When a man's ways please the Lord, this is a positive: He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. But the opposite is also true. When a man's ways displease the Lord, the Lord raises up enemies against him.

In 1 Kings 11, beginning with verse 9, we find why the Lord was displeased with Solomon: "And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared unto him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods, but he kept not that which the Lord commanded. Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake, but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom, but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen."

The Lord stirred up an adversary unto Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he was of the king's seed in Edom. Solomon had been disobedient to God, and his ways displeased the Lord. God said He would divide the kingdom: one tribe would be given for David His servant's sake, and a second tribe for Jerusalem's sake, but that was all. Then the Lord stirred up Hadad the Edomite.

Verse 23 says, "And God stirred him up another adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah, which fled from his lord Hadadezer king of

Zobah. And he gathered men unto him and became a captain over a band, when David slew them of Zobah. And they went to Damascus and dwelt therein and reigned in Damascus. And he was an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, beside

God had raised up two very vicious enemies and adversaries for Solomon, Hadad and Rezon. Both were outside the kingdom; they were external enemies. However, 1 Kings 11:26–27 says, “And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted up his hand against the king. And this was the cause that he lifted up his hand against the king: Solomon built Millo and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father.”

At that particular time, Jeroboam was a mighty man of valor. The phrase that he “lifted up his hand against the king” could refer to his being extremely critical of Solomon or disapproving of what Solomon was doing. It could also have meant that he disapproved of Rehoboam, who happened to be Solomon’s only son. As yet, there would not have been a clear opportunity for what we would call open rebellion, but it probably stemmed from this truth.

In 1 Kings 11:29, “when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem,” the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way. They were alone in the field, and Ahijah caught the new garment Jeroboam wore and rent it in twelve pieces. He said, “Take thee ten pieces. For thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee. But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel.”

"Because they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and my judgments, as did David his father. Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him prince all the days of his life for David my servant's sake, whom I chose because he kept my statutes and my commandments. But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes."

"And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light always before me in Jerusalem, in the city which I have chosen me to put my name there. And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. And it shall be that if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house as I built for David, and I will give Israel unto thee."

Here is Jeroboam, now being set up to be king over Israel. Ahijah tore that garment into twelve pieces and said, "You take ten. I'm gonna leave one for my servant David. I'm gonna leave one for Jerusalem." In the southern kingdom, Judah and Benjamin were the two main tribes, so Jeroboam received the ten. God told Jeroboam that He was rending the kingdom from Solomon because Solomon had forsaken Him.

There it is in verse 33: “Because they have forsaken me and have worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon.” In other words, you have not kept my law or my commandments; you have simply fallen into idolatry. That is all there is to it.

It was not just Solomon who went into idolatry. Solomon led the people into idolatry as well. That is why the people were judged with him. He says, “they have forsaken me” in verse 33. It was not just Solomon who had forsaken the Lord; it was the people as well.

Jeroboam's Unbelief and Human Reasoning

Jeroboam’s mind must have taken a turn against Solomon when he heard this prophecy from Ahijah the Shilonite. Go back to verses 37 and 38 in 1 Kings 11, because this is an astounding and startling truth. Look at what God says to Jeroboam. God said, “And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that which is right in my sight, and keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did,” and then God says, “that I will be with thee,

and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel unto thee."

God says, "Look, Jeroboam. You can reign all you want to reign. You can do as you wish to do, just so that you obey me. If you obey me, I will make you a sure house. You can reign over all Israel. I will give Israel unto thee."

Solomon evidently found out about this incident somehow. When God had given, through the prophet Ahijah, the prophecy concerning Jeroboam and giving him the ten northern tribes, Solomon tried to do to Jeroboam what every tyrant tries to do to an opposition: he tried to murder him. "Solomon sought therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose and fled into Egypt, unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of Solomon."

It never ceases to amaze me how people try to overthrow, thwart, and hinder the purpose and counsel of God. Solomon was a very wise man, especially at one time, and had riches beyond what we could probably ever dream of or imagine. Yet Solomon, in his wisdom, riches, and kingdom, could not stop or thwart the purpose of God. Men may fight against God, complain, and seek to overthrow his kingdom, but they will always fail. For God said in Isaiah 46 and verse 10, "My counsel shall stand and I will do all of my pleasure."

Here is the astounding thing: God had said to Jeroboam, "I'll give you Israel. You can have it. All you need to do is obey me." Jeroboam had the promise of God and the Word of God. He could reign as long as his soul desired, as long as he did that which was right in the sight of God.

Evidently Jeroboam was an unconverted man. He did not know God, believe God, or receive the promise or the Word of God. In 1 Kings chapter 12, verse 26, we read: "And Jeroboam said in his heart..." Remember, the heart is the mind. Jeroboam was thinking and reasoning in his mind. He said, "Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David? If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their Lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah."

Jeroboam had the Word of God and the promise of God, but he was not relying upon anything God had said or given him. He was relying upon his own humanistic mind. His thinking was absolutely contrary to what God had promised and said. Jeroboam was following his own will and his own way instead of the will and way of God.

The Sin of Jeroboam and Its Consequences

He feared that if the people sacrificed in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, their hearts would turn again to Rehoboam king of Judah; they would kill him and return to Rehoboam. Therefore, the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, saying, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

Jeroboam thought what he meant to do would preserve him. But what happened? It destroyed him. First Kings 13, verses 33 and 34, says, "And after this thing, Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again the lowest of the people priests of the high places. Whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. And this thing became a sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, destroy it from the face of the earth."

That is exactly what happened. Instead of following the Word of God, Jeroboam followed his own heart. He ended up destroying himself, his family, and his kingdom.

The sin of Jeroboam is stated over and over throughout Scripture. Scripture says that no man lives to himself and no man dies to himself. Everything that we do affects someone else. The sin of Jeroboam is spoken of throughout Scripture because all the kings that followed Jeroboam followed him in his idolatry. There was not one godly king in the northern kingdom. Every king in the northern kingdom was an idolater because they all followed in the worship of these calves.

In 1 Kings 14:16, the Bible says, "And he shall give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin," and then, "who made Israel to sin." Jeroboam not only sinned, but he made the whole northern kingdom to sin.

In 1 Kings 15:28-30 we read: “Even in the third year of Asa king of Judah did Baasha slay him, and reign in his stead. And it came to pass, when he reigned, that he smote all the house of Jeroboam. He left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he destroyed him according to the saying of the LORD, which he spake by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite.” Verse 30 says, “Because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin, by his provocation wherewith he provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger.” Verse 34 says, “And he did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin.”

In 1 Kings 16:2, God says, “Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel, and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins.”

Again, 2 Kings 17:21 says, “For he rent Israel from the house of David, and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat. And Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord and made them sin a great sin.” Over and over, Scripture shows that Jeroboam made Israel sin and drove Israel into idolatry.

Scripture makes this exceedingly clear: it is extremely possible for a ruler to lead and drive his people into idolatry. We see this clearly in the Bible. All of the kings who followed Jeroboam did the same thing. It is possible for a ruler to drive a people into idolatry. Here is what concerns me: we can see and understand this when reading Scripture, but why can we not see it when we look around our country and wonder what is going on, or when we look around the world? Let me ask you a few questions.

Modern Parallels: Government-Driven Idolatry

Who in our nation is pushing, promoting, and subsidizing the sodomite agenda? Who is pushing and promoting abortion, transgenderism, and political Marxism? The answer is our own government. Who is attacking Christians, the Bible, morality, biblical ethics, and righteousness? Our own government. Education today is not education; it is indoctrination. Why would you need to

teach sex education, especially perverted sex education, to kindergartners, first graders, and young children?

Who is responsible for the stupid variety of genders and pronouns? Our own government. Who is behind the unbiblical welfare system that provides for those who will not work, who do not want to work, and who will never work? Scripture says, "If any man will not work, neither should he eat." Who is subsidizing, supporting, and supplying illegal immigrants with not just the aid they need but more aid than any homeless veteran or any United States of American citizen receives? Our own government.

People are getting upset all over this country, but the vast majority of the American people are still absolutely asleep, engrossed in entertainment, amusement, and materialism. They do not realize how we have been pushed, prodded, and manipulated into idolatry and controlled by the government, which is statism. Statism is idolatry.

It is looking to the state, or looking to the government, to supply your every need. It is what you and I would call from-the-cradle-to-the-grave security, or from-the-womb-to-the-tomb control over every sphere and every area of life.

Now go back to 1 Kings chapter 12 and see how this was pushed upon the people of Israel. Jeroboam is the head of the government, and he is going to promote, push, and manipulate the people into idolatry for his own benefit. He is not doing this for the benefit of the people. He said, “If I don’t do something, they’re going to kill me and they’re going back to Rehoboam.” He is doing this for self-preservation, his own political gain, his own power, and his own life.

Why Dan? Existing Idolatry

In 1 Kings chapter 12, verse 27, he said, “If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their Lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.” Whereupon the king took counsel and made two calves of

gold and said unto them, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”

His selling point to the people was convenience: “It’s too much for you to go to Jerusalem. It requires too much sacrifice, too much time, and too much travel. You don’t have to go down there. If you’re in the north, you just go to Dan; if you’re in the south, you just go to Bethel. You don’t have to go to Jerusalem.”

Do you realize that, in the eyes of Jeroboam, there was no need to travel for truth? There was no need to go somewhere where you could have the pure worship of God and the pure Word of God. It is the same way today. People are not going to travel for the truth. They will not even walk across the street for the truth. “It’s too expensive. It requires too much time. I have children. It’s just hard to get the children ready.”

We have come to the place where, if our church buildings are not air-conditioned in the summer, people do not want to come. If they are not heated in the winter, they do not want to come. Some do not want to come if they do not have padded pews. Some do not want to come unless they have a big choir special or some type of entertainment. I am simply pointing out the fact that we have basically forgotten about the truth.

Years ago Alice and I were down in Tampa, Florida, visiting our son-in-law and daughter and grandchildren. My son-in-law took us out to supper, and we went by the Baptist church. On the marquee was this: “Come to our early service. In by 8, out by 8:30.” That is a Baptist church. They are going to sing one or two songs anyhow. Of course, they are going to take an offering. Then you have to have an opening prayer, followed by a closing prayer or an invitational hymn, which would leave about five minutes for someone to speak.

So what does that mean? It means all he was doing was trying to salve the consciences of people on their way to the beach. It's been the day there. It's what it amounted to. And that is where we are today. I am simply pointing out the fact that this was what Jeroboam said: “You do not need to be inconvenienced. You do not need to go

down to Jerusalem. You just stay home, and we are going to take care of you."

Here is my question: Why did he choose Dan and Bethel to place the calves there? He could have chosen any place in the Northern Kingdom. First of all, I hope you remember why he chose Dan. Dan was not only a tribe in Israel, but also a city. It happened to be the northernmost city in Israel, while Beersheba was the southernmost. Thus, when you read in the Bible, "from Dan to Beersheba," it meant the entire country. For instance, in 1 Samuel chapter 3, verse 10, when they came to transfer the kingdom to David from the house of Saul, the Bible says they came from Dan even to Beersheba.

Previously, Dan was named Laish. It was a Canaanite city, captured by the Danites and renamed for their father Dan. You will remember this and find it in Judges chapters 17 through 19. Dan was the northernmost city, but why in the world was this place chosen?

And here's why: the Danites were already given to idolatry. Once you've accepted idolatry, you'll accept more idolatry. It doesn't matter. Look back in your Bibles to Judges chapter 18, beginning at verse 29. The Bible says, "And they called the name of that city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born unto Israel. Howbeit the name of that city was Laish at the first." Now look at this: "And the children of Dan set up the graven image. And Jonathan the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. And they set up Micah's graven image which he made, all the time the house of God was in Shiloh." Look at verse 30 again. Manasseh was the son of Moses, Gershom was his son, and now Jonathan; so you've got the great-grandson or great-great-grandson of Moses as priest.

They had set up Micah's graven image, and the Bible says that they were priests unto the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land. This was a long-standing idolatry. Very clearly, then, Dan was chosen simply because the calves would fit right in. They were already worshiping molten idols, and so there was no problem there.

Why Bethel? Religious Significance and Competition

Now, here is the question: Why in the world did he choose Bethel? Of the two places, Bethel is the more prominent and probably the most important. The Hebrew word Bethel means “the house of God.” Bethel refers not only to a city, but also to the site of a major sanctuary established for the northern kingdom of Israel. Bethel sat at the boundary between the tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin and eventually delineated the border between the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom.

Bethel is first mentioned in the Bible in connection with Abram. Genesis 12:8 says, “And he, that is Abram, removed from thence into a mountain on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord.”

The second time Bethel appears with this importance is in Genesis 28, associated with Jacob and his dream. He saw the ladder and angels ascending and descending and said, “How dreadful is this place! This is nothing less and nothing other than the house of God.” He then took oil and anointed the pillar, telling the Lord that if He would look after him and bring him back safely, he would give Him a tenth of everything. When Jacob left Laban, he headed back to Bethel; there he built an altar and worshiped God, calling it El Bethel, which means “God of the house of God.” Thus Bethel was a very important place.

In Judges 20:18, the children of Israel arose and went to the house of God and asked counsel of God, saying, “Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin?” And the Lord said, “Judah shall go up first.”

at Bethel. This is where they were asking counsel because at one point in Bethel the people there would always come to Bethel to seek God because it was a prominent worship center. So here is something to remember now, watch this. I told you that Bethel eventually became the boundary line between the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. Bethel was only 11 miles from Jerusalem.

Bethel was in direct conflict with and in direct competition with the real true worship of God at Jerusalem. They were just 11 miles apart. And here's something else. I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Amos. Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos. And look in Amos chapter 7. I want you to see how important Bethel was to the rulers of the Northern Kingdom and those who worship the golden calves. So when you go to Amos chapter 7, Amos, who is from the southern kingdom, was prophesying in Bethel which was in the northern kingdom. And because they had claimed that it was right on the line, and of course the priest of Bethel was an apostate, in other words, he was the priest of the golden calf. I want you to look what he said to Amos. So Amos chapter 7, look in verse 10. Here it is: "Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel"—so he's the priest of Bethel—"Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam," now this would be Jeroboam II not Jeroboam I.

Bethel as the King's Chapel and Court

Jeroboam II, "sent to Jeroboam king of Israel saying, 'Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words.'" So what Amos was doing was up there preaching that God was going to kill Jeroboam and he was going to send Israel into captivity.

Now, let me tell you how easy it is to conspire. I hope you know what the word means. So if Gary and I stood over in the corner and we're whispering together about Steve and Steve caught wind of it, he'd say, "You fellows are conspiring against me." The word conspire just simply means to breathe with. "Spire" is to breathe and "con" is with. You conspire, you are breathing with someone.

Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, “Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos said, Jeroboam shall die by the sword and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his own land.” I do not know who Amos was breathing with except God, because he was just preaching the Word of God. Look what the priest said to Amos: “O thou seer, or prophet, go flee thee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and prophesy there.”

Let me stop right there. What did he tell him? He was paraphrasing it: “If you want to live, you better get out of here. We’ll kill you. You go eat bread down in the southern kingdom. You preach down there. We don’t want your preaching here.” Then Amaziah said unto Amos, “O thou seer, go flee thee away to the land of Judah and there eat bread and prophesy there. But prophesy not again anymore at Bethel, for it is the king’s chapel and it is the king’s court.” It is the king’s chapel. It is the king’s court.

So, in idolatry, the king is not just head of the state; he is head of religion as well. You cannot criticize—are you listening?—you cannot criticize the religion of the king without getting into trouble. This is why the government does not want you talking about the sodomite agenda, the transgender agenda, or anything else that they are for. It is their religion. It is humanism. It is the king’s court. It is the king’s chapel.

Now I want to try to tie this together and make some applications. The first one is astounding to me: tyrants, wicked men, are unafraid to compete with God. When you have Bethel eleven miles from Jerusalem, these tyrants and idolaters will throw their idolatry into the face of God and dare Him to do His worst. Men must deny the true worship of God so that they can establish their false worship. They must deny the true Word of God so they can establish their own word. They must deny God so they can establish themselves as God.

Applications: Protection Through God's Word

You cannot drive a people into idolatry that know the truth and refuse to bend and refuse to bow. Nebuchadnezzar couldn't make the three Hebrew children bend to that idol. The presidents couldn't make Daniel stop praying. If you do not wish to be deceived, manipulated, pushed, and prodded into idolatry, you better know the Word of God. You better read it. You better study it. You better apply it. That's why the Bible says in 1 John 5 in verse 21, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

Here's the next truth: although idolaters, tyrants, and wicked people are not afraid to throw their idolatry and blasphemy in the face of God, God is going to cut off the wicked ruler, and He's going

to also cut off the wicked people. It's just that simple. Look at Hosea chapter 10, beginning with verse 11. Watch what he says: "And Ephraim is as a heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn. But I passed over her fair neck, and I will make Ephraim to ride, and Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods." In other words, it's going to be slavery.

"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord till he come and reign righteousness upon you." Now look what he tells them. "You have plowed wickedness and you've reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies, because thou didst trust in thy way and the multitude of thy mighty men. Therefore shall a tumult arise among thy people, and all thy fortresses shall be spoiled, as Shalman spoiled Beth Arbel in the day of battle. Her mother was dashed in pieces upon her children. So shall Bethel do unto you because of your great wickedness. In a morning shall the king of Israel utterly be cut off."

So God said, "I'm gonna get with it. I'll deal with the king. I'll deal with the people. They'll all be cut off. They'll all be destroyed." Yes, they may ride high for a little while, but they will be destroyed. And now here's the next thing I want you to notice. Look particularly at 1 Kings chapter 12, verses 27 and 28 again. Watch carefully. Here's what

Jeroboam said in his own mind, in his own heart: “If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord in Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again to their Lord, even to Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah.” Whereupon the king took counsel and made two calves of gold and said unto them, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.” And he set the one in Bethel, and he put the other in Dan.

There was a method to his madness. He had to subdue the people and drive them away from the true worship of God in order to control them. He wanted them to stay with him, to worship him, so to speak, to rely upon him, and to trust him. In order to do that, he had to drive them from the truth and make them believe and receive error.

So here is my question: Do you think that modern-day tyrants are any less devious and devilish than was Jeroboam? Do you not understand that the Great Reset, the New World Order, and the chaos that we are experiencing was planned, premeditated, and deliberately applied to us to make us pliable and submissive? The planned destruction of our economy is no accident. It is deliberate and purposeful: to break us and control us so that we will be absolutely dependent upon those who said, "You will have nothing and be happy." If you have nothing, that means someone has everything.

The best thing that you can do for your protection and preservation is to be as holy, godly, obedient, and righteous as you can be by the grace of God. Apply the principles of the Word of God. What did God say in Proverbs chapter 6? "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise. Who provideth her meat in the summer so she can have for the winter?" God is saying that you had better prepare for hard times. Be as wise and industrious as an ant.

Above all, let me say this: Propaganda is everywhere. Mind control is everywhere. It is not just MK Ultra. Subliminal messages come on television and over the radio. It is astounding sometimes what you can see and hear without seeing, without hearing, and yet it goes into your brain. But let me tell you something: it is impossible to deceive a knowledgeable and

Well-informed people. If you do not wish to be deceived, you must know the truth. Jesus Christ said He is the truth, and His word is truth. We must know His Word, stand by it, and apply it. Those who do not know the Word of God, or the principles of the Word of God, are the ones who will be pushed very easily, very quickly, very swiftly into idolatry and destruction. Our protection is in God, His Word, and our obedience unto Him.

Jeroboam knew what he was doing when he put those calves in Dan and Bethel. Those seeking world domination know what they are doing in trying to destroy everything so that they can control everything. But the good news is, they shall fail. God will destroy them, and He will get honor and

glory for Himself, just like He destroyed Pharaoh and got honored for Himself. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. Lord, I pray that You would help us to know Thy truth. Thou did say, "Thou shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." Lord, help us to grasp Thy Word. Help us, Lord, to understand, help us to apply, and to live holily, righteously, and godly.

CHAPTER 15

Fear, Manipulation, and Vain Thoughts

April 27, 2024

Introduction: Jeremiah's Ministry and the Sins of Judah

Jeremiah 4:14 says, “O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved.” Then comes the question: “How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?”

Years ago, I preached a message from the book of Jeremiah entitled, “I Feel Just Like Jeremiah.” Jeremiah had a very unique ministry. He preached to people who would not listen. He preached to people who would not hear. He preached to individuals who really and truly did not even want the Word of God because they had turned away from God. They had turned away from His law. They had turned away from His worship. At the same time, they were professing to be His people.

And yet they were involved in gross idolatry. These were supposed to be His people, and they were supposed to be worshiping Him. In

Jeremiah 7:9–10, God asks, “Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not, and come and stand before Me in this house,” that is, the temple, “which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered to do all these abominations’?”

They were, in essence, sinning against God in every way possible, and yet at the same time they were claiming to be His people. I think over the last several years, I have given numerous warnings, as well as a lot of different counsel and advice concerning what is happening. I have asked people simply to look around. I have asked people to examine their own lives and examine their own hearts. Yet a lot of times people simply do not listen.

In Jeremiah 6:10, we can just about come to the same conclusion that Jeremiah did, because he said, “To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear?”

"Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken. Behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach, and they have no delight in it." There are people who simply do not want the Word of God. They could care less about the Word of God. Seemingly, a lot of the truth falls on deaf ears, on eyes that will not see as well as ears that will not hear. Oftentimes I have preached and spoken about the immutability of God. That word immutability refers to God's unchangeableness. God does not change. But we also talk about the immutability of His judgments. Just as God is unchangeable in His person, He is also unchangeable in His judgments.

God's Unchanging Judgment on Nations

In other words, exactly what He judged Judah and Jerusalem for, exactly what He judged Samaria and the other nations for, He will continue to judge nations today in the same manner. As I read through the Scripture today, notice that the sins prevalent in Judah and Jerusalem are the same sins prevalent today. God, then, is sovereign over every nation. He not only judged Israel; He also judged heathen nations because He is sovereign and He is the judge.

Turn back in your Bibles to 2 Chronicles chapter 20. Look at the confession of Jehoshaphat the king. Here is what he said: "And

Jehoshaphat stood in the congregation of Judah and Jerusalem in the house of the Lord before the new court and said, 'Lord God of our fathers, art not Thou God in heaven, and rulest not Thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen?'

"And in Thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand Thee?" God is not simply King and sovereign over His people. He is not only King and sovereign over His church; He is King and sovereign over every individual, over every nation, even the heathen. Just as individuals may think they can sin against God and escape His judgment, so families, churches, and nations may think they can sin against God, despise His law, trample His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, under their feet, and somehow escape the judgment of God.

Anyone who thinks that is only deceived and deluded, but according to Jeremiah 4 and verse 14, they have a lot of foolish and vain thoughts in their mind. Now, usually when we talk about sins, we think about individual sins. We think about family sins. Sometimes we think about church or ecclesiastical sins, but very seldom do we think about national sins. And yet the truth of the matter is governments and nations can sin equally as individuals, families, and churches. In fact, you're going to find out in Scripture that God condemns nations as well as individuals. So I want you to hold Jeremiah 4.

Biblical Evidence of National Judgment

I'm trying to set you up for something that I brought to read to you, okay? So look in your Bibles, if you would, to Psalm 9 to begin with. Psalm 9. Look, if you would, please, at verse 17. Psalm 9, verse 17. We'll look at several passages. Look, if you would, here's a verse that most people can quote, or at least I'm sure that have heard of it. Psalm 9, verse 17, the Bible says, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." Note if you would please, he's talking about nations. Then if you look in verse 20 of the same psalm, Psalm 9, he says, "Put them in fear, O Lord, that the nations may know themselves to be but men." In other words, men make up nations and God judges nations because He judges men. If you look in Psalm 22, Psalm 22 and verse 28, Psalm 22 in verse 28, the Bible

says, "For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He is the governor among the nations." He is a governor among the nations.

Let me just quote Isaiah 2 in verse 4, because there the Bible says, "And He shall judge among the nations and rebuke many people." So God is going to judge not only individuals, not only families, but He's going to judge nations as well. So here's a question that I want to ask you. And I'm going to read some Scripture just for a moment. But here's my question: Is America being judged? Well, that would bring me to another question. How would we know that America is being judged if we answer yes? And the truth of the matter is, there are plenty of answers to that last question. But what I want to do is this. I want you to look at Jeremiah 4 and let me read verses 5 through 21.

Jeremiah 4:5-21: Warning of Invasion and Destruction

Think of the sins being mentioned and the judgment brought upon Judah and Jerusalem, and then think about what is happening in our land. Look in Jeremiah chapter 4, beginning with verse 5. God says, “Declare ye in Judah, and publish in Jerusalem, and say, Blow ye the trumpet in the land: cry, gather together, and say, Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the defenced cities.” That is, you better give warning. “Set up the standard toward Zion: retire, stay not: for I will bring evil from the north, and great destruction. The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste, without an inhabitant.” The lion and destroyer are Babylon.

“For this, gird you with sackcloth, lament and howl: for the fierce anger of the Lord is not turned back from us. And it shall come to pass at that day, saith the Lord, that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder.” There is not going to be any leadership. Everyone is going to melt; no one will know what to do. Verse 10 says, “Then said I, Ah, Lord God! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul.” It was not God

who was saying that, but the false prophets, preaching peace when there was no peace.

Verse 11 says, “At that time shall it be said to this people and to Jerusalem, A dry wind of the high places in the wilderness toward the daughter of my people, not to fan, nor to cleanse. Even a full wind from those places shall come unto me.” “Now also will I give sentence against them. Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as a whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe unto us! for we are spoiled.” Then comes the call: “O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?”

One main vain thought is that Judah and Jerusalem would not be judged or destroyed. Everyone has heard of America’s exceptionalism. We think God will judge every country but us. Look at verse 15: “For a voice declareth from Dan, and publisheth affliction from mount Ephraim.”

“Make ye mention to the nations, behold, publish against Jerusalem, that watchers come from a far country, and give out their voice against the cities of Judah. As keepers of a field are they against her round about, because she hath been rebellious against Me, saith the Lord. Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee. This is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart. My bowels, my bowels, I am pained at my very heart. My heart maketh a noise in me.”

“I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.” “Destruction upon destruction is cried, and the whole land is spoiled. Suddenly are my tents spoiled and my curtains in a moment. How long shall I see the standard and hear the sound of the trumpet?” He is proclaiming war and invasion on every side.

Now, here is the interesting thing. If you skip down to verse 22, look at what he says: “For My people are foolish. They have not known Me. They are sottish children. They have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good, they have no knowledge.” Isn’t that amazing? That is basically where we are in this land today.

The average individual is indeed wise to do evil, but to do good, they have absolutely no knowledge.

Trumpets are sounding on every hand, and we do not hear. Warnings are blaring from every place, and we still do not listen. All you have to do is look around. We can see what is happening if we have our eyes open. I try to keep up with things that are happening with the news and understand the difference between true news and propaganda. I do not listen to a lot, because I would much rather spend my time in the Scripture, but I still want to have enough that I know what is going on and can listen to what people are saying.

Current Events as Signs of Judgment

I brought several articles with me that may end up shocking you. Some of you may have read them; you may not have. One article happens to be three pages long, or at least two and a half. I am not going to read the entire article. I have it on my notes so that I can send it out. Here is the headline.

“Top Republicans Warn Border Crisis Is Getting Worse.” Jason Walsh wrote this on February 23, 2024, last week. Republican lawmakers have sounded the alarm about a new security threat at the United States-Mexico border. Representative Mark Green, Republican of Tennessee and chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, gave a stark warning during a discussion at the Conservative Political Action Conference.

“I think every American should be scared to death. Not only is it the terrorist threat, we've had almost 400 suspected terrorists in this presidency, where there were only 11 last time. But it is the 24,000 Chinese nationals who came in last year, 20,000 since October the 1st. The highest year before that was 1,800,” he said.

“You don't leave China with a social credit score system unless the Chinese Communist Party knows about it. They're flying to South America and Central America, and they're coming up here. They're paying $60,000 to the cartels, which is enriching the cartels. Terrible organizations. They're subhuman,” he added. And we're basically feeding them money and letting those individuals come into the United States.

He says, "It is also more than a 7,000% increase from 2021." He adds, "I'm not suggesting that China is going to be attacking the United States. But if we defend Taiwan, I can imagine there are people in there who are going to be tracking our railroads, and railways, and looking at our ports," he said. Of course, the Chinese already have control of most of the ports in California. He continued, "And who knows what else? We had mass waves of Chinese terrorists storming military installations with cameras."

He called it a desperate threat and then discussed all the dope coming across. Concerning the illegal aliens, he said, "Since Biden's been in office, there's been 1,700 dead migrants crossing the border, a historic record, and 112,000 dead Americans from fentanyl poisoning." He also talked about a 600% increase in sex trafficking under Biden. Well, that's just one article.

Another brief article, written by Keith Griffin and dated February the 22nd, stated, "Number of Chinese migrants crossing the border at San Diego now exceeds Mexicans, and is second only to Colombians, with 21,000 entering there in the past five months. Chinese nationals are now reportedly the second largest group near San Diego. There's been 21,000 Chinese nationals encountered since October. The number of Chinese nationals crossing the southern U.S. border near San Diego has eclipsed the number of Mexicans in recent months, according to a new report." The article points out that these are not only not Mexican; these Chinese are now coming in across the Canadian border.

The figures vary. I have heard 24,000, 25,000, 30,000, and, in an article this morning, 40,000. The truth of the matter is, I have no idea how many are already in this country. General Mike Flynn made this statement: "The equivalent of seven United States Army divisions of Chinese nationals have invaded America during the Biden presidency." That is the equivalent of seven United States Army divisions already here.

Do you realize that since all of these illegal immigrants have been coming into this country, church attacks have increased 800% in the last six years? This was reported in an article on February 20. If you believe anti-Christian attacks have skyrocketed over the last decade, you are right. Attacks on churches have increased 800% in less than

six years and more than doubled over the last year, according to a new report released by the Family Research Council. They documented acts of anti-church hostility, including attempted bombings, shootings, satanic vandalism, and numerous attacks based on anti-Christian bias due to support for abortion or extreme transgender ideology.

Some constituted unpunished election interference. The report identified 915 acts of hostility against churches between January 2018 and November 2023, including 709 acts of vandalism, 135 completed or attempted arsons, 32 bomb threats, 22 gun-related incidents, and 61 other incidents, including assault threats and interruption of worship services. These acts of religious intimidation send the message that churches are not wanted in the community or respected in general. The man who authored the report said, "Regardless of the motivation of these crimes, everyone should treat churches and all the houses of worship with respect and affirm the importance of religious freedom in America."

The report shows that church attacks and acts of violence continued to explode in 2023. During the first 11 months of that year, researchers verified at least 436 acts of hostility toward United States churches, more than double the number of attacks in all of 2022. This included 315 acts of vandalism, 75 completed or attempted arsons, 20 bomb threats, 10 gun-related incidents, and 12 incidents of satanic graffiti; 59 churches faced repeated acts of hostility.

“These statistics likely understate the extent of the problem because in many acts of hostility against churches, they’re not likely reported to authorities and are not featured in the news or other online sources from which we collect data. The number of acts of hostility is undoubtedly much higher. Acts of anti-church hostility blanketed the country in 2023, taking place in 48 states and Washington, D.C. California experienced the largest number of incidents with 91. Texas churches endured 62 incidents, New York 58, and Florida 47.”

Everything seems to be falling apart. Why is everything seemingly falling apart? What is happening in our cities? What is happening in our towns? What is happening in our churches? What is happening

in the homes? Turn back in your Bibles to the book of Isaiah, chapter 1. Look at this and think with me. Isaiah chapter 1, verses 7 and 8. If you look at verse 1 first, we are still talking about Judah and Jerusalem, just like Jeremiah was in Jeremiah 4: "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem." So we are talking about Judah and Jerusalem. Skip down to verse 7. Look what God says to Judah and Jerusalem.

Because of the invasion of all these people, He said this: "Your country is desolate. Your cities are burned with fire." Think BLM. Think Antifa. "Your land, strangers devour it in your presence. And it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city."

So He says everything is being destroyed. Those few who are there are like a besieged city. They are like a cottage in a vineyard, a lodge in a garden of cucumbers. In other words, there are just a few things that are left; that is what it amounts to.

Now, I want to go back and tell you what motivated this message. This is the thing that really frosted my cake. I read this from one of our representatives, the Chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee. He said, "I think every American should be scared to death." When I read that, I thought, really? I can think of other things that Representative Mark Green could have said.

The Snare of Fear and Political Manipulation

When he was exposing all these Chinese nationals coming across the border, one thing he could have said was, "I think every American should be incensed, enraged, and angry at such a treacherous and traitorous government." I think he could have said that. I believe he would have been far better and far more right had he said that. He could have said something else: "I think that every American should repent and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and ask Him and seek Him for forgiveness and protection." Why?

Remember Psalm 127, verse 1: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

He could have said something else instead of, “I think every American should be scared to death.” He could have said, “I think every American should be armed to the hilt and trained so they could defend themselves and their families and their land.” He could have said, “I think every American should understand the need for a citizen militia, so we could fight together and help each other and protect our freedom and our rights.” He could have said many things, but he did not. What he said was, “I think every American should be scared to death.”

Why in the world would he say, “I think every American should be scared to death”? There is a biblical answer and a practical answer. The biblical answer is found in Proverbs 29:25. Turn in your Bibles to Proverbs chapter 29 and look at verse 25. Here it is. Look what God says: “The fear of man bringeth a snare. But whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.” The fear of man bringeth a snare. Now the Hebrew word for snare is mokesh. It refers to a trap, a snare, a bait, and a lure that causes one to be ensnared or trapped.

Do you understand that when one is fearful and afraid, he is easily manipulated and controlled? It is just that simple. Someone who is scared to death is willing to do anything and give up anything just to be safe. Whenever you have fear, you always have manipulation, and you always have control. Ben Franklin said it like this: “Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.” That is a fact. H.L.

Mencken was a humorist, satirist, author, and journalist. He gave many quotes, and these five are fitting. H. L. Mencken said, “The one permanent emotion of the inferior man is fear—fear of the unknown, the complex, the inexplicable. What he wants above everything else is safety.” Once you have been scared to death and put in fear, you will clamor to be made safe by whatever means necessary.

His second quote was this: “The most dangerous man to any government is the man who is able to think things out for himself without regard to the prevailing superstitions and taboos. Almost inevitably, he comes to the conclusion that the government he lives under is dishonest, insane, and intolerable.” I would say that one was dead on.

His third statement was, “The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed and hence clamorous to be led to safety by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.” COVID, disease X, whatever: “Do something, save us. We're helpless. We need governmental interference.” That is what he is talking about.

Fortunately, I love this one. To show the absolute corruption of most politicians—and there is a difference between a politician and a statesman—we have very few statesmen today and plenty of politicians. Mencken hit the nail on the head: “If a politician found or discovered that he had cannibals among his constituents, he would promise them missionaries for dinner.” I do not doubt that at all.

Then listen to this: “People do not expect to find chastity in a whorehouse. Why then do they expect to find honesty and humanity in government? A conglomeration of institutions, whose modus operandi consists of lying, cheating, stealing, and if need be, murdering those who resist.” I think he hit the nail on the head on all five quotes.

Biblical Refusal to Fear

I want to come back to what Representative Mark Green said: “I think every American should be scared to death.” I want to tell you something: I refuse to be scared. I refuse to be afraid. I refuse to be a victim. I refuse to believe that the government will help me or protect me. I refuse to believe that the Democrats and Republicans have my best interests at heart and in mind. I refuse to believe that all these people coming across the border illegally are refugees seeking a better life. I believe they are coming to invade our country.

When you hear, understand, and see the facts, you learn that most of these illegal immigrants are coming into this country under the authority of the United Nations, the Red Cross, and other NGOs, non-governmental organizations. Please remember that the United Nations’ main supporter is our own government. If these people were refugees, they could not afford to fly, and they could not afford to be driven in.

I saw one photograph of a woman who, I know, almost weighed 300 pounds. She was circled in the photograph, and the man wrote under it, “I refuse to believe that she’s walked all the way from South America.” If she had walked all the way, she would not have weighed what she weighed, I can assure you.

The point is, I am not afraid, and I am not going to be afraid. Neither should you, and I am going to show you why. I refuse to abdicate my personal responsibility to protect my life, my family, and my neighbors. I refuse to sit idly by and do nothing. I will prepare. I will train. I will do whatever is necessary to protect my family and the freedoms that God has given me. I am going to do that.

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 3; Psalm 27:1-3 (KJV)

I want to know exactly what I can do and what I cannot do. I may be old, but I am not helpless, I can assure you. At the same time, I'm going to be trusting in the sovereign providence of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in Christ, there is no need for fear.

I want to show you a passage. Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 3. I want to read all of that Psalm. It's a very short Psalm, only eight verses. There are a couple of other passages I want you to see. David says, "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me? Many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, 'There is no help for him in God.' But Thou, O Lord, art a shield for me, my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and He heard me out of His holy hill. I laid me down and slept. I awoke, for the Lord sustained me. I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about. Arise, O Lord, save me, O my God. For Thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheekbone. Thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly. Salvation belongeth unto the Lord. Thy blessing upon Thy people."

Turn right over to Psalm 27. David said in verse 3—I'm sorry, let's read verse 1. "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even my enemies and my foes came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.

Though an host," that is a whole army, "should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 27:4; Psalm 56:4; Psalm 91:1-13 (KJV)

"Should rise against me, in this will I be confident. One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire at His temple."

David said, "In God, I will praise His word. In God, I have put my trust. I will not fear. I will not fear. What can flesh do unto me?" I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. What can men do to you? They can arrest you. I guess they can confiscate your property. They could kill you. Well, that's it. And our Lord said, "Don't fear him who's able to kill the body. So I'll tell you, you shall fear Him who is able after the body is dead to cast you into the hellfire." That's who you fear. Not man. I'm not going to fear what man can do to me.

Psalm 91 is known as the soldier's Psalm. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in Him will I trust.' Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with His feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust. His truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flyeth by day, nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High, thy habitation.

"There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder, and the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under thy feet."

Psalm 118, verse 6, says, “The Lord is on my side.” David says this a little differently than he said it before: “I will not fear.” And then there is a colon: “What can man do unto me?” What can man do unto me? Man can take what you have, but everything you have, God gave you, and God can do you just like Job. He can give you twice as much once they steal it. They can take your life, but that would just put you in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is not a bad thing.

David said, “I’m not going to fear. What can man do unto me?” Man cannot really do anything apart from God’s sovereign direction and providence. It is just that simple. Proverbs 3, verse 25, says, “Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked when it cometh.” Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked when it cometh. God says, don’t be afraid.

I still would encourage you to go through the Bible and underline the “fear thou nots” or “fear nots.” Isaiah 41, verse 10, says, “Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.” What did God say? “Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not dismayed, for I am thy God.” Wow. If you can quote this verse, that is wonderful. If not, I would encourage you to learn it.

Second Timothy, chapter 1 and verse 7, says, “For God hath not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” So when you are afraid, your fear is not coming from God. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Practical Response: Prepare, Trust, and Reject Vain Thoughts

When Mr. Mark Green said, “I think every American should be scared to death,” that is humanistic, wicked, hellish counseling advice. We should not be scared to death. We should be angry, yes, at our own stupid government. We should be upset with the politicians, yes. But we should prepare the best we can, because the Bible says in Proverbs 22, verse 3, “The prudent man foreseeth evil and hideth himself, but the simple pass on and are punished.” The

prudent man foreseeth evil; he sees what is coming and makes preparation. But the simple pass on and are punished.

No, we should not be afraid. We should not fear. The truth of the matter is, we deserve far more than what is coming to this country, I can assure you.

I am not going to be afraid. I am not going to be scared to death, and I am not going to be afraid of my own shadow. But, on the other hand, I am not going to live with doom and gloom either. I will not fear. I will not be afraid. I will not be manipulated.

I will prepare. I will be self-reliant. I will train. I will plan. I will do my best, by the grace of God, to prepare myself and my family. What did God tell us? He tells us not to be afraid: "Fear not." Therefore, what is that old adage? If you want peace, prepare for war. We may hope for the best, but prepare for the worst, that is for sure.

I am not going to sit back and twiddle my thumbs and say, "Woe is me, woe is me, oh my, oh my." No, I am going to enjoy my life, my family, my relaxation, my ministry, God's creation, and God's wonderful providence. I am going to live with a spirit of praise and thanksgiving. I will teach until I am unable to teach. I will not quit. I will not give in. I will not give up. I will not give out. When God calls me home, I hope, by His grace, I will die with my boots on. I would rather be preaching and teaching than anything else. It is just that simple. I am not going to be afraid; I am going to trust in His sovereign grace and mercy.

Joseph P. Martino, in "Resistance to Tyranny: A Primer," said, "If you are unwilling to fight for a particular right, you will sooner or later lose it. And probably sooner than later, even in a free country, each generation must be prepared to fight for its rights all over again if they hope to pass them on to their children." And that is true.

Jeremiah 4:14 says, "O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from thy wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" The Hebrew word for vain is aven, which means vain, evil, false, and idolatrous. Think about this. A vain thought, a thought that is unbiblical and unscriptural, is not only wicked and vile and wrong; it is idolatry. What does the Bible say in Philippians 2:5? "Let this mind be in you which also is in

Christ Jesus." And in 2 Corinthians 10:5, we are to bring every thought into captivity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

When you and I begin to think thoughts that are unbiblical, unscriptural, and ungodly, they are not only vain and foolish and wicked; they are idolatrous. Jeremiah 7:27-28 says, "Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them," God says to Jeremiah, "for they will not hearken to thee. Thou shalt also call unto them, for they will not answer thee. But thou shalt say to them, 'This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth correction. Truth is perished and is cut off from their mouth.'"

When's the last time you heard truth from the White House? When's the last time you heard truth from Washington, D.C.? When's the last time you heard truth from Tallahassee or from Atlanta? Truth is perished and is cut off from their mouth. God said you can preach it, but they're not going to hear. You can call them, but they're not going to answer.

Because this is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the Lord. There are some who listen, some who hear, and some who see. Those are the few; they are the chosen; they are the remnant. May I tell you what happened to Judah and Jerusalem? Those who heard and obeyed lived. Those who did not hear and did not obey died. I can assure you: those who hear the Word of God and obey the Word of God will be delivered in one way or the other. Those who hate and despise the Word shall fall.

He asked, "How long shall vain thoughts lodge within thee?" Anyone who thinks they can sin against God, violate His law, trample the Lord Jesus Christ under their feet, and escape His righteous judgment is not only deceived and deluded; they have loaded their brains with vain, filthy, vile, and idolatrous thoughts. It is impossible. What did God say? "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Do not allow vain thoughts to lodge within you. Do not be afraid or scared to death. Say, "Lord, I look to Thee for protection. I'll fulfill my responsibility. I'll do what I can to prepare. But, Lord, my trust is in Thee."

Conclusion: Trust and Not Be Afraid

Years ago, when my oldest daughter was about two or three years old, she was afraid of the dark. So I told her to memorize a verse, and I went to Isaiah 12:2: “Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. For the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song. He also has become my salvation.” She could not memorize the entire verse at her age, but she learned the first part: “Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid.”

Many times Alice and I would either be awake or wake up, and she would get out of her little bed in the dark. As she walked to the light switch, we could hear her saying, “I will trust and not be afraid,” over and over.

That is what we have to do. We have to trust and refuse to be afraid. We will not be scared to death.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee. We thank You for Your truth. Lord, prepare our hearts, minds, and bodies, and help us to fulfill our responsibilities to the best of our ability while trusting in Thee. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 16

May I Have Your Attention

January 11, 2026

Introduction: The Call for Attention

Open your Bibles, please, to Jeremiah, chapter 22, and look at verse 21. This message came to me yesterday. I had planned on preaching something else, but as I was reading Scripture, this jumped out at me, and I thought I might have to deal with it in light of the situation going on in our land today. Jeremiah 22, verse 21:

God said, "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyest not my voice."

The title of the message today is, "May I Have Your Attention?" I hear that request quite often, especially in airports or meetings. Often the phrase is shortened to, "Attention, please." Usually, when I am in an airport, I totally ignore those announcements because they obviously do not relate to me.

However, on a recent trip I was in Chicago, Illinois. I always refuse to go through the scanner, so this was an unusual place. I had to remove my shoes and belt and subject myself to this search, and I

did so. I told the young man, "You know, I just don't understand how you and all these people can be so afraid of an 81-year-old man." But I said, "Evidently, you are quite afraid."

I gathered all my belongings and ran to the gate where my airplane was waiting. Just as I got there—a long, long way, I might add—I heard, "Attention please, will John Weaver report to the check station?" I thought, "What?" I looked at my briefcase and carry-on suitcase, checked my money clip, and thought I had everything. Then I noticed my driver's license was missing. I had to turn around and run all the way back carrying my luggage, require and receive my driver's license, and then run all the way back just in time to board that plane.

Let me tell you something about Chicago, especially the airport there. I have determined that if I am ever homeless, Brother Jim, or if the cops are ever after me for some reason, I am going to go to Chicago and buy the cheapest ticket I can, just to get a boarding pass and get through the checkpoint. No one will ever find you in that airport. There are so many different wings that you have to have transportation to reach them, and people are there all the time. No one would ever notice you; you could just live there. I was thankful, at least on that one day, that I paid attention to the announcement, “May I have your attention, please.”

It is interesting, though, how often we do not pay attention, or how inattentive we are most of the time. I recently read where one husband said, “My wife said I hardly ever listen to her,” or something like that. I think that could be said of all of us. The truth is that we do not normally pay attention to our surroundings. We are not attentive to danger or dangerous places. Consequently, we find ourselves at times in very troublesome and dangerous places because we are engaged in conversation, daydreaming, looking at our cell phones, or playing games.

The Problem in Jeremiah's Time

But here is something that dawned on me as I read this passage: Have you ever noticed that we tend to think less about the Lord, His worship, His work, and even His grace, mercy, and goodness when everything is going well, when we have plenty and there are no

problems whatsoever? We usually reserve God for times of emergency. We use Him as an emergency parachute, or as if the sign said, “In case of emergency, break glass.” In other words, we do not seek Him as we should until and unless we are genuinely in trouble.

This was the problem in Jeremiah’s time, and it is also a problem in our time. Notice verse 21 again: “I spake unto thee in thy prosperity,” or in thy tranquility and peacefulness, when everything was going well. “But thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyest not my voice.”

In verse 21, God said, “I spake unto thee.” Put it down: God spoke. That is, God gave His word. God gave His commandments, His statutes, and His orders. Many times in the Bible He sent His prophets, and He would speak to the people through His prophets. We understand, then, that God has spoken. Therefore, whatever transpires cannot be alluded to as ignorance, and it certainly could not be explained by saying, “Well, I just didn’t hear.” No, they heard, in one sense of the word, but they did not hear.

This was absolutely willful. God said, “I spake unto thee in thy prosperity.” It is interesting when we think about this: we never wonder where they derived their prosperity. Who gave them their prosperity? Who gave them their tranquility? Who gave them their peacefulness? The truth of the matter is, everything that we are and everything that we have, God made us and God gave us. Everything that these people had was derived from the blessings of God Himself. Yet He said, “I spake unto thee in thy prosperity, but thou saidst, I will not hear.”

We could put it this way: “I don’t want to hear. I will not hear.” Literally, what is being said is, “I will not obey.” I may hear, but I am not going to obey. I am not going to do anything about it. In their prosperity, they were saying, “At this point, we are set. We really do not need God, we really do not need anything from Him, so we can safely ignore His word and ignore Him for a little while.”

Then He said, “This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyest not my voice.” Patterns become habits, and habits become a lifestyle. What we are reading about in Jeremiah 22 and verse 21 is not the sin of ignorance. Rather, it is a sin of willfulness. It

is a sin of selfish rebellion. It is a sin of unthankfulness, unthoughtfulness, and ungratefulness.

The people had been receiving everything that God had been giving them, but now God speaks and they are not going to hear. This sin, which was prevalent in Jeremiah's time, is very prevalent in our time as well. It does not have to be a spoken sin. Someone may not say to God, "God, I'm not going to listen to You. I'm not going to hear You today. I'm not going to obey You."

You don't have to use those words. All you have to do is simply ignore Him, go on with an improper, unbiblical attitude. Then the actions will demonstrate that the attitude is unbiblical and ungodly as well. In our tranquility and prosperity, we are set right now. We don't need you; therefore, we're not going to listen to what you are saying to us.

Have you ever noticed this? It's easier to sin when everything's going well. Think about this. It's easier to sin when everything is going well because you're thinking, "Lord, you've blessed me, you've given me all this, and I must be doing pretty good. And so, Lord, just this little tiny sin that I want and I'm going to engage in, surely you'll overlook that." Of course, one sin always leads to another sin.

Prosperity Breeds Disobedience

I want you to note what happens when we get prosperous, normally speaking. In Deuteronomy 32:15, the Word of God says, "But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation." He forsook God which made him and lightly esteemed—that is, he thought nothing of it—the God of his salvation. Jeshurun forsook God when they were covered with fatness, when they had prosperity, when they had everything. They forsook him and then lightly esteemed the Rock of their salvation.

Here is a quote from Calvin: "It is indeed true what Moses says, that men are like meddlesome and wanton horses when they become fat. So fatness and tranquility have such an effect as to render us more refractory or disobedient, yet this cannot avail for an excuse

when God kindly invites us and connects with his doctrine, kind and paternal benevolence, and confirms it by the effects when we are teachable and yield to him willing obedience."

In other words, when we are willingly obedient, God blesses us, but then all of a sudden we get all of these blessings, all of this prosperity, and we don't think that we need to hear him. So here's a good question, and I'm going to answer it from the Bible: What do you do with a refractory animal? Think about a horse, think about a mule, think about a fool. What is the answer?

God's Methods for Getting Attention

Proverbs 26:3 says, “A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back.”

A fool in the Bible is not a mentally deficient person. A fool is someone who will not listen, who will not hear, and who will not be instructed. The Bible tells you that fools despise instruction and despise wisdom. But note what he said: when an animal is rebellious, there is a whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back.

When I was a boy, I drove and rode mules. When I was an adult, we raised and rode horses. In fact, Dinah, I had eleven at one time. All my girls had to have horses, and then the horses just kept reproducing. So I know the strength of a horse. I know the stubbornness of a mule. I know what is needed. Usually we read about a whip for the horse. Most riders carry what is known as a riding crop, which is a short whip. You just spur the horse and make the horse do whatever you desire him to do. The same thing applies to the mule.

You have to have the bit. You have to have the bridle. When you are driving a mule or plowing a mule, you have to have the traces, the collar, and the singletree. You have to have all of those things in order to control that mule. It is the same thing with an ox. When you get a three-thousand-pound ox, you need to have a yoke and everything on him in order to control him.

So this is what God is saying: we use a whip for the horse, a bit and bridle for the mule, and a rod for the fool's back.

Now, let me show you the counsel that God gives in Psalm 32:9: “Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.” God says, do not be like a horse and do not be like a mule. Do not be stubborn. Do not make me put a bit and bridle in your mouth.

If I have to, I will. But don't make me. Good counsel from God himself: “Be not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding.” If God has to put a bit and bridle upon us, we will obey; that is for sure.

Before I get to some Scripture, I want to give you a story that I read many years ago. The story has a point; that is why I am telling it. I read about a man, a farmer, who was selling his mule, and he set a very high price upon that mule. He had a neighbor who was very interested in the mule, so the neighbor came over and asked why the price of that mule was so high. The farmer said, "Because this mule is exceedingly obedient. This mule follows all the commands that I give the mule." The man said, "Okay. I'll buy the mule and I'll give you the price." So the neighbor bought the mule, took the mule home, and gave the mule a command, and the mule just stood there. Finally, he gave several commands, and the mule just would not even move. So he called the farmer and said, "Look, something is wrong. I can't get this mule to obey me." The farmer said, "I'll be over just momentarily and I'll take care of the situation."

When the farmer came over to take care of the situation, he brought a two by four six feet long. He walked up to the mule, hit the mule up beside the head, and said, "Go get in the stall," and the mule walked and got in the stall. The farmer looked at his neighbor and said, "I just forgot to tell you that that mule will obey, but you just have to get his attention first."

Now here is the point: What does God do to get our attention? What happens when we will not listen and when we will not hear? Do you think that somehow God has a way of getting our attention? We will not listen to the announcement of "Attention, please." Sometimes we just have to get hit upside beside the head. Let me show you.

Chastisement as a Father's Love

I want you to turn in your Bibles to the book of Hebrews, chapter 12, and let us begin reading there with verse 9. I think you can understand the point that I am getting to. Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 9. Actually, this section begins in verse 5, but we are not going to go all the way back to verse 5 because God is talking about chastisement. God is talking about punishment. Look what he said in verse 9.

"Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" When you were a child, did your parents have a way of getting your attention? I've told you this before, and it's the absolute truth. When I was a teenager, I talked back to my father one time. Just once. After that, he got my attention to the point that I never ever did it again. When you were a child and your parents spoke to you and you disobeyed, they would make sure that you heard. After a while, if you were still disobedient, then you got the rod. You got chastised. That's all there is to it.

Now, look at what he said in verse 9: "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" "For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure." Sometimes we made our parents mad, and they just whipped us because they were mad, which was not right, but that's exactly what happens.

But He, that is God, when He chastens us, does it for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." Did any of you, when you were children, ever rejoice in the fact that you got whippings? The answer is no, because it was very grievous. You did not like that at all. I did not enjoy the whippings I got when I was a boy, but now that I'm grown, I'm thankful that God allowed me to be chastised so that I could learn. When God chastens us, it is always for our profit, and we're always going to be more holy, more obedient, and more godly,

because we will end up being a partaker, he says, of His righteousness.

Our earthly parents loved us, that is for sure. But no matter how much earthly parents can love, no one can love more than our gracious Heavenly Father. Isaiah 55 and verse 3 says, "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live."

Everyone in this room knows I am hard of hearing. If you are speaking to me in a lower or softer tone of voice, I cannot hear well. I have to lean my ear closer to your mouth so I can hear what you are saying. This is what God is saying: "Incline your ear." In other words, come a little bit closer. Make sure that you hear everything I am saying. "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live."

The Context of Jeremiah 22: Judgment on Judah

In Jeremiah, chapter 22, we see this in its context. He said, "Go up to Lebanon, and cry; and lift up thy voice in Bashan, and cry from the passages: for all thy lovers are destroyed." These were those individuals and nations with whom they committed adultery—spiritual adultery and idolatry. All the lovers are gone; they are destroyed.

He said, "I spake unto thee in thy prosperity; but thou saidst, I will not hear. This hath been thy manner from thy youth, that thou obeyest not my voice." Now watch: "The wind shall eat up all thy pastors, and thy lovers shall go into captivity: surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness. O inhabitant of Lebanon, that makest thy nest in the cedars, how gracious shalt thou be when pangs come upon thee, the pain as of a woman in travail!"

"As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence; I will take it off, throw it away. And I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye

were not born; and there shall ye die. But to the land whereunto they desire to return, thither shall they not return."

"Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not?"

"O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah."

Here is what God is saying: You would not listen to Me. Therefore, I am going to destroy all your lovers—all those with whom you engaged in spiritual adultery and idolatry—and I am going to take you and throw you into a strange land. You are going into captivity. You are going to suffer and die there. You are never coming back home. As for Coniah, none of his seed will ever prosper—none whatsoever.

Do you think that was enough to get their attention? God is speaking about absolute destruction, not merely of individuals, but also of a nation. In verse 29, note this important statement: "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord." Anytime you see a word repeated three times, it is extremely important; even a word repeated twice is significant. In the New Testament, our Lord says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you." It is not merely, "Verily I say unto you." The word "verily" means "so be it"—"truly, truly," or "amen, amen." Our Lord is saying, "Truly, truly, I am saying this to you."

God says, "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord." It is important that we hear the word of the Lord. You would think that all the suffering being inflicted upon this people would finally get their attention.

America's Parallel Rebellion

So here is my question: What do you think it is going to take to get the attention of Christians in America? What do you think it is going to take to wake us up? What would it even take to startle the unsaved, so to speak?

I know, and you know, exactly the trouble we are in in this nation. You know that. And I know that the squeeze is upon most folks financially. I know, and I am sure that you know, that our economic system is theft and fraud and deceit. I am sure that you know, as well as I do, that our nation as a whole ignores God, ignores His Word, ignores His worship, and refuses to listen to Him. Period. I know, and you know, that there are laws passed in this country that are absolutely contrary to God and contrary to His Word. And you should know, as well as I, that in this nation and in our government, we help people that should not be helped, and we love people that should not be loved.

Now you are going to tell me, "But Brother Weaver, I think we are supposed to love everyone." No, no, that is not true. That is not true. Even God does not love everyone.

Now you have to understand that there is a special love and there is a benevolent love. I could say, "I love every woman in this room." By that I would mean that I do not want to see any of you suffer. I do not want to see any of you hurt, sick, or afflicted. I love you. I want you to be in health. I want you to be prospering. But I could look at Alice and say, "Alice, I love you," and love her a whole lot differently than I love the ladies in this room. You see what I am saying? There is a benevolent love, but there is that special love as well.

Now let me show you what I am talking about. I want you to turn in your Bibles, if you would, to 2 Chronicles, chapter 19. You have to understand what has happened now in 2 Chronicles, chapter 19.

Jehoshaphat had teamed up with, joined affinity with, and helped Ahab, king of Israel. Ahab was the king of the Northern Kingdom, the most wicked and vile king in that kingdom. He was a Baalite, a worshipper of Baal. He hated God, persecuted God's preachers, and despised God. Jehoshaphat had gone with him to help him. In 2 Chronicles 19:1-2 we read, "And Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord."

He said Jehoshaphat should not have helped Ahab. In the context, Jehoshaphat told Ahab, “I am as thou art, and my people as thy people.” That was not true. Jehoshaphat was a godly man, while Ahab was wicked; and the people of Judah were not like the people of Israel, because they were worshipping the golden calves. The wrath of God was upon Jehoshaphat because he had helped someone who should not have been helped and loved someone who should not have been loved.

Look back a few books to 2 Kings 3. Jehoshaphat, the king of Israel, and the king of Moab, Mesha, were going to fight against Edom. They ran out of food and water and were going to die. In verse 12, “And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the Lord is with him,” speaking of Elisha. “So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.” They were after Moab. Elisha then said to the king of Israel, “What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother.” The king answered, “Nay: for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.”

He said, "What have I got to do with you? Go back to your prophets of Baal. I don't have anything to do with you." The king replied, "No, no, no, no. God brought us here to deliver us to the hand of Moab." And Elisha said to the king of Israel, "As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee."

May I spell this out for you? Here is what he told him: "I wouldn't spit on you if you were on fire. I'd just let you burn." When you stop and think about what is going on in this country, we are headed for more trouble than you can shake a stick at. Look at the pagan invasion that our government has allowed for its own benefit. You are seeing this in Minnesota, Texas, Michigan, and now Florida. Did you know that one of the largest Muslim edifices is now being built in Tampa, Florida? Look at the Somalis.

All of these people are welfare recipients. They do not work, will not work, and never will work. Much of the fraud in this country, you see, comes from these immigrants and our politicians in cahoots with them. Look at Minnesota's governor, Tim Walz. I am simply

pointing out the fact. Here is my question: What in the world is it going to take to get our attention? I hope you saw at least a little footage of what is now going on in Minneapolis, especially since this lady had been shot by the ICE agent. Now there are riots. The police were driven off the streets by protesters and retreated. The protesters took the streets, entered the motel or hotel where the ICE agents were staying, and destroyed the lobby—just everything.

We look at corruption everywhere. We look at deceit and fraud everywhere. This is not the country that I was raised in, not the country you were raised in. It seems as if the whole world is going absolutely crazy. I had a pastor friend, Bob McCurry, who has been dead a number of years. I buried him several years back. I used to call him up and say, "Pastor McCurry," and he would say, "Yes, John." I said, "I think the whole world is going crazy except you and me, and sometimes I'm concerned about you." He would say, "You know, I believe the same thing." But think about this: What is it going to take to get our attention?

I want to show you. Turn in your Bibles, if you would please, to Psalm 107. I'm not going to tell you that this is what God is going to use, but I'm going to show you what He has used in time past. Look at Psalm 107, beginning in verse 1.

Psalm 107: Trouble as a Wake-Up Call

He said, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy; and gathered them out of the lands, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south."

The first thing you should notice in verse 1 is this: "O give thanks unto the Lord." We are to be giving thanks to the Lord. We are commanded to give thanks to the Lord. Here he gives you two reasons why we are to give thanks to the Lord: number one, "for he is good," and number two, "for his mercy endureth for ever." Then, in verse 2, he says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy."

So to make an application of that versus this, whatever God has done for you in delivering you from financial problems, physical problems, family problems, emotional problems—whatever He has done for you, say so. In other words, give Him the honor, the glory, and the praise. Let everybody else know what God has done for you. Just say so. Verse 3 says He has redeemed them from all corners, east, west, north, and south. This is exactly what He is saying we should give Him thanks for: He is good, His mercy endureth forever, and He has redeemed us out of the hand of the enemy many times and in many different ways.

There are sufficient reasons why we should be constantly and continually giving the Lord praise and thanks. When you stop and think about this, I do not suppose that anyone in this room is wealthy—what the world would call wealthy. But, on the other hand, we are not poor. We have not gone hungry, and we have not missed a house in which to sleep. I am simply pointing out the fact that we are not destitute or deprived. We have been blessed, and we have been blessed exceedingly—not just as individuals, not just as families, but as a nation. As corrupt as we are as a nation and as far as we are from God and His word, we have still been blessed. I do not think anybody could doubt that whatsoever.

Psalm 107 gives us something important. Four times in this psalm, the same verse is repeated: “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” You will read this verse four times. It appears in verse 8: “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” It appears again in verse 15: “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” It appears again in verse 21: “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” Now look in verse 31: “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” Four times he tells us this in one psalm.

Another verse is repeated four times in this psalm: “Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.”

Psalm 107 repeats four times, with slight variation: “Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses”; “Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses”; and, “Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.” So the question that has to be asked is this: What did it take to make these people cry unto the Lord? The answer is trouble—different kinds of trouble, but trouble. In this psalm, the psalmist speaks of what we would refer to as the most common trials, calamities, and afflictions of life. He demonstrates what we go through, why we go through them, and how they enable us to cry to the Lord, after which the Lord delivers us.

You will never cry to the Lord to be delivered from trouble until, first of all, you realize that you are in trouble. You will never cry to the Lord to get you out of a distressful situation unless you realize that you are in a distressful situation. What did our Lord say in Matthew chapter 9? “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” And then he said, “But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.” No well person simply goes to a doctor. You have to be sick. You have to try all your home remedies, and when nothing works, then finally you give up and go to a doctor.

This psalm is basically divided into four parts. The first begins with those who wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way and found no city to dwell in: “They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.” They were helpless, hopeless, and lost. “Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.” When they were hungry and thirsty, when they were lost, and when they found no way, “Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.” How did he deliver them? “And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation.” And he led them. Then the psalm says, “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”

For what does God do? “For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.” That is exactly what God does, but notice that they were in distress.

The second section begins with verse 10: “Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron; because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High.” They would not listen. What happened? “Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help.” In other words, they got to the end of their rope. They were worn out and could not accomplish anything.

Verse 13 says, “Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.” What did he do? “He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder.” Then he says, “Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” Verse 16 adds, “For he hath broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder.” God has delivered them. Notice how they had to be brought low before they cried.

Now look at verse 17. Here is the third one: “Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted.” There is the rod for the back of the fool. “Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death.” They are almost dying. “Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses. He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing.”

The fourth and final part begins at verse 23: “They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.” There is a storm. “They mount up to the heaven.”

"They go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end." They cannot save themselves, control the ship, or do anything. "Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses." What does He do, and how does He do it? "He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still."

"Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" Then He says, "Let them exalt him also in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders." This refers to giving public praise and public worship for what God has done for you.

The point in this psalm is that God had to do something to get their attention and make them cry. Then they cried unto the Lord, and He delivered them. If you look back at verse 1, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." Have you ever stopped to think how many times you and I have abused the grace and mercy of God, presumed upon Him, or been ungrateful and unthankful, and yet God remains merciful, gracious, and kind to us? "Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." It took trouble, pain, distress, and agony to awaken people and make them see their need for their Heavenly Father.

Too often he is ignored and even forgotten during times of prosperity and plenty, peacefulness and tranquility. John Trapp was an old Puritan, and he made this statement: “Men are at their best when in their worst and worst when in their best.” What he meant by that was this: men are at their best spiritually when they are in their worst and lowest position, and they are worse spiritually when they are in their best circumstance and position. That is certainly true.

Let me give you another principle. Put this thing together, especially in light of Jeremiah 22 and verse 21. God has this design: if he speaks and we hear, there is no problem, no chastisement, nothing. But if God speaks and we refuse to hear, there is going to be chastisement. There are no two ways about that, because we are disobedient. If he chastens us and we refuse to hear, there will be additional chastisement, but it will increase in its intensity and severity.

Escalating Judgments in Amos 4

It is kind of like having a child who is disobedient or does something wrong. You come along and swat the child on the bottom with your hand and get the child’s attention: “Don’t do that.” The child says,

“Okay, fine,” but three minutes later is doing it again. This time you come by and swat the child twice on the rear. “Don’t do that. I’ve asked you now; don’t do that again.” “Okay, yes.” And the next thing you know, fifteen minutes later he is doing the same thing. Now you go out and get a switch, come in, and wear his little hiney out. You have gotten his attention.

I want to show you this from the Bible. Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to the book of Amos, chapter 4. Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos. Listen to these verses and follow me. I think this is a very important point. Look, if you would, at Amos chapter 4, verse 1. We are going to read through verse 12.

“Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan.” By the way, do you know what kine are? K-I-N-E? They are cows. God is talking to the ladies here. He calls them cows. “Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor,” wicked women, “which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink.” Wow!

"The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks. And ye shall go out at the breaches, every cow at that which is before her; and ye shall cast them into the palace, saith the Lord." In other words, all your prosperity—nothing will save you when God comes to judge.

In verse 4 he says, "Come to Bethel, and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression." Gilgal and Bethel were where Jeroboam put the two golden calves. If you are going to transgress, go to those golden calves; you are an idolater worshiping there. He says, "And bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: and offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God." He is addressing the children of Israel, the entire northern kingdom: "You love worshiping these idols."

Verse 6 says, "And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." God said, "I sent famine among

you. It did not get your attention because you did not return unto me."

Then verse 7: "And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered. So two or three cities wandered unto one city, to drink water; but they were not satisfied: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." They did not listen to famine, so God sent drought, and they still paid no attention.

Verse 9 says, "I have smitten you with blasting and mildew: when your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees increased, the palmerworm devoured them: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." God destroyed their harvest, sending insects and worms to eat it up. They had blasting, drought, dry wind, and mildew, yet they had not returned unto Him.

There is a progression, an intensity, and a severity. In verse 10, God says, “I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword, and have taken away your horses; and I have made the stink of your camps to come up unto your nostrils: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.” He had given them sickness and plague, but they did not return to Him. There was war; He slew their young men with the sword and took away their horses. The stink of dead bodies was in their camps, and still they had not returned to Him.

Then, in verse 11: “I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.” God sent judgment in such a way that they knew He had done it. It was like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. A few were saved, plucked out of the fire, but they still had not returned to Him. Each time, there is an increase in the intensity and severity of these judgments, yet no one listened. Therefore, in verse 12: “Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.” God said, “I will just get you out of the way.”

Amos chapter 4 deals with a nation—not merely individuals, families, churches, or tribes, but an entire nation. God does judge nations. Psalm 9:8 says He is the judge of the world; Psalm 22:8 says He is the governor of the nations; and Psalm 94:2 says He is the judge of all the earth.

Scripture teaches that God is immutable, unchangeable, in His person and in His attributes. He cannot change for the better, because He is already perfect, nor for the worse, because then He would no longer be perfect. God is unchangeable, and so are His judgments. What He judged as sin in times past, He judges as sin in the present and will judge as sin in the future.

So my question is this: Does He have your attention? Look at Amos chapter 4 and what has been happening in this country. What will it take for God to get our attention?

Applications: Hear and Obey

God desires not only our attention, but our obedience. Isaiah 55:3 says, "Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." I have taught for 60 years, actually going on 61, everything from fourth grade through college. Here is a principle I have always taught young people: There are two ways to learn. The first is by listening and obeying. That is the simplest way: you hear and you act; you hear and you obey. The second is that you hear and disobey, and then you get the rod. Micah 6:9 says, "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." The man of understanding will hear. The simple way to learn is to hear God's word and obey God's word. If we do not, then the rod is going to come.

Do not think, or even let it enter into your mind, that God is some old meanie up in heaven, just waiting to smite and willing to strike at any moment. Anyone who has had children knows that whenever discipline was necessary, it was grievous. I never enjoyed whipping a child or doing something like that. I would much rather it not be done. Lamentations 3:33 says, "For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men." God does not afflict willingly. He does it only when it is absolutely necessary. If He does not have our attention, if we are not listening, paying attention, or obeying, He will get our attention. You chastise your children only when it is

necessary. God loves us far more than we could ever love our children. God desires our obedience just as we desire the obedience of our children.

We have four daughters, two of them identical twins. I had to whip those girls because they would egg each other on. But my baby, I probably whipped her no more than two or three times in her entire life. Why? She could do something wrong, and I could look at her and say, "Becca?" She would simply fall to pieces: "Oh, Daddy, I'm so sorry. Daddy, please forgive me."

"I won't do this again." "Yes, dear, I accept that." I never had to whip her. Do you know why? Because she was so willing to listen and obey. That is all God wants for us: to be willing to listen and obey. But when we look around and see the deceit, fraud, corruption, and depth of depravity in this country—and people murdering for fun—it boggles my mind. How can you walk up to an old man at a train station and push him in front of a train? How can you drive by a house and start shooting into it when you do not even know who lives there? Look where we are and what we are doing. These are not merely individual sins; they are corporate sins, societal sins, and governmental sins.

We should already be crying for deliverance: "Lord, help us." So the question must be asked: How far will God allow us to go in our rebellion before He judges us? What will it take to get our attention? I can assure you that God knows exactly what it will take to get our attention. He knows. Whenever He afflicts that, I do not know. Whenever He inflicts it, I do not know.

But He is going to use the rod unless we repent. It is just that simple. Therefore, the wise thing is to begin now to seek Him, cry to Him, and pay attention to His judgments. Hurricanes and tornadoes are under His control. Droughts and famine, plagues, pestilence, sickness, and crop failures are under His control. Everything is under His control.

If we are willing to listen, hear, and obey, we will not be judged so strenuously. But we are unwilling to hear and repent. Go back and read Amos chapter 4. He said, "All these things, yet you've not returned unto me, saith the Lord. And because of that, this will I do

unto thee, O Israel: prepare to meet thy God." God is the strengthener and destroyer of nations. We are already broken economically, societally, governmentally, and politically. We are on life support. God wants our attention. I would much rather say, "Yes, Lord, I'm listening. I want to hear you. I want to obey you," than be smitten with a rod and then say, "Oh, Lord, was that you?"

The wise thing to do is to seek Him now. Do not let Him have to get your attention. He can, and He will.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank Thee for Thy word and ask, Lord, that Thou would grant us repentance. Open our eyes. May we pay attention, especially to Thee and Thy word. In Jesus Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 17

The Discipline of the Mind

August 10, 2025

In Philippians 4:6–8, the Word of God says, “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

Most of you know that I teach a Bible class on Thursday evening, and it is recorded as well. This past week, I dealt with the Holy Spirit cleansing and particularly with the subject of mortification. After that class, I got to thinking about how we could still sanctify ourselves and how we could really rectify a lot of things in our lives. Of course, I came back to a truth that I have known for a long time. Although I have taught it, I have never really taught just one whole message on it.

Introduction: The Necessity of Disciplining the Mind

So here it is today: the discipline of the mind. Have you ever considered disciplining your mind? We discipline our animals. We discipline our children. We discipline our bodies. But we very seldom think of the fact that our minds need to be disciplined as well.

I would venture to say that not only is the discipline of the mind one of the most important aspects of our lives, it is also one of the most necessary aspects of our lives. In fact, it is so important that there cannot be any Christian growth or any Christian maturity apart from the discipline of the mind.

How do you control your thoughts? How do you control what is in your mind? First, consider the Scriptures in 1 Corinthians 9, where the apostle Paul uses an illustration that is easily understood. Beginning with verse 24, he says, “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.” He gives us a picture of a race, particularly that of the Olympics: “So run, that ye may obtain.”

The Analogy of Physical Exercise

“And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

The apostle Paul is using a picture of a physical race to teach a spiritual truth. The Olympians disciplined and trained not only their muscles and bodies, but also their minds, in order to win a crown that perished. That little wreath around their heads was temporary. Paul says they run to obtain a corruptible crown, but we run that we might obtain an incorruptible crown.

Notice that he says, “Everyone that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.” In other words, he is disciplined. Everyone who runs wants to win, and so they discipline themselves. Then Paul applies this to himself: “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so

fight I, not as one that beateth the air." In other words, he is not a shadow boxer; he is not playing, pretending, or merely beating the air. "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

The Apostle Paul is saying that he uses spiritual exercise to bring his body and his life under subjection, so that he can continue to preach and improve in his Christian life and faith. Just as physical exercise demands discipline, spiritual exercise demands discipline.

In 1 Timothy chapter 4, beginning with verse 7, Paul continues this concept of exercise: "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." An old wives' fable is something you have heard all your life that simply is not true. I remember hearing as a boy that if a pregnant mother listened to beautiful music, her child would be born musically inclined. I can assure you that is not true. I tell people that, if it is true, my mother must have been listening to a dying buzzard singing, because I cannot carry a note. That is just an old wives' tale; it is not true.

But notice what Paul says: "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness." Then he states, "For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." The Greek word for "little" is oligos, meaning little, small, light, and fewness.

I am not trying to discourage you, but I am going to tell you the absolute truth. You can work out all you want physically—every day, even two or three times a day. You can exercise all your muscles, but if the Lord allows you to live long enough, those muscles are going to sag. You are going to have wrinkles, ladies, and crow's feet, and both men and women are going to have love handles and loose skin. I do not care how much you exercise. If you live long enough, you are going to have all of that. Bodily exercise profits just a little bit, and you can have its benefit for a few years; after that, it is going to be gone.

But then he says, godliness, exercising yourself in godliness, is profitable not only for this life, but in that which is to come. Now, the interesting thing is this: if you look in verse 7, when he says, “and exercise thyself unto godliness,” the word “exercise” happens to be the Greek word gumnazo. If you look in verse 8, he says, “for bodily exercise,” and there the word in the Greek is gumnasia.

This is where we get our English words “gymnastics” and “gymnasium.” Literally, what he is telling us in verses 7 and 8 is that we are to gymnasticize ourselves in godliness. People who win all these trophies in gymnastics do not just start out saying, “Hey, I think I’ll go and win a trophy today.” They have built their muscles, their lives, and their discipline over all these years. That is exactly what God is saying right now. We have to learn to gymnasticize our minds and ourselves into godliness. We are literally told to gymnasticize ourselves in holiness.

If you work out like this, just as you would work out in gymnastics, it means that you have to be dedicated, determined, and disciplined. If you are not disciplined, you are not going to accomplish anything. Take, for example, those of us who go to the gym occasionally, say once or twice a year. The only thing we get from going to the gym once or twice a year is soreness. But those who go weekly or semi-weekly, and sometimes those who go daily, do not get sore. You have heard the old adage that pain is weakness leaving the body, and that may be true when you work out on a regular basis. But when you do not work out regularly, soreness is pain for not exercising; you simply end up getting sore.

Here is the point the Apostle Paul is making, not only in 1 Corinthians 9, but in 1 Timothy chapter 4: It does not matter whether you are talking about physical exercise or spiritual exercise; it must be a priority. There must be consistency, faithfulness, determination, and a disciplined mind. So here is a good question: How do you discipline your mind? You cannot whip it, and you cannot say, “Bad mind, bad mind.” That does absolutely nothing.

So what I want to do today is give you three truths. Three truths. The first one you should already know, because I've preached on this so many times, but I'm going to rehearse it for you and give you the scripture. So if you're going to discipline your mind, here's the very

first thing. The very first step in disciplining your mind is realization. What do I mean by realization? We have to realize that everything proceeds from the mind.

Step 1: Realization – Everything Proceeds from the Mind

We cannot function without thinking. Our thoughts determine our conduct. Our thinking determines our action. We always think before we do. So, if I pick up this phone and hold it up, then clearly I've already thought about picking up that phone before I actually picked up that phone. So my thinking then precedes my actions. Now, if you will turn in your Bibles—well, you don't have to hold 1 Timothy. I actually want you to hold Philippians 4, but if you will turn back in your Bibles to the book of Proverbs, the book of Proverbs, look in chapter 4, if you would please. And here's a verse that I've quoted many, many times, but I want you to see what follows this verse. So in Proverbs chapter 4 and verse 23, the Word of God makes this very simple statement.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." However, I want you to note what follows. "Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil." Now go back and notice verse 23. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." If you keep your heart, verse 24, you'll put away from you a froward mouth and perverse lips. And verse 25, if you keep your heart, your eyes will look right on, and your eyelids will look straight before thee. Verse 26, if you keep your heart, you'll ponder the path of your feet and let all your ways be established. Verse 27, if you keep your heart, you'll not turn to the right hand or to the left; that is, you'll walk straight, and you will remove your foot from evil. Now I've told you

this before, I'm telling you again: the heart in the Bible is the mind. In fact, the Hebrew word for "heart" in verse 23 is the Hebrew word leb. It is translated as "mind" 12 times in the Bible and

"understanding" 10 times. So it is the mind then, or the heart, that puts away all of these things in verses 23 down through verse 27.

Now may I remind you of Proverbs 23 and verse 7—you know this verse, you don't have to turn there—where the scripture says, "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." In other words, you are a result in your conduct and your actions of the way you think. Everything comes from the mind. So if you will turn to your Bibles, to the book of Matthew chapter 15, look at what our Lord says when He's teaching His disciples. And let's begin reading there with verse 17. Matthew chapter 15, verse 17 is what I want. So look what He says, Matthew 15 verse 17.

"Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: these are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man." But note, if you would, the very first thing He mentions: "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts." Out of the mind proceeds evil thoughts, and then He develops that—all kinds of evil thoughts that are mentioned there. So everything, all classes and all kinds of evil thoughts, come from the mind. If you look in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 9, Matthew chapter 9, beginning there with verse 2, look at what our Lord states. Matthew chapter 9 in verse 2: "And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain

The scribes said within themselves, “This man blasphemeth.” And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?” The heart is the mind. By nature our thoughts are contrary to God because we are depraved. We are fallen. We are sinful. In Isaiah 65:3, God said, “I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts.” They are walking in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts. Because of natural depravity, our thoughts are inclined to be evil, wicked, fleshly, and selfish. They are inclined to

desire our own will and our own way, regardless. I want you to see that it is only the goodness, mercy, and grace of God that enable us to entertain any good thoughts or biblical thoughts.

This is how it works. Everything actually stems from our thinking. In Ephesians 4:17, the Apostle writes, “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind.” What is the vanity of their mind? Verse 18 says, “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” Their mind is darkened. They are alienated from the life of God. They are ignorant. They are blind. What is the result? Verse 19 says, “Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” In other words, the unsaved man by nature is concerned only about himself—his will, wants, desires, and lusts. That is all he is concerned about.

We are not to walk like that. But look in verse 20: “But ye have not so learned Christ.” Has it ever dawned upon you that you have to learn Christ? You have to learn what is biblical; you have to be taught that. Verse 21 says, “If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.” Look what happens when you have been taught: “That ye put off concerning the former conversation”—or conduct—

"The old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." We have to be renewed in the spirit of our mind. We have to put on the new man. The new man and being renewed in the spirit of our mind are synonymous. "But ye have not so learned Christ." We must learn Christ. We must be taught by Him as the truth is in Him, and we have that truth.

What do we do? We put off the former conversation—that is, the way that we were raised, the way that we were taught, and the way that we were used to thinking. We put all that off and put on the new man, that renewed mind, which has now been renewed in righteousness.

Colossians 3:9-10 summarizes the same truth: "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." When you put Ephesians 4:23-24 and Colossians 3:10 together, you understand that the new man is the renewed mind—one that has been taught by God and has new knowledge, or biblical knowledge, compared to the old knowledge you had as a lost man. We are to put off all that old conduct and put on that which is biblical, that which we have been taught.

We have to learn to think biblically. We have to learn to think scripturally. We do not do that by nature. Learning to think biblically will always manifest itself in our actions and conduct. As Christians, we live differently because we think differently. We believe differently. David said in Psalm 116:10, "I believed, therefore have I spoken." You always speak and act out of what you truly believe, and what you believe is what you think to be true. Everything stems from the mind.

You will never be holy. You will never be mature in the faith until you realize that your mind controls your conduct and your actions. You have to think biblically in order to act biblically. If you do not think biblically, you are going to be acting wickedly. It is just that simple, because it is your mind that controls your conduct and your actions. The very first step in controlling and disciplining your mind is this realization: everything comes from the mind, whether it is good or bad. It still comes from the mind. So there must be realization.

The second thing in learning to discipline our minds is refutation. By refutation, I mean learning to refuse unbiblical and ungodly thoughts. Usually, when we think about ungodly thoughts, we think about lust, covetousness, and all kinds of things that are wicked and wrong. But think about depression. Think about discouragement. All of that stems from our minds.

Step 2: Refutation – Refusing Ungodly Thoughts

What was that old saying? “If you want to be discouraged, look around you. If you want to be depressed, look within you. If you want to be delivered, look up.” Stop and think. Most of this stuff we

bring upon ourselves. “Oh, it’s mean. Whoa, it’s me. Oh, everything’s against me.” You start going more and more, deeper and deeper, into the hole that you have dug for yourself because you are thinking that way.

God has designed us so that our feelings always follow our actions. If you act right, you are going to feel right. If you act wrong, you are going to feel wrong. God’s principles are to lead and direct our lives, not our feelings and not our emotions. Feelings change, emotions change, and circumstances change, but principles never change. When you give in to your feelings, when you give in to your emotions, and when you give in to your lust, you are always ending up in trouble.

You can have evil, wicked thoughts pop through your mind instantly, even when you have not been thinking about those things. They just are there, and you stop and think, “Where in the world did these come from?” All of a sudden, they are in your mind in living color.

What must you do when you have an unbiblical, ungodly, immoral, wicked, depressing, or discouraging thought? You must reject it, refuse it, and repudiate it. Refuse to think about it; refuse to dwell upon it. We may not entertain certain things in our mind.

Let me point out this: it is not a sin to be tempted. Our Lord was tempted—we will look at that a little bit later in Matthew chapter 4—but it is not a sin to be tempted. It is a sin to yield to the temptation. When that thought pops into your mind, the very first thing you must do is refuse it, reject it, and repudiate it. Say, “I will not have that thought. I will not meditate on that. I will not think about that. I will not desire that. It is over. I am not going to have that in my mind.”

David said it like this in Psalm 66:18: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” The word “regard” is the Hebrew word ra’ah, which means to consider, to esteem, to desire, to hold to it, to gaze at it, to ponder, and to give attention to it. If that thought comes into my mind, it is not a sin merely for the thought to pop into my mind. The sin comes when I back that thought up and say, “Yes, I

would like that. That would satisfy my flesh," and dwell on it and think on it. That is where the sin comes from.

You have heard the old adage: "You cannot stop a bird from flying over your head, but you can stop him from building a nest in your hair." The world, the flesh, and the devil can throw thoughts into your mind quicker than lightning can flash. That is not the sin. The sin is when you back it up and think about it.

David said, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." If the mere regarding of sin—meditating and thinking about sin, desiring it, and gazing at it—causes God not to hear our prayer, how much worse is it if we engage in that sin?

Now, I've got an awful truth for you to consider today. In Isaiah 43:24, God says to His people, "Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities." How did Israel make God serve with their sins? How did they weary God with their iniquities? I realize you could get tired of iniquities. But how did they make God serve with their sins? Because they were in a covenantal relationship with God. They were considered God's people and He was considered their God, and therefore what they did, He did.

And God says, "You made me to serve with your sins." If that was true in the Old Testament under the Old Covenant, how much more true is it in the New Testament under the New Covenant? In 1 Corinthians 6:15, Paul says, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? Know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit."

Then he commands, "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." So he teaches

us that Jesus Christ is our head. We are His body. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.

So the Christian then that commits fornication, the Christian then that commits adultery, is joining Jesus Christ to that harlot, which of course would be absolute utter blasphemy. But it is the same truth concerning any sin that a Christian commits. So if I steal from Clay, I'm joining Jesus Christ to theft, which is blasphemous. So the point I'm trying to make is this.

As Christians, we must understand that our bodies belong to Him, and whatever we do affects Him. Romans chapter 14, verse 17, says, “No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.” That is true not only physically, but also spiritually, if we are children of God.

Here is what we must learn: we have to break the links in the chains of sin. Our Lord said in John chapter 8, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.” The word “servant” means “slave.” Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. Sin wraps its chain around us tighter and tighter. The more we sin, the tighter that chain becomes, and the more it enslaves us. Therefore, we must learn to break the link in the chain of sin.

The first step in breaking the links in the chain of sin is very simple: you refuse, reject, and repudiate that thought. The thought comes into your mind: “Lord, I’m not going to think on that. That’s wicked; that’s wrong. You have said, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery.’ You have said, ‘Thou shalt not covet.’ You have said, ‘Thou shalt not steal.’” In other words, you quote whatever is the alternative to that thought. That is the easy way. You say, “Lord, I’m not going to think on this.” You put it out of your mind and refuse it. You say, “No, I’m not gonna do this.”

You are responsible to keep certain things out of your mind, just as you are responsible to keep certain things in your mind. Jude tells you plainly, “Keep yourselves in the love of God.” How do you keep yourself in the love of God? Very simply, 1 John 5:3 says, “And this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.” You keep yourself in the love of God by keeping His commandments and His Word.

You are also responsible to keep certain things out of your mind. That is why you should never watch or look at pornography, or watch anything wicked and ungodly, whether at the movie theater or on television—I don't care what it is. David said, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes." We must understand that we are responsible to keep certain things out.

When discouraging, depressing, wicked, or otherwise unbiblical thoughts come into your mind, the very first thing you should do is reject, repudiate, and refuse them: "I'm not going to think on that." But if you catch yourself already entertaining a wicked and ungodly thought—thinking about it, desiring it, and enjoying it in your mind—you must not only repudiate it; you must repent, acknowledge, and confess that sin before the Lord. That is the second easiest way. The easiest way, of course, is simply to refuse it, to refuse to think about it.

The third way is this: if you find yourself engaging in that sin, there must be repudiation, repentance, and confession, and you must make things right with the person that you have sinned with or sinned against.

Our Lord says very plainly, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." Here is the situation: Brother Clay and I may be together. I have been talking, and the next thing I know, he has something against me. I do not have anything against him, but he has something against me. If I know that he has something against me, God says I am to go to him. I may say, "He ought to come to me and tell me about it." But if I know he has something against me, I am to go to him.

Now suppose Clay does not have anything against me, but I have something against him. What does God require me to do? Matthew 18:15 says, "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." I am to go to him privately and work it out. That is strange. If he has something against me, I am to go to him; if I have something against him, I am to go to him. In

other words, I cannot evade the situation. God says it is my responsibility.

Now, it is true that if there has been a misunderstanding or a conflict between us, we should be meeting halfway—he coming to me and I going to him. That is the way it really should be. But God is saying that it is our responsibility to work things out when we have sinned against someone. It is just that simple.

Now, sometimes, if it goes that far, we need help. You know what the Bible says in Galatians 6:1-2? Listen to this: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." If Steve has fallen, I am not to go to him with a haughty attitude and start laughing, "Ha, ha, boy,"

You got yourself into it this time, didn't you? No. God says, "Were it not for His grace, it could be me and not Steve." I am to go to him in the spirit of meekness, considering myself, knowing that it is only the grace of God that has kept me from falling into the same sin that he fell into. Sometimes we need help. That is all there is to it. So the easy way to avoid a lot of heartache and problems is, when a wicked, sinful thought comes into your mind, to reject it, refute it, and refuse it, saying, "I'm not going to have it."

Step 3: Replacement – Thinking on Biblical Things

How do you discipline your mind? The first way is by realization. The second way is by refutation. The third step in disciplining your mind is by replacement: learning that on which you must think, keep, and place in your mind.

With that, let us go back to our text in Philippians chapter 4, because here is what God tells us that we are to think about. Beginning with verse 6, he says, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just,

whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

We should have already seen in Philippians 2 and verse 5 that the Bible says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." The mind of Jesus Christ is in His Word. If I am to have the mind of Christ, I must have a biblical mindset. How did Jesus Christ think? He thought biblically and scripturally. Because He thought biblically and scripturally, His actions and conduct were biblical and scriptural. That is why He said in John 8 and verse 29, "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." Since Jesus Christ thought biblically, He acted biblically. So look in verse 6.

Paul says, "Be anxious for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." Most of us are so filled with anxiety. Here is an easy way to remember verse 6: be anxious for nothing, prayerful about everything, and thankful for anything. If you are anxious for nothing, prayerful about everything, and thankful for anything, then the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Most of us do not have peace because we are too anxious, we do not pray, and we are not thankful.

Now look at verse 8. Paul is tying this together: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

First of all, we are to think about that which is true. The Greek word is alethes, and it refers to that which is truthful, that which is true, that which is spoken in truth, and that which loves the truth. It comes from aletheia, the word "truth." Years ago, I remember taking Greek with a young man who fell in love with the word aletheia, so he named his daughter Aletheia. It simply means truth.

If you are contemplating, meditating, and thinking about truth, you are not thinking about gossip, slander, innuendos, muckraking, or lies. You are thinking about truth. That which is true should be

centered in our minds. Of course, we know that the Word of God is true, the Son of God is true, and the Holy Spirit is a Spirit of truth.

So he says, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true.” Secondly, “whatsoever things are honest.” The word “honest” is semnos in the Greek, and it literally means that which is grave, venerable, revered, and honorable; it relates to persons and deeds. We may think about honorable people and honorable acts, including biblical characters and biblical acts. Anything that is honest, venerable, or honorable is what we should think about.

Thirdly, he says, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just.” The word “just” is the Greek word dikaios, and it refers to that which is righteous, approved, and acceptable by God. It also refers to that which is upright, virtuous, and obedient to God. May I remind you that dikaios is also often translated as “just” and “righteous.”

It is actually the same word. Whatever is just is right, and whatever is right is just. You cannot have justice without righteousness, and you cannot have righteousness without justice. They are basically synonymous.

Fourthly, he says, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure.” The word “pure” is hagnos. Hagios is the word for “holy.” It refers to that which is pure, chaste, venerable, sacred, and holy; to modesty and being pure from carnality; and to that which is clean. We are to have clean thoughts, modest thoughts, pure thoughts, venerable thoughts, sacred thoughts, and holy thoughts.

The word “lovely” is often used casually: “That’s a lovely picture,” “a lovely dinner,” “a lovely child,” or “a lovely cup he has right there.” I laughed when I read that—not that I was tickled at the Word of God, but at the way we so often use the word “lovely.” We throw it around and oftentimes have no idea what it really means. But the word “lovely” in this instance happens to be prosphiles. It means that which is not just lovely, but that which is acceptable and pleasing.

Actually, this word is made up of two Greek words. Pros is a preposition meaning “to” or “toward,” and philes comes from the verb phileo, “I love,” or the noun philos, “love,” from which we also derive our English word “family” and “phileo.” So it actually means “to” or “toward” filial or family love. That means we can concentrate upon our family—not just our earthly family, but also our heavenly, spiritual family as well.

Remember now, this word means that which is pleasing, that which is acceptable unto God. Let me give you two passages. Colossians 1 and verse 10 says, “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.” How do we walk pleasing unto the Lord? In this instance, by being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. There is a reason for that, which I’ll point out a little later.

How about this one? First John 3:22 should really sit well with you: “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.” What are those things that are pleasing in His sight? Keeping His commandments, obeying His Word, and bringing our lives into conformity to His Word. That which is lovely, pleasing, acceptable, and agreeable to God—that is what he is talking about.

He says, “Whatsoever things are of good report.” The word there is euphemos. It means those things that sound well, those things that are uttered words of goodness and kindness, speaking favorably. We are to keep in our minds that which is of good report.

I remember reading years ago about a Christian lady who always had something good to say about everybody. Finally, a Christian brother said to her, “I suppose if the devil himself was around, you’d have something good to say about him.” She said, “Well, I can always say he’s always about his business.” Well, that’s true.

Think about how this could be applied in our lives. Mary says something to me, and I think, “How did she mean that? Was she putting me down? Was she slamming me?” If I am thinking about good reports, I would not be thinking that way. I would think, “She probably did not mean it like that. But if she did, it was probably for

my correction and probably for my instruction." If it really bothered me, the only way I could resolve it would be to ask her, "Mary, what did you mean by that?" She is the only one who knows what she meant, and I would have to take her word for it.

Good report means I am not always slamming everybody, and I am not always thinking the worst. Some people think everything is horrible and everything is the worst. No. He says we are to think on things that are good, of good report.

Look back in verse 8. He says, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." When the apostle Paul uses the word "if" in verse 8, and he uses it twice, it is not something doubtful or questionable. We often use "if" in a doubtful situation: "If you go uptown tomorrow, please bring me two gallons of milk." I may not go, may not have a car, or may be sick; but if I do go, I will bring the milk. In other words, we use the word "if" in a doubtful situation.

SCRIPTURE READING - Matthew 4:1-6 (KJV)

In the Greek, there are two words for "if." The first one is ei, spelled E-I, and usually we say it is ei with the indicative. When you have ei with the indicative, it is a fact; it is true. When you have ean—ean is how we would spell it—with a subjunctive, then that is questionable.

Matthew 4:1-6: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall

bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."

In each of these instances when the devil said, "If thou be the Son of God," it is ei with the indicative, which means you could translate that, "Since thou art the Son of God." The enemy was not questioning whether Jesus Christ was God in the flesh. He knew He was God. So he said, "Since thou art the Son of God, command these stones to be made bread. Since you're the Son of God, let the angels catch you."

Look down, if you would, at verse 8: "Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." The word "if" in verse 9 is ean. The devil doubted whether or not Jesus Christ would bow to him. It is not ei with the indicative. He was saying, "I don't think you're going to bow, but I'm going to try it anyhow." Of course, He would not bow, and He could not bow, because He was God in the flesh.

When you look back now to Philippians chapter 4 and verse 8, where it says, "if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things," the word "if" is ei with the indicative. In other words, it is "since there is virtue, and since there is praise, think on these things." There is no doubt that the six things listed in verse 8 are virtuous and praiseworthy. Think on these things. They are clean, clear, pure, and commanded.

When he says, "Think on these things," the Greek word is logizomai. This word conveys truth and reality. It means to count, reckon, or impute. If I logizomai, then I have 250 bucks in my bank account; I have 250 bucks in my bank account because this word deals with facts and reality. If I tried to convince myself that I had 250 bucks when I had only 20, I would be deceiving myself. I would not be logizomaing the way I should. I would not be reckoning or counting in reality; I would be daydreaming.

The word "think" is actually an imperative, which means it is a command. God says, "I command you to think on these things." Put these things together in your mind. How do you discipline your

mind? How do you control your thoughts? Whatever thoughts are in your mind—good, biblical, or bad—are the seeds from which all your actions and conduct will spring. Wicked thoughts produce wicked conduct. Biblical thoughts produce biblical conduct.

The Battle of the Mind and the Promise of Peace

Any thought, habit, or scheme that comes from your old nature—the way you used to do things before you were saved—needs to be put away. You need to put off the old man and put on the new man, which is renewed in your mind, which you have learned of Christ. You have been taught by Him that which is biblical in its place. So you have to realize that everything comes from the mind.

Secondly, you have to repudiate, refuse, and reject anything that is unbiblical. You realize it is coming from your mind, but if it is unbiblical, you reject it. This is hard work. How many times a day do you think things that are unbiblical? How many times a day are you tempted or tested? How many times do things pop into your mind that you should never have in your mind? You have to be consistent and constant, repudiating every one of those things. Why?

The answer is because your flesh is not going to give up. Your flesh will not lie silently and quietly upon the altar as did Isaac. It is going to scream, cry, and beg to be fulfilled, and you are going to have to fight. What does the Bible say in Galatians 5 and verse 17? "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. They are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." The word "lusteth" means it fights against.

So you have to say, "I'm not going to give in or give up. I'm going to reject it, and then replace it. I'm going to think about the biblical alternative." If I am tempted to steal: "Lord, I reject that. I refuse that. Thou hast said, 'Thou shalt not steal.'" What is the positive? Ephesians chapter 4 says: "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." It is not only honest work, but a generous attitude. I am willing to give to someone who needs. Every time you have a wicked thought, say, "I'll not only refuse it, I'm going to replace it with that which is biblical, holy, and

just." This is a gymnastic exercise of the mind. You have to work at it over and over, day after day. And you cannot put off an old

You cannot remove a habit unless you put on a new habit in its place. If you say, "I'm going to quit this," and do quit it, but do not put a new habit in its place, sooner or later you will run back to the old way. You have to replace what you remove. When you get ready for bed, you take your clothes off and put your pajamas on. You have to take off before you put on. That is exactly what he is saying: put off the old man and put on the new man.

Here is an application: muscle memory makes exercise and learning very easy. There are things I can do smoothly and as quickly as they could be done by an eighty-year-old man because I have muscle memory. Mental memory is the same. It took years to develop the muscle memory in the physical area where I am pretty good, which means that mental exercise will take years as well.

In this exercise, you learn to live by principles. You do not live by your emotions, feelings, or circumstances; you live by biblical principles. You learn that biblical truth is to guide and direct you in every area of life, and that the way of peace is through obedience. Isaiah 26:3 says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee."

When you say, "I realize this is in my mind. I repudiate it. I am going to replace it with something good," you are not only increasing mental memory and exercising your mind; you are learning to rely upon and lean upon Christ and His Word. This is the way of peace. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked, but "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." I am learning to think biblically and to keep my mind upon Jesus Christ.

A second application is that it is impossible to take a switch to our minds. We cannot discipline our minds by using anything physical. However, if we continue to disobey, fail to put off the old man, and fail to put on the new man, our heavenly Father will use the rod of correction to enable us to change our thinking. My earthly father changed my thinking many times when I was a boy.

You know what the Bible says in Micah 6:9? "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." Just as my earthly father whipped the living

daylights out of me, as a Christian, if you continue to do what is wrong and wicked and harbor ungodly, unbiblical thoughts, God says, “I know how to take a switch to you to make you change your mind.” You can change your thinking, and your thinking will then change your conduct.

Think about this verse. In Isaiah 55:8–9, God said, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” God is not going to condescend to think the way we think, because the way we think is wicked and wrong. We must humble ourselves and learn to think the way He thinks.

The only way we can do that is by renewing our minds, putting off the old man, putting on the new man, being taught of Him, learning Christ, and learning to discipline our minds, discipline our thinking, and control our thoughts.

In 2 Corinthians 10, the Apostle Paul says, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." Your stronghold happens to be your mind. "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

So how many thoughts are you and I allowed that are unbiblical and ungodly? None. We are to bring every thought into captivity to Jesus Christ. Your mind is your stronghold. You have been taught things all your life that are wrong. Now you need to cast down those imaginations, every high thought that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Jesus Christ.

This is where you have to learn to replace. In 2 Peter 1, verses 3 and 4, we read: "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be

partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

How do we escape the corruption that is in the world through lust? Go back to verse 3: "through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." How do we get that knowledge? By renewing our mind, by being taught by Him. According to verse 3, it is "of his divine power"—the Holy Spirit—who has given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness. There is no reason why you and I should not be living holy, godly lives, because He has given us everything that we

What we must do is discipline our minds, control our thoughts, and bring our thoughts and our lives into obedience and conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. You are not going to discipline your mind in one day, one week, or one year. It is going to be a lifelong process until you die. You are going to have to fight every day. What did the Apostle Paul say in 1 Corinthians 9? “I die daily.” Sometimes we have to die hourly, sometimes minute by minute, moment by moment. It is a fight to keep our minds disciplined.

Once you learn these principles, it will get a little easier because you will do it without thinking about it once you get this mental memory. But it still will be a fight. You will still have to do it every day. We have to control our thoughts and control our minds so that we may live a holy, godly, obedient life. Then the peace of God that passeth all understanding is going to keep us because we will be walking pleasing unto Him.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and for Your truth. I ask, Lord, that You would help us and teach us. In Christ’s name, Amen.

A question was asked: why did the translators just use the word “since” in Philippians 4:8? Was the word “sense,” S-E-N-S-E, meant, or “since,” S-I-N-C-E?

Back in those days, you could not get into college unless you could read, write, and speak Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. Everybody knew it back then, especially. When you stop and think about it, I think it was Sam Adams, who graduated from the university at fourteen and

was sent as a diplomat to Russia at the age of fourteen. Those people, usually by the time they were three and four years old, could speak, read, and write not only English, but Greek, Hebrew, and Latin. Most of those folks were scholars back then.

Anybody with a Strong's lexicon or Strong's dictionary can look up all these words and see them. Strong's and Young's will do the same thing. Everybody knew back then, in 1611, when this was translated. I forget the man's first name, but his last name was Andrews. There is a wonderful book called God's Secretaries. The man who was head of the translation team when the King James Bible was translated spoke, read, and wrote twenty-one different languages, about fifteen or sixteen of them dead languages. You need to read that book, God's Secretaries.

It is astounding, the scholarship those men had. That was commonplace in those days. It was basically assumed that everybody could read Greek. There are many things in the Greek language upon which we place our own interpretation because we are familiar with a word, but that does not mean that is what the particular word meant in Greek.

For instance, take the word "friend." The word "friend" is basically from philos, which means family, filial, or love of the family. I could say, "Steve is a good friend; Clay is a good friend." But you remember when Judas came up and betrayed our Lord with a kiss? Jesus looked at Judas and said, "Friend, betrayest thou me with a kiss?" The word "friend" was not philos. It was hetairos. The hetairos, or the hetairai, in Greek culture were prostitutes. They were acquaintances, but they were not the wife. So our Lord looked at Judas and said, "Hetairos. You're an acquaintance. You're not a friend. You've walked with me three years, but you don't really know me."

There is so much that we lose in English, but it is there in the Greek, and we have to work it out slowly but surely. You can see it in the context. In Spanish, the word for "yes" is sí, but sí can also be used for "if": Si quiere, "if you want something." I remember reading in Proverbs about the darkness with the young man who is tempted. It talks about the night. In my Spanish translation, it spoke of la noche in darkness, in tinieblas y oscuridad. It is like saying there is

darkness of light—physical darkness—and also spiritual darkness, a depth of darkness. That is a fact. It seems that King James really understood the languages.

The first rule of hermeneutics—the first way to consider Scripture—is linguistically. What does the word actually mean? Most people never take the time to look up the meaning of words. That is what Strong's is all about. Lexicons, Greek lexicons, are there. Young's Dictionary is there. These words are easy to look up, and it is easy to find out what they actually mean. So it is our laziness, and the fact that we have never really been taught to study. That is what it amounts to. It is all part of the battle.

Let us be dismissed in prayer. Father, thank You again for Your love, Your grace, and mercy. Help us to love Thee, Lord, and live for Thee and honor Thee. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 18

What You Should Do When You Do Not Know What To do

August 17, 2025

Introduction: The Problem of Hasty Actions

Proverbs 25:8 sets the stage for what I want to share: “Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.” The message title is, “What You Should Do When You Do Not Know What To Do.”

Many times we get ourselves into what we would call an absolute mess. When we act hastily, it is usually because we have done so in the excitement of the moment. We act without thinking, without planning, and certainly without consulting or seeking the will of God. Consequently, we often get ourselves into messes and simply do not know what to do. We do not know how to extricate ourselves from that which we have gotten ourselves into.

I hope you have noticed in life that not everything always turns out the way you want or hope it will. You have heard me say many

times that a problem is not a problem if you know what to do. The problem with problems is that we do not know what to do; therefore, it is a problem to us. Many times we react instead of responding, and the situations in which we find ourselves are those for which we have never planned or even contemplated. We just happen to be in them.

Look again at Proverbs 25:8: "Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame." The word "hastily" means to go forth quickly, excitedly, and speedily. He says, do not rush into things. "Strive"—"go not forth hastily to strive"—can refer to a physical altercation or to a verbal altercation as well. When we run hastily into something like this, the end result is that we will be shamed. The word "shamed" is the Hebrew word "kalam." It literally means to be put to shame, to be dishonored, to be confounded, to be humiliated, and basically to be put to confusion.

Therefore, based upon this verse, it is biblical and right to think ahead, plan ahead, and prepare, especially concerning how we should respond to certain situations. Have you ever wondered or thought about what you would do in certain situations and circumstances?

The Need to Prepare for Inevitable Trials

I am not just talking about temptation. I am talking about situations in which we are inevitably going to find ourselves, not only as individuals, but also as families. Have you ever considered what you would do in what we would call a medical emergency? Have you ever considered what you would do when you endured the loss of a child? Have you ever considered what you would do in the loss of a spouse? Have you ever thought about what you would do when you discover that you are dying?

Each of these situations would certainly be devastating. Each needs to be contemplated, and our hearts need to be prepared for all of them. I have never lost a child, thankfully. I know Steve and Lorraine have lost two. But if I live long enough, that will probably be an inevitable result. Thankfully, I have never lost a spouse. I know you have, Dinah, that is for sure. But if I live long enough, I probably will face that situation as well.

As I was preparing this message, I thought about Alice, of course. If she died before I did, the loss would be very grievous and devastating. But as I was thinking about it, I also had to smile—not because I would enjoy the fact that she was gone, but because, if the Lord took her first, there would be many, many treasure hunts for me.

I do not mean that she has buried treasure. I mean that I do not know where anything is except my clothes, my books, and my weapons. I do not know where she keeps the dog treats. I do not know where the honey is stored. I do not even know what is in the refrigerator; if I go there, I have to ask her where something is.

The truth is that Alice takes care of everything around the house, not I. I simply have no idea where anything is except what I need on a daily basis. I have often said that if the Lord took her first, I would have to marry forty people—forty ladies—just to take her place, because she probably does the work of forty people around the house. It certainly would not be delightful to lose her, that is for sure.

One thing for sure, I tell everybody: if the Lord took her first and I remarried, I would not really have to marry a woman by the name of Alice, because I call that name a hundred times a day. I got tickled when I was thinking about it. I said, I could just see me remarrying and marrying a woman by the name of Kathy or Elaine or Judy or something like that. I would look at her and say, “Well, I love you, Alice.”

That actually happened. I taught a young couple in college many years ago, and they started courting and finally got married. Alice and I went to a conference, and there was this young couple. I knew each of them because I had taught them in college before they were married, but Alice had never met them. The young man was introducing his wife to Alice, and he introduced her not by her name but by the name of an old girlfriend. You should have seen the look on her face. He probably went for a month without a goodnight kiss, I can assure you. I had to correct him and tell him his wife's name. It embarrassed him as well, that is for sure.

When we contemplate circumstances like this, certainly they are not delightful to think about. On the other hand, we know that in

reality we are going to face them. We also have to understand that there are people who have gone through all these situations before. Usually, when we get into those kinds of situations, we somehow think that we are the only ones who have suffered or gone through them, but that is not true. The Word of God teaches us very clearly that it is possible to learn from the examples of others who have gone through suffering situations and come out with a shining example. It is also possible to learn from those who went through these same situations and came out with an unsuccessful example, in the sense that we are not to emulate them at all.

Biblical Examples of Successful Suffering

In James, chapter five, verses 10 and 11, the apostle said, "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." In other words, there are individuals who have gone through these same situations very successfully. It does not mean that we are going to go through these things, but, on the other hand, we may. It depends upon the providence of God.

In Hebrews chapter 11, beginning in verse 32, we have some positives to begin with: "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."

So far, everything has been successful and everything has been a blessing. Then, in verse 35, he says, "Women received their dead raised to life again," which is a good thing. But notice this: "and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being

destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) They wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

If you investigate these passages, including James 5, Hebrews 11, and many others in Scripture, you find that each of these successful examples was successful based upon faith, obedience, submission, and worship.

When You Lose a Child

These truths flow together. If you have faith, you will have submission and obedience. If you have submission and obedience, you will have worship. Worship will be the result of faith, submission, and obedience. Always, you will have worship.

What I want to do today is show you from the Bible some biblical examples, so that we would have something to think about, pray about, and conform our lives unto. Usually, when we think about these situations, they come upon us unexpectedly. No one really wakes up in the morning and says, “I plan to die today,” or, “I plan to have a medical emergency today.” It does not work like that.

I am going to give you at least five things. What should you do when you lose a child? One of the most heartbreaking experiences is the loss of a child. Probably more heartbreaking than the loss of a child is losing the child either at birth or just a few months after birth. Parents who truly love and desire their children always plan in their minds and envision the future of that child. Let me give you some ideas of why I am suggesting this.

What to Do When You Lose a Child: Worship Like David

Have you ever thought about Manoah and his wife? An angel came to Manoah’s wife and said that she was going to conceive and have a child, whose name was to be called Samson. He was to be a Nazarite from his birth, and he would begin to deliver Israel from the Philistines. The woman told Manoah, and Manoah asked the Lord to

send the angel back. The angel appeared again and gave Manoah and his wife some of the same truths. Once again, he warned the woman not to drink or have anything she should not have, because the child was to be a Nazarite. Can you imagine what went through their minds when God specifically said, “This child is going to be a deliverer for Israel. He’s going to deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines”? Undoubtedly, a million thoughts were running through their minds as to how that was to be done.

Consider Zacharias and Elizabeth. They were childless as well. While Zacharias was performing his priestly duties, an angel came and told him that Elizabeth was going to conceive. The child's name should be John, John the Baptist. He was going to be the forerunner of Jesus Christ, turning the hearts of the children back to the fathers, preparing the way for Christ, and turning many back to the Lord.

Undoubtedly, there were a thousand things going through their minds: What kind of child was this going to be, and how was this going to be accomplished? I am sure that they planned and thought about these things even before John was ever born.

Let me show you one more. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Luke 2. I am sure you know this passage, but there are a couple of verses that I want to point out. Look in Luke chapter 2, beginning there in verse 25.

SCRIPTURE READING - Luke 2:25-38 (KJV)

> And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

> And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.
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> And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.
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> Now the question is this: what in the world do you think went through Joseph and Mary's minds when Simeon blessed the Lord, and he said that this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel and for a sign? And then he looked at Mary and said, "Yea, a sword also shall pierce thine own heart." Obviously, clearly there were many thoughts going on in their hearts and their minds as well.

I've just given you these examples to set you up to see the expectations that parents have for their children and the things that go through their minds. But look in your Bibles, if you would, to 2 Samuel chapter 12, because here is the illustration of David. Many of you know this, but I want to point out something exceedingly clear and plain.

David lost this child, which had been conceived in adultery with Bathsheba. God said to David, "For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." And David said unto Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan said unto David, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die."

Nathan departed unto his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. The elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them.

It came to pass on the seventh day—the seventh day on the dirt, seven days fasting—that the child died. The servants of David feared to tell him, for they said, "Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead?"

When David perceived that the child was dead, he asked, "Is the child dead?" They said, "He is dead." Then David arose from the earth, washed, anointed himself, changed his apparel, came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped. Then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. His servants asked, "What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread."

And he said, “While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.”

Go back to verse 20 because it shows particularly what you should do in such a situation. Here is what David did: “Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshipped.” Isn’t that interesting? In a time of grief, in a time of bereavement, at the loss of a child, when he realized the child was dead, he arose, dressed himself, went to the house of God, and worshipped. The Hebrew word for “worshipped” here is “shachah.”

It literally means to bow down, to prostrate oneself, and to depress or lower yourself. In other words, this word particularly refers to what you and I would call submission and humility. This word involves submission, humility, and reverence, for it respects God’s sovereignty, His rule, His reign, and His supremacy. It is to

bow in obedience before Him, honoring His will and being grateful that His will is being accomplished.

When you get to the New Testament, the word for worship is in the Greek, and it is “proskuneo.” “Pros” is a preposition meaning “to” or “toward.” “Kuneo” is the verb, and the noun is “kuon,” which actually means a dog. So “proskuneo” means, “I act like a dog toward.” What does a dog do? A dog kisses the hand of his master and yields to his master. Alice can tell you that I can hold out the back of my hand and any of my dogs will come up and lick it. Usually, when I speak to them, they roll over, showing me their throat, chest, and vital organs. When they roll over, they are saying, “I trust you. You’re not going to harm me. You’re not going to take advantage of me. Here I am. I’m yours.”

That's exactly what the word worship means. When we bow before God, when we humble ourselves before Him, we're saying, "I trust you. You know what is best. I will kiss the back of your hand. You are my master. I'm willing to roll over and show you my heart, show you my inward, show you everything because you're my God and I trust you." That's what it means to worship. You bow before Him. You humble yourself before Him. You reverence Him. You recognize His sovereignty, His rule, and His reign.

In Matthew 9, verse 18, we read: "While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live." My daughter is now dead. But what did he do when he came to Jesus Christ? He came and he worshipped.

What to Do When Circumstances Are Against You: Worship Like David

So what do you do when you don't know what to do? You worship. You bow before God because He is the only one that can extricate you from the situation and circumstance in which you find yourself.

What should you do when circumstances are against you? In 2 Samuel chapter 15, Absalom, David's son, had rebelled against him, run him off the throne, and was seeking to kill him. The Bible tells us that Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. There was

conspiracy, and Absalom was the head of it. Even David's own counselor Ahithophel joined in the conspiracy against David. "And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom. And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom. And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword. And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint." He leaves, and the people leave with him. He leaves ten women, which were his concubines, to keep the house.

Absalom was coming, and David knew that he would not only kill him but everyone who was with him. Everyone was in a hurry to escape before Absalom arrived with the men who followed him. There were many with Absalom; it was a great conspiracy. But while David was fleeing, he stopped to do one very important thing. Second Samuel 15:32 says, “And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him, with his coat rent, and earth upon his head.” In all the haste to get out of the city, David reached the top of the mount and stopped to worship God.

This was part and parcel of David’s chastisement. Do you remember what God said? “You did this thing secretly. I’m going to do this thing openly before all Israel.” Of course, you know what Absalom did when he went into his father’s concubines. David understood this. Yet, in an extreme and dangerous circumstance, he stopped and worshipped God. He kissed the back of his hand and was saying, “I’m yours. Do with me as you please. Do with me as you will. You’re the only one who can extricate me from this situation. You’re the only one that can save me. I’m going to worship you.”

In extreme and dangerous situations, we should always stop and worship, recognizing that He is the only one who can deliver us.

David’s sin was great, but so was ours. I may not have done what David did, but it takes only one sin to make a sinner, and only one

sin to merit death. I am thankful that God has not given me exactly what I deserve. I hope you are thankful for that as well. The Word of God says in Psalm 103:10, “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” I am thankful that God has not dealt with me according to my sins, neither rewarded me according to my iniquities.

So, in the most dangerous situation, they worshipped. In the New Testament, in Matthew chapter 14, the disciples were in a boat, and our Lord was asleep in that boat. They were rowing when a storm arose, and they believed that they were going to drown.

They go to our Lord and say, “Lord, carest thou not that we perish?” And He says, “O ye of little faith.” Then He arises, rebukes the wind, rebukes the sea, and everything's a calm. Here is what the Bible says in Matthew 14:33: “Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.” They worshipped Him in a most dangerous situation.

What the Word of God is teaching us is this: We have to learn to see the hand of God in His providence. We have to see the hand of God in all these circumstances and situations that arise. When we see it, we worship.

The third point is this: Before you say, “This doesn't apply to me,” you better hang on. What should you do when you lose everything? What should you do when you don't know what to do when you lose everything?

What to Do When You Lose Everything: Worship Like Job

The truth is, most of us have never been in such an extremity. We have lost money, pets, children, jobs, or family, yet we've not lost everything, or at least everything at one time. But there was one man who did: Job. When you stop and think about this, he lost all of his children and all of his possessions in one day. One day he was exceedingly rich, and the next day

SCRIPTURE READING - Job 1:1-14 (KJV)

> He was a pauper. Moreover, he was afflicted in his body with huge sores and rotting flesh.

“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east. And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord.

“Now there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house: and there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: and the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.”

While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, "The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee." While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, "The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee." While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, "Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house: and, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee."

Here, one after another, before Job could ever even think what had happened, someone came along and said, "It's not just the oxen, it's the sheep. It's not just the sheep, it's the asses. It's not just the asses, it's the camels. It's not just the camels, now your children are dead." It was not just in one day; it was all at one time.

What does Job do? Look in verse 20: "Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Now, this next verse is the one that really gets me. It is not just that Job worshipped; he did. "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

Stop and think about this. Many have lost all of their possessions in floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes, but most have not lost ten children at one time, plus everything that they have. Job did not have time to grieve for one tragedy when another hit him. He did not have time to think. One was piled quickly upon the other. What in the world do you do in such a case? What do you do when you do not know what to do?

The answer is that you should worship. Job fell down and worshipped. He said, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken

away; blessed be the name of the Lord." And then he said, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." So Job did not whine. He did not complain.

When You Lose a Spouse

He did not become bitter, hateful, or ugly. He did not get out of control. No, he recognized God's hand in providence. He humbled himself, kissed the hand of God, and said, "You're too loving to be unkind and too wise to make a mistake. I'm going to bow before you and simply worship."

Worship. I have news for you: the average Christian could not put up with what Job went through, because we do not have the faith of Job. We do not have the maturity of Job. We do not have the integrity of Job.

What should you do when you lose a spouse? I suppose this is probably one of the most difficult circumstances, especially when you have lived together for fifty, sixty, or seventy years. I have read where young people have gotten married, left the church on their way to their honeymoon, and been involved in a wreck in which both were killed. I have also read of wrecks in which the groom was killed but not the bride, or the bride was killed but not the groom. I know and realize that is devastating. But once you live with someone for fifty to seventy years, it is even more difficult. Why?

Because you learn to think alike. You learn to speak alike. You learn to do the same things together. I usually say that I can tell you what Alice is thinking before she ever speaks, and she can always tell me what I am thinking before I ever speak. It is exceedingly difficult after a period of time.

What to Do When You Lose a Spouse: Obey and Submit Like Ezekiel

But let me point out what to do. In Ezekiel chapter 24, beginning with verse 15, Ezekiel had a very beautiful and loving wife, and she was the desire of his eyes. In fact, that is exactly what God called her. God used Ezekiel's wife to teach Israel a lesson. Just as his wife was the desire of his eyes, the temple was the desire of Israel's eyes.

Ezekiel was going to lose his wife, and Israel was going to lose the temple.

This is what this is all about. In Ezekiel 24, beginning in verse 15, we read: “Also the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke”—that is, his wife. God was going to take her with a stroke—“yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Forbear to cry, make no mourning for the dead, bind the tire of thine head upon thee, and put on thy shoes upon thy feet, and cover not thy lips, and eat not the bread of men.” In other words, do not lament. Now look at verse 18: “So I spake unto the people in the morning: and at even my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded.” Isn’t that amazing? He preached in the morning, his wife died that evening, and in the morning he did as he was commanded.

I realize that our text does not say Ezekiel worshipped. But faith leads to submission and obedience, and submission and obedience lead to worship. What happened when God took Ezekiel’s wife? He obeyed. He submitted to God and did exactly what God commanded him. That means he worshipped God. He honored God, reverenced God, kissed the hand of God, and said, “All is well.” It is difficult to lose a spouse, but we have to recognize and realize the hand of God and submit to Him.

What should you do when you know that you are dying? Many die without even knowing that they are dying; many die instantly. Years ago, while traveling from a meeting, I was talking to someone on the phone—Harold. I hung up, and within five minutes a preacher called me back and said, “Harold is dead.” I said, “What? Don’t joke like that. I just talked to him.” He said, “I know. When he hung up the phone, he dropped dead. The aneurysm had burst.” He did not have the opportunity even to know that he was dying. But some do.

What to Do When You Know You're Dying: Worship Like Jacob

I am thankful for that, and I pray that God will give us the realization that, when we are dying, we may know it so that we may do one very important thing: worship. Hebrews 11:21 says, “By faith Jacob, when

he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." What did Jacob do when he was dying? He worshipped God. I do not know about you, but to me, dying seems like a very appropriate time to worship.

I have often thought about this. If God would be so pleased to let me know a little while before I die, just so I could speak to my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, but most of all so I could worship one more time and thank Him for life, health, and everything He has done; kiss His hand one last time and say, "Lord, you're right. And you're too loving to be unkind and too wise to make a mistake." I pray that my last act would be to worship Him as I die.

Let me make some applications. If worship is demanded in what we would call exceedingly dire and even dangerous situations, is it not also demanded and beneficial in all circumstances? We are given opportunities daily to worship, humble ourselves, reverence and honor God, and kiss His hand and thank Him for all His graciousness and kindness.

Applications: Cultivate a Habit of Worship

So the question is, do we take advantage of that? Whatever you have, whether little or much, God gave it to you. Whatever you are, God made you. Whatever life and breath you have, God gave you. Whatever you are capable of enjoying, God allowed you to enjoy. So why not worship Him? Why not bow and thank Him for it?

I enjoy creation. I often thank God for trees. I love trees and animals, and I thank God for my animals. I even tell my animals I love them, and I tell the Lord I love Him. Although I do hunt, I have often said that if every deer in the woods would come and allow me to pet them, I would never shoot one of them. I realize animals can be taken for food; I understand that. I am just saying, I love animals.

Someone asked me, "How many of your cows do you eat?" I do not eat my cows; they are pets. "Then why do you raise them?" Because I love them, and I want my pets. All I am trying to say is that we can worship God, thank God, and bless God in a multitude of ways.

Here is the next application: You must consider this question: What makes you think that you will worship God in exceedingly dire and dangerous circumstances when you will not worship Him when you are not in dire and dangerous circumstances? If you can worship Him freely and easily right now, without a dire and dangerous circumstance, why are you not doing it? Why in the world would you wait until you are in such a dire, dangerous circumstance?

What you and I need to learn is a perpetual habit of worship. If we are in the habit of worshiping God daily—yea, sometimes hourly—it will come naturally and easily when we are in a dire, dangerous situation. But we cannot expect to all of a sudden think about worshiping

God puts us in a dire and dangerous situation if we are not accustomed to worshiping Him before we get into that situation. God gives us opportunities. The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” In everything, give thanks. You can thank Him for a good night's rest, for sleep, for health, for life, and for a multitude of things. As long as you are thanking Him, you are recognizing Him, worshiping Him, and letting Him know that you are kissing the back of His hand, because He is sovereign and has given you all these things.

Worship is never out of style, and we do not simply worship publicly on the Lord's day. We worship privately every day, and sometimes every hour. So what you should do when you do not know what to do is worship God and submit to Him. Think about all those tests and trials in the Bible and how God delivered them. Daniel was in the lions' den overnight. I do not know how long the three Hebrew children were in the fiery furnace, but probably not that long. Job was probably suffering a whole lot longer than Daniel, and a whole lot longer than the three Hebrew children. But it was God who brought each one of them out.

What did Daniel say? “The Lord has sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths.” What did the three Hebrew children say? They did not bow or worship Nebuchadnezzar's false god. Nebuchadnezzar saw the fourth man walking around in the fire. And what did Job say? “Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and

naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." We need to learn to worship.

What should we do when we do not know what to do? The answer is, worship the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, in thy name, we commit ourselves unto thee, and we ask that you would teach us. Give us a heart for worship, a heart that loves thee and is willing to submit to thee, and the ability to kiss thy hand and say, "Yes, Lord, you're right, and we're yours, and you have the absolute right to do with us as you please." Give us a worshipful heart, a worshipful disposition, a worshipful attitude, and a worshipful life. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

Source Notes

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Chapter 2: How Not To Live Out Your Remaining Days
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Chapter 7: Are You Concerned?
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