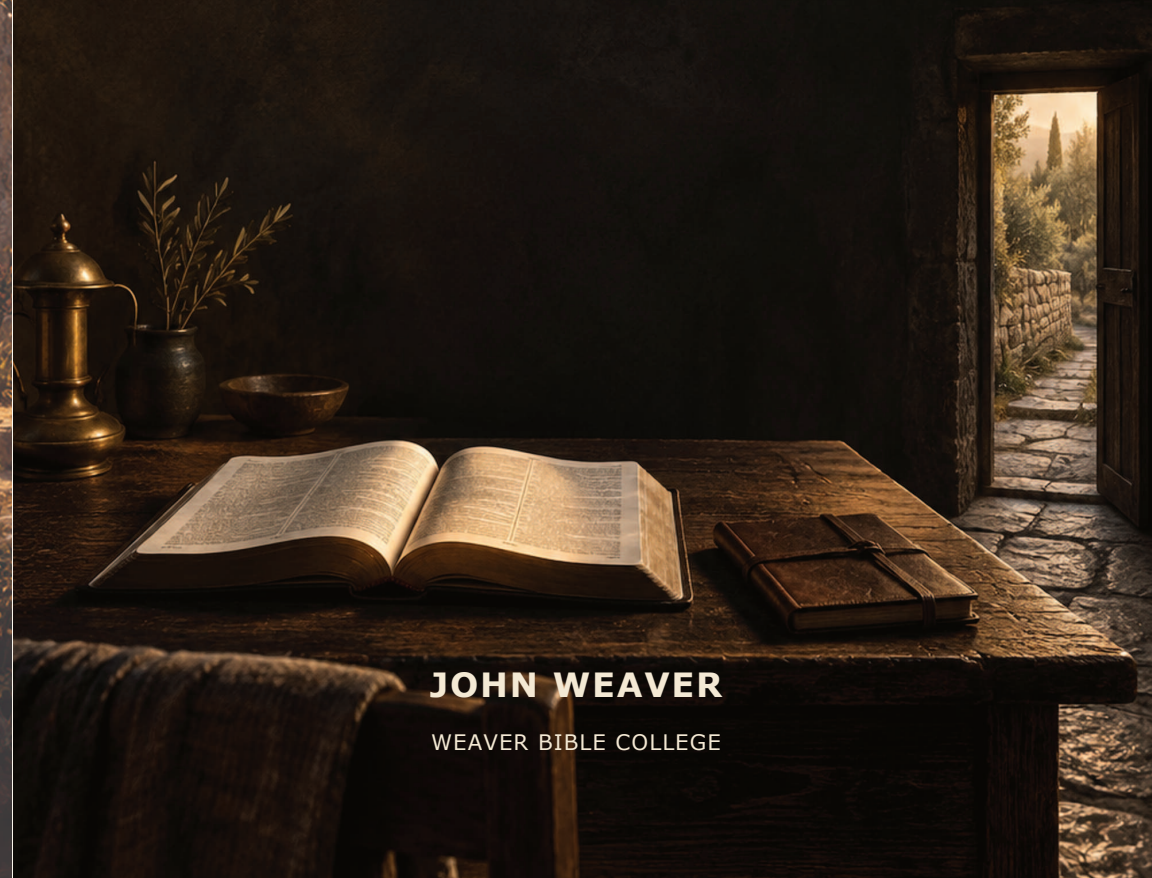
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"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."

PSALM 119:105



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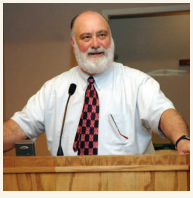
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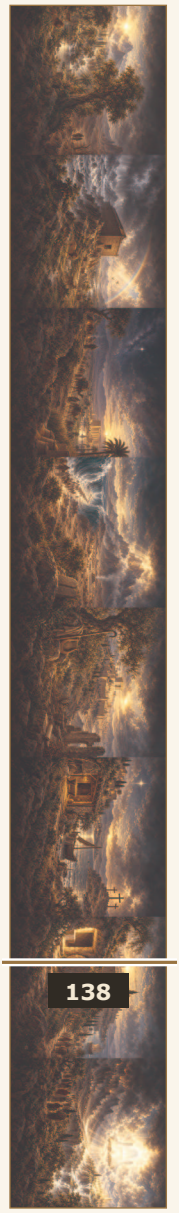
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CHAPTER 1

The Death of Private Dee Jobe

March 18, 2001

The Death of Private DeWitt Smith Jobe

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Samuel 11:1-8 (KJV)

Today I am going to preach an unusual message rather than a normal exposition of Scripture, but I think it will be enlightening and will illustrate some principles from Scripture. The message concerns the death of Private DeWitt Smith Jobe, who was a Confederate Medal of Honor recipient.

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 at eventide 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. 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? And David sent messengers and took her. And she came in unto him, and he lay with her, for she was purified from her uncleanness, and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child. And David sent to Joab, saying, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David. And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded of him how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered. And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. And Uriah departed out of the king's house, and there followed him a mess of meat from the king. But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house. When they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down into his house, David said unto Uriah, Camest thou not from thy journey?

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Samuel 11:1-27 (KJV)

Why didst thou not go down into thine house? And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah abide in tents. And my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields. Shall I then go into mine house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As thou livest and as thy soul livest, I will not do this thing. And David said to Uriah, Tarry here today also, and tomorrow I will let thee depart. So Uriah abode in Jerusalem that day and the morrow. And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him, and he made him drunk. And at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house. And it came to pass in the morning that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die.

And it came to pass when Joab observed the city that he assigned Uriah to a place where he knew that valiant men were. And the men of the city went out and fought with Joab, and there fell some of the people of the servants of David, and Uriah the Hittite died also. Then Joab sent and told David all things concerning the war, and charged the messenger, saying, When

> thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war unto the king, if so be that the king's wrath arise, and he say unto thee, Wherefore approached ye so nigh unto the city when ye did fight?
>
> Knew ye not that they would shoot from the wall? Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman cast a piece of a millstone upon him from the wall, that he died in Thebez? Why went ye nigh the wall? Then say thou, Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. So the messenger went and came and showed David all that Joab had sent him for. And the messenger said unto David, Surely the men prevailed against us, and came out unto us into the field, and we were upon them even unto the entering of the gate. And the shooters shot from off the wall upon thy servants, and some of the king's servants be dead, and thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also. Then David said unto the messenger, Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another. Make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it, and encourage thou him.

Introduction: The Righteous Do Not Always Win

One of the few good things that can be said for Hollywood movies is that, at least in a movie, you can make the good guy win every time. However, in real life, good guys do not win every time. One of the most frequently asked questions is, Why do the righteous suffer? In fact, the entire book of Job centers around the righteous suffering.

In 2 Samuel chapter 11, David, who normally is what you and I would call the good guy, is now the villain. Here is the one instance where David deviated from the clear, concise word and will of God. David had not only committed adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, and made Uriah drunk, which was a sin as well, but he was now definitely planning to murder Uriah. He was doing so with the sword of the children of Ammon.

In this story, in each and every instance, Uriah was the godly, obedient, and righteous individual. In fact, Uriah was more godly, more obedient, and more righteous than David. And yet, it was Uriah who lost his life.

Uriah's Righteousness and Sacrifice

It was Uriah who was willing to suffer with the people of God. When David called for Uriah and thought to cover his sin, instead of Uriah going home, Uriah slept at the door of the house of David. When David asked him, Why in the world did you not go down and sleep in your own bed with your wife and eat your own food? I said, food down there? Why did you not go? He said, Is the Lord living? The ark and the people of God, and Joab my commander, they're suffering in the field. They're being deprived. And shall I go and enjoy myself while God's people are suffering? God forbid. I'm not about to do this thing.

Uriah was willing to sacrifice for the people of God, for the good of the country, and for God's honor and glory. He was courageous, bold, brave, and righteous. And yet he died, killed by the enemy.

There is a truth that you and I need to understand: good guys do not always finish first. Sometimes they come in last according to the reckoning of the world. But there comes a time and a day when God will always set the record straight. Deuteronomy 32:35 says, "Notice what the Word of God says."

God's Vengeance is Certain

“To me belongeth vengeance and recompense. Their foot shall slide in due time, for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.” Over and over in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, the Word of God declares, “Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay.” Vengeance belongs to God.

Just because the wicked get away with things temporarily does not mean that they have escaped permanently. Their foot shall slide in due time. God says, “The day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.” In other words, when God gets ready for payback time, it shall come quickly and suddenly upon them.

God also says, “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me. I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up mine hand to

heaven, and say, I live forever." Then He declares, "If I whet my glittering sword, that is, if I sharpen my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh, and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy." When He whets His glittering sword, He will make it devour much flesh and make it drunk with blood.

The truth of the matter is this: vengeance belongs to God. Just because God does not give an individual His pay on Friday does not mean that individual has escaped the judgment of God. God's paydays are not always on Friday.

God may, in His righteous judgment, send forth His vengeance immediately, delay it, or even wait unto eternity. But sooner or later, the vengeance and judgment of God shall fall upon the wicked. First Timothy 5:24 says, "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid."

Private DeWitt Smith Jobe

Judgment May Be Immediate or Delayed

Here you have a comparison. God says there are wicked people whose sins everyone knows, and they are judged and dealt with. But there are other wicked people whose sins are unknown; their sins follow after them. In other words, God will get them on judgment day. Likewise, some people's good deeds are made known, and they receive their reward. Others are good, godly, and holy, yet never receive a reward in this life. God says their good deeds follow after, and He will reward them as well.

God may bless or curse in time and history, or reserve it for eternity. But the truth is that good guys do not always win in time. A lot of times we do, but not always. Uriah certainly did not win in time, because he lost his life when he should never have lost it.

The Story of Private DeWitt Smith Jobe

Another good man who did not win in time was Private DeWitt Smith Jobe, commonly referred to as D. Jobe. Dee was one of the famous Coleman scouts. Sam Davis, whose death I have mentioned, was the young man hanged at twenty-one years of age as a spy when he was not a spy. He was captured in military uniform, which entitled him to be treated as a prisoner of war. General G. M. Dodge wanted information from him and threatened to hang him as a spy if he did not provide it. Sam Davis refused, and was hanged until dead.

Dee was one of the famous Coleman scouts. Captain Henry Shaw was head of the scouts and had taken the name E. Coleman as an alias. As E. Coleman, he traveled in and out among the northern camps, posing as an itinerant herb doctor while gathering information for the Confederate Army.

It was the purpose and duty of each scout to gather as much information as possible for the guidance of superior officers. The scouts were known as the eyes and ears of the army. They were not spies, because they usually stayed in full military uniform. They were in enemy territory, scouting for information to give their superior officer. Sometimes they traveled in pairs, sometimes in larger groups, but more often alone. They preferred to travel alone and were well acquainted with danger.

They understood that death lurked around every bend in the road, yet they were willing to risk their lives for the advancement of the Confederate cause. D. Jobe knew Sam Davis, the other Coleman scout who had given his life for the Confederacy. As noted earlier, Sam had been hanged as a spy by General Dodge. Sam and Dee grew up together in Rutherford County, Tennessee: Sam in Smyrna and Dee in Mechanicsville, approximately eight miles away. In that area, most families were related, or at least knew one another. Many of the Coleman scouts knew each other. Sam Davis had a half-brother, John G. Davis, who was also a Coleman Scout. When Tennessee seceded from the Union, Sam joined the first Tennessee Volunteers, and D. Jobe joined the 20th Tennessee Volunteers. Dee had been captured by the Union and had spent seven months in prison at Camp Chase.

He was exchanged on August 25, 1862. In the prisoner exchange, Confederate soldiers were returned for Union soldiers, and Dee was one of those exchanged.

Men with intimate knowledge of Rutherford and Williamson Counties were needed as scouts. By the spring of 1863, D. Jobe had been detached on service at the request of General William Hardy. When Dee joined the Coleman Scouts, he found his cousin, DeWitt Smith, and also a friend, Tom Joplin. DeWitt Smith was the cousin of DeWitt Smith Jobe. Thus, either Jobe was named after his cousin, DeWitt Smith, or both were named after another relative. They were cousins.

Dee and the other scouts knew what had happened to Sam Davis. Undoubtedly, these young men wondered whether, if they were captured and tortured, they would have the courage to stand by their convictions and refuse to cooperate with the enemy. Would they be as bold and brave as young Sam? By the spring of 1863, many incidents of cruelty had already been exhibited, not only toward Confederate soldiers but also toward civilians.

Burnings, lootings, rapes, pillages, robbery, and even hangings had become common as Northern troops wreaked havoc upon the South. Private D. Jobe had just turned twenty-four in June and was near Nashville, Tennessee, probing for information and speeding it southward. Tom Joplin and some of the other scouts had come with him, and they were operating around College Grove, Triune, and Nolensville, Tennessee. On Monday, August 29, 1864, General Sherman was tearing up thirteen miles of Montgomery Line track around Atlanta.

In Chicago, the Democrats were nominating McClellan and hoping for victory. In Tennessee, former Tennessee governor William B. Campbell was addressing the Democrats, urging peace, warning of the restoration of civilian property, and warning that Southern rights be recognized. He was also denouncing Andrew Johnson as a tyrant and a despot. All these things were going on, but near Nolensville, Tennessee, time was running out for D. Jobe. Dee had been scouting alone between Triune and Nolensville, and he was in grave danger.

He had been given a message to deliver to his superior officer. He had ridden all night, winding his way through the back trails of the forest, and toward sunrise came to the farm of William Moss. Moss had two sons who had joined the 20th Tennessee Volunteers, the same outfit that D. Jobe had joined, so Dee knew Moss's sons. The farm was about 200 yards west of the pike that ran from Triune to Nolensville. Dee thought, undoubtedly, here was an opportunity for breakfast, a place to rest, and a little fellowship. As the sun began to rise, he came to the farm, and Mr. Moss fed Jobe breakfast.

He also probably communicated to him what information he had concerning the movement of the Federal troops in that particular area. But Mr. Moss told Dee that he could not stay because daylight was coming on strong, and everyone knew that he was a Confederate sympathizer. Undoubtedly, the Yankee patrols would be checking his home. So, right after breakfast, Dee got on his horse and headed west toward the Sam Waters farm. About a mile away from the Moss farm, Dee tied his horse in a thicket, went into the cornfields of the Sam Waters farm, and lay down to rest.

Remember, he had been riding all night, had just eaten a big breakfast, and undoubtedly was probably asleep by the time he hit the ground. It did not take him long at all. But it is reported that, as he rode along, someone was looking at him through a telescope. Someone had seen the lone horseman going toward Sam Waters' farm, perhaps riding along a fence road. At any rate, by the time he had lain down, he was being tracked by a patrol of 15 soldiers from the 115th Ohio.

As they came into the cornfield, which they knew he was in, they surrounded him and began to close in. Probably Dee did not hear the first sounds of danger, because he was sound asleep. When he awakened, however, he knew instantly that he was in danger. He evaluated his chances for escape and decided that they were too slim. By this time, he could hear the Yankees screaming and hollering as they rushed through the corn to get hold of him.

He had information that he could not allow them to obtain. Instead of trying to escape, he took it out of his pocket, tore it into little bitty shreds, and began to swallow as much of the message as he could. By the time the fifteen Yankees got around him, he had

swallowed most of it. Just a few scraps had fallen on the ground. They grabbed him, and as they did, he swallowed one last time.

The sergeant of the 115th Ohio Regiment demanded to know what was in those papers and who his contacts were. He told him that he had to tell or die. They took D. Jobe's hands and tied them behind his back. Then they demanded that he talk: tell them what was in the message, where he got it, and where he was supposed to meet the other scouts.

Jobe refused to talk. Because he refused, there came brutal slaps to the head and punches with a fist into the stomach. Still he would not talk. The men of the 115th Ohio were enraged. They arranged for a leather strap, maybe a bridle rein, crisscrossed it around his throat, and tugged from behind so that with each tug it choked him tighter and tighter. They even hanged him some—picked him up with the leather strap off the ground and let him down—telling him that he must talk or else. He refused to talk.

This time a pistol butt came up and knocked out some of his front teeth. Here was D. Jobe, bound, disarmed, helpless, and bleeding, yet he revealed absolutely nothing. They were dealing with a man in gray who put the welfare of the Confederacy above his life. Each time they questioned him, he refused to answer. Now they used rifle butts instead of fists and pistol butts.

They were smashing his face. By now, he was so weak that he could not answer. When they questioned him further, he merely shook his head. From the rifle butts and fists, his eyes were swollen and bulging out, his teeth knocked out, and his jaw undoubtedly broken. Probably at this point he realized that his captors were not going to kill him immediately. The torture gave way to monstrous cruelty.

The 115th Ohio were so enraged that they were whooping, hollering, and screaming loudly enough to be heard at a nearby farm. Because Jobe refused to talk, one reached up and gouged out one of his eyes. Others drew a knife and carved out the second. Now he was blind, being choked, and his face was a bloody mess. They took the straps around his neck and dragged him up and down through the cornrows, trying to make him talk. Jobe still refused.

They stood him up. The sergeant of the 115th Ohio said, “You won’t talk. You won’t give us the information we want. We’ll make sure that you never talk again.” He called for the knife. One man forced open D. Jobe’s mouth while the sergeant reached in, grabbed his tongue, and cut it out.

Can you imagine what was going through Dee’s mind? Probably he was remembering his friend Sam. Hanging, as awful as it was, would at least have been more dignified than what he was enduring. They tied the strap around his neck to his horse’s tail, and one soldier struck the horse to speed him on his way. D. Jobe’s agony was about to be over: strangled, choked by his own horse. The horse ran and stopped at the road.

When the fifteen men of the 115th Ohio reached the Nolensville Road, one of them admitted that D. Jobe was the bravest man they had ever seen. A woman who had ridden by and seen Jobe lying on the ground, by then loose from the horse’s tail, got down, removed her handkerchief, and placed it over his face to keep the sun from broiling him.

Word of the crime began to spread. For years afterward, men would shudder when they reached the point in the road where D. Jobe died. Someone wrote a little poem:

“Many good men who passed this spot would think of Jobe and the deal he got, or cross themselves like nuns, and say on nights when the dark clouds toss, can you hear the clatter of a running horse?”

"Oh lordy, what's the matter? But nobody talks, the clatter stops, and the Ghost Horse Walks, it's the Yankees teaching D. Jobe, who's boss, at the point of 15 guns." The horrible news reached Jobe's parents, Mr. E. C. and Mary Smith Jobe. They were absolutely stunned and shocked. Their grief was so overwhelming that they could not even go after their own son. The only one who went was old Frank, D. Jobe's faithful servant and slave of a lifetime.

The August sun was sinking, and a spring wagon was creaking down the road. Old Frank, the Negro slave who attended Jobe as a child, was driving. His cheeks were wet with tears as he lifted his young master's body into the wagon to bring it back to the old log

house where D. Jobe was born on June 4, 1840. There he was laid to rest.

Today there is a roadside marker that speaks of Jobe on US Highway 31A in Williamson County near Triune and Nolensville. The marker says: "Dewitt Smith Jobe. A member of the Coleman Scout CSA was captured in a cornfield about 1.5 miles west August 29, 1864 by patrol from the 115th Ohio Cavalry. Swallowing his dispatches, he was mutilated and tortured to make him reveal the contents. Refusing, he was dragged to death behind a galloping horse. He is buried in the family cemetery 6 miles northeast."

Linda Lee has written a poem concerning Private D. Jobe, and I want to read that poem to you. "A young man of just 24, D. Jobe was in the ranks of Southern men to give their lives to fight against the Yanks. He did not know that fateful day the message that he bore would lead to crimes that man commits and blames upon a war. He hid the message in his shirt. And as he rode away, he had no thought of what could come before the end of day. Faintly first, he heard the sound of hoofbeats far behind. He took the message, tore it up, and hoped they wouldn't find a piece of paper they could read, his silence for his life. Fifteen men watched this man, and one came from among, held D. Jobe's bloody mouth apart while they separated off his tongue.

"The Yanks then asked him one more time, what did the paper say? Bruised and bleeding almost dead, so still now D. Jobe lay. They kicked his side to see if life had seeped into the ground. They fashioned a rope around his neck and tied it round and round to the chestnut horse that Jobe had rode, then slapped it on its flanks. A gruesome death would follow soon by way of 15 Yanks."

A Negro slave had lifted him into a creaking dray; slowly, mule and Negro slave brought home the man in gray. A private, just a common man, had more than done his part. The secrets that he never told remained within his heart. And in the quiet evenings we remember what's been done: torture, death on a lonely road, fifteen men to one.

Aftermath and Revenge

Now the story is not over. D. Jobe is dead. A few days later, news reached DeWitt Smith, Jobe's cousin and friend of the 45th Tennessee Regiment. They had been extremely close friends and, as I pointed out earlier, may have been namesakes. When DeWitt Smith heard what the Yankees had done to his cousin and friend, the history books say he became unhinged, or mad. Whether he did or not, I do not know. But I do know this: DeWitt Smith broke away from Hood's army and from the 45th Tennessee Regiment, and raised the black flag.

I don't know if you understand what a black flag is. It signified this: I give no quarter; I expect no quarter; I take no prisoners; I expect not to be taken as a prisoner. I will kill you if you don't kill me. Quantrill and some of his men, as well as other men, fought under a black flag. DeWitt Smith went back into middle Tennessee as the Avenger. Before he was killed, he took the lives of as many as 50 Yankees in revenge for what they had done to D. Jobe.

He was like a wolf in the night hunting a pack of sheep, singling them out and dealing with them. It is reported that the sergeant of the 115th Ohio, after the incident with D. Jobe, lost his mind over the incident. It literally drove him crazy.

But DeWitt Smith, who determined he was going to even the score, began to hunt the Yankees with knives. Linda Lee wrote this poem:

“I heard it said within a man a rage will quickly grow when head and heart collide with hate at things he should not know. When body parts and human flesh are carved from mortal form, when dignity has left mankind and treachery the norm. A man can only take so much, and DeWitt Smith was there.

“A cousin’s tortured death would be the cause of this affair. D. Jobe was found a bloody mass. His eyes, his tongue cut out, and DeWitt Smith would even up, he’d teach them all about. The cost of war not played by rules, the Yanks had taught him well, and DeWitt Smith thought the time was right to send them all to hell. He saw their campfires burning late, far off into the night, and slipped around the sentries till only one man was in sight. So quick his blade

was flashing, a gurgled dying breath, a throat was slit from side to side, and shadows claimed a death. I've heard it said that many nights there's oil in their lamps, a demon moved among the Yanks, and blood flowed in their camps. Who would it be this fateful night, whose throat would slowly bleed, and warm the southern ground for them, revenge for Yankee deed? The guilty men are in their graves, the cost of D. Jobe's life, It took fifteen to take his breath, but fifty felt the knife.

"When winds blow deep in Tennessee, I know the tales they tell. Phantom nigh from vengeful hand that opened gates of hell. They talk of all the frightful nights, the devil of the deep, when soldiers fought to stay awake, terrified of sleep. I've heard it said within a man, there's parts to fear admire, and heaven help the ones that feed the flames that fuel the fire."

Years after the war was over, the survivors of the Coleman Scouts gathered in Nashville, Tennessee, to pay their respects to their comrades who had given their lives during the war. When D. Jobe's name was invoked, the following resolution was adopted by the Living Scouts.

"Resolved, that while we regret, with the sorrow of our inmost soul, his cruel fate, we can but recollect with pride how nobly he died, strangled, beaten, and abused. Yet he defied his persecutors and died rather than betray his comrade and others who had given him assistance. Has history a brighter example of true patriotism, of true friendship, of a higher capacity to endure, suffer, and die rather than betray."

"Death makes no conquest of this conqueror, for now he lives in fame, though not in life."

D. Jobe was posthumously awarded the Confederate Medal of Honor. Here is the citation: "Realizing that he was surrounded and about to be captured by the enemy, Private Jobe destroyed the valuable papers in his possession by tearing and eating them. Infuriated by this ploy, his captors bound and beat him, demanding that he tell them the contents. Refusing all their demands, Private Jobe was slowly strangled with a leather strap around his neck. While the enemy realized Private Jobe would never talk, they

tortured him, kicking in his front teeth, cutting out his tongue, gouging his eyes from their sockets, all the while dragging him by the leather strap until he ultimately choked to death."

Let me make a couple of applications. In Psalm 55:23, the psalmist says, "But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction." Here is the part I want you to see: "Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days, but I will trust in thee."

Applications: Courage and Character

I want you to note what has even happened in our country to bloody and deceitful men. A lot of them are cut down in the prime of their life. The truth is this: God may exercise His judgment and His vengeance in time and in history as well as in eternity. Vengeance belongs to God alone, and the wicked shall not escape God's judgment. Many will experience the judgment of God in this life, but all will experience it at the eternal judgment.

This next application I have given you before, but I want you to see it. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Romans, chapter 14.

Here is a clear illustration of this principle. Look in Romans, chapter 14, and notice verse 7: “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.” Isn’t that a simple verse? What does it mean? Whatever we do always affects other people. Your sins do not just affect you; they always affect someone else. Your good deeds do not just affect you; they always affect someone else. No one lives to himself. No one dies to himself.

When a man says, “It’s my body. If I want to get drunk, I can get drunk. It hurts nobody but me,” that is not true. It hurts the wife. It hurts the children. If he is drunk in a car, it may hurt and kill someone else. No man lives to himself, and no man dies to himself. Here, 15 men cruelly tortured and murdered one man, and yet 50 others who did not do that deed died because of what they did. Whatever we do always affects others.

There is another application: We need to learn courage. We not only need courage to die; we need courage to live. We need courage to do what is right at all times. We even need courage to keep our

mouths shut when they need to be kept shut. What am I talking about? Gossip is a horrible sin—just revealing things that no one needs to know.

When you hit a skunk with your car, that is bad. But when you wait three days, until another hundred cars have hit that skunk and the sun has had time to warm him up, and you hit him again, it is worse. Do you realize that the more you spread things, the worse they get?

Here is a principle we need to learn: If we cannot help be part of a solution, let us not be part of the problem. Suppose I know something about Roy. Something has happened; maybe it is embarrassing to Roy, or maybe he did something wrong. But suppose I know it, and I go over and tell Ed. What business is it of Ed's, even if I am telling the truth? If Ed cannot help resolve the problem, why does he need to know about it?

Here was a man who had the courage to keep his mouth shut when it was vitally important. I do not believe that we will have courage to die right unless we have courage to live right. We will not have courage to do right at an inopportune time if we do not have the courage to do right when everything is normal. If walking makes you weary, what will you do when you try to run with the horses? In other words, if you want to do right in extreme situations, you need to be used to doing right before you enter those extreme situations.

It amazes me that someone like young Sam Davis, twenty-one, would have the courage to be hanged rather than point to someone and say, "That's amazing." It amazes me that a young man, twenty-four, like D. Jobe, could endure everything that he endured. This generation has lost an awful lot of character from previous generations. We think we are smarter, and we may be in one sense of the word, but we are certainly more immoral and have not the courage and convictions of those of the last century or two. If we are going to do right in extreme situations, we need to be used to doing right before we enter those situations.

Conclusion: Good Men Ultimately Win

Good men do not always win in this life. But good men always win, either here or in eternity.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask for Your blessing and Your help. Encourage our hearts, Lord, with the story of D. Jobe. May it enable us to say, “I want that character; I want that courage.” Help us, Lord, to do that which is right and holy. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Five Ways to Discern God's Will

August 2, 2010

Introduction: The Command to Understand God's Will

We need men who understand the Word of God and will apply the Word of God. You can know all the doctrine in the world, but if you do not know how to apply it, it is useless to you. All you have is head knowledge without application. It is like having a weapon in your home but not knowing how to shoot it. What good is a rifle when someone is breaking into your home if you do not know how to shoot it? The Word of God needs to be applied to our lives on a daily basis.

With that in mind, open your Bibles to Ephesians, chapter 5. The message I am bringing is pure application. There are many things I want to share with you, and I will not be able to share everything. This is a message I have recommended several times to the Nelson family concerning their young folks, and to other people, because there are so many questions about knowing the Lord's will.

Look at what the Bible says in Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 17: "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Isn't that amazing? "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."

Let me ask you a couple of questions by way of introduction. Do you know the will of God for your life? Let me ask that another way: Do you know the will of God in everything that relates to your life? How can you discern the will of God in every situation and circumstance?

Note this commandment in verse 17. God says, "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." The first thing you should see is that there is a negative and a positive. God is commanding us, telling us how not to act on the one hand and how to act on the other. Negatively, He tells us not to be unwise concerning the will of the Lord.

The word “unwise” is from a Greek word, aphrōn, which literally means to be foolish, to be unwise, to be senseless, and to act rashly and without reason. God says, do not be senseless and do not act without reason when it comes to the will of God. Positively, He tells you in verse 17 that we are to understand what the will of the Lord is.

The Greek word for “understand” is syniēmi. It literally means to understand, consider, and be wise; but technically, when you break the word down, it means to set or bring together, or to join together in the mind. Since you join something together in your mind, you perceive it, understand it, grasp it, and make it yours. This is what God is saying: you have to understand, perceive, and lay hold of the will of God, literally making it yours.

We are to be constantly and consistently not only knowing but proving the will of God in our lives. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 12, verses 1 and 2, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” Not only are we to present our bodies unto Him, but we are not to be conformed to this world; we are to be transformed, that we may prove what is that good and acceptable will of God.

The word “conformed” literally means to be pressed into a mold. My wife used to make butter. We have an old butter churn, in fact, several of them, and she had butter molds. She would take that butter, press it into the mold, and put it in the refrigerator. When she dumped it out, that butter had been conformed to the mold. God says, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed. “Transformed” is where we get our English word “metamorphosis”—to go through changes like a butterfly or a caterpillar.

So He's saying that we're to be metamorphosized, changed by the renewing of our mind. Although we're to be constantly knowing and proving the will of God, it is not something to be done routinely, mechanically, or callously. The Bible says in Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 6, "Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but doing the will of God from the heart." Our hearts are to be behind our service to God. We're to be eat up with the will of God in our lives, so to speak. You remember that Epaphras, in Colossians chapter 4 verse 12, prayed for his godly friends that they would stand perfect and complete in the will of God.

Have you ever stopped to think about that—standing perfect and complete in the will of God? Wouldn't it be absolutely wonderful if every one of our young people, every father, and every mother could truthfully and honestly say, "I'm standing perfect and complete in the will of God right now"? You need to ask yourself this question: Are you standing perfect and complete in the will of God?

Since God has commanded us to understand what the will of the Lord is, we have to ask ourselves, how in the world do we know and find the will of God? There are several specific answers, but there is one general answer as well. Let me give you the general answer first. First and foremost, we must understand that the will of God is revealed in the Word of God.

The General Answer: God's Will is Revealed in His Word

We do not understand God's will through trances, dreams, fortune tellers, tarot cards, or any other humanistic, wicked, and blasphemous way. I never will forget when I was a boy, my dad told

me about he and my mother. They were very young, and they went to a county fair, holding hands as they walked past the fortune teller's tent. The fortune teller said to my father, "Well, come on inside, and I'll tell you when you're going to get married."

Daddy looked at her and said, "If you knew anything at all, you'd know we're already married," and just kept on walking. Very obviously, I get so exasperated: "Sister Mary, psychic." You walk in, and the first thing she wants to do is ask you a whole bunch of questions. If she's really a psychic, she ought to know why you came in and know the answer without asking anything.

All of that is humanistic and wicked. We have the will of God in the Word of God. Hebrews chapter 1, verse 1, says: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets.” In the Old Testament, God did use some trances and some visions, and there were a few in the New Testament. He says, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

The Bible says God used to speak in these ways in the old times, but He hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things. You have to remember, first of all, that Jesus Christ is the living Word. John 1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.” Verse 14 says, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”

Then 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect,

throughly furnished unto all good works." All Scripture is God-breathed.

Just as Jesus Christ is the living Word, the Bible is the written Word of God. Any time you seek to know the will of God apart from Jesus Christ and apart from His Word, it is an insult to the Father and a rejection of Jesus Christ. The Bible says in John 6:38, our Lord was speaking: "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." And our Lord, in John 5:23, tells us, "That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him."

When you try to bypass Jesus Christ, the living Word, or the written Word of God, which Jesus Christ has spoken, you are not only insulting God and rejecting Christ; it is an act of blasphemy. You are saying that Jesus Christ is not the full and final revelation of God. You are trying to say that the Word of God is not complete in and of itself.

The general answer to how we know the will of God is that the will of God is revealed to us in His Word. Second Peter 1:3 tells us exactly what God has given us: "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness," and this is "through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue." According to His divine power, God has given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness. It is through the knowledge of Him. The more we know about God and the more we know about His Word, the more knowledge we have concerning life and godliness.

You say, "But Brother Weaver, there's just so many things that I don't know." I have news for you: there are a lot of things that I do not know, and there are a lot of things that you never will know. But Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law." I am not concerned about the secret will of God until and unless it comes to pass in time and history. My concern is with the revealed Word of God.

That is what I must guide my life by. He has given me His Word so that I can indeed guide my life by it. The problem is, folks, that we do not really apply the truth of God's Word to our lives. You remember, I quoted the verse the other day, James 4:17, where the Bible says, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

Years ago, Alice and I had some dear friends whom we called Mama and Papa Morris. We were not related, but we were dear friends. They were older than Alice and me; in fact, they had children our age, one a little older than us. Papa Marsh played the saxophone. He would always come to our house, and Alice had to sit at the piano for hour after hour and play hymns with him, because he had nobody to play with at home. One day he told me, "I'd rather be at your house than at mine any day." I said, "Well, I'm thankful, Papa."

Whenever they had a family reunion, they invited us. Alice and I were coming from a meeting when we stopped at one. I had been preaching for several weeks and driving for several hundred miles. When I arrived, his daughter-in-law began to pepper me with question after question, and I tried to answer her.

Finally, Papa looked at her and said, “Francis, why don't you shut up and leave him alone? Can't you see he's tired?” She said, “Because, Papa, I don't know the answer to these questions, and it bothers me.” I never will forget what he said: “It's not what I don't know that bothers me; it's what I do know. And if you know what's right and you don't do it, to you it is sin.” If you know that you should apply the Word of God to your life and you do not, to you it is sin.

Specific Areas Where God's Will is Clearly Stated

There are a number of things that God spells out in the Bible about which you and I should never have a question. We are specifically told what God's will is in certain matters. For instance, 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication.” I do not have to wonder what God's will is concerning adultery, fornication, incest, or anything immoral, unclean, or impure. This is the will of God:

your sanctification, that ye abstain from fornication. There can be no guessing about that. God said very specifically that it is His will for you to live a holy, godly, pure, undiluted life. It cannot be any plainer than that.

Likewise, 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” You do not have to wonder about God's will.

Whatever happens to you, give thanks. I realize that sometimes it is difficult. How difficult is it to say, “Thank You, Lord, I lost my job today”? Yet the Bible says, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God concerning you.” You could say, “Lord, thank You that You let me have that job for twenty years and at least have some savings.”

I have had Christian friends who lost husbands and wives. It is a sad, sorrowful thing to lose someone you love. I understand that. But you can at least thank God that He allowed you to have them for thirty or forty years. Do you realize that is far more than many people ever have their mates? “In every thing give thanks. This is the will of God concerning you.” We do not have to worry about that. God tells us and spells it out. Whatever comes our way in the providence of God, we have to understand that our heavenly Father is too loving to be unkind and too wise to make a mistake. Therefore, we have to give thanks in everything.

Here is something else you do not have to worry about. First Peter, chapter 2, verse 15, says, “For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” When we are criticized, slandered, lied about, and rumors are spread concerning us, God says the best thing we can do is live in such a holy, right, and biblical way that those who slander us will be found to be obvious liars.

Some of you may have heard what one man said: “I’m upset. There are some vicious rumors going around about me, and some of them are true.” Well, I guess that should upset you. People occasionally tell me, “Brother Weaver, do you know what so-and-so said about you?” I have two stock answers, depending on who is telling me. First: “Well, if they’re talking about me, at least they’re

leaving some poor widow alone." Second: "Well, if they really knew me the way the Lord does, they'd probably say a whole lot worse than that." Well, that is what he said.

Make sure that you live your life when you are criticized, so that those who are doing the criticizing will be proven to be liars and spreaders of rumors and gossip. First Peter 3:17 says, "For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing." So God says this: if you are going to suffer, here is His will. He would rather you suffer for doing what is right.

That is something I have always said. I do not want to go to prison; I have never been in prison. I have no desire to go, but that does not mean I will not end up there one day. If I do end up there, however, I want to be there for doing the will of God and not for doing something stupid, contrary to the will of God. I want to suffer for righteousness' sake. I do not want to suffer because of my own stupidity. So He says very plainly, "It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing." Then First Peter 4:19 says, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." It is the Lord's will, then, that whenever we suffer, even for right doing, we commit our souls to Him and say, "Lord, we understand You are in control. You are going to work it out. I am not going to fret. I am not going to get upset. I am not going to jump ship. I am just committing everything to You like You have told me."

You and I should have no problem in these particular areas because they are spelled out for us in black and white. So the question has to be asked: What about all those areas in which it is not spelled out in black and white? How do we discern the will of God in those areas? How do we know the will of God in those areas, for instance?

Five Ways to Discern God's Will in Unclear Matters

There is nothing in the Bible that says, "Jeremiah, go to this college." There is nothing in the Bible that says, "Luke, marry this girl." There is nothing in the Bible that says, "Ernie, sell this house and buy this house." There is nothing in the Bible that says, "Ben, change jobs now." There is nothing in the Bible that says, "Go to this church over

here." You say, "Would it be nice if everything were spelled out for us?" Yes, it would be nice. The only problem is that you could not carry your Bible around. It would be so heavy and so thick that you could not.

God gives us principles in His Word so that we may be able to discern the will of God in every area of our lives. The Bible says in Proverbs 25:2, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter." We are responsible to search out God's will in every area of our lives.

There are five ways that you can know the will of God in every situation and circumstance. This whole message is application, because Scripture says, "Be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Here is an application of that one verse.

The very first way is this: we may know the will of God by His promise. John 7:17 says, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." It is true that, in context, our Lord is speaking of doctrine, but the principle is still the same. He said, "If any man will to do my will, he shall know." In other words, if we genuinely and truly want God's will, He said we shall know God's will.

First Way: By His Promise

Think about this: did you realize that God is far more interested in you doing His will than you are in doing His will? God is far more interested in you knowing His will than you are probably interested in knowing it. God has promised that if you genuinely want to know the will of God, He is going to give it to you.

If you come to God with this attitude—"Dear Lord, I want Your will. I could care less about the situations or the circumstances. Lord, what I want is Your will, period"—I can assure you, based upon the Word of God, that you are going to know His will. But if you come to the Lord with this attitude—"Lord, You show me what Your will is, and if I like it, I'll do it,"

If I do not want God's will, I can assure you that God will never show me His will. But if I come and say, "Lord, I want it, regardless of anything else; I want Your will," I can mark it down that God is

going to show me His will. I have His promise. You know what He said in Isaiah 30 and verse 21? "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." God said, "I'll lead you, I'll guide you."

Now, look in your Bibles to Psalm 32. I love this passage. In fact, I have about an hour's worth of preaching just on this one passage, but it is so simple to grasp. Look what God said in Psalm 32, verse 8: "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye." That is a wonderful promise. But notice this warning: "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, "I will instruct you, I will teach you, and I will show you the way that you should go. I'll guide you with my eye." But listen carefully: Do not make Me guide you. Why do you put a bit in a horse's mouth or in a mule's mouth? So you can guide them.

Mules are some of the stubbornest creatures that ever lived. Brother Charles knows that; he's from Missouri. We had a mule when I was a boy. She had a little lip, and we called her Old Crip. She was an older mule. My cousin came up from Miami, Florida, a city boy. He saw the mule and wanted to ride the horse. I said, "Larry, that's not a horse. That's a mule."

He said, "I want to ride her." I said, "Well, okay. But understand, mules are stubborn." We were young boys. I got the old mule out of the stall, put the bridle on her, and jumped up on her back. I had ridden her plenty of times before. I reached down and pulled my cousin up behind me. We were in the yard, and we started toward the road. That mule started heading straight for a pecan tree with a low limb. I took both hands on the left rein and pulled as hard as I could to turn that mule from the pecan limb. I knew right where she was going.

I finally had that mule's head turned up like this. I was pulling so hard, and she was walking straight on. When I found out that the mule was not going to budge and that I could not turn her, I said at the last moment, "Duck, Larry!" I laid down and grabbed the mule's

neck. My city cousin, sitting behind me, looked up in the sky and said, "Where?"

About that time, the limb hit him. That boy never did forgive me. He swore to the day he died that I had done it on purpose, but I did not. Notice what God said: "Don't be like that." I do not have any idea that I was gentle with that mule. I was not. Probably I was hurting her. I was pulling that bit so hard and so tight in her mouth, but she just kept going.

God said, "Don't be like that. I promise you, I'll show you my will. But don't make me put a bit and a bridle in your mouth." So the very first way that we can know the will of God is by His promise. The second way that we can know the will of God is by His providence. Everyone in this room can quote Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Let me also give you Revelation 3, verse 8, because there God said, "I know thy works:

Second Way: By His Providence

“Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.” God, in His sovereign providence, will open some doors and close others. You have to remember that God is sovereign over everything. God controls everything, and He works everything out for our good and for His glory.

In 1 Corinthians 16:9, the Apostle Paul says, “For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.” There may be adversaries, but God opened the door. In 2 Corinthians 2:12, he says, “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord.” What is he saying? God sovereignly opened the door. God put me right there where I could preach.

Acts 16 gives another biblical illustration of the sovereign providence of God: “Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul

in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them."

But note this: the Holy Ghost told them not to go into Asia. When they wanted to go to Bithynia, no, God says you do not go there either. But then God opened the door into Macedonia, and that is exactly where they went.

If I had hour after hour tonight, I could tell you innumerable times how the providence of God has shut some doors in my life and opened other doors. One particular time, I was preaching in Virginia. I was in an itinerant ministry, going from church to church, and had been preaching for two weeks. After leaving the church in Virginia, I was supposed to go to a church in Illinois for two weeks, and then I was going to have two weeks off.

I came in one night from the meeting in Virginia, and there was a message waiting for me on the phone. A pastor from Illinois said, "Brother Weaver, I hate to do this, but I'm going to have to cancel the meeting. We have just had a church split. We are in such horrible straits. No one would listen to anything that anybody said right now."

I called the pastor back and said, "Well, you're the pastor. You're responsible with people. That's totally up to you." I hung up the phone and thought, "Now, Lord, I don't understand this because that would give me four weeks without preaching. I'd go crazy if I couldn't preach in four weeks."

So I went to church the next night. God just opened the bottoms of heaven and it dropped out, and the glory of God came down. The pastor looked at me and said, "Could you stay and preach another week?" I said, "You know, it just so happens I can."

When I got back to the motel that night, there was another call from a pastor in Michigan. He said, "Brother Weaver, the Lord is broken out upon us up here in Michigan. Can you come up here a week after next?" I said, "It just so happens I can, brother."

What did God do? He closed the door in Illinois and opened the door in Virginia and then in Michigan. When God closes the door, all you have to do is fold your arms and say, "Lord, I'm just waiting on You, because I know You're going to open a door." And when God opens a door, you simply walk through it.

The Bible tells us that God brought the Israelites out of Egypt to bring them into the Promised Land. He did not bring them out of Egypt to drop them in the desert. God did not bring us out of the kingdom of darkness and translate us into the kingdom of His dear Son just to drop us. He is not going to forsake us or leave us. Our Lord said, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

Third Way: By His Principles

So we can know the will of God first by His promise, secondly by His providence, and thirdly by His principles. John 17:17 says, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” Peter wrote in 2 Peter 1:19, referring to the Word of God, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” Until our Lord returns, we have the full and final revelation of God in His Word.

God never leads us to violate His Word or the principles in His Word. His Word is forever settled in the heavens, and its principles are eternal. There is never an instance in which God will command us or lead us to violate His Word. I have preached for 46 years, and during those years I have heard innumerable horror stories about individuals who claimed to be led by the Holy Spirit of God and then went absolutely, totally, and completely contrary to the Word of God.

The leading of the Holy Spirit is indeed real and genuine, but He always leads us in agreement with and in accord with the Word of God. The Bible says in Romans 8 and verse 14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." In context, the Holy Spirit is leading us to mortify the deeds of the flesh, obey Christ, and live obediently. He is not leading us somewhere beyond the Word of God or contrary to it. Please do not tell me that the Holy Spirit is leading you to have an affair, steal, or murder. He is not. If

you do those things, I do not doubt for one instant that you are being led by a spirit, but it is not the Holy Spirit.

Just last year, some of you may remember, there was a woman down in Florida named Marie Moore. She had a son named Mitchell. She took her son, who was in his twenties, to a gun range. She shot a pistol and reloaded, then let her son step up and shoot. As he stepped up, she put her pistol to the back of his head and pulled the trigger. She stayed there until the law came and told them that God had led her to do it because she had to send her son to heaven and herself to hell.

I have news for you. God said, "Thou shalt not murder," and, "Thou shalt not kill." God never led her to murder her son. When I was in college, there was a woman in Greenville, SC, who caught her husband sleeping on the couch. She slipped up, put her .38 to his temple, and pulled the trigger. Then she had the audacity to tell the law and everybody else that the Holy Spirit had led her to do it.

I know better than that. But ever since then, Brother Myra, when my wife tells me to get my feet off the couch, I move them. God does not lead you to violate His Word. I know women who have forsaken their husbands. I know men who have forsaken their wives and run off with others. Their excuse is that the Holy Spirit led them to do it because the person with whom they ran off was more spiritual than their spouse.

That is not only nonsense or hogwash; it is blasphemy. The Holy Spirit never leads you to violate the Word of God. Suppose I were to ask you, “Please pray for me because I’m thinking about going out and getting drunk tomorrow night.” I would hope you would have enough sense to say, “Brother Weaver, I don’t have to pray about that. God said don’t do it.” “Well, pray for me; I’m thinking about having an affair.” “Don’t have to pray about that. God says don’t do it.” “Well, pray for me. I’m thinking about defrauding someone.” “Don’t have to pray about that. God says don’t do it.” The Holy Spirit never, ever leads us contrary to His Word.

We could save ourselves a great deal of heartache and trouble by remembering this simple truth: it is never right to do wrong. It is never right to violate the Word of God. It is never God’s will for you

and me to go contrary to His revealed Word. Never! How do we know God's will? First, by His promise; second, by His providence; third, by His principles; fourthly, by prayer.

Fourth Way: By Prayer

John 14, verses 13 and 14, says, "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." 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." Colossians 4:2 says, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." Ephesians 6:18 says, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." Romans 12:12 says, "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer." Prayer is indeed a form of communication. It is a command, and it is also a privilege because we fellowship with our sovereign God through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Prayer is never meant to change the mind of God. It is a means to accomplish the purpose and will of God, not to inform, instruct, or direct Him. God is immutable and unchangeable, and we will have an exceedingly difficult time trying to change the mind of the unchangeable One. Everything must be done in faith, in the name of Christ, and according to His Word and His will.

It is amazing how many people never think about prayer. They say, "Well, Brother Weaver, the doctors told us that prayer was our last resort." Why was it not your first resort? Others say, "They have done everything they can do. It is just up to the Lord now." It has always been up to the Lord. We need to learn to pray about everything. How many of you really pray about your health? How many of you pray about your witness? How many of you pray about your finances? I am sure a lot of people do, especially in this day and time.

We can know the will of God by His promise, by His providence, by His principles, and by prayer. Fifthly, we may know the will of God by His peace. Colossians 3 and verse 15 says, "And let the peace

of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." Let the peace of God rule in your hearts.

Fifth Way: By His Peace

The word "rule" literally means to decide, to determine, to be an umpire, to direct, and to control. Let the peace of God direct you, be an umpire, and control you. Philippians 4 and verse 7 says, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Adam Clarke wrote, "No heart is right with God where the peace of God does not rule, and the continual prevalence of the peace of Christ is the decisive proof that the heart is right with God." The Greek word for peace is eirēnē, referring to a settled state of tranquility.

It is an exemption from rage, havoc, turmoil, and strife. When the Bible says, "Let the peace of God rule your hearts," the peace of God is a settled assurance that we are doing the will of God. We are not fighting against the will of God, battling it, or trying to escape it. It is settled. There is no fighting on our part; we genuinely want the will of God.

But let me tell you something about peace. The Bible says, "Let the peace of God rule your hearts and minds." God's peace does not mean the absence of all human anxiety or nervousness.

I've never had an operation, or at least not one that I can remember. I had a minor operation, I think, when I was two years old. But let's suppose that I had to have an operation next week. Maybe my gallbladder has to be taken out. I have the promise of God that He's going to bring me through this thing. The providence of God has opened the door so I can get it fixed, and I've got a good Christian doctor. I'm not violating any principles of His Word, and I've prayed about it.

I may know that God is going to bring me through that operation successfully, but I haven't been operated on since I was two years old. I don't know what it's like to be put to sleep or to be in the hospital like that. Suppose Brother Charles came up to me and said, "Oh, Brother Weaver, I had that same surgery two years ago—piece of cake. I was in the hospital one day, out the next day, and

preaching the next weekend." Then Myron comes up and says, "I had the same surgery six months ago. Came through with flying colors. It's a piece of cake; there's no problem." I have all these brothers assuring me that it's simple. But do you think for one minute that, when I actually go to that hospital and they start to put me to sleep, there won't be just a little nervousness in me because I've never experienced it?

I do not know what it is like or what I am going to be going through. I know God is going to bring me through it, but I have never experienced that. God's peace means that we cannot be shaken from the confidence that we are in His will and that we are going to do His will.

But if, in the sovereign providence of God, you lose your job, you may know that God is going to take care of you, provide for you, and open a door for you. Yet there will be some anxiousness while you wonder, until He does, "How am I going to pay my bills? How am I going to feed my family?"

If I were to tell you how God called me to Jesup, Georgia, and how the providence of God worked out so that I went there, no one in this room would doubt for one instant that it was the will of God for me to be in Jesup, Georgia. But when we moved there, with no family, no friends, and no one known to us, I woke up the first morning and thought, "What in the world are you doing in Jesup, Georgia? You don't know anybody here." Still, I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was exactly where God would have me. Then the peace of God came like an umpire and said, "That's it. You don't have to worry about this. This is right where you need to be. It's settled."

Application and Conclusion

Now, think with me. I am trying to tie this together for you. I have given you five ways that you can know the will of God: by His promise, His providence, His principles, prayer, and peace.

Listen carefully. God does not need to lead you in all five of those ways. He may lead you by any one, any two, any three, or any four of them. If God so chooses, He could lead you by all five at one time. But He does not have to give you all five at one time. Any one of

them, or any combination of them, would be sufficient. Are you listening?

If whatever you start to do violates one of those five things, it is not God's will. If you do not have His promise, it is not His will. If His providence does not open the door, it is not His will. If it violates a principle, it is not His will. If there has been no prayer, it is not His will. If there is no peace, it is not His will. Should I buy a house? Should I buy a car? Should I get another job? Should I go to college? Should I marry this person? Those five principles will work in every situation. You just have to realize that you cannot violate either one of those and have the will of God in your life.

If that is not sufficient, Romans 14:23 says, “And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith,” and, “for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” If you cannot do what you want to do or go where you want to go in faith, God says, “Don’t do it.” It is sin. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Here is my counsel to every young person and every old person: If in doubt, don’t. Whatsoever is not of faith is sin. If there is any question in your mind, don’t. If someone is pushing you for an answer, say no. It is always easier later on to change a no to a yes than it is a yes to a no. So, when in doubt, just don’t.

There is one other principle: Proverbs 16:3. God says, “Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.” I have been in a lot of churches in this country. I have been to some where, before I ever got there, I knew exactly what I was going to preach. I knew that was what God would have me to preach.

But there have also been some places where I did not know where to start or where to end. It was not that I did not have anything to preach; I had too much to preach. I just could not preach everything, but I knew that I had to give something. I would say, “Lord, I know that You honor Your Word, and that is the main thing that You won't talk Your Word. And Lord, unless You give me further illumination, I'm going to preach from this passage right here.”

I would do it because the Bible says, “Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.” Inevitably, people come up to me afterward and say, “Oh, Brother Weaver, that is

exactly the message that we needed. That's exactly it." But here are the principles of the Word of God: Do not go by your feelings or emotions. Feelings change, and emotions change; God's principles never change. Period.

And what did he say? "Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." You have an obligation, a duty, and a responsibility to understand the will of God in every area of your life. If you will take these principles and apply them, you may know the will of God in every situation.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We're so thankful that Thou hast said that we're not to be unwise in Your will, but wise, understanding what the will of the Lord is. Help us to do it tonight, Lord. Help us learn to apply this Word in our everyday life. Help us, Father, to live for Thee, love Thee, and glorify Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, amen and amen.

CHAPTER 3

Condemning Christ

October 23, 2016

Condemning or Damning Christ

Introduction and Scripture Reading

Mark 14:55–64 says that the chief priests and all the council sought witness against Jesus to put Him to death and found none. For many bare false witness against Him, but their witness agreed not together. Certain witnesses arose and bare false witness, saying, “We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.” But neither so did their witness agree together.

The high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, “Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee?” But He held His peace and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, “Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” And Jesus said, “I am. And you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.” Then the high priest rent his clothes and said, “What need we of any further witnesses?

You've heard the blasphemy. What think ye?" And they all condemned Him to death.

The Meaning of Condemnation

Condemnation is a very powerful word. We do not understand its impact unless we understand it theologically. We may understand condemnation in a legal sense. When a criminal is condemned, he is found guilty in court and sentenced. At times, condemnation may be just or unjust, and the sentence imposed may likewise be just or unjust. Man is not perfect and, consequently, cannot be perfect in this life. Therefore, most judgments are not completely just because of our imperfections. Innocent men have been condemned, and wicked men have been declared innocent. Unjust and unbiblical sentences have often been meted out even to those that do not deserve them.

The theological implications of condemnation can be readily seen by the use of the word in the New Testament. The Greek word for condemnation in our text is katakrino. It is translated in our Bibles "condemn" seventeen times and "damn" two times. Thus, the word literally means to condemn or to damn—to give judgment against and to judge one worthy of punishment.

The word is used in various ways in the Bible. First, it is used in reference to Adam and what Adam did to his posterity. In Romans 5:16, the Bible says, "And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift." Then it says, "for the judgment was by one to condemnation." Speaking of Adam, the judgment was by one to condemnation. Romans 5:18 says, "Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation." This is the same word used concerning Adam's posterity. Every one of us is found in a state of condemnation by nature.

We are born condemned. Romans 5:12 says, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." All sinned in Adam; all fell in him, and thus condemnation came upon all.

Our unrepentant and unbelieving state is highlighted in John 3:18: "He that believeth on him is not condemned." Jesus Christ is

the one who takes us out of condemnation. “He that believeth on him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already.”

“Because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” The Bible teaches us very clearly that men by nature are already damned. We are already condemned; we are under the judgment of God.

Moreover, you have to understand that the entirety of the Old Covenant was referred to in the Bible as a ministry of condemnation. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 3:9, the Bible says, “For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.” Here is a comparison between the New Covenant and the Old Covenant. Even the ministry of condemnation was glorious, but the ministry of grace is certainly far more glorious.

The Old Covenant as a Ministry of Condemnation

Why was the Old Covenant called a ministry of condemnation? Obviously, the Old Testament is the Word of God, and everything in the Bible is truth. Why, then, does God call the Old Covenant a ministry of condemnation? Hebrews 10:1–4 shows us why: “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.” The law had a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things. Those sacrifices, offered year by year continually, could not make the worshipers perfect.

“For then would they not have ceased to be offered?” In other words, if perfection had come by the Old Testament sacrifices, they would not have been repeated. “Because that the worshipers once purged should have no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices”—that is, in the Old Covenant—“there was a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin.”

If you read verse 5 onward, the subject becomes the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament sacrifices could never make anyone perfect. They had to be repeated because there was a remembrance of sin every year.

Thus, it was called a ministry of condemnation. Now, let me just make this clear. Condemnation is a passing of judgment. It is a declaration. It is a sentence. So condemnation, then, is not only the declaration of a sentence, the other word that is used, which I used is damnation. That's why I titled this message "Condemning Christ or Damning Christ." So let me show you how this word is translated as damnation.

Damnation and the Danger of Cursing Others

I want you to look in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 23 and verse 14. Matthew 23, verse 14. So our Lord is talking to the scribes and the Pharisees and look what he says. Matthew 23, verse 14: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." You could say the greater condemnation, but the word condemnation and damnation are the same here. Look in the book of Mark, chapter 12 and verse 40. Mark 12, verse 40. Here it is translated as damnation again. Mark 12, verse 40: "Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation" or greater condemnation. Then if you would turn to Luke chapter 20 and look at verse 47. Luke 20, verse 47 again, he says, "Which devour widows' houses, and for a show make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation." Now, the point I was trying to make is the same word is translated as condemn or to damn or damnation.

Now stop and think with me. Thus many individuals who take God's name in vain and then attach the word "damn" or actually asking God to judge and condemn and damn the individual at which they are angry. Hang on. They do not realize their sin in taking God's name in vain and profaning the name of God, neither do they realize the theological implication of their requests. Think about this. If merely calling a brother a fool endangers one to hellfire, how much

worse is it to request that God would damn an individual simply because you're angry with them. Let me show you.

Look at the words of our Lord in Matthew chapter 5, verse 22. I am not making this up. Going back to verse 21, our Lord says, “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.” Merely calling someone a fool out of anger places you in danger of hell fire. How much worse is it when you ask God to damn an individual simply because you are angry with him? You have to understand that condemnation may either be just or unjust.

Obviously, Jesus Christ was wrongly condemned in the Scripture. Even the repentant thief recognized the innocence of our Lord. Those two thieves were crucified with Him. One ridiculed and mocked Him, saying, “If thou be the Son of God, come down off the cross and take us down.” In other words, they would like to steal some more. But the other thief, in Luke chapter 23, verses 40 and 41, said, “But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing that thou art in the same condemnation?” or the same damnation.

“And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man”—speaking of Jesus Christ—“hath done nothing amiss.” Even that one thief recognized that they were there justly, receiving the penalty for their sins. But he also recognized the innocence of Jesus Christ.

In Acts chapter 2, the apostle Peter condemned the wickedness of those Judeans on the day of Pentecost. Beginning with verse 22, he says, “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” It is very important that you realize what he is saying.

"Ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." What did Peter say? It is true that everything that happened to Jesus Christ was ordained by God the Father. Nothing was by chance. Nothing was by accident. Yet that did not relieve those Jews of their responsibility, because Peter said, "ye have taken by wicked hands and have crucified" the Lord of glory. In other words, they did what they did not to fulfill God's word, not to fulfill prophecy. They did what they did out of a malignant, hateful, wicked, sinful, rebellious heart. He said, "ye have taken by wicked hands and have crucified."

There are a number of illegalities concerning the trial of Jesus Christ. I will probably mention one or two of those illegalities, but it is not my intent today to bring out all of them. In fact, you could have a whole series of sermons just on the illegalities in the trial of Jesus Christ. Everything they did was illegal according to their own council and according to their own statutes.

The Illegal Trial of Jesus

In Mark chapter 14, verse 53, they had captured our Lord: "And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him"—that is, with the high priest—"were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes." This is part of the message on condemning or damning Christ. The high priest was a Sadducee. All of the high priests were Sadducees, and they were in control of the temple. Acts chapter 4 shows what was taking place.

What you had in the days of Annas and Caiaphas was a clique. Let me express it like this: the Clinton Foundation. Now you understand. Or the Democratic National Party. It was a clique. Acts chapter 4, beginning in verse 5, says, "And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem."

You talk about a family-run institute. The Sanhedrin was run by a family. It was a clique. The Sadducees were in charge of the temple.

Now, the Pharisees basically controlled the general populace. And the Pharisees and the Sadducees were usually at odds with each

other. And the reason they were at odds with each other is because the Pharisees would be considered to be the fundamentalists of the day. They would be considered the Bible believers or the law believers of the day. While the Sadducees were the liberals. You have to remember, the Sadducees did not believe in a spirit, nor did they believe in the resurrection from the dead. But, of course, the Pharisees believed both. Now, here's what happened. Jesus Christ had silenced both the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

Neither one of them could capture him with words. They could not ensnare him. And so, although the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who were normally at each other's throat, will now join together in order that they might condemn Christ. Let me show you. Hold Mark 14, but go in your Bibles to Matthew 22. And let's look at verse 34, and I'll take you through the scripture very quickly. Matthew 22, verse 34. Look what the Bible says, Matthew 22, verse 34: "But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together." Wow. Then if you look at Mark 14, verse 1, Mark 14, verse 1: "After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death." The chief priests and the scribes. Look in Mark 14, verse 55, which we read earlier: "And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none."

Now if you would turn right over to John chapter 11. Look if you would at the counsel that is given. John chapter 11 and let's begin reading there with verse 48. John 11, verse 48. You see, it was impossible for them to just leave Jesus Christ alone. It's impossible. And they recognize that impossibility. So in John 11, verse 48, let's begin with verse 47: "Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we?"

"For this man doeth many miracles. Ah, what are we going to do? If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole

nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad."

The interesting thing is verse 53: "Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death." Caiaphas says, We cannot let him alone. If we let him alone, we are going to lose our position, our power, and our prestige. We have to do something.

It is expedient that one man die. Let us get rid of Jesus Christ; let us kill him and get him out of our hair. It is true that Caiaphas did not understand what he was saying. Being high priest that year, he was prophesying that Jesus Christ would die for His people. But that was not what Caiaphas meant. What he meant was, Let us kill him. One man is going to die, and the rest of us are going to live. Let us take care of that now.

In Mark 14, verse 55, we read: "And the chief priests and all the council sought for witnesses against Jesus to put him to death; and found none." The chief priests and all the council sought witnesses against Jesus to put Him to death. Here you have the council, which was supposed to be an impartial jury. The trials were to be held, but they were seeking witnesses for the express purpose of putting Jesus Christ to death. Matthew 26:59 shows this again.

"Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death." It is not that Jesus Christ had done anything wicked or wrong. It is not that He merited or earned the death penalty. They simply intended to put Him to death. They prejudged Him before a trial ever began. First, there was no complaint and no cause of action. There was no one who could claim harm or injury.

Second, pay attention to the fact that the judges initiated the action against Jesus Christ without a complaint and without witnesses. If the judges had not initiated this case, there would not have been a case. Just stop and think. It was like a judge sitting on the bench today and saying, "Well, we need to get Robert. Let's plan on how we're going to get Robert," instead of being impartial. They

were the ones initiating the complaint. Third, they intended to condemn Jesus Christ and execute Him.

Fourth, they were not interested in justice. They simply wanted Jesus Christ dead. They were violating not only numerous principles from Scripture, but also their own principles. One of the principles they followed was this: listen carefully. In pecuniary causes, they could either begin for absolution or condemnation. But in capital causes, they had to begin for absolution and not for condemnation. So, if money was involved, they could either begin for absolution or condemnation. But if the death penalty was involved, according to their own principle, the case had to begin with absolution. It had to begin with innocence.

That is why we say a man is innocent until he is proven guilty. They were to begin with such evidence as tended to acquit a man, and not with such evidence as served to condemn him. This court, however, was only seeking such evidence with which they might condemn Jesus Christ.

John Gill said, “First they take him up, and then seek out for witnesses against him, being determined, right or wrong, to put him to death, if possible, and false witnesses too, even those whose business it was to examine and detect false witnesses.”

In biblical law courts, it was the duty and responsibility of judges to examine and detect false witnesses. According to Deuteronomy 19, verses 18 and 19, if a witness was found to be false, the judges were to do to him whatever he thought to have done to his brother. It was their responsibility to seek out, examine, and punish false witnesses. Gill continued, “even those whose business it was to examine and detect false witnesses and to afflict the same punishment upon them which they by their false testimony intended to have brought upon another.”

“And besides, it was night when it was forbidden by their canons to begin the trial of capital causes or to receive and admit of witnesses. Indeed, the Syriac and Persic versions read only witnesses or witness and leave out the word false, perhaps imagining that men could never be so wicked to seek out for false witnesses. But this need not be wondered at, when these men were bent upon the death

of Christ at any rate, and were aware that nothing true could be objected to him that would legally take away his life. And besides, their manner, procedure, and judgment against the false prophet, a deceiver, and one they enticed to idolatry, and such one they would have Jesus to be, was quite different from what they took with other persons."

Their canon stated, "The judgment of a deceiver is not as the rest of capital judgments. His witnesses are hid and he has no need or ought not to have any premonition or warning as the rest of those that are put to death."

"And he goes out of the Sanhedrin acquitted, and one says, I can prove the charges against him, they turn him back. But if he goes out condemned and one says, I can prove him innocent, then they do not return him." Thus their own canons were violated.

Mark 14:56 says, "For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together."

False Witnesses and the High Priest's Oath

The obvious implication of these verses is that none of Christ's accusers, who were sought out by the chief priests, could get their stories together. Moreover, their testimonies did not merit the death penalty. These priests were not so much concerned with false witness as with the fact that the false witnesses could not produce the result they wanted.

John Gill says that the council was not concerned about the falsehood or contradiction of the testimony, but that the witnesses' statements were not equal or answerable to the wishes of the council. They were insufficient to prove a capital crime against Jesus in order to put Him to death, which was what they wanted. Their accusations concerned only light and trivial matters and did not amount to a charge of blasphemy or sedition.

If you look at verse 60, Gill's assessment is correct: "And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?" That was a very provocative question, designed to imply guilt in Jesus Christ. It implied that all the witnesses were truthful and that, since so many witnesses were present, Christ must be guilty of something. If possible, they wanted Jesus Christ to confess and condemn Himself.

The high priest presented the accusations: "What is it that all these witnesses testify against you?" But Jesus Christ did not fall into their trap. The Bible says, "he answered them nothing." He knew that the witnesses were false. The high priests and the council wanted Him dead, executed, and condemned. Let me say it another way: they wanted Him damned.

Verse 61 says, "But he held his peace, and answered nothing"—when they questioned Him about those witnesses. "Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?" They had heard His answer and had what they wanted: "Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death."

Now, finally frustrated in verse 61, the high priest asked Him, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" May I remind you that the term "the Blessed One" was a common name for the one true and the living God. He is so called because He is everlastingly blessed in and of Himself, as well as blessed and praised by men and angels. Zacharias began his canticle in Luke 1:68 with, "Blessed is the Lord God." So when he asked, "Are you the Son of the Blessed?" he was asking, "Are you the Son of God?"

So here is the question: When all these false witnesses testified against Christ, Christ answered nothing. Now the high priest asked Him, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" and He answered. Previously, He had stood silent. Now He answers. Why? Why did our Lord not remain silent? Let me show you. Hold Mark 14, but turn in your Bibles to Matthew 26, verse 63. Here it is given a little more fully. This is the same trial: "But Jesus held his peace.

And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Note the words, "I adjure thee."

I am putting you under an oath. You tell us whether or not you are the Son of the living God. Christ had now been charged with an oath. Now turn back in your Bibles to Leviticus chapter 5 and look at verse 1. Leviticus 5:1 says, "And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness..." Well, the high priest swore and put Christ under an oath.

"Whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity." When the high priest said, "I adjure thee by the living God, you tell us whether or not you are the Son of the Blessed One. You tell us whether or not you are God," Jesus Christ was indeed a witness to the fact that He was the Son of God. Therefore, He could not stand silent; He must answer. That is why He gave His answer in verse 62.

John Calvin said that from Caiaphas's words we may infer that it was common among the Jews to bestow on the Messiah the title, the Son of God. This form of interrogation arose from their ordinary custom and from the prediction of Scripture that He was not less the Son of God than the Son of David. Caiaphas employed this epithet either to terrify Christ or to excite prejudice against Him, as though he had said, "See where you are going. You cannot call yourself Christ, that is, Messiah, without claiming at the same time the title of the Son of God with which Scripture honors Him."

Jesus' Confession and the Verdict

Such is the reason for using the word blessed, which Mark gives instead of God. This pretended reverence for God was intended to bring a heavier charge against Christ than simply profaning the holy name of God. Everything the high priest is doing is calculated to condemn Christ. Christ is claiming to be the Messiah. If you claim to be the Messiah, you must claim to be the Son of David. If you claim to be the Son of David, you must claim to be the Son of God.

Go back to verse 61. Previously, He had held His peace: "Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the

Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye?"

"And they all condemned him to be guilty of death." When the high priest said, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus Christ answered, "I am." In other words, He said, You asked Me, and I am telling you that you have it right. I am the Son of the Blessed One. He then offered two proofs. First, "ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power"—that is, on the right hand of God—"and coming in the clouds of heaven." His position declares His deity: He is seated at the right hand of God. He would also come with power. They would see Him coming in the clouds of heaven, either at the destruction of Jerusalem, which is in all probability, or at the last day, when He would demonstrate not only His divinity and deity, but His judgeship as well.

When He was put under oath and asked, "Art thou the Son of the Blessed?" He said, "I am." I am God in the flesh. I am the Messiah. I am the Son of God.

Notice the reaction of the high priest: "Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death." The question, "What think ye?" might appear to be fairly put. However, it was already prejudged, for the high priest said, "Ye have heard the blasphemy. What think ye?" As president of the court, he was supposed to vote last, but he voted first. He not only prejudged the case; he conditioned the others. Consequently, all who agreed with him condemned Jesus Christ, damning Him to be guilty of blasphemy.

The Bible says that the high priest rent his clothes. He tore them off at the sound of Jesus Christ saying, "I am." This pictures the ending of the Old Covenant sacrifices and ceremonies. As the high priest removed his holy garment, it pictured the end of that covenant and the beginning of the priesthood and ministry of Jesus Christ. In reality, as they condemned Jesus Christ, the high priest condemned himself, and so did all those who were with him.

Now I want you to note they charged him with blasphemy. "Ye have heard the blasphemy. What think ye?" "Ye have heard the blasphemy." Why? Because he made himself the Son of God. If you look back or look over your Bibles to John chapter 5, they understood very clearly what our Lord was saying. They had understood previously what our Lord was claiming. In John 5, verse 18. Notice if you would, verse 17.

"But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath"—that is their interpretation of it—"but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." So if he's claiming to be the Son of God, he is claiming to be God. And if you go back in your Bibles to Luke—I'm sorry, to Leviticus 24, Leviticus 24.

When the priest said, "Ye have heard the blasphemy, what think ye?" Notice Leviticus 24, verse 16. Leviticus 24, verse 16: "And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death." So blasphemy merited the death penalty.

Now, I want you to turn in your Bibles, Luke chapter 23. I want you to turn there and watch this, please. Answer this question for me. What did they charge Jesus Christ with? The answer is blasphemy. And consequently, they said he was deserving of death. And you will remember now that they now, after they do this, take him to Pilate. Right? Well, look at Luke chapter 23, verse 1. "And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate."

"And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King." Whoa. The charge just changed. Isn't that amazing? The charges just changed. Because they knew Pilate could care less about their interpretation. And so they had to get a political charge against him. And when Pilate was determined to let him go in John 19, they said, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend." Now, let's go back.

What I want to share with you is so simple. I want you to see this, I want you to understand this. The high priest said, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus Christ said, "I am. You'll see me sitting at the right hand of God the Father. You'll see me coming in heavens. I am the Son of God." The high priest said, "You have heard his blasphemy. What think ye?"

Application: Aligning with the Sanhedrin or with Christ

They all said He was guilty of death. What did they just do? They damned Jesus Christ. They said concerning Christ that He was an imposter, a deceiver, a charlatan, a liar, and a blasphemer. He was not the Son of God; He was speaking blasphemy.

Unless you repent of your sins, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and acknowledge Him as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior, the Lord of Glory, the Great I Am, God in the flesh—unless you repent and bow to Him—you are aligning yourself with the Sanhedrin and damning Christ, saying that He is an imposter, a liar, and a blasphemer. The condemnation of Jesus Christ is not over. The damning of Jesus Christ is not over. You may either condemn the wickedness and rebellion of the Sanhedrin, or you may condemn and damn Jesus Christ. You may either condemn yourself as a sinner and wicked, or you may condemn and damn Jesus Christ. There is no neutrality. You are either for Jesus Christ or against Jesus Christ.

If Jesus Christ is God, you owe Him obedience, submission, repentance, and faith. If you refuse to bow to Jesus Christ, just like the high priests and the council, you are damning Him as a liar, an imposter, and a blasphemer. Is it any wonder that God the Father looks with great anger and great wrath upon those who deny Jesus Christ? They are saying, in essence, that the Sanhedrin was right: Jesus Christ is not God.

But I am here to tell you, Jesus Christ is God. Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, and beside Him there is none other. The wise and scriptural thing to do is to bow to Him, for He is King of kings, Lord of lords, and God of gods. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to You this day. We thank You for Your Word and

Your truth. We ask, Lord, that You would help us to see the implication of…

CHAPTER 4

The Intercession of Christ and Prayer

August 13, 2017

Introduction: The Neglected Intercession

Hebrews chapter 7, verse 25, says, “Wherefore he,” that is, the Lord Jesus, “is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

There is an amazing thought here. The Bible does not say, “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he gave his life a ransom or a sacrifice for them.” Now, he did give his life as a ransom and a sacrifice, but the Bible says he is able to save us to the uttermost, seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Most people hardly ever consider the intercession of Christ, and very few, if any, ever consider the intercession of Christ and prayer.

We pray oftentimes, but we have never really understood that the efficacy, or power, of prayer truly does not lie within us. Here is a

good question to ponder: Have you ever asked yourself why any of our prayers are answered?

The Sinfulness of Our Prayers

Most people want to know why their prayers are unanswered. Certainly, that is a legitimate question from time to time, but we need to consider why any of our prayers are ever answered. I understand that there are certain requirements in the Bible for prayer. We must pray in faith, and we must pray according to the will of God. But have you ever considered the sin actually involved in our prayer, even when we endeavor to pray biblically? None of us prays perfectly.

Oftentimes there are wicked, vile, humanistic, and fleshly thoughts. We are bothered; we cannot concentrate or think. There is absolutely nothing in us that is perfect. One old preacher said it like this: “There’s enough sin in our prayers to send us to hell if it were not for the priestly work of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Stop and think about that. It is true.

We cannot fulfill any responsible action, nor can we do anything really and truly solidly biblical, because of our sin, weakness, and wickedness. No one but Jesus Christ prays perfectly. Jesus Christ is prophet, priest, and king.

Confessional Foundations of Christ's Intercession

Two quotations will help us begin. The first is from the Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith, and the second is from the Westminster Confession of Faith. In one area, they are basically the same. They speak of the session—the heavenly session, Christ seated at the right hand of God—and His intercession.

The Philadelphia Baptist Confession says: "To all those for whom Christ hath obtained eternal redemption, He doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them, uniting them to Himself by His Spirit, revealing unto them in and by the Word the mystery of salvation, persuading them to believe and obey, governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit, and overcoming all of their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom;

in such manner and ways as are most consonant to His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation, and all of free and absolute grace, without any condition foreseen in them to procure it. The office of mediator between God and man is proper only to Christ, who is prophet, priest, and King of the church of God, and may not be, either in whole or in any part, transferred from Him to any other."

"This number and order of offices is necessary. For in respect of our ignorance, we stand in need of his prophetical office; and in respect of our alienation from God, and imperfection of the best of our services, we need His priestly office to reconcile us and present us acceptable unto God; and in respect of our averseness and our utter inability to return to God, and for our rescue and security from our spiritual adversaries, we need His kingly office to convince, subdue, draw, uphold, deliver, and preserve us to his heavenly kingdom."

Those are a few paragraphs from the Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith concerning the intercession of Christ. Paragraph 8 from the Westminster Confession is almost word-for-word with the Philadelphia: "To all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption, He does certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them and revealing unto them in and by the Word the mysteries of salvation, effectually persuading them by His Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit."

"...overcoming all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom in such manner and ways as are most consonant to His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation."

You and I believe, based upon the Word of God, that the only approach to the one true and living God, the only approach to our Heavenly Father, is through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We can have no access unto God except through Jesus Christ. In John 14:6, He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." The only way to God the Father is through Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that the proper approach to God is through the Son and in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:18 says, "For through him," that is, through Jesus Christ, "through him we both have

access by one Spirit unto the Father." The proper avenue of approach to the Father is through the Son and in the Spirit.

Christ as Our Advocate and High Priest

One author said this concerning Jesus Christ: "He who might have been placing a vial of wrath in the hand of every angel around his throne with a commission to pour it out upon this rebellious world until it was utterly consumed, is standing at this moment at the altar of incense presenting our prayers for mercy and officiating there as our great High Priest." Christ could have rightly and justly condemned us, but He did not.

Romans 8:34 says, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God, and He maketh intercession for us. Hebrews 9:24 says, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands," which are the figures of the true, "but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."

Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God, appearing there for us. This should greatly encourage us in prayer when we grasp the fact that Jesus Christ is our intercessor and our advocate.

He actually represents us before the Father. In 1 John 2 and verse 1, the Bible says, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

The word advocate literally means that he is our attorney. He pleads our cause and prays in our behalf. Consequently, because of this, we should have boldness to enter into the holiest of all. You remember in the Old Testament, the only one who could go into the holiest of all was the high priest, and then only once a year, and that not without the shedding of blood.

But look in Hebrews 10, beginning with verse 19. The Bible says, “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full

assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised).” Look at verse 19 again: “...having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.” Please remember again, no one but the high priest went into the holiest of all.

If any man ran into that, he would have been instantly killed. Now the Bible says that we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ who makes our prayers effectual, for the Father always hears Jesus Christ. In John 11, verse 41, where our Lord raised Lazarus from the dead, He said, “Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.”

In fact, God the Father always hears God the Son. There is a tremendous passage in Psalm 2, verse 8, where the Father said to the Son, “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” In other words, the Father said to the Son, “All you have to do is ask, and I'll give it to you. Whatever you ask, you may have.”

Let us look in John 17 at some aspects of the intercessory work of Christ. We cannot cover everything, but this will give us an idea and an example of our Lord's intercession.

Christ Prays for His People (John 17:6-9)

This passage is the high priestly prayer of our Lord. Previously, we considered the sovereignty of God in prayer and what is commonly referred to as the Lord's Prayer, which is really the model prayer in which our Lord taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven." However, John 17 is indeed the high priestly prayer of our Lord. In verse 1, the Bible says, "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come. Glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee." The entire chapter is the prayer of our Lord.

The first thing we see in verses 6–9 is that Jesus Christ prays for His people. He says, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou

gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me."

Then He says, "I pray for them," that is, the ones the Father gave the Son. "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine."

In this brief passage, we also see the prophetical office of Christ as well as His priestly office. His prophetical office is seen when He says, "I've declared unto them the words which thou gavest me." In other words, He preached, taught, and gave His disciples the truth that God had given Him to declare. But we also see His priestly work because He is now praying.

It is interesting that He says, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine." Matthew Henry points out three things concerning this passage: "The elect whom the Father gave to Christ were His own in three ways."

First, they were creatures, and their lives and beings were derived from Him. When they were given to Christ as vessels of honor, they were in His hand as clay in the hand of the potter, to be disposed of as God's wisdom saw most fitting for God's glory.

Secondly, they were criminals. Their lives and beings were forfeited to Him. They were a remnant of fallen mankind given to Christ to be redeemed. They might have been made sacrifices to justice, but they were chosen to be monuments of mercy; they might justly have been delivered to the tormentors, but they were delivered to the Savior.

Thirdly, they were chosen, and their lives and beings were designed for Him. They were set apart for God and consigned to Christ as His agent.

Matthew Henry said that we belong to God in three ways: we were His creatures; we were His criminals, having sinned against Him and been delivered into His hand for justice; and we are chosen, because He delivered us from that criminality and brought us to Jesus Christ. Have you ever stopped to think that Jesus Christ is the

agent of God the Father? He received us as God the Father's agents. But He is also our agent, because He is our surety and undertook on our behalf to guarantee everything.

When we think of our Lord's salvation, we automatically think of His sacrifice and His substitutionary death. Very seldom do we think about His priestly intercession. Yet the truth is that He not only died in our place; He now lives to intercede for us. That is why Hebrews 7:25 says, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him," not just because He gave His life for them, but because "he ever liveth to make intercession for them." In other words, the priestly work of Jesus Christ is just as important in salvation as His substitutionary and sacrificial work.

As our suffering Substitute, He made atonement for our sins while on earth. As our High Priest, He now maketh intercession for each of us unto the Father. Romans 8:32–34 says, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

The Philadelphia Confession of Faith and the Westminster Confession of Faith contain this identical paragraph: "To all those for whom Christ has purchased redemption, He does certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same, making intercession for them and revealing unto them in and by His Word the mystery of His salvation." Notice how they tie the intercession of Christ to the salvation of Christ. His sacrifice merited and earned salvation, but His priestly intercession enables Him to apply that salvation.

The Intercession as Application of Salvation

Has it ever dawned upon you that you were brought savingly to God the Father not simply because of the work of God the Holy Spirit, but also because of the priestly work of God the Son? His intercession is just as important as His sacrifice. I usually ask a question when preaching on Matthew chapter 5: Which is more important, the circumcision of Jesus Christ or the crucifixion of Jesus Christ? Most people will say, "The crucifixion." But the crucifixion would have

been ineffective had He not kept the law of God perfectly. Both are equally important, and it is the same when we consider the intercession of Christ and the sacrifice of Christ.

John Owen, the old Puritan known as the prince of preachers, lists three divisions of Christ's work in redemption: first, the incarnation of Christ, when Jesus Christ became flesh and dwelt among us; secondly, His oblation, or sacrifice; and thirdly, His intercession for those for whom He made atonement. Owen says, "His intercession is for all and every one of those for whom he gave himself for an oblation. He did not suffer for them and then refused to intercede for them. He did not do the greater and omit the lesser." We are saved just as much by our Lord's intercession as we are by His sacrifice. His intercession is simply the application of His purchased salvation.

Christ executed the first element of His priestly office, surety, when He gave Himself as a sacrifice. He likewise administers the second element of His priestly office, as He is still our surety and intercedes for us. He is not merely standing before the throne of God saying, "Father, these are my friends." Scripture does call us His friends, but He stands there as our surety, guaranteeing everything for us.

It is like someone wanting to buy something without quite having enough money, while another person stands behind him and says, "I'll be his surety." In other words, he guarantees that the seller will receive his money; if the buyer cannot pay, he will. Jesus Christ is our surety in the sense that He is pleasing before the Father through the perfection of His work and the pureness of His sacrifice.

Matthew Henry said, first of all, that we were God's creatures. Secondly, we were God's criminals, and we were that. But thirdly, he said, we were God's chosen. Think about this. He said, "Thirdly, they were chosen and their lives and beings were designed for him. They were set apart for God and were consigned to Christ as his agent." So Jesus Christ, as the agent of the Father, is the one who guarantees that those whom the Father has given Him will indeed end up in glory. But since we have been given to Him, He's not only the agent of the Father; He's also our agent and our surety, and He undertakes for us. He is our advocate.

In 1 John 2 and verse 1, the Bible says, "My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The word for advocate is a very interesting word. It is the word parakletos. Parakletos literally means one that is called alongside to help. Para means alongside. Kletos is from the word called. It is translated in our Bibles as advocate and as comforter. So actually the parakletos is the one who is called along beside of to plead our cause before a judge, to be our counsel for defense, to be our helper, and to be our aid.

The same word is used of the Holy Spirit. In John 14 and 15, Jesus said that He was going to the Father, but He said, "If I go to the Father, I will not leave you comfortless." "I will send you another Comforter." The word Comforter there is parakletos, and He is talking about the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 8, verses 26 and 27, we see what the Holy Spirit as Comforter does for us, or at least one of the things that He does for us. Romans 8, verse 26, says, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities."

"For we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." The Holy Spirit is a Comforter. He is the paraclete, the one called alongside to help, because we do not know how to pray as we ought. The Bible tells us that He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. Why, then, is the Holy Spirit called the Parakletos, and why is Jesus Christ called the Parakletos?

The answer is simple: the Holy Spirit is an intercessor in us, and God the Son is the intercessor for us. Both do intercessory work. Both are paracletes. Both are called alongside to help.

Christ Prays for Preservation, Protection, and Preachers (John 17:11-20)

Jesus Christ is our intercessor and our advocate. In John 17, verse 11, He stands as surety for our preservation: "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are." Our Lord is saying, "I'm leaving. I'm going back to you. Now keep them. They are in the world, but they need to be kept."

First Peter 1 and verse 5 tells us that we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time. Why would God keep us? Because God the Son prayed for us and asked the Father to keep and preserve us. Jude writes, "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ." God the Father heard the prayer for our preservation, and we are preserved in Jesus Christ.

Why did Peter not fail utterly, totally, and completely? We know that he denied Christ three times. In Luke 22, verses 31 and 32, Jesus Christ said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." The reason Peter did not falter and fail totally, completely, and permanently is because Christ interceded for him. The only reason you and I do not fail and falter completely, totally, and permanently is because of the intercessory prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you realize it is impossible for God's people to apostatize totally and completely?

How can I say that? First, because of the prayer of Jesus Christ. He asked the Father to keep us, and the Father always hears and answers His prayer. The Bible says in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." If anyone ever leaves the faith permanently and apostatizes, it is evidence that he was never in the faith to begin with. They went out from us because

they were not of us; for had they been of us, no doubt they would have continued with us.

Our Lord prays for our preservation. We will be preserved, and we are preserved in Jesus Christ. He also prays for our protection. In verses 14 and 15 He says, "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." Actually, the wording is, "that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one."

Is it ho ponēros? Is there a definite article there? In any case, Satan is referred to in Revelation 12:10 as the accuser of the brethren. We have not only the accuser of the brethren, but also the world, the flesh, the ungodly, and wicked rulers. All of these seek to overthrow us and destroy us.

The amazing thing is this: they will never, ever prevail. The Bible says in Psalm 37:12, “The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth.” The wicked scheme, plan, and conspire to destroy us, but they shall not do so. John wrote in 1 John 2:13–14, “I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.” And 1 John 4:4 says, “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”

Our preservation and protection rest upon the great High Priest, our Intercessor, the Lord Jesus Christ. He prays for His people. How could you not be encouraged to pray when you realize that the Son of God prays for you?

Second, look in John 17:20. He not only prays for His people; He prays for His preachers. He says, “Neither pray I for these alone,” meaning His then-living disciples, “but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.” Thus He also prays for future

believers, and for His preachers as they preach, teach, and tell others, who will believe on Him through their word.

Every preacher desires success in the ministry, but one's definition of success may be faulty and unbiblical. By today's standards, Noah would have been an epic failure: he preached for 120 years and never had one convert. Jeremiah and Isaiah, too, would have been epic failures, yet they are listed as heroes of faith.

What is the ground or foundation of success in the ministry? Is it the oratory ability, charisma, ability, or knowledge of the preacher? No. The foundation of success in the ministry is the intercession of Jesus Christ. It is invigorating, encouraging, and edifying to know that Jesus Christ intercedes and prays for the preaching of the gospel. In our Lord's High Priestly Prayer, in verse 20, He not only prays for the men who will be preaching; He also prays for the method—the preaching itself—and for those who will believe only through their words. Have you ever really considered the ministry?

John Flavel, one of the earlier Puritans and one of the most delightful to read, explains its problems: “The labors of the ministry will exhaust the very marrow from your bones. Hasten to old age and death. They, God's preachers, are fitly compared to the toil of men in harvest, to the labors of a woman in travail, and to the agonies of soldiers in the extremity of a battle.

“We must watch while others sleep. And indeed, it is not so much the expense of our labors as the loss of them that kill us. It is not with us as with other laborers. They find their work as they leave it. So do not we. Sin and Satan unravel almost all we do. The impressions we make on our people's souls in one sermon vanish before the next.

“How many truths have we to study? How many wiles of Satan and mysteries of corruption to detect? How many cases of conscience to resolve? Yea, we must fight in defense of the truth we preach, as well as study them to paleness, and preach them and all, and welcome pained breasts, aching backs, and trembling legs, if we can by all but approve ourselves Christ's faithful servants, and hear that joyful voice from his mouth, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant,' all will be well.”

But notice what he said: that which kills preachers most is not merely putting forth the labor, but the loss of it. If you are building a house, studding up the wall, and night comes before you finish, you can quit, go home, eat supper, and go to bed. When you return the next morning, the wall is still standing. You can pick up your hammer and saw and go back to it. You find your work exactly as you left it.

He said that is not true in the ministry. Sin and Satan unravel almost all we do. The impressions we make on our people's souls in one sermon vanish before the next. That is why most people cannot remember what the preacher preached last Sunday; they certainly cannot remember what he preached a month ago. It is gone. It has evaporated. Where did it go? The Bible tells us Satan steals the seed. It also tells us there are the flesh, the world, and all kinds of things to destroy it.

The point I am trying to make is this: the power is not in the preacher. Arthur W. Pink said it like this: "A hundred preachers are unable to make an unregenerate person realize the dreadful nature of sin, or show him that he's been a lifelong rebel against God, or change his heart so that now he hates himself and longs to please God and serve Christ. Only the Spirit can bring a man to the place where he's willing to forsake every idol, cut off a hindering right hand, or pluck out an offending right eye."

You could take all the preachers in America, and we could not convert one lost sinner in and of ourselves. It is impossible. Jesus Christ sent the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ prays for the success of His preachers. Listen to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2, verses 1 through 5: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

It was not my oratory or my wisdom; that is worthless. Paul said it this way in 2 Corinthians 4:5–7: “For we preach not ourselves, but

Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

When you stop and think how weak, wicked, and helpless are the most brilliant, wise, and godly preachers, you realize that we cannot convert one sinner. We cannot comfort, console, or encourage one saint in and of ourselves, in our strength and power, because we have none. The only hope of success in the ministry lies in the intercession of Jesus Christ.

The ministry will be successful for three reasons. First, God the Father ordained it. Second, God the Son prayed for it. Third, God the Holy Spirit is covenantally engaged to honor the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. In this intercessory prayer, our Lord prays for His people—for our preservation and protection. He prays for His preachers, and He is the ground of our success in the ministry. He also prays for our perfection.

Christ Prays for Our Perfection (John 17:21-24)

In verses 21 through 24, our Lord prays: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." Then He says, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

Can you fathom being with Jesus Christ and beholding Him in all His glory, worshiping and glorifying Him in a body capable of constant and continuous praise? He prayed for our perfection.

Romans 8:30–34 ties this together: "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also

justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

Now go back to verse 30 and observe something unusual in this verse: "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Do you notice anything peculiar about the three words called, justified, and glorified? They are all past tense. In the Greek, they are all in the aorist tense, which means that each is a completed action.

Now, here is my question: Have you yet been glorified? No. But your glorification is just as absolutely certain and sure as if it had already been done. In fact, God the Father views it as a completed action. He called you. He justified you. He glorified you. Wow!

So verse 30 says that you have been called, justified, and glorified. Then verse 31 asks, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" If God is for us, it really does not matter who is against us, because no one can overthrow God, thwart Him, or hinder Him.

Verse 32 continues: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

The Greater-to-Lesser Argument (Romans 8:31-34)

The Apostle Paul is using a very precious argument from the greater to the lesser. If God has done the greatest in giving His only begotten Son to be our sacrifice, our substitute, and our surety, will He not do the lesser? Would He not follow through with the completion of His purpose and of His salvation? That is what he is saying: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he

not with him also freely give us all things?" If God has done the greatest thing for us, He is not going to fail to do that which is lesser.

"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." God is the one who justifies. No one can lay a charge against us before God. You might lay a charge against us before man, but you are not going to lay a charge against us before God, because God is the one who has justified us. "Who is he that condemneth?"

It does not do you any good to condemn. Why? "It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Do you see how the intercession of Jesus Christ is intimately connected with our salvation? We have been called, we have been justified, and we have been glorified. The heavenly session of our Lord denotes His power to save and protect us, and His intercession assures it. He is there.

He is going to make sure that our glorification comes to pass, because God has already given the greater—that is, His Son—to be our sacrifice and our substitute. Now God is going to finish the work. If God has done the greatest, shall He not do that which is least? Of course He will.

Conclusion: Encouragement to Bold Prayer

Our glorified Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, is conscious of His claims. He is conscious of the efficacy of His life, death, and resurrection and its intercession. Our Lord is confident in His prayers. He says, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." I do not know about you, but that boggles my mind.

How could anyone think that the Father would not answer that prayer because the Father sent the Son to accomplish salvation? That is why glorified is in the past tense. It is accomplished in the will and purpose of God.

Faith finds joy and triumph not just in the sacrifice of Christ and not just in His resurrection, but in His intercession at the right hand of God. When we understand that our prayer is connected to the intercession of Christ, how could we not be constant in prayer? How could we not be continuous in prayer when we know that the Holy

Spirit is an intercessor in us, and Jesus Christ is an intercessor for us before the throne of God? How could we not pray? How could we not come with holy boldness within the veil into the most holy and have communion with God? If God has done the greatest, will He not do that which is least? If God has sent His Son to be our intercessor and the Spirit to be our intercessor, He certainly encourages us to pray.

Does that mean He will not hear us? No. He will hear us. He has done that which is greater; He will certainly not fail to do that which is lesser. In Hebrews 10:22, we read, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." We can say, "Father, in faith, I know the Holy Spirit prays in me. I know the Son of God prays for me. I want Your will; I want Your Word. Hear me, O Father." We have perfect communion with God the Father through Jesus Christ in the Spirit.

Hebrews 7:25 says, "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." The intercession of Jesus Christ is the foundation for our prayer life. He is praying for us, encouraging us to pray to God the Father through God the Son in the Holy Spirit.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee. We thank You for the intercession of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Father, make us holy, make us godly, make us prayerful. May we praise Thee for Thy work in Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 5

Prayer & The Sovereignty of God

August 17, 2017

The Sovereignty of God in Prayer

As I considered the prayer life of a spiritual giant, I could not help but think of George Mueller and all those orphanages that he had. On one occasion, some of the women came to him and said, "What are we going to do? It's dinnertime and there's absolutely no food."

He said, "Set the table." They left to set the table, and he prayed. By the time it was time for the meal, there was a wagon load of food outside. It is astounding. There are so many that you could choose from. Hudson Taylor is another blessing.

Introduction: The Problem of Prayer and Sovereignty

The subject I have been asked to deal with is the sovereignty of God in prayer. In Job 42, beginning with verse 1, Scripture says, "Then Job answered the Lord and said, I know that thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from thee." This

is a statement of the greatness and power of God, and it raises a question for us.

Since God is sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and immutable, why pray? The question most often is asked, why pray? Obviously, God has declared in Isaiah 46 and verse 10, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all of my pleasure." If God's counsel is going to stand, and He is undoubtedly going to do all of His pleasure, why pray?

Moreover, when you think about Daniel 4 and verse 35: "and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing, and He doeth according to His will in the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou?" Now if God is going to do His will in the armies of heaven and in the inhabitants of the earth, and no one can thwart Him, no one can hinder Him, and no one can stop Him, why pray?

Moreover, Job said in verse 2, “I know that thou canst do everything, and no thought can be withholden from thee.” Now, since God can do everything, why pray? God certainly has ordained the end from the beginning. The Bible tells us in Acts chapter 15 and verse 18, “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” You must understand that history is nothing less than God's eternal decree coming to pass in time. The world is not governed by luck, chance, fate, or fortune. It is governed by the sovereign providence of God.

Let me give you a good illustration. In Acts chapter 4, beginning in verse 26, the Bible says concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, “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 thy 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.” Do you realize that everything about the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ was decreed before the world began? Absolutely nothing happened to Jesus Christ except that which was ordained by God before the world began.

When these wicked people crucified our Lord, mocked Him, ridiculed Him, and railed upon Him, the fact that this was ordained before the foundation of the world did not excuse them or alleviate their guilt or sin. They did not do to Jesus Christ what they did in order to please God, honor God, and worship God. They did it because they hated God and Jesus Christ, despised Him, and wanted to do what was in their own hearts; and their hearts were filled with envy, malice, and hatred. Therefore, they are responsible for their actions before God.

In fact, the Bible makes this clear in Luke 23:25. Pilate was going to release someone at the feast day: "Whom will ye that I release? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?" They cried, "Barabbas, Barabbas, release Barabbas unto us." The Bible tells us, "And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they desired, but delivered Jesus to their will."

Do you realize they did to Jesus Christ not what God necessarily ordained for God's honor and glory? They did to Jesus Christ what they willed to do because they hated and despised Him. He was delivered to their will. They desired a murderer over the Son of God; they preferred to free a murderer and murder the holy, harmless Son of God. The Bible tells us clearly in Psalm 76:10, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise the Lord: and the remainder of wrath shall he restrain."

So, in Acts 4, they did exactly what God ordained before the foundation of the world, yet their sin was not excused. God used their wickedness to accomplish His will. Therefore, you must ask: If God's will is going to be done, why pray?

I can give several biblical answers. The first is brief: 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. Simply because God is absolutely sovereign, once He gives the command, it is ours to obey.

Reason 1: Prayer is Commanded by God

The Bible tells you in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray without ceasing. Luke 18:1 has already been quoted: "And the Lord said, men ought

always to pray, and not to faint." Moreover, God has given us the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are to be conformed to His image. Matthew 14:23 tells us, "And he sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray, and when the evening was come, he was there alone." Our Lord went up into a mountain apart to pray. Luke 6:12 says, "It came to pass in those days that He went out into a mountain to pray and continued all night in prayer to God." I suspect very few of us have ever prayed all night. Yet our Lord did. Luke 9:28 says, "And it came to pass about eight days after these things, he took Peter, James, and John and went up into a mountain to pray."

Very obviously, our Lord was indeed a man of prayer, and He prayed to His Heavenly Father. John 17, of course, is the high priestly prayer of our Lord. He prayed there to His Father, and if He prayed to His Father, then likewise we should pray to our Heavenly Father. If the Lord did not intend for us to pray, why did He teach us to pray in Luke 11? Very obviously, we are to pray even though God is sovereign, simply because God has commanded that we pray.

Reason 2: The Purpose of Prayer is to Glorify God

The second reason is this: We must pray because of the purpose of prayer. May I remind you that the purpose of prayer is not simply to make your requests and petitions known unto God? We are certainly encouraged to do that. But the truth of the matter is, our Heavenly Father knows what we need before we ever ask. If you would look in your Bibles to Matthew 6, beginning with verse 7, notice what the Bible says.

Our Lord said, "But when you 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 you have need of before you ask him." Isn't that amazing? When you pray, use not vain repetitions. You do not say something over and over as the heathen do, and you are not going to be heard for your much speaking or your loud speaking. Your Father knoweth what things you have need of before you ever ask.

Is it wrong, therefore, to ask for our needs, our wants, and our desires? Absolutely no. It is not wrong to ask. We may freely do so,

and we are encouraged to do so in Scripture. But the purpose of prayer is not simply to make our needs known to God. He already knows those needs.

I am a father, a grandfather, and a great-grandfather. I knew that my children and grandchildren needed food, clothing, and other necessities. But it always delighted me when one of them came to me and asked for something special, or when they thought that I was the only one who could provide it for them.

My oldest grandson, who I think is now twenty-nine, used to call me when he was five to eight years of age. After I answered, he would begin, "Papa, I need," and then fill in the blank. I would ask, "Well, have you talked to your parents about this?" He would say, "Yes, sir. And they told me to call you." Either they did not have the money or the time, but they knew that Papa would take the time to get him what he wanted.

You know what the Bible says in Proverbs 15:8: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. But the prayer of the upright is his delight." Have you ever thought about delighting the heart of God? He tells us that the prayer of the upright is his delight. Proverbs 15:29 says, "the Lord is far from the wicked, but he heareth the prayer of the righteous."

If he hears our prayers and delights in them, it should be obvious that we can speak openly, freely, and personally with him, confiding in him all our needs, wants, and desires. When you study the Apostle Paul, he made a statement like this in Philippians 1:4: "Always in every prayer of mine, for you all, making requests with joy." Paul made requests for the Philippians. Do you make requests for yourself? Do you make requests for your family? Do you make requests for your friends? You can quote this passage in Philippians 4:6: "Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." As one of my friends said, "Be careful for nothing, be prayerful about everything, and be thankful for anything."

Just stop and think about that. I was talking to my daughter yesterday as I was driving up here. She was telling me about her husband David just got out of surgery, and she was having some

problems herself. I said, “Well, sweetheart, let me tell you. I will give you a phrase that's found often in the Bible. In fact, it was read last night. You just hang your head on this phrase.” She said, “It's not a verse.” I said, “No, it's not a verse. It's a phrase.” She said, “What is it, Dad?” I said, “The Scripture says, ‘Now it came to pass.’ It didn't come to stay. It came to pass. Just sit tight and hold on and trust the Lord. It'll pass. It will. It will.” The Bible says that we are to be careful for nothing, prayerful about everything, and thankful for anything.

Look in Matthew 7, verse 7. We are still talking about the sovereignty of God in prayer. Our Lord said, "Ask, and it shall be given you. Seek, and ye shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. 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?" Now watch verse eleven: "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father, who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?" Isn't that amazing? There is not a father here who has ever had a child ask for a piece of bread and picked up a stone, saying, "Here, munch on this."

If you, being evil, know how to give good things to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him? As evil, sinful, wicked, and depraved as we are, we would never give a child a snake when he asked for a fish. We take care of our children and give good things to them.

Obviously, we are encouraged to pray. There are multitudes of verses that encourage us to seek and petition our heavenly Father. In Psalm 65:2, the Bible says, "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come." Notice what it says: "O thou that hearest prayer." God does hear our prayer. Psalm 145:18 says, "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all them that call upon him in truth."

The Bible promises that God not only delights in our prayers, but hears them and wants us to call upon Him. Although we are encouraged to pray and make our requests known unto our Heavenly Father, the object of prayer is not to inform God of what

we need. God is omniscient; He already knows what we need. We are not informing God of something of which He is unaware. What, then, is the purpose of prayer?

When you think about prayer, you must think about its constituent parts. Hardly any of us cover all of these when we pray. In prayer there are adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, praise, intercession, communion, and fellowship. Some have suggested another part of prayer at which we frequently fail: silence.

We speak to God and then refuse to listen as He speaks. But the Bible says in Psalm 4:4, "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." When we say someone is awestruck, what do we mean? They are standing there with their mouth open; they cannot speak. They are silent, simply standing there. If you are lying in bed, communing with your own heart, you are still and silent. Then the Bible says in Psalm 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God."

"I will be exalted among the heathen. I will be exalted in the earth. Be still and know that I am God." You remember when the people were restless and complaining against Moses and against God at the Red Sea? What did Moses say? "Be still. Just stand still." Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones put it in these words: "Man is at his greatest and highest when upon his knees he comes face to face with God."

So let me make this again very clear. The purpose of our prayers is not to inform God. God already knows our hearts. He already knows our needs. He already knows our desires. He knows everything. The purpose of prayer is not to change God's mind. So many people say prayer changes things. No. You are not going to change the immutable God. God is immutable. He is unchangeable. Malachi 3 and verse 6 says this: "For I the Lord change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." I the Lord change not. If someone is going to attempt to instruct God, inform God, teach God, or change God in any way whatsoever, he's only going to have a monumental task. He's going to have an impossible task, because God is immutable. And there is no need for God to change His designs or alter His purpose for the all-sufficient reason that these were framed under the influence of perfect goodness and unerring wisdom. So God's

counsel, God's ordinations, and God's appointments are like unto himself, perfect and unchangeable.

So if we really want to understand the purpose of prayer, we need to look at a couple of passages. First of all, in Matthew 6, and then we're going to Luke 11, and read basically the same thing. Matthew 6, beginning there with verse 9.

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 forever. Amen."

In Luke 11:1, we read, “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 ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, as in heaven, so in 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.” Then there is a wonderful illustration that He gives after that.

Notice the request in verse 1: “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” The request was not, Teach us a prayer. The request was to teach us to pray. Some try to say that this passage in Matthew 6 and Luke 11 is the Lord’s Prayer. It is really not, because His prayer is found in John 17, the high priestly prayer of our Lord. You could call this the model prayer, certainly, because it gives us some constituent parts of prayer.

This prayer is very easily divided, and it expresses itself both Godward and manward. Three of the petitions deal with God’s glory, and three deal with man’s needs. The first three petitions are, “Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, and thy will be done.” The next three deal with man’s needs: “Give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our debts, and lead us not into temptation.”

In each of these passages, our Lord said, When you pray, you say, “Our Father who art in heaven.” Prayer is designed to honor God and

to place God in His rightful place. Everything begins with God, everything ends with God, and everything in between flows from God as well. All prayer should begin with the character of God: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.”

What are we doing? We are recognizing God as our sovereign, the supreme ruler and owner, and the only one true and living God. We are putting God in His rightful place. Prayer recognizes God first and foremost.

Now, I want you to look, while we are coming right back there, but look in your Bibles, Romans 11 and verse 36. I want you to understand this in light of what I have just said. Everything comes from God. It begins with God. It ends with God. Notice Romans 11:36: “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” Here is a wonderful passage. “For of him,” that is, originally; “and through him,” that is, providentially; “and to him,” that is, ultimately, “are all things.” Everything flows from God. It is from Him originally, through Him providentially, and unto Him ultimately. So when you think about this, look back to Matthew chapter 6.

So you have to ask yourself, What is the purpose of prayer? If God is sovereign and already omniscient, omnipotent, immutable, infinite, and omnipresent—if God can do anything and everything—why in the world should we pray? First of all, the Bible teaches us that prayer is to hallow the name of God. Secondly, the Bible teaches us that it is to ask for His kingdom to come. Thirdly, the Bible teaches us that we are to ask that His will be done. That is one of the main purposes of prayer.

Here is a question. Think about this: When you have prayed in times past, have you ever come to God the Father and said, “Father, I’m coming today for the express purpose of hallowing, honoring, praising, and glorifying Your name, asking that Your kingdom come and that Your will would be done on earth and in my life”? That is putting God in His place. That is recognizing Him as sovereign.

When we talk about man’s needs, when He provides our daily bread, that is provision. When He forgives our sins, that is pardon.

When He says, “lead us not into temptation,” that is protection. So notice, when God fulfills our needs, provides for us, pardons us, and protects us, He is exalted in His glory, His kingdom, and His will.

You need to understand prayer in a different sense of the word. You must consider it by looking at the names and characters of God. First of all, God is a Father. So we are taught to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven." Second, God is a King: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done." Thirdly, God is a Master. He wants His will done.

As a Father, He gives us our daily bread. He provides for us. As a King, He pardons us; that is a royal prerogative. And as a Master, He leads us not into temptation, but delivers us from evil.

God's glory is the issue. When you pray, you have to understand that you are not informing God. You are not forcing God, badgering God, irritating God, or conning God. It is absolutely ridiculous to try to bargain with God: "Now, Lord, if you do this for me, I'll do that for you."

People say, "When I come to God sometimes in prayer, I'm so cold, I'm so indifferent." You might as well confess and acknowledge it, because God already knows it. You cannot con Him. You cannot say, "No, Lord, I want this for Your glory," when in reality, you want it for yourself. What did he say? "You ask and have not." Why? Because you ask amiss, that you might consume it upon your own lusts.

When you come to prayer, you are recognizing Him as your Father, your King, and your Master. In reality, you are submitting to His sovereignty. When you pray, "Our Father who art in heaven," you are adoring God. When you pray, "For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever," you are still adoring God. In the middle, everything still flows from God.

The real purpose of prayer is to glorify God in the role that He has revealed Himself, especially in relationship to His children. It is to hallow His name, glorify His name, and praise and honor His name as Father, King, and Master. When we come to God as Father, we submit to Him as His children. If He is my Father, I am His child. I do not instruct my Father.

Here's an interesting question. Of course, I was raised probably different from a lot of people. My family was a very loving family, outwardly expressive. In fact, when my wife first met my family, she thought, "What have I gotten myself into?" I would always hug my mother and kiss her. I would hug my father. I would hug my aunts and uncles, and they would hug me. That's the way I was raised. I told my mother I loved her, and I told my father that I loved him.

So here's my question: If you are the child of your heavenly Father, how often do you tell Him you love Him? How often do you tell Him you recognize His authority, His sovereignty? Because when you come to God as a Father, you're saying, "I'm a child. I don't have sense enough to come out of the rain unless You instruct me, unless You help me."

When you come to God as your King, you come to Him as His subject. You come again to submit to His authority, His rulership, and His supremacy. The subjects do not make law; the King makes law. The subjects do not rule; it's the King who rules. When you come to the Father as your Master, you're now coming as His student, His disciple. You're now sitting at His feet.

Our Lord said, when you pray, say, “Our Father,” that is, recognize His role as your heavenly Father. “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.” Recognize that He is your King. “Thy will be done.” Recognize that He is a Master, that He teaches you and rules over you.

When you come to God recognizing Him as Father, King, and Master, and come submitting to Him, you are experiencing not just communion and fellowship, but eternal life. Let me shock you: eternal life is not simply living forever. If you define eternal life as living forever, and if you believe in eternal hell and eternal punishment, then those people who are in eternal hell and punishment are going to be living forever, too. Do you know what eternal life is? Let me show you.

Look in your Bible, John chapter 17. This is the high priestly prayer of our Lord. Beginning with verse 1: “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.” “As thou

hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." Now get ready, because He is going to tell you what eternal life is. Verse 3: "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 not just living forever. It is a personal, intimate fellowship, relationship, and communion with God the Father through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. So many people think, "When I die, I'm going to get eternal life." If you do not have eternal life now, you are not going to have it when you die. Some think, "I love the world. I love the flesh. I love the devil. I love everything. But when I die, I'm going to love God." No, you will not. Eternal life is a personal relationship with God. Adam knew his wife. What did God say to the children? "You only have I known of all the children of the earth."

Prayer is a personal relationship. When you come to God in prayer, recognizing Him as your Father, King, and Master, you are His subject, and you commune with Him. You exercise this personal, intimate relationship that God the Son spoke of in John 17:3: "And this is eternal life, that they may know thee, the only true and living God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." Have you ever thought about that? "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." This is eternal life. Prayer is also a means of experiencing eternal life, since it involves knowing God and communing with Him. Wow.

Therefore, when we pray, we must realize that the purpose of prayer ultimately is to honor and glorify God in every area of our lives.

Reason 3: God Ordains the Means as Well as the End

Thirdly, we must pray because we believe that God has appointed the means to the end which He ordained. Predestination is absolutely true. Moreover, God is in absolute control. He will accomplish His purpose; His counsel shall stand. God ordained the end from the beginning, and His sovereignty and providence extend over everything and everyone. There are no exceptions. Stand up and think about this: If God is not sovereign over everything, then

whatever He has no control over or no sovereignty over has to be God itself or have power above God, which would ungod God. God is absolutely sovereign. However, the same sovereign God who decreed the end has also decreed the means to reach that end, and one of those means is prayer.

Now, how can this be understood? Let me give you a couple of illustrations. The first is the death of King Ahab in 2 Kings, chapter 22. Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, was there, and Ahab wanted Jehoshaphat to go with him to battle at Ramoth Gilead. Ahab said, “Know you not that Ramoth Gilead is ours and we sit still and take it not?” Jehoshaphat spoke where he should not have, I think.

He said, “My people are thy people, my horses thy horses.” It said what? No, the king of Judah and the Judahites were not like the Israelites, that is for sure. Then Ahab got all his false prophets, and they prayed, saying, “Go up and prosper, go up and prosper.” Jehoshaphat said, “Is there not here a prophet of God that we might inquire of him?” Ahab said, “Well, there’s one, but I hate him.”

"He never speaks good concerning me." "Send and get Micaiah." When they got Micaiah, they said, "Let your word be good, because all the other prophets are speaking good." Micaiah replied, "I can only say what the Lord God tells me to say, and that's it." When Micaiah came into the presence of King Ahab, Ahab asked, "What do you say, Micaiah?" Micaiah answered, "Oh, go up and prosper, go up and prosper." King Ahab looked at Jehoshaphat, then at Micaiah, and said, "How many times must I adjure you to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of God?"

Micaiah said, "You want the truth, King? You can't handle it, but I'm going to tell it to you. You're a dead man." In verse 17 he said, "And I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills as a sheep that have not a shepherd. And the Lord said, These have no master. Let them return every man to his house in peace." In other words, Ahab, you are dead. God is going to kill you. The reason you will not believe me is that He sent a lying spirit into the mouth of your prophets, and you are going to believe them instead of me. I am telling you the truth, and they are lying. King Ahab said, "You take this man and throw him back in the prison. You feed him with the water of

affliction and the bread of affliction until I return in peace." Micaiah said, "If I return at all in peace, the Lord has not spoken by me."

Ahab was a cunning rascal. He told Jehoshaphat to wear his royal robes while he disguised himself and went into battle. The Bible tells us 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 the chariot, Turn thine hand, and carry me out of the host, for I am wounded. And the battle increased that day again, and the king was stayed up in the chariot against the Syrians, and died at even, and the blood ran out of the wound in the midst of the chariot." A certain man simply let an arrow go. He did not see King Ahab; he was just shooting an arrow in the air. Yet God, in His sovereign providence, directed that arrow to the joints of the harness, precisely where it joined together and where there was no protection.

The God who ordained the end of Ahab also ordained the means to end Ahab. The same thing is going to happen to us. God has ordained our end according to Job 14 and Job 7. Each of us is going to die. Some may die in an automobile wreck, some may die of old age, and some may die of cancer, but we are all going to die. The end has been ordained. God says, “Thou hast appointed our bounds that we cannot pass.” God has also ordained the end and the means to that end.

Let me give you one other illustration. Look in your Bibles to Ephesians 1 and 2 Timothy 1. I am trying to show you that the God who ordained the end also ordained the means to the end. Here is the question: When did God choose us unto salvation? When was grace given unto us? Look at Ephesians 1, beginning at verse 3: “Blessed be God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. According as He has chosen us in Him,” that is, in Jesus Christ, “before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy without blame before Him in love, having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will.” Verse 4 says, “According as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.” Before the world was ever made, God chose us in Jesus Christ.

Now look in 2 Timothy 1, verses 8 and 9. The Apostle Paul writes Timothy: “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor me his prisoner, but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.” We are talking about what God has done. Look at verse 9: “Who hath 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.” When did we get grace? Before the world ever began. When did God choose us? Before the world ever began. God chose us in Christ, and God gave us grace in Jesus Christ before the world ever began.

The same God that ordained the end also ordained the means to the end, because the Father sent forth His Son. 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 under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." And 1 Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." What did God the Father do? He chose us, gave us grace, and then gave us His Son.

Second Timothy 1:9–10 says that God "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 hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." God gave us grace in Christ before the world began, but that grace is now made manifest through the appearing of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ abolished death and brought life and immortality to light, and now we have the gospel.

Titus 1:1–3 says, "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? To Christ and to us in Christ. The passage continues: "But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is now made manifest, which is in due time manifested his

word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior."

Did God have an eternal purpose in Jesus Christ? The answer is yes. Ephesians 3:11 speaks of "that eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." God chose us, gave us grace in Christ, and then sent Christ—the means to bring us to Himself.

Paul puts it all together in 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14: “But we’re bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation.” Oh, God chose us. That is exactly what the Bible says in Ephesians 1:3.

Yes, grace was given to us before the world began (2 Timothy 1:9), but watch: “We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God has from the beginning chosen you to salvation 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.”

Those whom God chose, those to whom God gave grace, God sent the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Savior, the Mediator, the Redeemer. Now they hear the Gospel, and now, of course, we are called through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. The God who ordained the end also ordains the means of that end. The God who ordained salvation ordained the means to accomplish that salvation. He sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be our sacrifice, our substitute, our surety, our propitiation. Then God gave us repentance and faith, that we might turn from our sins and believe in Him.

Why pray? Because God ordained the end, but He ordained the means to the end, and one of the means is that we pray that His will would be accomplished in time and history. When God is determined to grant a blessing, He always prepares the heart to seek that blessing.

Consider Jonathan Edwards and that powerful sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." You can hear the fire and thunder in that sermon, but what most people do not know is that Jonathan Edwards had such horrible eyesight that he had to hold his notes in

front of him and read. Humanly and oratorically speaking, what kind of impact would simply reading a sermon have? Yet he stood up and read, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," while his men had been in the basement praying all night before he preached it.

When God is determined to send a blessing, He prepares the hearts to seek that blessing, and He also prepares the hearts of people who are going to be involved in that blessing. God is sovereign, and prayer is a means that God has ordained to bring to pass His will in His providence in time and in history.

Application: Sovereignty is the Foundation of Prayer

The sovereignty of God does not nullify or abrogate the need for prayer. The sovereignty of God is the very foundation of prayer. If God is not sovereign, why should I pray? If God does not have control over everything, why should I pray? I can say, "I know that thou canst do everything."

"No thought can be withholden from thee. I know that thou doest according to thy will in the inhabitants of the earth and in the armies of heaven, and none can stay your hand or say unto thee, What doest thou?" I understand that. It is the very fact that God is sovereign and omnipotent and omniscient and omnipresent and eternal and immutable and infinite that gives me the very hope in prayer. Why would I believe Romans 8:28 if God is not sovereign? "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." How could God work everything out for our good if God is not sovereign, if God does not have control over everything? The sovereignty of God does not nullify prayer; it is the very foundation and fabric of prayer. Why would I be interested in mission work if I did not believe that God had a people? I know that not everyone is going to be converted, but thank God, some are.

You study the lives of Hudson and Carey and Judson and a host of others. These missionaries went there because they believed that God had a people and that, inevitably and invariably, God would grant repentance and faith, and they would come to Him savingly. If you do away with the sovereignty of God, you might as well quit praying, because sovereignty is the foundation for prayer.

Conclusion: Never Separate What God Has Joined

One of my prayers, which I pray usually every day, is, "Lord, save thy people, whoever they are, wherever they are, and Lord, if it please thee, use me to reach some of them." I cannot reach everybody, but I can reach somebody. Never separate that which God has joined together. God has not only joined together His end, but also the means to reach that end. One of those means is prayer. We must pray because God has commanded us to pray; because prayer is a means whereby God is honored and glorified and recognized and hallowed; and because it is a means to reach the end that God has ordained. I can assure you, God is on the throne and He ruleth over all.

Everything is under His control. It may look like the world is coming apart at the seams, but I will tell you, the wrath of man shall praise the Lord, and the remainder of wrath shall He restrain.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word, Your truth, and Your sovereignty. You and You alone are God. We bow to Thee as our Father, our King, and our Master. We ask, Father, that You would be pleased to work in our hearts as Your children, as Your subjects, and as Your disciples. Give us Thy Word. Give us Thy truth. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 6

Clean Hands Doctrine Exemplified

December 30, 2018

Judges 19

SCRIPTURE READING - Judges 19:1-11 (KJV)

Introduction and Reading of Judges 19

> And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite journeying on this side of Mount Ephraim, who took him a concubine out of Bethlehemjudah. And his concubine played the whore against him, and went away from him unto her father's house to Bethlehemjudah, and was there four whole months.
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> And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak friendly unto her, and to bring her again, having his servant with him, and a couple of asses: and she brought him into her father's house: and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him. And his father in law, the damsel's father, retained him; and he abode with him three days: so they did eat and

drink, and lodged there. And it came to pass on the fourth day, when they arose early in the morning, that he rose up to depart: and the damsel's father said unto his son in law, Comfort thine heart with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way. And they sat down, and did eat and drink both of them together: for the damsel's father had said unto the man, Be content, I pray thee, and tarry all night, and let thine heart be merry. And when the man rose up to depart, his father in law urged him: therefore he lodged there again.

And he rose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart: and the damsel's father said, Comfort thine heart, I pray thee. And they tarried until afternoon, and they did eat both of them. And when the man rose up to depart, he and his concubine, and his servant, his father in law, the damsel's father, said unto him, Behold, now the day draweth toward evening, I pray you, tarry all night: behold, the day draweth to an end, lodge here, that thine heart may be merry; and to morrow get you early on your way, that thou mayest go home. But the man would not tarry that night, but he rose up and departed, and came over against Jebus, which is Jerusalem; and there were with him two asses saddled, his concubine also was with him. And when they were by Jebus, the day was far spent; and the servant said unto his master, Come, I pray thee, and let us turn in into this city of the Jebusites, and lodge in it. And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside hither into the city of a stranger, that is not of the children of Israel.

SCRIPTURE READING - Judges 19 (KJV)

We will pass over into Gibeah. And he said unto his servant, Come and let us draw near to one of these places to lodge all night in Gibeah, or in Ramah. And they passed on and went their way. And the sun went down upon them when they were by Gibeah, which belongeth to Benjamin. And they turned aside thither to go in and to lodge in Gibeah. And when he went in, he sat down in a street of the city, for there was no man that took them into his house to lodge him. And behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at Even, which was also of Mount Ephraim. And he sojourned in Gibeah.

> But the men of the place were Benjamites. And when he lifted up his eyes he saw a wayfaring man in the street of the city. And the old man said, Whither goest thou, and whence comest thou? And he said unto them, We are passing from Bethlehem Judah toward the side of Mount Ephraim, and from thence am I. And I went to Bethlehem Judah, but I am now going to the house of the Lord. And there is no man that receiveth me to house.
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> Yet there is both straw and provender for our asses. There is bread and wine also for me, and for thy handmaid, and for the young man which is with thy servants. There is no want of anything. And the old man said, Peace be with thee. Howsoever let all thy wants lie upon me, only lodge not in the street. So he brought him into his house, and gave provender unto the asses, and they washed their feet, and did eat and drink.
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> Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial, beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man saying, Bring forth a man that came into thine house, that we may know him. And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly, seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly. Behold, here is my daughter, a maiden, and his concubine. Them will I bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you. But unto this man do not so vile a thing. But the men would not hearken to him. So the man took his concubine and brought her forth unto them.

And they knew her and abused her all the night until morning. When the day began to spring, they let her go. At dawning, the woman fell down at the door of the man's house where her lord was till it was light. Her lord arose in the morning, opened the doors, and went out. Behold, the woman, his concubine, was fallen at the door, her hands upon the threshold. He said unto her, Up, and let us be going. But none answered.

Then the man took her up upon an ass and rose into his place. When he came into his house, he took a knife, laid hold of his

concubine, and divided her together with her bones into twelve pieces, sending her into all the coasts of Israel. All who saw it said, There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day. Consider of it, take advice, and speak your mind.

The Disturbing Nature of Judges 19

There is no chapter in the Bible more revealing, disturbing, and distressing than Judges chapter 19. It raises eyebrows and creates empathy, sympathy, and revulsion at the same time. It stirs the fighting emotions in every true man, husband, and father. It cries out for vengeance, human and divine. It makes you question the manhood of the father and husband and ask, Why did they not fight for the woman?

Surely, had they done so, it would have meant their deaths as well as the death of the woman. But we would say, at least they died trying, or at least they died with honor.

One of the things that distresses the average individual is found in verse 24. The father said to these reprobates, “Behold, here is my daughter a maiden, and his concubine. Then will I bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you: but unto this man do not so vile a thing.” How could this father offer his virgin daughter and his married daughter to this bunch of reprobates? Today, that simply boggles my mind, and it certainly boggles your mind. But we really and truly do not understand the customs that existed in Bible times.

Ancient Customs of Hospitality and Protection

This man found them in the street and said, “Don’t lodge in the street. You come into my house.” In verse 23, the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said, “Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly; seeing that this man is come into mine house, do not this folly.”

In Bible times, the custom was that if a visitor or traveler came to your house, you were obligated to protect that individual with your life. It did not matter what it took; you were responsible to protect

that individual. H. Clay Trumbull, in his book Studies in Oriental Society, page 110, gave this paragraph: “In the lands of the East, when a host accepts a man to be his guest, he thereby agrees at whatever the cost to defend his guest from possible enemies during the time of his entertainment.” Then he says this: Dr. Cyrus Hamblin, an American missionary in the East, was entertained by a governor. The host took a piece of roast mutton and handed it to the missionary, saying as he did, “Now do you know what I have done?”

He went on to say, “By that act I have pledged you every drop of my blood: while you are in my territory, no evil shall come upon you. For that space of time we are brothers.” The Arab said to the Christian man, “You are now under my protection. I will defend you with every drop of my blood.”

The customs of that day explain that which you and I would deem horrible, vile, and unthinkable. When you consider what happened to this woman, the sins of the Benjamites who lived in Gibeah were unthinkable. At the same time, there are viler, grosser, and worse sins being committed on every hand, which deserve God's wrath and judgment as well. The sins of the Benjamites cried out for justice, just as the sins being committed today cry out for divine justice.

Israel's Demand for Justice and Benjamin's Refusal

We need to rest assured of one thing: God is not mocked. The Bible says that you will reap exactly that which you sow.

When this woman was found dead at the threshold, her husband, her lord, took her home, cut her into twelve pieces, and sent her to the twelve tribes, saying, “Nothing like this has ever been done. You consider what needs to be done.” Thus, in Judges chapter 20, Israel came together to avenge this sin and criminal act and to make war upon Benjamin. Initially, they sent to Benjamin and said that all they wanted was for the guilty parties to be handed over: “Deliver those who were involved in this, and we will execute them; that will take care of it.”

Judges 20:12 says, “And the tribes of Israel sent men throughout all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you? Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of

Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel." But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren, the children of Israel. Instead, they gathered themselves together out of the cities under Gibeah to go out to battle against the children of Israel.

Mark this down: as vile, wicked, corrupt, and depraved as the sins and criminal acts committed against this woman were, it was far worse for the Benjamites to band together to protect those who committed such sins. When you do that, you are guilty of the same sins.

The Sin of Consenting by Silence or Protection

"But unto the wicked God saith, What is thou to do to declare my statutes? Whether thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thy back."

When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentest with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother, thou slanders thine own mother's son, these things hast thou done, and I kept silence. Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such in one as thyself, but I will reprove thee and set them in order before thine eyes.

"When thou sawest a thief and thou consentest with him," how do they consent with the thief? They never exposed him. They never did anything. When you saw the thief and consented with him, you became a partaker with him. You gave your mouth to evil and your tongue framed deceit. You sat and spoke against your brother and slandered your mother's son. These things you did, and God kept silence. You thought that God was altogether such an one as yourself, but He will reprove you and set them in order before your eyes.

They just let him steal. How did they become partakers with adulterers? They knew what was going on, but they never did anything. So they consented by silence.

If it is a sin, wicked, and wrong to keep silence when you see sin and wickedness, how much more wicked and vile is it when you protect the wicked and make sure they do not come to punishment? Now, still holding Judges 20, look at Romans 1:32. The Bible tells us that when we see people sin, and we do the same sins—or at least get a vicarious enjoyment out of that sin—we are guilty ourselves. Romans 1:32 says, "Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." God says that when people commit all these sins, they may be worthy of death; but others do the same thing, and others merely have pleasure in those who do them.

Here is the part that has bothered me when I read Judges 19 and Judges 20. When all the Israelites came together, the Benjamites came together to fight against them and protect all these wicked people. There were several battles and many fatalities, including many Israelites. So the question must be asked: Why? The Benjamites were wicked and vile; they were the ones who had sinned. The Israelites had come to execute justice, obey God's law, and do what God demanded. Yet the Benjamites were not only guilty of the sins; they were also guilty of covering up and protecting those who were guilty of them.

The Costly Battles and the Question of Israelite Deaths

In the first two battles, a multitude of Israelites were killed. Look in Judges 20, beginning with verse 15. The children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities, 26,000 men that drew the sword, besides the inhabitants of Gibeah, which were numbered 700 chosen men. So they actually had 26,700 men. But notice how accurate these men were: among all this people were 700 chosen men left-handed; everyone could sling stones at a hair's breadth and not miss.

You remember that David used a sling to take out Goliath. Here was a man who could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss. The men of Israel, besides Benjamin, were numbered 400,000 men who drew a sword; all these were men of war. The children of Israel arose, went up 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.”

So now the battle was set: 26,700 men against 400,000. You would think that 400,000 men could simply overcome 26,000 men. But it did not work that way, because they asked counsel of God, and God said, “Send the Judahites up first against these people.”

That is exactly what they did. Look at the result of the first battle. Judges chapter 20, verse 19: “And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah.” The men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin and put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah. The children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites that day 22,000 men.

Wait a minute—22,000 men. May I ask you a question? Why did 22,000 Israelites die in this first battle? They were trying to enforce God's law. The Benjamites were the wicked ones, and, as far as we can tell from the text, none of the Benjamites were killed. There may have been some, but the Bible does not say. After 22,000 men had died, the Israelites began to weep, pray, and seek God's counsel: Should they go up, or should they quit? They had lost 22,000 men.

In Judges 20:23, the children of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until evening, and asked counsel of the Lord, saying, “Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother?” The Lord said, “Go up against him.” The children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day. Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men. All these drew the sword.

Now, in two days, Israel had lost forty thousand men—ten percent of their army. They came out with four hundred thousand; in two days and two battles, they had lost forty thousand men. We read nothing of any of the Benjamites being killed. They had lost forty thousand men in two days, and they were the ones trying to do what was right.

Certainly, this called for a time of fasting, weeping, and praying, and for trying to figure out what was going wrong. That is exactly

what they did. They had asked once again, “Shall we go up?” Then, in Judges 20:26, all the children of Israel and all the people went up and came into the house of God, and wept, and sat there before the Lord, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. The children of Israel inquired of the Lord, for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days.

Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days, saying, “Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease?” And the Lord said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into thine hand.”

The Clean Hands Doctrine Explained

Now watch. Israel sent liers in wait round about Gibeah. God says, “Tomorrow I’m going to give them into your hand.” Israel works out an ambush, putting liers in wait behind the city and hiding others in the woods. Israel goes up and attacks as they normally do, then begins to fall back as if beaten, drawing the Benjamites out. As the Benjamites come out of the city, the liers in wait enter it, set everything on fire, and kill the inhabitants. Then the other liers in wait come in behind the Benjamites. Benjamin turns around, sees the smoke and these people, and then those who were fleeing turn back. The Benjamites are caught in a vice, and they kill twenty-five thousand Benjamites.

Look down, if you would please, at verse 31: “And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city. And they began to smite at the people, and kill, as at other times, in the highways, as which one goeth up to the house of God, and the other to Gibeah, in the field, about thirty men of Israel.” So we have lost forty thousand, and now thirty additional men. But the Benjamites were drawn away, and now they are devastated and defeated.

Look in verse 35: “And the LORD smote Benjamin before Israel, and the children of Israel destroyed the Benjamites that day, twenty-five thousand and a hundred men, all these drew the sword.” If you skip down to verse 43, you see how many were killed, when, and where: “Thus they enclosed the Benjamites round about, and chased them, and trod them down with ease over against Gibeah

toward the sun rising. And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men, all these were men of valor. And they turned and fled toward the wilderness into the rock Rimmon, and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men, pursued hard after them unto Gidom, and slew two thousand men of them."

All those who fell that day of Benjamin were twenty-five thousand men who drew the sword; all these were mighty men of valor. Six hundred of the Benjamites escaped to the rock Rimmon and abode there four months. The men of Israel then turned again upon the children of Benjamin and smote them with the edge of the sword, both the men of every city and the beast, and all that came to hand. They also set fire on all the cities they came to.

Now we know that over 40,000 Israelites had been killed, and over 25,000 Benjamites had been killed. We understand that the Benjamites deserved the wrath and punishment of God. I do not know how many people were killed in the city; the Bible does not say, nor does it tell how many were killed in the other cities.

But here is the question: Why did 40,000 Israelites have to lose their lives in trying to enforce God's law and judgment against these wicked individuals? You would stop and think that if you had 400,000 soldiers and 26,000 soldiers on the opposing side, you would simply walk in, walk over them, and keep going, because 26,000 men cannot defeat 400,000.

Then consider this: These Israelites prayed, fasted, cried, wept, offered offerings, sought the Lord, and the Lord said, "You go and fight." Each time, when 40,000 were killed, God told them to fight.

Now I want to show you something. My question is, why did 40,000 Israelites die? Look back in your Bible through the book of Numbers, chapter 31. God had ordered a war against the Midianites, and Moses sent his men to smite the Midianites. After the war, they had defeated all the Midianites, captured their animals, and brought everything back, including all the spoil. The officers over the thousands of the host, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, came near unto Moses and said, "Thy servants have taken the sum of the men of war which are under our charge, and there lacketh not one man of us." They went to war, slew all the enemy,

and did not lose one man. Now we know that God can protect thousands if He so chooses.

And David said it like this in Psalm 140, verse 7: “O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.” What does he mean? God sovereignly protected him as he was fighting. God was his helmet; God was his protector. So God can protect one, or God can protect thousands. Now the question is, why did all of these Israelites die?

They were trying to enforce God's law and do that which was right. Well, you have to understand what is known in the Bible as the Clean Hands Doctrine. The Clean Hands Doctrine is not only a biblical doctrine; it is also a truth that has been instilled in American jurisprudence. In other words, even today, the courts still understand the Clean Hands Doctrine. In fact, let me give you one little quote from 283 Southwestern, Second Edition, pages 43 and 46, Franklin versus Franklin. Here is what it says: “Under clean hands doctrine, equity will not grant relief to a party whose actor seeks to set judicial machinery in motion and obtain some remedy if such party in its prior conduct has violated conscience of good faith or other equitable principle.”

Here is what it means, simply: If I am going to take Ron to court, accusing him of being a thief and a fraudster, I have to have clean hands. I cannot be guilty of the same thing he is guilty of. Number one, I would be condemning myself; number two, they say I have no standing because I am accusing him of doing what I am doing. It is like a man who called the police because he bought some dope, and it was false dope, and he wanted the police to arrest the man who sold it to him. So they arrested him. Come on.

The Clean Hands Doctrine is taught throughout the Bible. For instance, let me show you a whole—Judges chapter 20. But look in your Bibles, if you would, to Matthew chapter 7. Matthew chapter 7, beginning with verse 1: “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge?”

“You shall be judged. And with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own

eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."

Notice what He said. You see a mote in your brother's eye, and the mote is just a little, tiny splinter, but you have a beam in yours, which is a huge piece of lumber. What you are trying to do is judge this man for the little, tiny splinter, while you have something far greater in your own life. He says, "Judge not, that ye be not judged."

In other words, He is talking about wicked judgment. He is not talking about judging righteously, for in John 7:24 He says, "Judge righteous judgment." But now He is talking about wicked judgment. He said, "With what measure ye mete, it is going to be measured right back to you." The more you condemn someone viciously and wickedly, God said, "I'm going to measure that same amount right back to you." If we are going to do any judging or condemning, we better have clean hands.

Let me give you another example. Turn in your Bible to John chapter 8. Everybody knows this story, or at least you should. It is the account of a woman taken in adultery. These men came to our Lord and said, "This woman was taken in adultery, in the very act."

You cannot get fresher witnesses than that. They said, "Moses in the law says she is to be stoned, but what sayest thou?" Several things were wrong with this. Number one, if they caught this woman in the very act, where was the man? Why did they not bring him?

Secondly, this whole thing was basically a setup for Jesus Christ. If He said, "Take her out and stone her," then He was no friend of sinners. If He said, "Do not stone her," then He was guilty of violating the law. It was a catch-22. But what did our Lord do? He knelt down and wrote on the ground. I do not know what He wrote. I have an idea, but I do not know exactly. I could not prove it. By the way, in the Old Testament, when a husband was jealous of his wife, he went through this ritual, this ceremony.

The priest would write on the dust in the tabernacle as well. So our Lord here is writing on the ground. In John chapter 8, verse 6, He was writing on the ground. When they continued asking Him, He

lifted up Himself and said, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” And again, He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

When they heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, they went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even at the last. And Jesus was left alone with the woman standing in the midst.

Now, actually, what He said was, “The one that is sinless.” In other words, the one that does not have this sin in his life, you cast the first stone. I do not know what He wrote on the ground, but I would imagine that He was probably writing down names, dates, and times, because all of these men had been guilty of the same thing. Obviously, if they condemned her, if they stoned her, then they were condemning themselves, and they needed to be stoned as well.

So again, this is the clean hands doctrine. In Acts chapter 23 and verse 1, the Apostle Paul said, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” In other words, he had a clear conscience.

Now let me show you how even the clean hands doctrine affects our prayer life. First John chapter 3, verse 21, says, “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then we have confidence toward God.” And verse 22 says, “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” What does he mean when he says, “Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then we have confidence toward God”? Here is what he means: How in the world can you pray when you know that you have known sin and rebellion in your life that has been unconfessed and unrepented of?

David said it like this in Psalm 66:18: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” So I am coming to God in prayer and asking for something. I need to have a clean heart, a clean conscience, or clean hands. If I have that cleanliness, then I have confidence toward God. But if I do not have that cleanliness, I cannot have that confidence toward God.

Charles Bridges, one of the early evangelical leaders in the Church of England, who lived from 1794 to 1869, wrote this:

"The testimony of conscience has often been the rejoicing of the Lord's people when suffering under unmerited reproach or proud oppression. They have been able to plead it without offense in the presence of their holy, heart-searching God. Nay, even when in the near prospect of the great and final account, they might well have been supposed to shrink from the strict and unerring scrutiny of their omniscient judge."

Perhaps, however, we are not sufficiently aware of the importance of moral integrity in connection with our spiritual comfort. Mark the boldness it gave David in prayer when David said, "I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors." He said, "I have done what is right. My hands are clean. So, Lord, do not leave me to my oppressors."

Romans chapter 2, beginning with verse 1, says: "Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?" No. You are judging somebody and doing exactly the same thing, bringing judgment upon yourselves. We are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth. The man in Matthew 7 who was judging the mote in his brother's eye had the beam in his own eye. He had a greater sin. In John chapter 8, those who were condemning the woman for adultery were guilty themselves. Obviously, the doctrine of clean hands has a very great impact upon our lives, even our prayer lives.

Hosea's Revelation: Israel's Guilt from the Days of Gibeah

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Hosea, because I want to answer this question and show it to you from the Bible. It has perplexed me in times past, and it has perplexed many people. Why in the world did 40,000 Israelites die to defeat 25,000 wicked Benjamites? You begin to think, Who really won that war? You lose 40,000 to

25,000—who knows? Obviously, the Benjamites were defeated, but the cost was very great.

Look in Hosea chapter 9, verse 9. God is talking about Israel: "They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah: therefore he will remember their iniquity, he will visit their sins."

Now look in chapter 10, beginning with verse 9: "O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah: there they stood: the battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them." It was God's desire to chastise them, and the people would be gathered against them. Note verse 9: "O Israel, thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah."

These two passages demonstrate this truth: The Israelites were just as guilty as the Benjamites. They had unclean hands. They were guilty of vileness as well. Hosea 9:9 says they were deeply corrupted, and Hosea 10:9 makes clear that they had sinned from the days of Gibeah. They were seeking to condemn and punish sins in Benjamin that they were allowing in themselves—in their cities, towns, and families. Their sins may not yet have been open sins like the sins of the Benjamites, but the sins were there.

Commentators on Israel's Greater Sin

I want to give you three quotes and then try to tie this together. The first is from Matthew Poole. Listen to what he says: "The meaning of Hosea 10 and verse 9 could be understood comparatively. It will bear a comparative thus, Thou hast sinned above or more than. The ten tribes were greater sinners than those Gibeonites." Wow. Matthew Henry.

Not only was the wickedness committed in that age revived in this one, as a copy from the original, but that wickedness continued in a constant series and succession through all the intervening ages down to this. Thus the measure of iniquity had long been filling, and additions had still been made to it: "Thou hast sinned more than in the days of Gibeah." Here are two commentators saying that these Israelites were just as guilty as, and even worse than, the Benjamites.

John Calvin says that the prophet reproached Israel for having been long inured to their sins, not for being lightly corrupted.

Transcript variant (JW01527):

He had said in the last chapter that they were deep in their sins as in the days of Gibeah. We then explain why the prophet adduced the example of Gibeah, and that was because the Gibeonites had fallen away from all the fear of God, as if not a word about the law had ever been heard among them.

We indeed know that they abandoned themselves to filthy and monstrous lusts, like the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Since such great obscenity prevailed openly and with impunity in Gibeah, the prophet rightly said that the Israelites were lost and past hope, as the people had been at that time. But he now regards another thing: from that time they had not ceased to accumulate evils upon evils, spinning, as it were, a continuous rope of iniquity. As it is said elsewhere, “Thou hast sinned from the days of Gibeah.” Hence, Calvin says, they ravished the Levite’s wife and killed her by their filthy obscenities.

This was the cause of that memorable slaughter, which nearly demolished the whole tribe of Benjamin. The history is related in the book of Judges, and it deserves to be recorded so that people might know what it is not to walk with care and fear in obedience to the Lord. Who could have believed that a people taught in the law of God could have fallen into such madness as this city did? It was not Jerusalem, the destined place of the Temple, though the Temple was not yet built. Yet, without mentioning the Temple, who could have thought that this city, in the midst of the people, could have become so demented that, like brute beasts, its inhabitants would abandon themselves to the filthiest lusts?

“Nay, that they should have been more filthy than the beast, for monstrous lust, I’ve said, were there left unpunished as at Sodom and the neighboring cities.” He then goes on to say that God is going to judge them and destroy them.

What you have is this: all these Benjamites created and accomplished this wickedness, while the others tried to defend them. There was a great war in which 40,000 people were lost merely for trying to enforce the law. Why were they lost? Because they came with unclean hands.

Application to Modern America

If we are going to condemn and judge others, we had better make sure that we have clean hands. We had better make sure that we are not guilty of the same sins or greater sins. Because when we condemn them, we in turn condemn ourselves. Our Lord said it like this: “With what measure you mete, it shall be measured right back to you again.”

There is not an individual in this room who cannot see the wickedness, vileness, and depravity of what the Gibeonites, who were Benjamites, did to this woman and to her husband. You and I could say that it was absolutely horrific. I do not see how anyone could endure such a thing. What is even worse is that all the other Benjamites then came to protect the criminals and keep them from being punished.

We have to cry out against evil. We have to cry out against sin. We have to cry out against wickedness. We have to try to bring anyone who violates God’s law to His bar of justice. Those who guard and protect wicked people are just as guilty as the perpetrators. When is the last time you heard of a church exercising church discipline on an adulterer or whoremonger, a thief, someone who defrauds his brethren, or someone who lives unholy and under God? You do not ever hear of that anymore. There are very few churches that will exercise church discipline.

Think with me, please, of what is happening in our country. What caused the deaths of so many people? Let me ask it again: What caused the deaths of over 40,000 Israelites, over 25,000 Benjamites, and all the other people? What caused their deaths? The answer comes back: some individuals were going to cover up and protect the wicked and keep them from suffering biblical justice.

If merely protecting pedophiles, sodomites, fornicators, murderers, abortionists, and adulterers are heinous violations of God’s law and deserve punishment, how much worse is it, and how much more deserving of punishment, when you have a humanistic government that makes such sin legal—not only makes it legal, but subsidizes it?

Psalm 94:20 asks, “Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by law?” They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous and condemn the innocent blood.

A throne speaks of government, power, and authority. This is a throne of iniquity—a wicked civil government. The question is whether a wicked civil government, which frames mischief by law, or makes sin legal, can have fellowship with God. In the Bible, mischief is another word for sin. The answer is no. The result is that they gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous and condemn the innocent blood.

Look how many babies have been murdered in this country through abortion. Look how many people have been killed because of adultery, fornication, and rape. Look at it. If merely protecting them is enough to merit and bring forth God’s punishment, how much more do we deserve God’s punishment when we make it legal and subsidize it? Since God is immutable—that is, unchangeable—He does not change.

You need to understand something: we are in for a world of hurt, a world of wrath and vengeance, if we do not repent and come back to God in faith. He judged Benjamin. He judged Israel. He will judge America. When you look at everything going downhill in this country as fast as it can go, there is no other need to wonder as to why: we have sinned against Him and protected anyone and everything contrary to Him and His law. It is a heinous violation of His truth.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your word. We thank You for Your truth. We ask You, Heavenly Father, to grant us repentance, faith, and obedience. Help us, Lord, to live lives of holiness and righteousness. Help us, Lord, to have moral integrity, uprightness, honor, and character. Help us, Lord, to walk in Thy law and in obedience unto Thee. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, amen.

CHAPTER 7

What is Ministry?

August 30, 2020

Introduction: The Question of Ministry

In the last couple of weeks, several things have arisen that made me think a lot of people do not particularly understand ministry. So I wanted to clarify this truth from Scripture. In 2 Corinthians 4:1-2, the Apostle Paul says, "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

I have heard many say, "I am in the ministry." I have heard parents say, "My son has entered into the ministry." I have heard a lot of preachers say, "Well, we must focus on the ministry." So the question would have to be asked: What exactly is the ministry? We could also ask at the same time: Are there variations in the ministry? Obviously, there must be differences in the ministry because not everyone has the same gifts. Therefore, we do not all function exactly the same in serving the Lord.

Diversities of Gifts, Ministries, and Operations

A few of these questions can be answered very quickly by looking at a couple of passages. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Scripture says, "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all."

When verse 4 says there are diversities of gifts, the word for gifts is charisma. In context, it is saying that the Holy Spirit of God imparts these gifts to individuals for the honor and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and for the service of the church as well. God gives these gifts to each of His believers. But differing gifts, therefore, according to verse 5, lead to different ministries. He says, "Now there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord."

The word administrations there is actually the word for ministry, or the word for service. In verse 6, he says, “There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.” When the Bible speaks in verse 5 of differences of administrations, it uses the Greek word diakonia, which refers to service and ministry. In verse 6, diversities of operations refers to the effects or operations of the working of the ministry. The Greek word there is energema, from which we derive our English word energy. Thus, there are different gifts, different ministries, and different energies.

The Body Analogy: Every Member Necessary

Now he explains this in verse 14: “For the body is not one member, but many.” Obviously, we have many members in our body, but one body. “If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members, every one in the body, as it hath pleased Him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are there many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which

seem to be more feeble, are necessary. And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: that there should be no schism in the body."

"But that the members should have the same care one of another." If we understand 1 Corinthians chapter 12 correctly, we cannot dismiss, denigrate, or deny any ministry as insignificant, no matter how small it may be, because each part is absolutely necessary for the whole. Just as each part of the body is necessary for the whole, each separate ministry, however small or seemingly insignificant, is absolutely necessary for the whole.

If you go back and look at verses 11 and 12, the Bible says, "But all these"—that is, not only the diversities of gifts, but also the diversities of service and operations—"worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ."

God Sovereignly Assigns Gifts and Ministries

There is no room for jealousy or envy in the gift, because God has sovereignly bestowed each gift upon each believer, and each one is given for the benefit of the whole body. Translated very bluntly, we do not choose our ministries. We do not even choose our gifts. God chooses for us. We should be grateful, thankful, and appreciative for any gift we have, simply because we do not deserve to have any gift whatsoever; neither do we deserve to have any ministry whatsoever. Anything we have received of God is nothing but pure grace and mercy. Therefore, we must learn to submit to God and His wisdom, enjoy the gifts He has given us, and use them for His honor and glory and for the good of His people.

One of the problems today is that many Christians do not understand ministry. Unhappily, many pastors do not understand ministry either. Most preachers and Christians wrongly think that when they hear the word ministry, they should think only of

preaching or of church. We tend to think that those called to preach or to be missionaries are in the ministry. That is true, and I am certainly not downplaying it; those gifts are absolutely necessary. But the truth is that ministry is far more than that. The average Christian probably tends to think that his life is regular, mundane, without meaning, or without purpose, because he does not view himself as being in the ministry.

Ministry in Everyday Life

In 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 31, look what he says: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." If we are doing something for the glory of God, that is ministry. It is ministry to God and His glory. Whether we eat, drink, or do whatever we do, we do all to God's glory.

It was the habit of Stonewall Jackson, every time he mailed a letter, to pray over it and ask the Lord to bless that individual and to bless the message he had in that letter as well. That was simply an illustration of this. In Colossians chapter 3 and verse 17, we find a verse similar to 1 Corinthians 10:31: "And whatsoever ye do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."

When we put 1 Corinthians 10:31 and Colossians 3:17 together, eating and drinking, working, and speaking, if done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and for the honor and glory of God, are ministry. You need to think about the phrases "whatsoever ye do" and "whatsoever ye do in word or in deed." These phrases basically cover every area of life.

The truth of the matter is this: The life of each Christian is to be a life of ministry. It is not just preachers and teachers; it is every child of God. His life is to be a life of ministry. A wife who keeps the home, washes dishes, and cooks is engaged in ministry, as long as it is done for the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ and the glory of God. Waiting on and taking care of elderly parents is ministry. Taking care of anyone who is sickly is ministry. It does not matter what we are doing, as long as it is in word or in deed. Raising children and teaching children are also ministry because they are part of our calling and part of the gifts God has given us.

Whatever our ministry is, we are not to faint in that ministry. So, if you look back in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 1, He says this: “Therefore, seeing we have this ministry.”

Now, watch carefully: “as we have received mercy.” It is only God’s mercy that gives us any ministry whatsoever. Since we have received this ministry and mercy, we faint not. We are not to faint.

I have fainted one time in my life. When I was at boot camp, I was running, stepped in a hole, twisted my foot, went down on it, and heard it break. I hobbled up to the sergeant and said, “I just broke my foot.” He looked at me and said, “Well, can you march back to camp?” Stupid me said, “Well, yeah, I guess I can.” We were two miles from camp, and I marched back on a broken foot. My foot was being held in by that boot, so they had to cut the boot off. When they cut it off, my foot just… And boy, you come out the pain and I fainted.

Here is the point: when I fainted, that sergeant could have stood over my face and yelled, and it would not have mattered. He could have yelled, “Parade rest!” or “Right arm!” It did not matter. I had fainted; I did not hear him and was incapable of functioning. So he is saying that, since we have received this ministry, we are not going to faint. We are not going to become incapable of functioning.

The Meaning of Diakonia: Service and Waiting Tables

The interesting thing is that the word ministry here is the Greek word diakonia. This is the main word used throughout the New Testament for ministry. It is translated as ministry, ministration, and service, and occurs thirty-four times in the New Testament. We derive our English word diaconate, referring to deacons, from this word. It is also translated, or literally transliterated, as deacon. Diakoneo, the verb, means to serve; diakonia is the service; and diakonos is the servant, or the deacon. When you talk about a deacon, you are talking about a servant—about diakonia, which is ministry. A deacon is literally a servant. A minister is a servant. It is exactly the same word, and it speaks of personal service.

In Acts chapter 6, we find the first deacons. Acts 6:1 says, “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there

arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." The word ministration is diakonia. They were being neglected in the daily ministry. Verse 2 says, "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables."

"Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

What happened? The apostles were waiting on tables. They were serving food to the widows and the orphans. They became so busy that some of the Grecians were neglected, and they complained. The apostles said, "Look, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Look ye out among you seven men full of faith and the Holy Ghost, whom we may appoint over this matter." The first deacons were appointed for the ministry: waiting on tables, the ministry of waiting on tables. This is the word for ministry, and literally it means a servant. It means a waiter. These deacons were supervising the feeding of the widows and the orphans.

We do not tend to think of waiting on tables as ministry. It seems too mundane. But when you look in Luke 10:40, you remember how Mary sat at the feet of Jesus, but the Bible said, "But Martha"—what did she do? She served. It is the word ministry, diakonia. She was ministering. How was she ministering? She was cooking food, providing tables, and waiting on tables to feed those people. Peter's mother-in-law, in Mark 1:31, had a fever.

Our Lord went in, touched her, and healed her. The Bible says that she arose and ministered unto them. How did she minister to them? She cooked food and fed them. Then, in Matthew 4, our Lord was in the wilderness for forty days, fasting. When you get down to verse 11, the Bible says that the angels came and ministered to Him. It is the Greek word diakonia. What did they do? They probably brought Him food, since He had been fasting for forty days.

Thus, waiting on tables in Scripture is clearly ministry. The word ministration in verse 1 and the word ministry in verse 4 of Acts

chapter 6 are exactly the same word. Waiting on tables—that is, rendering service to others in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and for the honor and glory of God—is just as much ministry as preaching and teaching the Word. It is ministry. Ministry is all about ministering to others through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that our heavenly Father might be honored and glorified.

Let me give you some Scriptures. Consider Matthew 20:28: “For even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Jesus Christ did not come to be waited on; He came to wait on others. He did not come to be served; He came to serve. In Luke 22:27, our Lord said, “For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth?” Then He said, “Is not he that sitteth at meat?” Yes, the one that sits and is waiting on. “I am among you as one that serveth.” He did not come to be waited on; He came to be the waiter. He did not come to be served; He came to serve.

The Servant Heart and the Failure of Modern Christianity

In both of these passages, Matthew 20:28 and Luke 22:27, the Greek word is diakoneo, which means to minister, to wait upon, to be a domestic, to be a servant. So while I am on this, let me tell you what I conceive in my mind as one of the greatest failures we have in Christianity today. This is, I believe, one of the greatest failures among Christians.

We have lost the idea. We have lost the attitude. We have lost the motive. We have lost the propensity to serve. In other words, we no longer have a servant's heart, like our Lord had a servant's heart. We want to be the master. We want to be the one waited on. We want to be the one served. We do not want to be the one serving and waiting on others. So we no longer desire to be a servant; we desire to be a master.

Romans 12:6 says, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministry. Or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that

ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness." Then he goes on to say, "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." He talks about different types of ministry. Whatever gift God has given you, that is what you are to be exercising.

First Peter 4:10 says, "As every man hath received the gift"—which indicates that every Christian has some kind of gift—"as every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God. If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

We are to minister one to another. Oftentimes we talk about a Christian community, and I certainly believe in community. Usually, when we think of community, we think of a group of people living in the same geographical area. But “com” is a preposition which means “with,” and “unity.” That is what the word community means: “with unity.”

One dictionary definition of community is “a unified body of individuals, such as the people with common interests living in a particular area.” I then went to Webster’s 1828 dictionary and looked up the word community. Here is what I found: “A society of people having common rights and privileges or common interests, civil, political or ecclesiastical or living under the same laws and regulations. This word community may signify a commonwealth, a state, a body politic, or a particular society or order of men within a state as a community of monks,” or we could say, a community of believers.

It is often used for the public or people in general with very definite limits. When we are talking about the community of faith, we are talking about people who are living under the same law and regulation, that is, God’s law. We are talking about people who hold the same ideas and the same belief. That is why the Apostle Paul said that we are to do good unto all men, but especially they that be of the household of faith.

When we think of the word commune, I could say that Brother Gary and I communed yesterday. We may simply think about talking, or about talking and eating. But the word communed is from the Greek word homileo, and it means to communicate, to be in company with, to associate with, and to stay with, as well as to converse one with another. When we commune, we are not simply talking; we are associating with one another. The word minister implies community, because you have to have someone to minister unto.

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians, chapter 8. The word community does not necessarily mean someone in the same geographical area. Look at 2 Corinthians, chapter 8, beginning with verse 1: "Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit"—that is, we want you to know—"of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia." Macedonia was in Greece. "We want you to know the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality."

Paul writes concerning the churches of Macedonia: "For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering"—there is that word diakonia—"to the saints. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

These churches, through their great trial of affliction and their poverty, had taken a financial gift for the poor saints at Jerusalem. In verse 19, Paul says, "And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered"—there is the word diakonia again—"by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind: avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered"—there it is, diakonia—"that is ministered by us: providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men."

The Apostle is saying that this is a ministry. Whenever you see the word administered, it is the same word as ministry.

In Romans 15, verses 30 and 31, Paul asks prayer specifically that the offering given to the saints at Jerusalem would be received and that he would be protected as he carried it: “Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service”—that is, my ministry, diakonia—“which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints.” This is ministry: the saints in Macedonia have taken an offering for the community of saints in Jerusalem.

Now consider something extremely significant. Many times we proclaim our love for our heavenly Father. I would hope and pray that you would tell God every day that you love Him, that you love the Lord Jesus Christ, and that you love the Holy Spirit—one God manifested in three persons. But here is a good question. We often say, “We’re God’s ministers.” If we are God’s ministers, how in the world do we minister to the one true and living God? How do you minister to someone who has absolutely no needs whatsoever? God has no needs.

Ministering to God by Ministering to the Saints

How can you give to Him when He possesses everything? He created everything. You cannot give to Him without Him first having given to you. So the question has to be asked: How do we express our love to Him? How do we express our love for Him? Here is the answer. Hebrews 6:10 says, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." Now, let that sink in: "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name." In other words, you did it for God; you were honoring Him.

But how did you do it? "In that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." Let me put it to you very plainly: We love God by loving His people. We serve Him by serving His people. We minister to Him by ministering to His people. It is impossible to minister to God without ministering to His people.

The house of Stephanas presents an interesting concept. Paul says, "I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.)" Now that is an addiction. They have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints. That was their life. Their life was serving others, especially the people of God.

I understand that there is an office of a bishop. I understand there is an office of a deacon, and a true shepherd feeds the sheep, while the true deacon helps the pastor and waits on the people. I understand that. But if you are a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ, you do have a ministry. You may not be a preacher; you may not be a missionary in the sense that you travel to a foreign land, but you do have a ministry.

Examples of Faithful Ministry: Onesiphorus, Epaphroditus, Melvin Stringer

In 2 Timothy 1:16-18, Paul says, “The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus.” Why would God give mercy to that house? He explains: “For he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: but, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.” Paul continues, “The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.” Onesiphorus found Paul in prison, sought him out, was not ashamed of his bonds, refreshed him, and brought him food and gifts.

He did everything he could to take care of me. So visiting God's imprisoned saints, supplying their needs, and refusing to be ashamed of them is a ministry. That's what Onesiphorus did. Paul said he ministered to me in Ephesus, and you know very well how he did that.

Epaphroditus was an individual who truly understood ministry. Paul said, "Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants." "For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I

should have sorrow upon sorrow. I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful."

Here was a man who had actually made himself sick. Paul continued, "Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me," your lack of ministry toward me. Epaphroditus was one of them, and he ministered to Paul to the point that he was almost dead because they had failed in their ministry. Here was a man who took ministry very seriously.

The term ministry is indeed a very wide term. It includes preaching and teaching, but it includes preaching and teaching on all things. If I am teaching the doctrine of justification by faith alone, that's ministry. If I am teaching the doctrine of sanctification, that's ministry. If I am teaching the biblical doctrine of self-defense, that's ministry, too. If I am teaching someone how to plant, how to garden, or how to clean an animal and take care of themselves, that's ministry. The average preacher would not necessarily say that is ministry, but the truth of the matter is that it is, because we are ministering to the saints.

What God has called us to do is to take heed to our ministries. Paul wrote to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it."

Making Full Proof of Your Ministry

The word fulfil is from the Greek word pleroo, which means to make full, to fill up, to fill to the brim, to cause to abound, to put into full force, and to fill to the top so that nothing will be wanting. So he says, Archippus, you need to make your ministry abound in every way that you possibly can.

The Apostle Paul also told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5, “But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, and make full proof of thy ministry.” Well, how do you make full proof of your ministry? Don’t give up. Don’t give out. Don’t quit. I

have known a number of pastors who quit preaching. You ask them why: “Well, I got burned out.” Well, how did you get burned out?

That is strange to me, because this is all I have ever done, all I have ever wanted to do, and all I want to keep doing. I know you can get hurt in the ministry. I understand that. I know you can get betrayed and stabbed in the back. I understand that; it has happened to me, and it has happened to a lot of people. But the point is, you still do not quit. You still do not give up. You do not give in, and you do not give out. Whatever ministry God has given you, you are to exercise it for the honor and glory of God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Each person, each believer, has a gift and has a ministry. That does not mean everyone is called to preach or to teach. It means that God has given every believer a gift, and everyone has a ministry. There are some who are exhorters, some who are benefactors, and some who simply want to support the ministry. I had a dear friend, now dead, whom many of you knew, Melvin Stringer. Melvin was one of those unique individuals for whom everything he touched just turned to money. He could make money faster than any man I have ever seen in my life.

And he made it honestly. If he had kept all of his money, he would have died a millionaire, probably a multimillionaire, but he did not keep it; he gave it away. Alice can tell you that, had it not been for Melvin Stringer, she and I and our children would have gone hungry many, many times. When my refrigerator quit and we had no money, he bought us a refrigerator. When our car quit, he bought us a car. It was not a new car, but it was one that would run.

He would help any young preacher and widows. I have seen him go to a widow's house when her hot water heater had quit, take it out, buy a new one, install it, and never charge her a penny. That's a ministry. He had another ministry that most of you would never dream of. Melvin Stringer would see a husband and wife walking along the road, stop and pick them up, take them to his house, feed them, give them a room to stay in, teach them to work, and get them a job. He did that over and over.

When I had his funeral, there were grown men and women there who referred to Melvin and Barbara as Mom and Daddy—people he had picked up alongside the road and taught. That's a ministry. I could never have that ministry, but God gave it to him. Everyone has a ministry, and we have to be faithful. The Apostle Paul said, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." He also said, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry." The word counted means, "I thank Jesus Christ our Lord, who imputed me to be faithful." In other words, He charged me as being faithful. I really was not faithful, but He counted me faithful anyhow and put me into the ministry.

When the Apostle Paul found out that bonds awaited him in Jerusalem, he said in Acts chapter 20 and verse 24, "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." Prison did not bother him. It did not cause him fear. When it came time for Paul to die, in 2 Timothy chapter 4, verses 6 through 8, he said, "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." He finished the course; in other words, he was faithful to the end. That is making full proof of your ministry. Stay faithful to the end.

We have to learn to respect and honor the ministry of other believers. Their ministry may not be our ministry. It may not be something we would like or something we would do, but it is a ministry. How would you like to be a minister to a leper colony? You would not. Most people would not. But there are individuals who have given their lives waiting on and serving lepers. How many would like to be a missionary to the cannibals? I would not. But there are people who have, and they have given their lives. Just because we do not like a ministry or think we would not like it, we would do it does not mean it is not a ministry.

My Ministry, Our Ministry, The Ministry

Moreover, there is a vast difference between my ministry, our ministry, and the ministry. I could say to Brother Gary, "Well, this is my ministry. I teach; that is what I do." But how many people could I teach if nobody came? It is not just my ministry; it becomes our ministry, if all of that. Our ministry would take precedence over my ministry, and the ministry would take precedence over our ministry. If we were honest and unselfish, we should desire that my ministry would fail, and our ministry would fail—not the ministry. If God is pleased to prosper some other ministry that is not ours, we should still rejoice, because it is the ministry. The ministry takes precedence.

Moreover, understand this: as Christians and as Christian ministers, God has called us to holiness and obedience. That is why He said in 2 Corinthians 6:3, “Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.” Our lives should be holy and righteous. We are His ministers, His deacons, His servants, and His children, and we minister to Him by serving each other.

Conclusion: Faithfulness and Service

In Matthew 25:34, the King says to those on His right hand, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” The righteous answer, asking when they saw Him hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, or in prison and ministered to Him. “And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

The rest of that passage says, “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” For He was hungry, and they gave Him no meat; thirsty, and they gave Him no drink; a stranger, and they took Him not in; naked, and they clothed Him not; sick and in prison, and they visited Him not. They ask, “Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in

prison, and did not minister unto thee?" They might say, "Lord, if we had seen You, surely we would have done that for You." But He answers, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

Our Lord said very clearly that when we minister to others, we are ministering to Him. We cannot have a ministry without ministering to the Lord, and we cannot minister to the Lord without ministering to each other.

Whatever gift God has given you, whatever ability He has given you, use it for His honor and glory by teaching and sharing with the saints of God. That is ministry. The Apostle Paul said, "Let us do good unto all men, but especially unto the household of faith."

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we ask You for Your grace, mercy, goodness, and kindness. Thank You, Father, for the ministry You have given each one of us, and for the gifts You have given each one of us. Help us, Father, to be more faithful in serving each other, so that we may serve You more acceptably and effectually. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, whose name we pray, amen.

CHAPTER 8

The Confidences of the Wicked

February 3, 2012

SCRIPTURE READING - Joshua 3:9–13 (KJV)

"And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither and hear the words of the Lord your God. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap. And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; and as they

> that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,) that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan."

"And those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan."

Introduction: The Believer's Confidence in Christ Alone

Let me begin with a personal testimony. I trust in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. My confidence is in Him alone. My salvation, if I am a believer, depends completely upon the Lord Jesus Christ. It is His life, His merits, His grace, and His mercy that sustain me. I am nothing and can do nothing apart from Jesus Christ. My salvation rests totally and completely upon Him. I cannot save myself or even help save myself. The Bible says in Jonah 2:9, "salvation is of the Lord."

Since Christ has saved me, my desire is to bring my life into conformity to the Word of God. I have been instructed, as you have, according to Matthew 4:4: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Likewise, each of us who are believers has been commanded by Christ not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. According to Romans 8:29, the ultimate goal of our salvation is to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

Any good deeds or works of grace and mercy in our lives are simply the outworking of His grace and mercy in us. That is why the Bible says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto

good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Likewise, Philippians 2:12–13 says, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." God works it in, and we have the responsibility to work it out. Whatever good is in us is only by His grace. Any good, gracious, righteous, or holy thing done by us or coming from us originated only in His grace and mercy in us.

One of my favorite hymns is entitled "My Faith Has Found a Resting Place."

Let me just give you two stanzas. "My faith has found a resting place, not in device nor creed; I trust the ever-living One, His wounds for me shall plead. Enough for me that Jesus saves, this ends my fear and doubt; A sinful soul I come to Him, He'll never cast me out. I need no other argument, I need no other plea; It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me."

And then the second stanza, "My heart is leaning on the Word, the written Word of God, Salvation by my Savior's name, salvation by the Savior's blood. The great Physician heals the sick, the lost He came to save; For me His precious blood He shed, for me His life He gave. I need no other argument, I need no other plea; It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me." The hymn is expressive of the faith and confidence of every child of God. And if you are a child of God by faith, then your heart echoes every sentiment that I have just enunciated. My wife can tell you I've often remarked to her and probably to many of you as well, that I just do not understand and I cannot conceive in my mind how any man or any woman can live today without Jesus Christ, especially in this world of danger and disappointment. I cannot even imagine what it is like to live without faith, and to be honest with you, I don't want to try to imagine what it is like to live without faith.

You have to ask this question. Since we as believers trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and unbelievers do not, in whom do they trust or in what do they trust?

SCRIPTURE READING - Matthew 7:24–27 (KJV)

Everyone Has a Foundation

> Every man has to have a foundation. It is true that that foundation may be an unstable one or a shaky one. But everyone has to have a foundation. Everyone has to believe in something. Everyone has to believe in someone. Our Lord says this: "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

So our Lord is telling us that basically everyone has to have a foundation. You either have a solid foundation, or you have a foundation that is very unstable and very shaky. In other words, the Word of God is telling us that a false foundation is worthless and useless.

In Job 4:19, let me quote one of these verses. We are going to turn to a lot of passages momentarily. The Word of God says: “How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth?” Now I want you to note the question, “which are crushed before the moth.” In other words, those who are not built upon Jesus Christ have a foundation so unstable and so shaky that even a moth lighting upon it will destroy it.

Then he said, in Ezekiel 13:14, God said: “So will I break down the wall that ye have daubed with untempered mortar, and bring it down to the ground, so that the foundation thereof shall be discovered, and it shall fall, and ye shall be consumed in the midst thereof: and ye”

Then you shall know that I am the Lord. Now note, God said, “I’m going to break down the wall that you have daubed with untempered

mortar, and your foundation is going to be exposed, and then it's going to fall."

I remember the first time I ever tried to build a brick wall. I had worked some with a brick mason, and after doing something once, you think you know everything. So I decided to build myself a little barbecue pit. It was a single wall, and it took me just about all day to build the thing. I tried to make sure it was right. Finally, I asked my brick mason friend to look at it. I said, "What do you think of my wall?" He walked around it, then said, "Huh," and kicked it. All my bricks fell down because the mortar was not right. And all he did was just kick it, and the wall totally fell down.

That is exactly what God says: "I will expose your foundation. And if it's not a solid foundation, it will be crumbled." Why will God, in His righteous judgment, expose and destroy all false foundations? The answer is very simple. In Isaiah 28:16, the Scripture says: "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste."

Now Peter tells us that foundation is Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 3 and verse 11, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." So when He said in Isaiah 28, "I will lay a foundation," that foundation is Jesus Christ.

The Bible says in Proverbs 10 and verse 25, "As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more: but the righteous is an everlasting foundation." How can the righteous be an everlasting foundation? The answer is found in Ephesians 2 and verse 20, where we are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

One of my favorite verses is found in 2 Timothy 2 and verse 19: "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Based upon the Word of God, it should be obvious that everyone has a foundation. It may be stable or unstable, but everyone has a foundation, and everyone who

has a false foundation will ultimately have that foundation collapsed and destroyed by the righteous judgment of God.

Now you say, "Pastor, I know all of that. What in the world has that got to do with Joshua chapter three?" Well, I'm glad you asked, because I want to tell you and show you what differing foundations have to do with Joshua chapter three. To show you that, look in Joshua chapter two, beginning there with verse 8. Everyone knows the story of Rahab. The two spies have gotten there. She has hidden them on her roof under flax.

Rahab's Change of Foundation

"And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof; And she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath."

"Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token." Rahab acknowledged and confessed the sovereignty of God, the providence of God, the power of God, the protection of God, and the punishment of God. She said that, because of God and the children of Israel, their terror had fallen upon every one of them that did not believe.

Rahab was ready, willing, and eager to change her foundation structure. She was no longer interested in the heathenistic, non-biblical foundation. Instead of trusting in what the wicked trust in, she was willing to rely upon the Lord God of Israel. How do I know that? Because the Bible says specifically in Hebrews 11 and verse 31, "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." Notice: it was by faith Rahab the harlot perished not with them that believed

not. So she switched foundations. She said, “I'm not going to be trusting in the same thing the rest of these people are trusting in.”

If Rahab changed foundations, what was her confidence previously? What were the confidences of all the other people of Jericho and the other Canaanites? In what did they trust, and upon what was their foundation built?

Remember the ten plagues in Egypt. Each of those plagues was directed at a god of Egypt. Egypt was polytheistic; they believed in many gods. Finally, Pharaoh himself believed that he was God, yet in the last plague the firstborn of every family died. Even Pharaoh was powerless to save his own child, exposing him as no god at all and having no power. The ten plagues were destroying the foundation upon which all the people of Egypt stood, believed, and relied. Why did God destroy the false foundations of Egypt?

Why is God destroying the false foundations and wicked confidences of the Canaanites? Isaiah 42:8 gives the answer: “I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.” God would not let a dumb idol take His praise and glory. What were the confidences of the wicked in Jericho? Are these same confidences prevalent in our land today?

First Confidence: Trust in Natural Elements

The Canaanites in Jericho trusted, first of all, in the natural elements. Look in Joshua 3:15: “And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest).” Scripture tells us that the Jordan was overflowing all its banks; it was in flood stage. The Jordan River is mentioned nearly 200 times in our Bibles. Its fast-flowing waters, especially during flood stage, created a natural barrier between Canaan and the lands to the east. The river begins at the foot of Mount Hermon and travels about 25 miles before emptying into the Sea of Galilee. From there it travels about 65 miles down into the Dead Sea. Normally, the Jordan is surprisingly narrow, only about 50 to 75 feet wide, but during flood stage it can be as much as a mile wide. The waters flow fast and furiously, and anyone who enters them is certain to drown.

Here then are the Israelites on one side, the people of Jericho on the other, and this natural element—what the heathen like to call "Mother Nature"—between the Canaanites and the Israelites. We must ask why God brought the Israelites to fight against Jericho while the river was at flood stage. Could He not have timed it differently, when the water was not overflowing and there was a narrow passage? Of course He could have. But when He brings the children of Israel there at flood stage, guess what? They are now forced to trust in Him. They are not only forced to trust in Him, but this will magnify His power as well as His kindness to Israel.

We tend to think humanistically, although we are Christians. If you were an Israelite on this side of Jordan, with Jordan overflowing all its banks, would you not tend to think, "The wicked have an advantage over us. How in the world are we going to get across this river without drowning? How are we going to get over there to fight?" We tend to think that somehow, some way, the wicked always have a superior advantage, which is not so. God is going to show us in this passage that the wicked do not have an advantage, no matter how great that advantage may appear in our own minds.

In all probability, the Canaanites were very pleased with this timing. Here they were sitting back in their fortress, while the river was at flood stage. According to Rahab's own testimony, they had already heard about Sihon and Og and how the Israelites had killed them. They had also heard what God did to the Egyptians. But now, at least, the river was at flood stage, and it would remain so for some while; therefore, they were pretty safe.

The floodwaters of the Jordan demonstrated Baal's power to save the people of Jericho. Many ancient people considered their homeland rivers sacred, and still do. The people of India revere the Ganges, and the Egyptians honored the Nile. The pagans who lived in Canaan, especially in Jericho, viewed the Jordan River—particularly when it overflowed its banks—as symbolizing the power and protection of their fertility gods, the Baals. So when God stopped the flow of the Jordan and allowed His people to walk across on dry land, He first destroyed their foundation of trusting in Mother Nature.

The natural elements were not their God. Think about this great miracle: the crossing of the Jordan River in its flood stage, on dry ground, by approximately two million people. In this miracle, God was glorified, Joshua was exalted, Israel was encouraged, and the Canaanites were terrified.

Now look at verse 16. God says, "That the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho." God cut the waters off "very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan." That is about eighteen miles away. God stopped the waters eighteen miles away. When He stopped the waters, it was not muddy land over which they went; it was dry land. God also allowed all the moisture in that soil to go out. So there was a huge opening. The children of Israel did not have to wait, and they did not have to go around.

They did not have to look for possible fords. They simply walked out, across on dry land, straight to the city. You know what the Bible says in Job 28:11? "He bindeth the floods from overflowing; and the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light." What does God do? God binds the floods from overflowing. Then Psalm 29:10 says, "The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever." The Lord is the one who controls the floods.

Hold Joshua 3, but look in your Bibles to Psalm 114. Here is a reference to what happened in Joshua chapter 3. Notice especially verses 3 and 5, because they particularly relate to this incident. Psalm 114: "When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion. The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back. The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs."

I love verse 5: "What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?" What was wrong with you? You had no control over yourself. No one else could control you, but God had control over you, and God drove you back.

In Job 38:22–37, the Bible tells us that God has control over all the elements. Listen to verses 22 and 23: "Hast thou entered into the

treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, Which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war?" What is God saying? All of the elements are under His control. He controls the rain, the hail, the dew—He controls everything.

Jeremiah 10:13 says, "When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth. He maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures." Jeremiah 14:22 asks, "Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art not thou he, O Lord our God? therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things." God is the only one who can give rain, and God is the only one who can withhold rain. He is in control of all the elements.

Now let me ask you a question. If you were inside the city of Jericho, looked out, and saw your Baal, your god—the natural element of that Jordan River overflowing its bank—and saw the enemy on the other side, you might think, "My god's got him." But suddenly the water stood on a heap, the land was dry, and your enemy walked across on dry ground right in front of you. What would you think? Would you begin to think, "I might be in trouble"? My foundation may be breaking up. I may have been trusting in the wrong things. Their first confidence was that natural boundary, that natural element, and God simply wiped out their confidence. He destroyed them. May I remind you of 1 Corinthians 3:11? "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." God is in control of all the elements.

The Second Confidence

He uses them for His glory and for the good of His people.

Second Confidence: Trust in Personal Preparations

Their second confidence was this: These Canaanites trusted in their personal preparations—not only in the natural elements, but also in their personal preparations.

Joshua 6:1 says, “Now Jericho was straitly shut up because of the children of Israel: none went out, and none came in.” Jericho was an extremely well-built and strongly fortified city, surrounded by walls. The fortress could only be obtained through the city gates. Joshua 2:5 says, “And it came to pass about the time of the shutting of the gate, when it was dark, that the men went out: whither the men went I wot not: pursue after them quickly; for ye shall overtake them.”

Note the words, “it came to pass about the time of the shutting of the gate.” Verse 7 says, “And the men pursued after them the way to Jordan unto the fords: and as soon as they which pursued after them were gone out, they shut the gate.” Verse 15 says, “Then she let them down by a cord through the window: for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall.”

Joshua 6:5 says, “And it shall come to pass, that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him.” Here, then, was a strongly fortified city with a huge wall. You could only get in through the gate, and once you were in or out, they barred the gate.

Jericho was surrounded by a huge wall which they believed was insurmountable and impenetrable. May I also call your attention to the fact that in Joshua 3 the Bible said the river of Jordan overflowed all her banks during harvest time? A harvest had just ended. The people were therefore in this fortified city with plenty of food and, undoubtedly, plenty of water, because it had been raining.

SCRIPTURE READING - Deuteronomy 9:1–3 (KJV)

Probably had springs in there as well. So when Israel walked across on dry land, I'm sure that they were concerned, but probably not that concerned because we've got this fortified city. We have these huge walls. We have plenty of food and plenty of water. We can hold out for a long time. But the children of Israel should have known what God told them in Deuteronomy chapter 9, the first three verses:

“Hear, O Israel: Thou art to pass over Jordan this day, to go in to possess nations greater and mightier than thyself, cities great

> and fenced up to heaven, A people great and tall, the children of the Anakims, whom thou knowest, and of whom thou hast heard say, Who can stand before the children of Anak! Understand therefore this day, that the Lord thy God is he which goeth over before thee; as a consuming fire he shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the Lord hath said unto thee."

But notice what God said: "You're going to face a people that's greater than you, mightier than you, and they've got cities fenced up to heaven." We both know that the fence or wall did not go up to heaven, but this expression shows that those walls were truly great.

I want to read to you a couple of archaeological reports on the excavation of Jericho. One archaeologist wrote, "The mound or the tell at Jericho was surrounded by a great earthen rampart or embankment with a stone retaining wall at its base. The retaining wall was some four to five meters, that's 12 to 15 feet high." It is one thing to see a 12- to 15-foot stone wall. On top of that was a mud-brick wall two meters thick—six feet—and about six to eight meters, or 20 to 26 feet, high. So there was a 12- to 15-foot stone wall, and then a mud-brick wall six feet thick and another 20 to 26 feet high.

At the crest of the embankment was a similar mud-brick wall whose base was roughly 14 meters, or 46 feet, above the ground level outside the retaining wall. This is what loomed high above the Israelites as they marched around the city each day for seven days. Humanly speaking, it was impossible for the Israelites to penetrate the impregnable bastion of Jericho. The citizens were well prepared for a siege. A copious spring, which provided water for ancient as well as modern Jericho, lay inside the city walls. At the time of the attack, the harvest had just taken place, so the citizens had an abundant supply of food.

This has been borne out by many large jars full of grain found in Canaanite homes by John Garstang in his excavation in the 1930s and also by Kathleen Kenyon. With plentiful food and ample water, the inhabitants of Jericho could have held out for perhaps several years. The Bible records that when Jericho was stormed, the walls

collapsed and everything in the city was destroyed. You can read about that in Joshua 6:16–24.

Kathleen Kenyon wrote in her excavation report, “The destruction was complete. Walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire, and every room was filled with fallen bricks, timbers, and household utensils. In most rooms the fallen debris was heavily burnt.” She continues: “What caused the strong walls of Jericho to collapse? The most likely explanation that is usually given is that the walls fell because of an earthquake. If God used an earthquake, it was an unusual one,”

Because it struck in such a way as to allow a portion of the city wall on the north side of the site to remain standing while everywhere else the wall fell. Why would only a portion of the wall be left standing? The answer, of course, is given to us in Joshua 2 and Joshua 6. Where was Rahab's house? Upon the wall. Every one of her family got into that house. Rahab's house was upon the wall, and God sovereignly preserved the wall in that area so as to spare Rahab and her family. Isn't that amazing?

We are told in Hebrews 11, verses 30 and 31: "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace." The walls did not fall because of an earthquake. They fell in response to faith. It is interesting that Scripture says Rahab perished not with them that believed not. Simply stated, Rahab had come to trust in the Lord God of Israel.

So the question has to be asked: What happened to the foundations of those who believed not? They were destroyed. What good were all their preparations? They did them no good at all. Preparations are useless, and they fail to protect in time of danger without the blessings of God.

Now let me show you another incident. I want you to turn in your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 5. Here is another incident that will equal, in one sense of the word, the conquest of Jericho.

David is about to conquer Jerusalem. Look what happens. 2 Samuel 5 and verse 5, speaking about David: "In Hebron he reigned

over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah. And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither. Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David. And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house."

The Jebusites believed that their fort was so fortified and so strong that they mocked David and said, "Unless you can defeat the blind and the lame, you can't come in here."

Even the blind and the lame can keep you out of Jerusalem. You cannot possibly win. But he did. The point I am trying to make is this: Personal preparations without the blessings of God are worthless. What were these people of Jericho trusting in? Not only the natural elements, but their own personal preparations.

Now, let me emphasize a biblical truth here. It is evident from the Bible that preparations are demanded. What did he say in Proverbs chapter six? “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.” The Bible tells you in Proverbs 22:3 and Proverbs 27:12, “A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.” The Bible does teach that, yes, we must make preparations. Preparations may concern even the destruction of society, but preparations without faith are worthless.

You remember that passage in Luke 12, verses 17 through 21. The rich farmer said, “What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?”

So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Preparations in and of themselves are worthless. In all of our preparations and defenses, we must seek the blessing and protection of God. When foundations break up, so do men. When foundations break up, so does society. Our preparations are worthless without His blessings.

The Confidence in Natural Ability and Numerical Superiority

Third Confidence: Trust in Natural Abilities and Numerical Superiority

The third confidence of the wicked was in their natural abilities and numerical superiority. They not only trusted in the natural elements and their personal preparation; they also trusted in their natural strength and numbers.

In Joshua 9:1–2, we read, "And it came to pass, when all the kings which were on this side Jordan, in the hills, and in the valleys, and in all the coasts of the great sea over against Lebanon, the Hittite, and the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, heard thereof; That they gathered themselves together, to fight with Joshua and with Israel, with one accord."

Here were all these kings and peoples gathering to fight against Israel. Probably 2 million people crossed over Jordan, including women and children. There may have been 7 or 800,000 fighting men, but those 7 or 800,000 fighting men were probably facing several million. They were all coming together.

Many people possess natural strength and abilities. Goliath of Gath and his brethren are examples of that. Down through history, there have been warring tribes, factions, and nations. Even the Spartans are known for their fighting ability. Everyone knows the story of the Battle of Thermopylae, where 300 Spartans withstood hundreds of thousands of Persians for the longest.

The Canaanites evidently were a very warlike people and possessed a great army, which they amassed very quickly. We do not

know how many people lived in Jericho, but many Canaanites lived in the land. They may have wanted to help Jericho but possibly could not have. Yet, after its fall, they all banded together to fight. According to Joshua 10:1–5, they were not merely going to fight Israel; they were going to fight the Gibeonites.

They were going to destroy the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites were Amorites, the people who had deceived Joshua and the others and made peace with them. God would not allow Joshua and Israel to kill them, since they had made peace with them, but they made them drawers of water and hewers of wood. The Gibeonites, who should have been destroyed, were now spared because God made Israel honor her word, and they were to live among them as slaves.

Then all the other Amorites banded together to kill the Gibeonites, their fellow Amorites. It is amazing that wicked men will turn on and seek to destroy each other simply because of a perceived advantage: "Well, you're not going to have to fight like the way we are, so we'll just kill you too." That should be encouraging in our day and time. God can turn the swords of wicked men upon each other.

The Gibeonites were no longer under the gun, so to speak, and the rest of the Amorites said, "Look, we'll just kill you too and we'll fight against the Israelites." All these kings came together to fight against Gibeon and Israel. Who could withstand such superiority of firepower and numerical advantage? The answer is God can. Read Joshua 10:6–25, where God allowed Israel to wipe them all out. Numerical advantage and natural abilities mean nothing to God.

I love Ecclesiastes 9:11: "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all." Now, the word chance does not mean what we think of when we say, "I'll buy a lottery ticket. I'll take a chance. Or I'll jaywalk. I'll take a chance."

The Hebrew word means a current or incident. It has nothing to do with what the world calls fate, luck, or chance. Rather, it teaches that everything is done in its own time as God, by His providence, orders it. Events do not happen according to the will of man,

according to some clock that has been wound up, or by haphazard measures. Events come to pass only because God has foreordained them in time and in history.

That is what he means when he says, “The race is not to the swift and the battle is not to the strong, neither bread to the wise nor riches to the understanding in favour of the men of skills.” It does not come about because you have all those abilities; it comes about because God has ordained it. That is what he is saying. Acts 15:18 says, “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”

Biblical Illustrations of God’s Sovereignty Over Human Strength

Victory, the rise and fall of armies, the rise and fall of leaders, and the rise and fall of nations are all in God's hand and not in the hand of man. Therefore, there is no reason to fear the greatest nation, the greatest power, or the greatest ruler, because they are all in the hand of God.

Consider what happened to Asa, king of Judah. They were going out against the Ethiopians. 2 Chronicles 14:9 says, “And there came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an host of a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots; and came unto Mareshah.”

Zerah the Ethiopian came against Asa and Judah. He had a million soldiers, a thousand thousand, and three hundred chariots. Verse 10 says, “Then Asa went out against him, and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah.”

Asa had an army of 580,000 soldiers: “And Asa had an army of men that bare targets and spears, out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bare shields and drew bows, two hundred and fourscore thousand: all these were mighty men of valour.” Zerah had a million soldiers and 300 chariots. We could say 300 tanks, because that is about what the chariots were in those days. Judah was outnumbered two to one, besides the chariots.

“And Asa cried unto the Lord his God, and said, Lord, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name

we go against this multitude. O Lord, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee. So the Lord smote the Ethiopians before Asa, and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled. And Asa and the people that were with him pursued them unto Gerar: and the Ethiopians were overthrown, that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before the Lord, and before his host; and they carried away very much spoil."

The battle is not to the strong, no, the race to the swift. The battle does not belong to those who have natural abilities or numerical superiority. What happens when natural abilities fail? What happens when numerical superiority fails? Men break up because their foundations break up. Here they were destroyed. The only sure foundation is the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. That is the only sure foundation. Our confidence is to be in Christ.

Applications: Build on the Sure Foundation

He is the sovereign God of heaven and earth. He controls history. He has ordained it. The elements are His, not man's. Preparations mean nothing without His blessings. Natural ability and numerical superiority mean nothing when God is against you.

Foundations are important, not just in the construction of houses, but personal and spiritual foundations are the most important of all. They must be built solidly upon the Word of God and upon the Lord Jesus Christ. What did God say?

"Behold, I lay in Zion a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." We do not have to worry or run around like chickens with their heads cut off, because we have a sure, solid foundation in Christ.

Confidence in the time of danger is equally important, because we must have a place of safety. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." Psalm 127:1 says, "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

So the question is, Who is your confidence? What is your foundation? In whom do you trust? If you have any foundation other than Jesus Christ and His Word, your foundation shall crumble and

be destroyed. When your foundation breaks up, so will you. The Apostle Paul said, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Let us pray. Father, help us to understand the absolute importance of building upon Thy Word and upon the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the sure foundation. Lord, many in our country have turned from Thee. Our leaders and our government have turned from Thee, and according to Thy Word, that foundation will be destroyed. It will be broken up. For Thy glory Thou wilt not share with another, neither wilt Thou give Thy praise to graven images.

Give us grace and mercy, Lord, that we may trust in Thee and not in the natural elements. May we fulfill our responsibilities and prepare, but do so in faith, asking Thy blessing and protection. Help us not to fear man, natural abilities, or numerical superiority, for Thou art superior to everyone and everything. We rest in Thee and trust in Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 9

How to Resist Marxist Bullying Tactics

May 24, 2024

Introduction: The Principle of Resistance

This is something we have a lot of experience with in South Africa. Resistance is respected; weakness despised. There is nothing the communists respect more than strength, and nothing they despise more than weakness. Think of what you have seen in recent days at Columbia University in New York City, during the BLM burn, loot, murder riots in America, and in how Antifa has shown this works.

Telling police to stand back is insane. All over the world, you can see what happens when police are handcuffed, restricted, and intimidated while rioters are emboldened and encouraged. Burning, looting, murdering BLM—or Baal, Lucifer, and Moloch, as I like to call them—throwing firebombs at police, and then, bizarrely, people in America coming and washing the feet of BLM protesters. Those who think they can calm the situation by bowing to the mob, washing their feet, or brushing or kissing their boots are insane.

American police disgracing themselves and their profession by bowing to the mob and kneeling on the US flag—how much more contempt can they show for everything you stand for? They give the clenched fist, the fist of rebellion against God, the Marxist salute. In Sweden, police bowed to protesting mobs; one stupid Swedish policewoman even gave the clenched-fist salute while bowing. Senators and congressmen did similarly in Congress.

Never Bow to Bullies

Never bow to bullies. In my experience, it is absolutely essential never to give Marxist bullies or mobs one millimeter. Give them an inch, they take a mile; give them your finger, they take your arm. Brought up in war-torn Rhodesia and experienced terrorism and revolution, worked in war-torn communist Angola and Mozambique, and imprisoned in communist Zambia and Mozambique, I have seen in so many cases that the more steadfastly and strongly you stand, the better.

Colonel Jan Breitenbach and Frontline Fellowship

The moment Marxists sense weakness, fear, or compromise, they smell blood. They howl for more and escalate their unreasonable demands. One member of Frontline Fellowship was Colonel Jan Breitenbach, a South African legend. He founded the South African Reconnaissance Commando and was one of our first paratroopers—parabats—in 1961. He was involved in sixty-four different conflicts and battles, including the largest airdrop combat operation in South African history. Not since the Second World War had so many paratroopers been dropped at one place in Africa.

That was the Battle of Cassinga in 1978. Colonel Jan Breitenbach led a South African paratrooper assault on the enemy headquarters in Angola. He is visible in the middle during the raid. They had flown into Angola to destroy the SWAPO terrorist base. The story has been put into book form in Eagle Strike, by Colonel Jan Breitenbach.

He also flew into Angola during the Angolan Civil War and, behind enemy lines, recruited more than 3,000 black, Portuguese-speaking ex-communists into the South African Army. He forged them in battle in 32 Battalion, the Buffalo Battalion, with

its distinctive camouflage hats. They became some of South Africa's most elite infantry. They lost more men in combat and killed more enemy than all the other infantry battalions combined. The so-called Buffalo soldiers of 32 Battalion were an elite fighting unit recruited by Colonel Breitenbach. He was an extraordinary person.

This is Colonel Eddie Viljoen, one of his successors, whom I have also met. He ran the units after Breitenbach. It is hard to believe that we used to have units like this. When Colonel Breitenbach retired from the Army, he joined Frontline Fellowship. When I received his application in the mail, I fell on my knees next to my desk and prayed, “Lord, give me wisdom.” What do you do when one of your greatest military legends joins your little missionary unit?

Colonel Breitenbach worked throughout the border, ministering the gospel to soldiers in combat areas and traveling in vehicles like this, in areas where landmines were the national plant. This armored vehicle of South Africa detonated a triple-decker anti-tank mine, and the armor plating did not protect them. The people in that cabin were dead. Even an armored vehicle does not guarantee survival from a landmine.

In the early days of Frontline Fellowship, we worked throughout the South African Army and Southwest African Territorial Force. I preached at least 1,200 times in chaplain services and meetings throughout Southwest Africa, what is today Namibia and Angola, having Bible studies and prayer meetings with them. Often our accommodation at night was a ground sheet as our only protection from the rain, along with our ration pack and water bottle. That was how I started my day. My mug did not contain coffee or tea, but water with a vitamin drink, my standard for a long time. Our 5.56 millimeter—I think you know them as the Galil.

South Africa produced them in cooperation with Israel. Colonel Breitenbach once spoke to some of the military in the briefing room. The sand in front of us was where they would often make an operational map: this is the place we are going to attack, or this is the situation. They would work it out in the sand or build little models. One of our bomb shelters held a prayer meeting and Bible reading; one of the halls was for meeting with the soldiers, lectures, and

preaching. We preached in the rain to soldiers up at the frontier on the border.

Colonel Breitenbach was a legend. The South African soldiers were in awe of him. He was the most combat-decorated, experienced soldier in South African history. We had the opportunity of preaching to tens of thousands of soldiers throughout the border areas. At one point, I woke up one morning, and Colonel Breitenbach, in the sleeping bag opposite me, said, “Peter, let’s go to Angola; let’s preach to the communists.” So we crossed the border into communist Angola during a ceasefire, intending to preach to the enemy.

On one of those occasions, Colonel Breitenbach was next to me with his arms behind his head. Marxists were all around us: Cubans and all kinds of communist weaponry surrounded us. A 32 Battalion soldier came along as our translator, translating into Portuguese so the enemy could hear what we were saying. Colonel Breitenbach stood up and said, “I’m Colonel Jan Breitenbach of 32 Battalion. My men and I, we’ve killed thousands of you communists—thousands. We never had any trouble killing you. Our problem was catching you. You ran so fast, you broke Olympic records running away from the fight. Even when you outnumbered us ten to one, one hundred to one, you still fled like the spineless, yellow-bellied cowards you are. Why are you so afraid of fighting? You’re afraid to die. You should be afraid to die.

“If you knew what was waiting for you one second on the other side of the grave,” he said, “your god is Karl Marx. Your religion is atheism. Your commissars are the priests of Satan. You’re damned, you’re doomed, you’re lost, you’re going to burn in hell forever. If you knew what was waiting for you on the other side of the grave, you’d crawl across the minefield and beg 32 Battalion to show you the way of salvation of Jesus Christ.”

I'll never forget that sermon. That's Colonel Breitenbach at his best. He fought and preached as he fought: straight for the enemy. The enemy was so shocked that my hand went to my 9mm on my hip. I thought, The colonel wants a short way to glory. I didn't think I'd see the sunset that day. Yet the combatants stood around holding

their AKs, PKMs, and RPGs. They stood there absolutely riveted, listening to what the colonel had to say.

I also preached: "You say you don't believe in God, but you spend so much time fighting God. You know there's a God. You've seen Him in the eyes of the pastors you've murdered. You're brave when you are tying someone up with his hands behind his back with wire, and you bayonet him in the back. But when you face real soldiers, you run. And you know there's a God. That's why you're fighting Him."

We preached the gospel on three occasions across the border that day. On no occasion did the communists retaliate; they were just too spineless. When we got home that night, the colonel and I felt good about ourselves.

As we came into base, the commandant, a lieutenant colonel, greeted us, saying, "Colonel, the wires have been humming to the Bastion today." The Bastion was the military headquarters for Southwest Africa in Windhoek. And the PIC, the PIC builder was the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Pik is hopping mad, and the orders are, you and Hammond are to be expelled from the country forthwith.

We were in Southwest Africa, fighting the communists. Colonel Breitenbach fired the first shot of the war back in 1966, and here he was being banned from the country he had dedicated his life to defending. We were out by the next day. The foreign affairs minister said, "You and Hammond are trying to restart the war."

The story is in Confronting Communism with the Gospel, a chapter in my book Behind the Enemy Lines for Christ, and it is also an article on our website. When I marched 30,000 people to Parliament in Cape Town to oppose President Nelson Mandela's secular state policies, I was summoned to the president's mansion. We were marching against Mandela's attempts to paganize our country.

Confronting Nelson Mandela

This constitution must be based upon the law of God—upon God's Word, or God's Law. The people protested that they were trying to kick out acknowledgment of Almighty God from the Constitution.

Cyril Ramaphosa was the Chairman of the Constitutional Assembly. They were trying to write a new Constitution, and they had kicked out God. They were kicking out sanctity and were going to legalize pornography, blasphemy, prostitution, and all these evils, as well as legalize abortion. So we marched and protested.

I read out a memorandum against this. The first time I met Cyril Ramaphosa, he was pushed out the door and came to us with big, wide eyes. He looked terrified. They had never seen such a large march before, and I think they were afraid. I was told later by people inside Parliament that the ANC thought their days had come to an end, that they were going to be hanging from the lamppost by the end of the day.

Of course, Christian protesters do not behave like that. We had every intention of being peaceful; we did not break anything. Cyril Ramaphosa stood at the foot of the little ladder leading up to the back of a pickup truck, which was our speaking platform. Looking around, he saw a Zulu friend of mine, Fana Sibisi, and said, “Brother, can I borrow your Bible?” Fana Sibisi had a leather-bound Bible my father-in-law had bought for him in Arizona, engraved in gold with “Reverend Fana Sibisi” on the cover. Without waiting for an answer, Cyril Ramaphosa grabbed it, climbed onto the platform, and began by lifting the Bible and saying, “Look, I’m also a Christian. See, I bring my Bible with me to Parliament every day.”

That was the man who is now the President of South Africa. Fana and I exchanged expressions: we knew he was lying, he knew that we knew he was lying, but most of the crowd did not. You can tell when a politician is lying, can't you? His lips move. And when he dies, he lies still. Polytyx: poly, many; tyx, blood-sucking parasites. Polytyx, many blood-sucking parasites.

Unfortunately, the crowd was eating out of his hands within seconds. But I made a strong stand back to the Bible. On that occasion, a man from the government, from the presidency, said, “President Mandela—Madiba, as they call him—wants to see you on Thursday, two days' time, at the Groote Schuur Estate, the house Cecil Rhodes built, which is the president's mansion in Cape Town.”

The first words Mandela said to me when I met him at his mansion were, “What were you doing during the years of struggle?” Struggle was their word for the war. It was not a real war; it was more like terrorism: planting landmines, burning policemen, and throwing petrol bombs at night. “But, Mr. Hammond, what were you doing during the struggle?” My response was, “Fighting people like you, sir.” Mandela smiled and laughed. He got up from his couch, came over, shook my hand again, and said, “I'm so glad to meet an honest white man.”

“All the other whites I've met have told me how they always opposed apartheid and were actually supporting me.” He said, “I wondered how the National Party stayed in power for over 44 years, while all the whites actually opposed the National Party and supported me.” My response was, “Well, make no mistake, Mr. President, we were not fighting for apartheid. We're fighting against communism; we're fighting against terrorism.” His response was, “Apartheid is the greatest evil in the history of the world.” I replied, “I cannot agree with you, Mr. President. That prize must go to your friends and your supporters, the communists.”

He had just welcomed Fidel Castro, the longest-reigning dictator in the world, to South Africa, given him the biggest award anyone could get there, and invited him to speak to a joint sitting of the Senate and House of Parliament. Mandela was a long-standing friend of Castro, not to mention all the other Marxists. I then gave him a recounting of the atrocities of the Communists and said, “That prize must go to your Communists. Your friends have littered the twentieth century with over 160 million corpses—not foreign people killed in wartime, but their own people, killed by their own governments in times of peace,” as documented by Professor Rummel’s Death by Government and The Black Book of Communism, written by ex-communists using Communists’ own files and records. Over 66 million people were slaughtered under Communism in the Soviet Union, under Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev, and Khrushchev, and another 69 million in Red China under Mao Tse-Tung.

I went through a whole list, including Castro, Pol Pot and Cambodia, and Mengistu in Ethiopia, who had killed millions and

was a friend being hosted by Mandela at that moment. He was wanted for genocide by the International Court of Justice, but Mandela was protecting him in South Africa. There is no doubt the Communists murdered more Christians in the twentieth century than any other group, even more than the Muslims. That is the reality.

When I wanted to talk about apartheid, remember, the context was the Soviet Union in the Cold War. We were seeking to defend our country against communism. Because Mandela was silent, I carried on working through the facts. Look at all the countries that fell to communism from the First World War and the Versailles Treaty, and then, of course, at the end of the Second World War. Under Ronald Reagan, praise God, there was a precipitous drop in communist countries because America resisted communism, a change after the craven cowardice and treachery of the Jimmy Carter years. Mandela then said, "When I was a prisoner of the Boers, they would not allow me to wear sunglasses."

My response was, "Well, sir, my eyes are also very sensitive, and I can understand how unpleasant and uncomfortable it must be." That hardly compares with the atrocities documented by Alexander Solzhenitsyn in The Gulag Archipelago.

Here's a picture of Nelson Mandela wearing sunglasses. He claims that the Boers never allowed him to wear sunglasses, but there is a picture in the Nelson Mandela Museum where he is wearing them. He also said that the Boers never allowed him to wear long trousers. Here we have photographic proof that they did. Perhaps he was talking about the first few months, but it is not accurate.

Here is also a picture of Nelson Mandela in Addis Ababa being trained as a terrorist by the Cuban DGI. Apparently, even Che Guevara was one of his trainers. The man was a well-known terrorist; he trained in Algeria. At one point, Mandela expressed surprise that we wanted to restrict the rights of women by opposing abortion. He was championing the legalization of abortion.

So I responded, "Mr. President, you are questioning the Christianity of people who, forty years ago, justified apartheid. It will not be forty years from now before people question your humanity

for legalizing abortion. You are seeking to replace apartheid with abortion. Abortion is worse than apartheid. It does not merely restrict the area where a person lives, give them separate beaches, cinemas, or restaurants, or restrict their right to vote. It takes away their life before they get to breathe their first breath of air.

"Abortion does not merely place a baby on a separate voters' roll or restrict where the baby can live or swim. Abortion takes the baby's life. Life begins at conception. Abortion is the violent taking of an innocent life. Every abortion stops a beating heart. Abortion is the worst type of apartheid: it separates a baby from its mother and from its life support at the most crucial stage of development. You are seeking to replace discrimination on the basis of race with discrimination on the basis of age."

We went back and forth like a tennis match. At the end of the hour, Nelson Mandela stood up and told us, "You can now take your pictures." I had not meant to be rude, and I had not thought about it. I had not brought a camera. I simply said, "No, thank you." His mouth dropped in shock. Perhaps we were the first delegation to meet him who did not want pictures taken with him. What would I do with a picture of myself and Mandela? But then I said, "We would like to pray for you."

He said, "No, no, that's very private and personal." So I pretended not to hear. I placed a hand on one shoulder while Germany's June Siebenster placed a hand on the other, and we prayed. We prayed that the Lord would not grant Mr. Mandela peace until he did what he knew was right and introduced legislation protecting helpless, innocent babies from the violence and injustice of abortion. I prayed that Mr. Mandela would find peace in Christ by bowing the knee and surrendering to Almighty God to do His will.

At the end of our prayer, I handed over a book from Dr. James Kennedy. Mr. Mandela thanked us and assured us that he was always responsive to the concerns of our constituency and that his door was always open should we have concerns. That was Thursday. We marched on Tuesday.

Monday morning, senior investigators from the Inland Revenue Service knocked on our door and began a seven-year audit of our

mission family. They went back to their chairs and carried on for a thirteen-year audit of myself, my wife, and every ministry I was involved in. We had to hire a special accountant and lawyer just to keep us out of jail. The initial assessment was that we owed them millions, which would have destroyed our mission.

We had no such funds. The lawyer we went to said, “This is ridiculous. You’re very small fry as things go in terms of funding.” Our budget was minuscule. These senior investigators in the Revenue Service wasted thirteen years auditing our little mission. But that’s the kind of person Mandela was: charming to our face, vindictive behind our back.

Dealing with Marxists in Parliament

On another occasion, in 1995, I was summoned to Parliament to give a submission to their subcommittee on their Draft Publications Bill. Effectively, they were seeking to legalize pornography and blasphemy, and we were opposing this. I was sometimes invited into this very chamber—the old Assembly’s chamber, the National Assembly’s chamber—in which our Prime Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd, was stabbed to death by a communist, Sir Fundus, right by the Prime Minister’s desk at the front. He later was not tried, was put into an insane asylum, and was released later in life when Mandela came to power. Because he was not tried, not judged fit to try, the evidence did not come out that Haunt was a communist who was expelled from the country, working in Parliament as a messenger, that he had the right to access, right of the promise, and that he stabbed him to death.

Interestingly enough, according to Stephen Mitton Goodson's book on Hendrik Verwoerd, this Zafandas was a victim of MK Ultra, and the same people who assassinated you, or John F. Kennedy, were involved in the assassination of our Prime Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd. Verwoerd was also planning to abolish our South African Reserve Bank, which isn't South African, has no reserves, and isn't a bank. There were two assassination attempts on Prime Minister Verwoerd, and both men were judged insane and cared for by the very same Communist Party member, a psychiatrist.

No conspiracy to see here. I was in Parliament, and after the presentation an ANC MP said, “Have you ever apologized for what you did in the South African Defence Force?” I answered, “Are you wanting me to apologize for what I did in the South African Defence Force? I'm sorry we didn't kill all of you. You were not freedom fighters; you're terrorists. You didn't attack our military bases; you attacked civilians, black civilians. You burned over 1,000 black South Africans with a brutal necklace murder. You burned Indonesia town councilors and mayors.

“You planted landmines in dirt roads. You killed whole families. You planted landmines in roads leading to schools and killed schoolchildren coming in school buses. You kidnapped young children from schools, took them across the border to brutalize them and train them for your terrorist groups, murdered many, and raped the girls.

“You threw hand grenades through the windows into black policemen's homes at night. You petrol-bombed the homes of black town councillors and mayors. You used car bombs and limpet mines. You blatantly targeted civilians. You are hypocrites, like the Church Street bombing, which the IRA, by the way, helped them to plan, and which murdered huge amounts of people. This was the Church Street bombing in Pretoria in 1983. We had signs like this all over our shopping centers so people could recognize these weapons.

“All Soviet-bloc produced, in Russia or China. The landmines, grenades, and limpet mines were tools of terror, as documented by Henry Pike's book, A History of Communism in South Africa.” I continued my rant in Parliament: “You speak against racism, then you laugh, applaud, and give standing ovations to the worst racist on the planet today, Robert Mugabe, dictator of Zimbabwe.” Here was a picture of Robert Mugabe's police whipping black Christians in the main street of Harare, Samora Machel Avenue.

They were having a prayer march for peace, getting whipped and beaten. These were women praying for justice outside a government home—I think this is Home Affairs—being beaten by the police. This is Zimbabwe, and this is freedom and liberation for black people in Zimbabwe under Mugabe. You have no right ever again to speak against racism when you so obviously applaud, endorse, and

enthusiastically practice racism. I am sorry we ended the war before thoroughly and completely eradicating all of you communists.

There was a stunned, awkward silence. Then the chairman said, "Right, let us move on to our next point." They never brought up the subject again. That is the only way you can deal with Marxists, guilt manipulators, gaslighters, thugs, and terrorists. There is nothing they respect more than strength, and nothing they despise more than weakness.

Historical Lessons on Mobs and Anarchy

Napoleon observed that he could not believe the foolishness of King Louis XVI in not ordering his men to open fire on the mob. On October 5, 1795, Napoleon did this, which led to his becoming leader in France and then emperor. Napoleon Bonaparte was adamant that you cannot reason with a mob. Throughout history, it has been understood that the only way to deal with arsonists and looters is to shoot them. He opened fire on the mob with artillery, giving them what he called "the whiff of grapeshot." That ended the French Revolution and brought about the empire under Napoleon. There is not one innocent person in the mob. Shoot them all in the street; that is the end of it. You will not have another riot after that. Those who advise the police to stand back or stand down in the face of threats to life and property are unraveling the foundations of civilization. There can be nothing worse than mob-rule anarchy. It used to be, "If you loot, we shoot." That is the only way to deal with looters.

The Agenda of Defunding Police

You cannot appease them, debate with them, or argue with them. The burn loot murder plan to defund the police does not mean a police-free state, because Marxists want control. I have been to many communist countries, and they all had police forces and secret police forces. Under the Tsar of Russia, an average of 65 people were executed every year for murder, assassinations, rape, and so on. He had a secret police about 3,000 strong. Under Lenin and Stalin, they had a secret police of 3 million, and murdered an average of 150,000 a year. So that is the difference between oppression under the Tsar

and liberation under the Commissar. Defunding the police does not mean a future with no police; it means a future where Antifa are your police. The plan to defund, disarm, and disband the organized professional police force, which is mostly conservative and generally pro-Trump, is just a beginning.

What they want is for their warlords and gangs to replace the existing professional police force with BLM and Antifa revolutionaries in police uniforms. That is what defunding the police means: it means revolutionizing the police. Break down to build up better; build back better. This would be followed by gun confiscations, and you know how that ends. Every genocide begins with gun control.

These pictures show how justice works in Africa after the police have been defunded. There is a new form of tyranny, and this is how the revolutionaries deal with their black civilians. Those people are tied up by their ankles, and this is normal in Africa. The issue is never the issue; the issue is the revolution. Consider the French Revolution of 1789, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, and the Cultural Revolution in China. How many more times must we see this agenda worked out before people understand what Curtis Bowers documented in his video Agenda, Masters of Deceit? The issue is never the issue. The issue is the revolution. They might use black-white, bourgeois employees and employers, or the gender issue. They might use black against white. But that is never the issue; it is only the pretext.

Let us never be guilty of sacrificing any portion of truth on the altar of peace. When I talk about coexisting, you cannot coexist with people who want to kill you. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. Submit to God. Resist the devil. He will flee from you. Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. We need to stand up, step out, and fight the good fight of faith. We need to smash cultural Marxism.

Resources and Cape Independence

This cancel culture is nothing other than cancel Christianity. On our website, FrontlineMissionSA.org, there are audiovisual resources, screen captures from lectures, PowerPoints, links to sermon audio,

newsletters, and articles from around Africa, particularly where the church is being persecuted. We also have a From the Frontline podcast, where I tackle these things in audio every week, and a few copies of the former Frontline book, my testimony and that of our mission among the persecuted church. It gives the behind-the-news headline stories of what really happened in Africa.

One exciting thing happening in South Africa is the Cape Independence movement. We are moving for secession, and I am the chairman of the Cape Independence Forum. We have marches for freedom, with wide ranges of people marching through Cape Town, calling for independence at the provincial legislature, protesting against what they are doing, and receiving much support from the local population to free the Cape. Cape Independence, or Cape Exit, is one of our slogans.

You can see the new flags. In fact, I have brought a flag of the Cape Independence Movement for Brother John, so that you can have it as an example of what we stand for. We are producing many books that are available free electronically and online. The real story is Soweto, right? Soweto, but God. How the Soviets and Cubans lost the war. The Chaplain's Handbook.

There is also Reformation 500 and Christian Terror by Father Arthur Lewis, the first board member of Frontline Fellowship. He was an Anglican missionary to Rhodesia and exposed the fact that the World Council of Churches was funding terrorists who were murdering Christians in Rhodesia. That was even published in Reader's Digest at one point. Christian Terror went out of print, so I reprinted it. His documentation led the Baptists and the Salvation Army to leave the World Council of Churches in protest.

As people move away from hymns, we produced a new Livingston Fellowship Reformation 500 hymn book, a discipleship training manual, and other free books available on our website. We have many newsletters describing what is happening in Sudan, the Congo, Nigeria, and other places where we work. Because our postal service no longer works—indeed, it does not exist—people need to download them from the website or sign up for an email list. I have a few copies of the Frontline newsletters here; please help yourself, but pass them

on and circulate them. The few hard copies I can bring across the ocean need to be circulated.

Your pastor, John Weaver, also helped us with an introduction to our Security and Survival Handbook, copies of which I know you have on the shelf. That handbook is also key. We need to know how to resist. Many of our Frontline book resources are now available electronically as print-on-demand books or e-books.

Christian Liberty Books is a book ministry we started in our mission in 1995, after I marched to Parliament. It primarily provides homeschool textbooks for Christians in South Africa. Our homeschool network there has become so large that homeschoolers now have matric dances—I think you call them proms. My oldest daughter, Andrea, was part of the very first homeschool prom in South Africa. Christian Liberty Books provides 85 percent of its book sales to homeschoolers, through textbooks imported from America and some textbooks we produce ourselves.

How many people have seen Agenda: Masters of Deceit by Curtis Bowers? This video is absolutely outstanding. It exposes what we are doing today and what we are facing in government. I also helped Jeremiah Films produce three films on Sudan, which we have made available on our website. Our mission has operated since 1982. I have worked in thirty-eight countries, traveled in forty-two countries, and been involved in eight wars.

Q&A: South Africa's Fall and BRICS

Our vision is Africa for Christ. How has South Africa turned over so easily, it seems? Well, it was not easy. We fought very hard for decades and endured international sanctions and boycotts. What you see on your campuses now with Free Palestine resembles what university campuses were doing in the 1980s to end apartheid in South Africa. Every university was disinvesting in companies trading with South Africa, and there were tremendous boycotts. At one point, Congress put sanctions on South Africa.

President Ronald Reagan vetoed them. Congress, including a majority of the so-called Republican RINOs, overturned his veto. That included traitors such as the Arizonan maverick candidate,

John McCain, who voted against President Reagan to bring sanctions on South Africa.

Ronald Reagan's speech in 1987, I think it was, against the sanctions was one of the best defenses of South Africa ever heard. He explained its history and how critical South Africa was in fighting communism. It was a strategic country because of the Cape Sea route and its minerals: chrome, manganese, copper, diamonds, and many others. Only Russia and South Africa have a monopoly on many of these. Without minerals obtained primarily from South Africa, we could not make refrigerators, air conditioners, fighter planes, or aircraft carriers. Much of our strategic defense depends on minerals over which South Africa dominates the market. Ronald Reagan gave such a strong defense that South Africa was defending the free world from communism and we needed to support it.

We fought long and hard, killing vast numbers of communists in defense of our country. It was not easy, but we were infiltrated from within. We were betrayed by the Broederbond, which is like the Freemasons of South Africa and was definitely tied in with the Sabbateans, I'm sure. They betrayed our country from within. The National Party, our predominant party, had dominated the political landscape and had been in government for forty-four years. They said, "Vote National Party for a strong opposition to the ANC," and then handed the country over to the ANC.

It is sort of like Woodrow Wilson: "Woodrow Wilson kept us out of the war. Vote Woodrow Wilson for peace." Then, in 1917, after being elected in 1916, he got America involved in Europe's war. That is treachery. We have faced treachery in our country from politicians.

Along with Ian Smith of Rhodesia, we can say that we were never beaten by our enemies; we were betrayed by our friends—and, sadly, by our own government as well.

Has BRICS been a good thing for you? I think so. BRICS—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—has been excellent as an alternative to economics dominated by the U.S. dollar. Russia is also more Christian and is putting greater pressure on South Africa to behave. Putin has spoken up several times for our farmers when the

government was discussing killing them. That was a major positive step. Being in BRICS, we feel safer because the U.S. government did everything it could to betray South Africa.

In 1992, the U.S. ambassador in South Africa went on national television and said, "If you don't vote for Mandela, America will do to you what we did to Iraq." Then, as if we lacked imaginative memory, the screen filled with missiles pouring into Baghdad and explosions across the city. "We will do to you what we did to Iraq."

We were bullied. I was among the 650,000 white South Africans who voted no in the referendum on whether to give a blank check to the National Party government. For us, it did not matter what the question was; the answer was no. Many of us opposed it. But is it acceptable for an ambassador to interfere in the internal elections of another country?

The other day, I was in Indiana, and somebody said to me, "But Vladimir Putin is a killer. He has been involved in political assassinations." I turned to the person and said, "Who do you think leads the world in political assassinations, revolutions, and coup d'états?" Donald Trump once said to somebody who told him, "But Putin's a killer," "Well, what do you call us?" We have killed a lot of people, speaking of the U.S. government, and I think that is relevant.

Maybe you had a question: How long were you in prison, or banned from the country? Southwest Africa was the fifth province of South Africa, and we treated it as part of South Africa. It had been German—Deutsch-Südwestafrika—in the First World War, and South Africa invaded it as part of Britain's war plan.

Of course, Namibia had most of the world's diamonds, and that fell under De Beers, which is the main girl. When the South African army returned from conquering Deutsch-Südwestafrika, they were given the freedom of the city in Kimberley. The mayor, who was an Oppenheimer, said, "You have now enabled us to dominate 80-something percent of the world's diamond industry."

The South African army was told it was going into Southwest Africa to stop the German shortwave radio program at a station in Lüderitz from helping the U-boats in the Atlantic. But once they got the place, apparently the main thing was the diamonds. When I was

locked up, I was kicked out of Namibia, and that lasted until they gained independence. I have been back since. When I was imprisoned, it was for a few weeks at a time—sixteen days in Zambia, communist Zambia.

Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister of Britain, and she campaigned to get me out. Friends of ours had given her the details. She confronted Kenneth Kaunda, the communist dictator of Zambia, who was imprisoning us: "Who are you to talk about human rights abuses? You are the unelected dictator of a one-party state. You have four British missionaries being tortured, detained without trial by your security forces in Lusaka right now." Kenneth Kaunda was knocked out.

The Iron Lady had won the debate, while he was trying to humiliate her and put sanctions on South Africa. We were the trump card. When Kaunda got back to Zambia, the first words he said as he came down the stairs were, "Get those missionaries out of here." Thus we were freed, thanks to the Iron Lady, which is quite a story. I have included it in the book Behind Enemy Lines as well.

Another imprisonment in Mozambique was a whole story in itself. It was the year I got married, and my poor wife back home was the only one campaigning for our release. She mobilized people to demonstrate outside Zambian and Mozambican embassies in Washington and London. Finally, through that pressure, we were let free.

There are fifty-five countries on the continent of Africa, if one counts some of the islands, such as Madagascar and Seychelles. Africa used to have thirteen communist countries, but there are a lot fewer now; I think we are down to seven. There are also seven Muslim countries in northern Africa, where the majority is Muslim and Arabic-speaking. The Muslims are mostly in northern Africa, and the communists are mostly in the south—sadly, including South Africa now.

Q&A: White Communities and Historical Grievances

I am now living behind enemy lines. Some of the whites have tried to go on their own. Is that successful in South Africa? They are super

successful. For example, Orania, the oldest, has no power failures or crime. They do not need burglar bars, security gates, big fences, or barbed wire around their properties because it is a white-only, Christian-only community.

The Protestant Evangeliese Kerk is the sort of national church there. Orania is a thoroughly Christian community. They said the key thing is that they do not bring in migrant labor. The white people living there must do all their own work: construction, farming, everything. The good thing is that they have no crime, and the children are being taught enough for constant. They are Christian people, and they celebrate Christian holidays.

Orania is an anomaly in South Africa: no power failures, no crime, and no litter. The government would like to take them out, but they were grandfathered in at 1994 under rights of self-determination. So they are going fine. A few other communities are trying to get going, like Zuidland, and I am visiting some of them. But that is not good enough long-term, because at some point the government could invade. They will at some point, I am sure, if they can, because once you have looted and broken everything else, you have to invade these sanctuaries. That is why we want the Cape of Good Hope to be independent, and why we brought out The Case for Secession.

In Orania, it is mostly Afrikaans people, of course, but they invited me to be a guest speaker because they say I am like an English-speaking Afrikaner. That comes from being Rhodesian. To the average Afrikaner, the British are the enemy. The British did do a dirty on South Africa: the Anglo-Boer War, concentration camps, killing the women and children, blowing up the farms, dynamiting the wells, and wiping out millions of livestock—cattle, horses, and sheep. The British were really brutal to the Boers.

I remember one nice young girl I went on a date with. I came back to her family, and they were shouting at her in Afrikaans: how could she bring this verdomde Engels, one bloody Engels, bloody rooinek, there? I knew enough Afrikaans to know what they were saying. She could not continue to see me by order of her family because I was English-speaking. Even though she said, “You know, Rhodesian, and he’s on our side,” they thought like that.

My generation's animosity has ended because we were on the border together against a common enemy. Many of my generation have Afrikaans and English friends, no problem, because we learned there was a common enemy. We cannot keep fighting the old Anglo-Boer War. My father fought all six years in the 8th Army in North Africa and Italy. He said, "I'm ashamed that a son of mine has Afrikaans friends." My brother said, "I'm ashamed that a brother of mine has so many Afrikaans friends."

And so it works both ways. You get that kind of hostility. I think we have overcome it now. There is a lot of Afrikaans and English working together for Cape Independence. You have to see the common enemy; we cannot continue to let them divide us.

Stephen Mitford Goodson also brought out a book on the genocide of the Boers. We documented that the Rothschild dynasty wanted to genocide the Boers to guarantee Rothschild control of South African gold and diamonds.

In Christmas 1901, British soldiers received a card and a hamper, signed by all three of the main Rothschilds worldwide. The hamper contained Christmas cake, cigars, tobacco, sweets, playing cards, and personal things from the Rothschilds, thanking them for what they were doing. If I were on a border in South West Africa, fighting Angola, and suddenly received a card from a Rothschild or Oppenheimer saying, "Thank you for your service," I would be deeply concerned, because I am not there for them. Yet everyone in the British Empire fighting against the Boers—Australians, Canadians, and New Zealanders—received such a card and hamper.

That was very expensive and logistically challenging: 650,000 British troops in South Africa fighting 18,000 Boers, and the Rothschilds thanked them for their service. It is like Oppenheimer thanking South African soldiers for conquering Deutsch-Südwestafrika so that they controlled all the diamonds in the world. These are inconvenient facts. They ruin a lot of the narrative.

CHAPTER 10

The Displeased Prophet

August 11, 2024

SCRIPTURE READING - Jonah 4:1-11 (KJV)

Introduction: Jonah's Anger at God's Mercy

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish, for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take I beseech thee my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live. Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry?

So Jonah went out of the city, and set on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, until he might see what would become of the city. And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow, or a shade over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to

> pass, when the sun did rise, that God prepared a vehement east wind, and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry even unto death. Then said the Lord, Thou hast pity on the gourd for the which thou hast not laboured, neither made it sit to grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.
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> And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?
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> Jonah is the only preacher that I know, or at least one of the few that I've ever known, that was displeased with the fact that his message was successful and blessed by God. Jonah, of course, was mad that God spared the Assyrians. He did not want them spared. He wanted them destroyed.

Have you ever been mad at God? Have you ever been displeased with the providence of God in your life? Have you gone through tests, trials, and afflictions and thought to yourself, “I don't deserve this”? The truth of the matter is, you did deserve it. Actually, you deserve even worse. God was just merciful unto you and did not give you that which you really deserved.

Recently, I saw a headline from WALB, a TV station in Albany, Georgia. I read it on the internet, and it concerned a wreck. The headline was, “No one deserves to die like this.” Someone died in that wreck. I do not know who, but I can assure you that the family who lost a loved one was certainly mad at God and displeased with the providence of God in that individual's life. The truth is, yes, he did deserve to die like that. In fact, he deserved even worse.

It is never a joyous experience for a family to lose a loved one. Understand that. But we must also understand that we are sinners and that we are going to die. Jonah is one of these individuals who is exceedingly critical and angry with God.

Before you condemn Jonah and his bitterness, resentment, and anger, you have to examine your own life. Have you ever been upset

with God enough to voice your anger? Jonah certainly did. He voiced it very fully and freely. Most of us would never voice our anger, resentment, and bitterness at God. Although we would not say what Jonah said or necessarily act the way Jonah acted, we would display our anger not only in our attitude but in our disposition as well. I have known Christians who became angry with God at the loss of a husband, wife, or child.

I had an uncle who lost his wife after something like fifty-five or fifty-six years. He was exceedingly critical and angry with God because he lost his wife, and he died as well shortly thereafter. There is not one family that has not been touched by death. There is not one family that has not lost a loved one. Jonah, here, is exceedingly angry.

In light of the title of this message, "The Displeased Prophet," consider these questions: Have you ever been angry with God? Did it do you any good to be angry with God? Did it change His providence? Did it stop Him from accomplishing His purpose? The answer, of course, is absolutely not. Who then suffered because of your anger, your resentment, and your bitterness? Certainly, it was not God. It was you. And not only you; it was probably others who suffered because of you.

The Danger of Bitterness and Resentment

Consider what God says specifically concerning bitterness in Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 15: "Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled. Lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." Notice that he speaks about "the root of bitterness." That root of bitterness will spring up and trouble you, and then he says, "and thereby many be defiled."

Bitterness and resentment will not only eat you alive; they will spread to other people like a canker and affect them as well. When you observe what is happening in the land today, and especially in most churches, most Christians are like a spoiled child, especially when it comes to discipline and correction. We want what we want, and we want it when we want it. God had better not get in our way.

That is the way most people think. We have to have our way, or else we will show Him. The truth of the matter is, we do not show Him.

God's Sovereignty and Goodness in Affliction

It is true that God is absolutely sovereign. It is God who does His pleasure. It is God who fulfills His counsel. It is God who fulfills His purpose. No one can hinder Him, thwart Him, overthrow Him, or stop Him, because God is sovereign and God is God. That is what the psalmist said in Psalm 115:3: “But our God is in the heavens; he does whatsoever he pleases.” God is the only one who can really do as He pleases. In Isaiah 46:10, He says, “Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all of My pleasure.”

We have to come to the realization that God's will is absolutely best for us. We may not understand it. We may not like it. We may not necessarily agree with it, but we have to bow and say, yes, God's will is absolutely the best for us. Let me clear up something right now. Each one of us has suffered, some more than others. Each one has been through tests, trials, and afflictions, and some are going through them now.

Don't you understand that God is not some old meanie in heaven waiting to beat the living tar out of each one of us? That's not what Scripture says. In Lamentations chapter 3 and verse 33, the Bible says, "He does not afflict willingly or grieve the children of men." God does not willingly afflict us. He is not waiting to spring upon us and whip us so that we cannot walk. No, not by any stretch of the imagination.

Our heavenly Father is not some old meanie who enjoys depriving us, chastening us, and causing us heartache. I can say that no, a thousand times no. Matthew chapter 7 and verse 11 says, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?" Now stop and think about that verse. Every one of us who has had children knows what it means to give good gifts to them and please them, and we are happy to do that, especially when they are obedient and submissive and live and do that which is right and that which they should do. If we, being evil, know how to give good gifts

to our children, how much more shall our heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?

If we are going to be bitter and resentful, then what we need to do is be bitter and resentful at ourselves—at our ignorance, sin, and rebellion, which oftentimes cause God to chasten us.

Jonah was a very angry man. Jonah chapter 4 and verse 1 says, "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry." In verse 4, the Lord asked, "Doest thou well to be angry?" Then in verse 9, God said, "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" Three times, God pointed out that Jonah was an angry man.

Jonah's Repeated Anger and Desire for Death

The word angry here is the Hebrew word harah, which literally means to be hot, to be furious, to burn, to become angry, to be kindled, and to work oneself into vexation. Jonah is not someone who is just a little ticked. He is exceedingly furious against God. Why was Jonah angry? The answer is that God had mercy on the Assyrians. As I pointed out in the first message, the Assyrians were enemies of God's people. If the Lord allows us to live, and I get to preach next Sunday, you will find out something very informative about the Assyrians, something that most of us have not even considered at this particular time. Jonah knew exactly what the Assyrians were going to do to Israel. He did not want them to attack and destroy Israel; therefore, he wanted their destruction. He wanted their doom.

Turn to 2 Kings chapter 8. This gives us a good parallel. This is almost the way Elisha felt when he was talking to Hazael. Notice what Elisha did and how he composed himself until basically he was ashamed. “Then Elisha came to Damascus, and Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, was sick.” It was told him, saying, “The man of God is come hither.” And the king said unto Hazael, “Take a present in thine hand, and go meet the man of God, and inquire of the Lord by him, saying, Shall I recover this disease?” Ben-Hadad asked only one question: Will he recover?

Verse 9 says, “So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels'

burden, and came and stood before him." I do not really know how much you can pack on a camel. I am sure it is pretty hefty. This is probably almost a semi-truckload of goods, or a half a truckload of goods, being brought just so Elisha can answer whether Ben-Hadad will recover. Verse 10 says, "And Elisha said unto him, Go, say unto him, Thou mayest certainly recover. Howbeit the Lord hath showed me that he shall surely die."

SCRIPTURE READING - 2 Kings 8:11-15 (KJV)

> And he settled his countenance steadfastly, until he was ashamed, and the man of God wept. And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do to the children of Israel. Their strongholds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with a sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazael said, But what is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath showed me that thou shalt be king over Syria. So he departed from Elisha, and came to his master, and said unto him, What said Elisha to thee? And he answered, he told me that thou shouldst surely recover.

It came to pass on the morrow that he took a thick cloth and dipped it in water, and spread it upon his face, so that he died, Ben-Hadad, and Hazael reigned in his stead. Notice that in Jonah chapter 4, Jonah is exceedingly angry because God has spared the Assyrians. He knew exactly what the Assyrians were going to do to Israel. Likewise, Elisha knew what Ben-Hadad was going to do to his people. The Bible says that Elisha settled his countenance steadfastly until he was ashamed, and the man of God wept.

Hazael said, "Why in the world are you weeping?" Elisha answered, "I know what you're going to do to the children of Israel. You're going to rip up their women with child. You're going to slay their young men." Hazael said, "But what is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" That is exactly what Hazael did. He murdered Ben-Hadad the king, reigned in his stead, and did exactly what Elisha said he would do.

So Jonah knew that the Assyrians were going to attack Israel. I have told you about the book of Nahum and the book of Habakkuk,

how they also dealt with the Assyrians and Babylonians. They knew exactly what was happening. Jonah, therefore, was exceedingly angry. In Jonah chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, we read: “But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish, for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take I beseech thee my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” Then saith the Lord, “Doest thou well to be angry?”

In verse 2, Jonah is basically saying, “Lord, I knew You were a merciful God. I knew You would have mercy upon those people. I knew You would spare them.”

“Lord, I did not want to see them spared. I wanted to see them destroyed.” Therefore, Jonah fled to Tarshish. He knew exactly what God was going to do: God’s mercy is exceedingly great, and He is as kind and gracious as He can be. Jonah did not desire their repentance. So God asked him, “Doest thou well to be angry?”

Notice that Jonah wanted to die because God blessed his preaching. He said in verse 3, “Therefore now, O Lord, take I beseech Thee my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” You remember that back in chapter 2 Jonah wanted others to kill him because he told them, “Throw me in the water.” He wanted to die, and he thought that would be the end of it. Now he was not willing to do anything, but was asking God to take his life.

In Jonah chapter 3, after Jonah repented, God renewed the commission and sent him back to Nineveh with the message, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” Why did God send Jonah? Jonah said, “God, I know that You are going to have mercy upon these people. I knew You were going to spare them. That is why I fled.” But God subdued Jonah in the belly of that whale. God prepared that fish especially for Jonah, and when He had the whale spit Jonah out, Jonah was willing to obey. He went and did exactly what God said. Why, then, did Jonah have to preach if he knew God was going to be merciful?

God Ordains the Means as Well as the End

God has not only ordained the end; He has also ordained the means to the end. He has ordained not only the end over here, but everything that goes to that end as well. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, the Scripture asks, “Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” Then it says, “For after that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” What was the means of achieving salvation? Preaching.

Turn to Romans chapter 10, beginning with verse 13. This is a verse most people can quote, but we usually take it out of context: “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” That is good. But look at verse 14: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?” What precedes calling?

The answer is faith, or belief. Calling does not save you; calling demonstrates the faith that God has given you. You are not going to call on someone in whom you do not believe. Verse 13 says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Now verse 14: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?” You must believe before you call. “And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?”

If I tell you about my youngest daughter, you are hearing about her. But if she is in this room speaking, you hear her. Notice again: “How then shall they call on him whom they have not believed?” You must believe before you call. “And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?” Not merely heard about, but heard.

What did Jesus Christ say in John chapter 10? “I know my sheep, and I call them by name, and they follow me.” It was like Mary at the tomb. She turned and saw our Lord, supposing Him to be the gardener. She said, “Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me, and I’ll take him away.” All He said was, “Mary.” She replied, “Rabboni, Master.” She instantly knew Him when He called her name.

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Yes. “How then shall they call on Him whom they have not believed?” You must believe in order to call. “Now shall they believe

in whom they have not heard?" You must hear Christ in order to believe. "How shall they hear without a preacher?"

How shall they preach except they be sent? God sends His preachers to preach His Word, and He speaks to His people through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. Clearly, it was necessary for Jonah to go and preach in Nineveh. God sent him and told him he needed to go.

Here is the truth: whenever God is going to have compassion upon a people, He always sends them a preacher. Whenever God is going to judge a people, He always removes the preacher, or at least silences the preacher. When you stop and think about what is going on in our country today, and especially in Christendom, think of the churches that cannot find a pastor. Every week, I see churches asking for and begging for preachers from all over this country. There is an email that I get, and every week it lists churches asking for pastors. I do not doubt that some of those churches probably ran some of their pastors off.

God Sends Preachers for Compassion, Removes Them for Judgment

The truth of the matter is that most churches really and truly do not want a real preacher. What they want is an administrator, an orator, or an entertainer. They do not want someone who is actually going to teach the Word of God, and people get upset with that.

Now let me show you something very interesting. Hold Jonah chapter 4, but go back in your Bibles to the book of Judges, chapter 6. This is an astounding passage. I want to read it to show you the absolute devastation that was happening in the land by the Midianites and the Amalekites. Look in Judges chapter 6, beginning with verse 1:

"And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years. And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. And because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made them the dens, which are in the mountains, and caves and strongholds." In other words, they were driven out of the cities and their homes. They were living in the

mountains and the caves. Now watch verse 3: “And so it was when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them. And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came up as grasshoppers for a multitude.”

In Judges, Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites, the Amalekites, and all the destruction of the land. Their enemies were without number and entered the land to destroy it. Therefore, the children of Israel cried unto the Lord because of the Midianites.

What did God do? “The Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel.” The prophet reminded them, “Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought you up out of Egypt, and I brought you forth out of the house of bondage. And I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land. And I said unto you, I am the Lord your God. Fear not the gods of the Amorites, whose land you dwell, but you have not obeyed my voice.”

Then there came an angel of the Lord and sat under an oak in Ophrah. This introduces the account of Joash and Gideon, when Gideon was called. But notice again: “I am the Lord your God. Fear not the gods.” When the children of Israel cried unto the Lord because of the Midianites, the Lord sent a prophet.

Why did He not send a warrior, a captain, or a great military leader? He did not. He sent a preacher. God was saying that He would not deliver them unless they repented and came back to Him. If they would not repent, they could call on the gods they had chosen and let those gods deliver them. If God is going to have compassion upon a people, God always sends a preacher.

In 2 Chronicles 36:15, we read, “And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending. Why? Because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place.” God sent His preachers because He had compassion. But verse 16 says, “But they mocked the messengers of God, and

despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against the people, till there was no remedy." When God has compassion on people, He sends them His preachers. When God judges a people, He removes His preachers.

You remember how Elijah was in a foreign land, away from Israel for three years. There was a drought for three years. What did he say to Ahab? "As the Lord God liveth, for whom I stand, there shall not be rain nor dew these years, but according to my word." The drought was nothing more than a physical symbol of a spiritual reality, because the man of God had been taken out of the land. For three years, they had no word from God.

When it came to Jeremiah, God left him in the land, but God shut his mouth. In Jeremiah chapter 7, God said, "Pray not for this people." Jeremiah wanted to pray for them. In chapter 11, God again said, "Pray not for this people." In chapter 14, God said, "All right, Jeremiah, you want to pray for them, I'm going to let you pray for them. But here's what you pray: you pray that I'll destroy them, for that's exactly what I'm going to do."

So God took Elijah out of the land, but God left Jeremiah in the land and simply shut his mouth. He said, "No, I'm not going to allow you to pray for these people."

When God has compassion upon a people, He sends them a preacher. When God judges a people, He either removes the preacher or shuts them out. In Amos chapter 8, verse 11, God says, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land. Not a famine of bread, not a 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." So God said there would be a famine—a famine of hearing the word of God.

In light of this, consider the book of Jonah, chapter 4. We are talking about the displeased prophet because Jonah is so upset with God because God has spared the Assyrians. I do not know if you have picked out the theme of the book of Jonah, but you will find it over and over: God prepared. In Jonah chapter 1 and verse 4, God sent out, or God prepared, a great wind. In Jonah 1 and verse 17, the Bible

says God prepared a great fish. In Jonah 4 and verse 6, God prepared a gourd. In Jonah 4 and verse 7, God prepared a worm. In Jonah chapter 4 and verse 8, God prepared a vehement east wind.

So, in this brief book, you can see God's absolute sovereignty—not only His sovereignty in dealing with Jonah, but also His sovereignty in dealing with people in general, especially nations. Now look in Jonah chapter 4, beginning with verse 4.

The Gourd, the Worm, and Jonah's Misplaced Pity

"Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry?" Jonah was really angry. He went out of the city, sat on the east side, and made himself a booth under its shadow, waiting to see what would become of the city. The Lord God prepared a gourd and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head and deliver him from his grief. It is astounding how merciful God is. Jonah did not deserve the gourd, but God sent it to spare him from his grief. So Jonah was exceedingly glad for the gourd.

But watch verse 7: "But God prepared a worm when the morning rose, and the next day it smote the gourd that it withered." Then, when the sun rose, God prepared a vehement east wind, and the sun beat upon Jonah's head until he fainted. He wished himself to die and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah still wanted to see the destruction of Nineveh. He went out on the east side and built himself a little brush harbor, probably made of sticks, leaves, and branches—anything that would shield him from the sun. He sat there hoping that somehow God would change His purpose and, instead of sparing the Assyrians, would kill them. Remember that Nineveh was a city of three days' journey. Jonah started at one end and went to the other, preaching, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Undoubtedly he was tired after walking and preaching for three days. Now he sat under the booth, waiting to see what God would do.

God caused a gourd with big, broad leaves to grow, shading and cooling Jonah immensely. A creek or swampy area can produce a remarkable difference: it may be ninety-seven degrees on the hill, while beneath the shade trees near the water it is in the eighties. God

had created this gourd, and Jonah was thankful for it. But the next morning God prepared a worm, which ate the root of the gourd, and the gourd died.

If you do not think that can happen quickly, let a tomato worm get into your tomato plants, or let any kind of worm underground get hold of the root of your plant, and it will die almost the same day. Jonah has now lost the gourd. Look at the question God asked him in verse 9: "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" Jonah answered, "I do well to be angry even unto death." Jonah appears to be the kind of child you would really love to slap—by which I mean slap some sense into him. How can you be so absolutely stupid? Look at this.

He has an attitude marked by the height of unthankfulness, ungratefulness, pure sorriness, and rebellion. Jonah is upset and angry over the gourd and the fact that the worm ate it. He believes he has an absolute right to be angry even unto death. I know some people like that, and even a few preachers. It is insane.

Now watch this, because we are going to make the applications. In verses 10 and 11, the Lord said, "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, which thou hast not labored, neither made it sit to grow, which came up in a night, and perished in a night. And shouldest not I spare Nineveh, that great city wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?" Jonah had concern for the gourd, though he had not planted, watered, or fertilized it.

It was exceedingly temporary. His concern was not merely for the gourd, but for his own comfort and pleasure. He had no concern for the inhabitants of Nineveh, nor for its animals. As God said in verse 11, and as I pointed out in the first message, Nineveh was the greatest city in that era.

It was greater than Babylon. I gave you some of the statistics concerning Nineveh in the very first message. But consider that He mentions in this verse 120,000 persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand. We are talking about 120,000 babies, 120,000 little children. If you have 120,000 little children,

you know they have brothers and sisters, mamas and daddies, aunts and uncles. There were probably over a million people in Nineveh.

Jonah is not concerned about any of these, nor even the animals. He is concerned only about this stupid gourd. God is pointing out the crux of the matter with Jonah, and the crux of the matter with each of us: we are more concerned with our comfort, desires, wills, and wants than anything else.

Years ago, I was preaching in Indiana, and Alice and I were staying with a couple who had just returned from Russia. They had gone on a mission trip, and he brought back pictures of a Russian baptism. There, they had axes and ice picks breaking the ice in the river so they could baptize these new converts. Now, show me a professing Christian today who is willing to get into a freezing river just to be baptized. Most people will not walk across the street to go to church.

The fact is, most churches are air-conditioned, with cushioned seats and all that. Why? In some countries, people have to begin congregating a day or two before the church meeting, and they must walk individually or in groups of no more than one, two, three, or four, because it is illegal for them to have church. Yet they go to a secret place.

This is indeed where we are today. Turn back in your Bibles to Amos, chapter 6. God is pointing this out. Beginning with verse 1: "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and that trust in the mountain of Samaria." That would be the government. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom.

Mountains refer to nations and governments. He said, "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came. Pass ye into Calneh, and see, and from this go ye to Hamath the great. Then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Be they better than these kingdoms, or their border greater than your border?"

"You that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near, they lie upon beds of ivory, and they stretch themselves upon their couches, and they eat the lambs out of the flock, that is the best and the tenderest, and the calves out of the

midst of the stalls, that chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music like David, that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments. But they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph."

What is he saying? You take care of yourself. You want the best for yourself, but you are not concerned about the afflictions of Joseph. If you will turn back just a few pages to Hosea, chapter four and verse 13—indeed, verse 12—he says, "My people ask counsel at their stocks, that is, idols, and their staff declares unto them, for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err, and they go a whoring from under their God."

"They sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains and burn incense upon the hills under oaks and poplars and elms. Why? Because the shadow thereof is good." In other words, they want comfort. They would rather be comfortable in their idolatry. This is exactly what God is pointing out to Jonah: you are more concerned about your personal comforts than you are about the people or the animals that happen to be in Nineveh.

Ministries of Reconciliation and Condemnation

Here is another truth that we have to learn from Jonah chapter 4. This is very disconcerting to some folks, but it is still the absolute truth: preachers do not get to choose the type of ministry that they prefer or desire. God is the one who ordains their ministry for them. There is a ministry of reconciliation and a ministry of condemnation. Jonah was given a ministry of reconciliation, but he really wanted a ministry of condemnation. Isaiah and Jeremiah were given a ministry of condemnation, but they really wanted a ministry of reconciliation. What about Noah? Noah preached 120 years and never had one convert.

The Bible says in 2 Peter 2:5 that Jonah was a preacher of righteousness. Let me show you. If you will turn back in your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 1, God gave Jeremiah a ministry of condemnation. Notice verse 10. Look at what God says: "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, and to build and to plant."

He had to do three times as much destruction as he did building and planting. Now skip down to verse 15. Look at this: “For lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the earth, saith the Lord, and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering into the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah.” That is, all these heathen were going to conquer Jerusalem. “And I will utter my judgments against them, touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worship the works of their own hands.”

"Now therefore, gird up thy loins and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee. Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and a brazen wall against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, against the people thereof. And they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee. For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee."

What was God saying to Jeremiah? Nobody is going to listen to you. I am going to end up destroying them. Jeremiah says in chapter 9, verse 1, "Oh, I wish that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." He wanted to weep all the time.

Jeremiah was a man full of compassion. He is known as the weeping prophet. Yet God gave him a ministry of condemnation, not a ministry of reconciliation. In Isaiah chapter 6, God calls Isaiah into the ministry: "Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go and tell this people, and hear ye indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed."

God said, I want you to go. These people are not going to listen to you. They are not going to see, hear, or understand. Isaiah finally asked in verse 11, "Then said I, Lord, how long?" That is, how long do I have to go to these people? "And he answered, until the cities be

wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate." In other words, I am not going to let them hear you. You are going to have a ministry of condemnation. Isaiah wanted a ministry of reconciliation, and so did Jeremiah, but they did not have it.

God does not give every preacher a ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, George Whitefield, or the Apostle Paul. No. He gives some a ministry of condemnation and others a ministry of reconciliation.

In 2 Corinthians 2, the Apostle Paul shows us the ministry of reconciliation and the ministry of condemnation: “Now thanks be unto God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place.” Then he says, “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish.”

The sweet savour refers to the incense and smoke that came up from the offerings in the Old Testament. Paul continues, “For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish. To the one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life, and who is sufficient for these things.”

Suppose there are one hundred lost men and women in this room, none of them saved. I preach as hard as I can, God blesses the Word, and the Holy Spirit works in their hearts. Let us say all one hundred are regenerated and converted by God, and they are all praising the Lord. What does God do? My Son is preached, and I am satisfied.

Take that same one hundred unsaved men and women. I preach Jesus Christ, but every one raises his fists, clenches his teeth, and says, “We’ll not have this man to reign over us.” They try to run me out of town. What does God say? My Son is preached, and I am satisfied. One would be a ministry of reconciliation; the other, a ministry of condemnation. That is what He said.

We are the savour of life unto life and death unto death. Who is sufficient for these things? Only God.

Understand this: it is faithfulness that counts, not greatness. Noah was faithful for 120 years and never had one convert, yet God put him among the heroes of faith. Isaiah and Jeremiah are heroes of

faith; they never had any converts. There are preachers we have never heard of, and Christians we have never heard of and probably never will hear of, who have led faithful, consistent, godly Christian lives. God counts them as successful.

Success is not in numbers, nor in greatness. Success is in faithfulness. We may be small and insignificant, but what counts is faithfulness. Our Lord demanded that a steward be found faithful, and that is true in 1 Corinthians chapter 4. God demands faithfulness.

Now note what God said. God told Jonah that there were 120,000 babies in that city who could not discern between their left hand and their right hand. There were undoubtedly plenty of sinners in that great city, but there were also children. There were also animals. God said, “and all the cattle.” Here is an astounding thing for me: God is concerned about animals. He is not only concerned about humans; He is concerned about animals as well.

God's Concern for Animals and Creation

Stop and think about this. Animals are just as much God’s creation as we are, and God takes care of them. God feeds them, protects them, and provides for their needs as well. Psalm 104, beginning with verse 10, says:

“He sent the springs into the valleys which run among the hills. Why? They give drink to every beast of the field. The wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. He waters the hills from his chambers. The earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man, that he may bring forth food out of the earth. And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart.

“The trees of the Lord are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which he hath planted. Where the birds make their nests is for the stork, the fir trees are her house. The high hills are refuge for the wild goats, and the rocks for the conies. He appointed the moon for

seasons, the sun knoweth his going down. Thou makest darkness, and it is night wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth."

"The young lions roar after their prey and seek their meat from God. The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together and lay them down in their dens. Man goeth forth into his work and to his labor until the evening." Then he says, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works and wisdom! Thou hast made them all. The earth is full of thy riches. Praise the Lord."

No animal deserves to be abused, mistreated, starved, beaten, or destroyed any more than any man or woman deserves to be beaten, mistreated, abused, starved, or destroyed. God takes care of the animals as well.

When we treat God's creation with contempt, we treat God with contempt. When we disrespect God's creation, we disrespect God. There are three reasons in the Bible why the lives of animals may be taken. We may take an animal's life for food. God has given animals to us to eat; there is no problem with that. We may also take the lives of animals in self-defense.

I know men who were attacked by deer, a buck. In fact, one man was killed in Texas by a buck. I've known several people who were attacked by animals. When you are attacked, yes, you may defend yourself. God gives animals to us for food, and God gives us the right of self-defense. Thirdly, animal life may be taken if animals are hindering dominion. If rabbits are eating up my garden, I might shoot the rabbits because I want my garden.

I'm not going to just let the rabbits lie. I don't eat them, but I will give them to somebody who does eat them. The point is that there are three reasons why animal life can be taken based upon God's terms. If those animals are hindering dominion, then they may be rightly destroyed.

This is an astounding thing. Deuteronomy 22, verses 6 and 7, gives another reason God promises long life. One reason, of course, is obedience to parents: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, honor thy father and thy mother, that your days may be long upon the earth." Another reason is related to money, whether we are honest or not. But here is another reason. The Bible says, "If a bird's

nest chance to be before thee in the way, in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones or eggs, or the dam, the female sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young. But thou shalt anywise let the dam go, and take the young to thee, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days."

Why would you let the dam go? Because if you take the dam, the young will die as well. God says, No, if you are going to eat them, take the young and let the female, the mama, go. She can have more babies. Notice the latter part: "that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest prolong thy days." In other words, God promises long life based upon how we treat animals, how we are honest with our money, and how we honor our fathers and mothers. Those are the three promises for long life in the Bible.

So God says to Jonah, No, Jonah, you are more concerned about your comfort than about the people of Assyria. Now let me show you what we are to learn from the book of Jonah. I have seven things down, recapping the other three messages as well as this one.

Seven Lessons from Jonah

First, the Word of God teaches us that we cannot run from God. I explained what that meant in Jonah chapter 1. Second, God knows exactly what it will take to break us and bring us into submission and obedience. When God got through with Jonah, he might have smelled a lot like fish, but he felt a whole lot more like preaching. God knew exactly what it would take to break Jonah, and He knows exactly what it will take to break us.

Third, God desires repentance and faith, and He certainly gives second opportunities. Fourth, we should be more concerned about God's will than our will and our comforts. Fifth, it is God who determines our ministry.

Sixth, we must learn to honor His creation and not abuse it or misuse it. Seventh, it does us no good to be angry with God. We should be angry with ourselves and our sin, but we should never, ever find fault with God. For God doeth all things well. Whatever

God does, He does for our good and for His glory. We have to honor Him and submit to Him.

There is so much in the book of Jonah, and so much for you and I to learn and apply to our lives.

Father, thank You again for the Lord Jesus Christ. Thank You for Your Word. Thank You for the truth. Lord, help us to learn. Help us, Lord, to be students of Thy Word and apply Thy Word to our lives. Help us not, Lord, to commit the same sins and errors that others have committed, which, Lord, You reveal for our benefit, that we might not be critical and angry with Thee. Our God of love is love. And Lord, we love Thee today and we submit to Thee. We ask, Lord, that You would teach us and build us up in the most holy faith. In Thy name we pray.

Amen.

CHAPTER 11

Calvin Crozier Texas Martyr

February 9, 2012

Introduction: The Manhood of John the Baptist

Let us open our Bibles to the book of John, chapter 1. Look at verse 6. The message today is on Calvin Crozier—C-R-O-Z-I-E-R—Texas Martyr. Notice John 1 and verse 6: "There was a man sent from God whose name was John." Let me take that one phrase: "there was a man."

Think about that. When God looked down upon John the Baptist, He said, "There was a man." It is not just that there was a man sent from God whose name was John. John was indeed a man. When God refers to John the Baptist as a man, we must understand that He is referring to the character, courage, valor, and integrity of John the Baptist, and all of those things were exceedingly evident in his life. He was indeed a real, genuine man.

You have to remember that it was John the Baptist who took on the religious establishment of his day. In Matthew chapter 3, when the Pharisees and Sadducees flocked to John, the Bible says that when John saw them come to him, he said, "O generation of vipers,

who had warned you to flee from the wrath to come." Thus he referred to the religious establishment as a generation of vipers.

Can you imagine that today—a preacher going to the local ministerial association and saying, "You bunch of snakes, let me tell you something"? That is exactly what John the Baptist did. He could not and would not put up with their hypocrisy, their legalism, and their phariseeism. Moreover, it was not just the religious leaders that John took on; he also took on King Herod. The Bible tells us that King Herod feared John. In Mark chapter 6, when King Herod had taken Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, John said to the king, "It is not lawful for thee to have her." John even confronted the king. The next verse tells us that Herodias had a quarrel with John because he had plainly said it was not lawful for Herod to have her, and she wanted John put to death. Eventually, Herod did indeed have him put to death. But John, as Matthew chapter 3 records, preached very pointedly to the people and told them that they must repent.

John not only spoke to the people; he also preached to the soldiers. They asked, "What then shall we do?" He told the soldiers likewise to repent. They were not to exact any more than was demanded by law, but were to be content with their wages and do no violence to any man. In other words, here was a man who was very plainspoken. Here was a man who spoke the truth. Very obviously, he was a man of character, courage, valor, integrity, and truthfulness.

The Lost Concept of Manhood Today

All of these were marks of his manhood. Manhood, in reality, has nothing to do with age. You are not automatically a man just because you are twenty-one, thirty-one, forty-one, fifty-one, or any other age. According to the Bible, manhood deals with character, responsibility, and integrity. One of the greatest faults of modern-day society is that we have lost the concept of manhood.

We have lost the concept of manhood in about every way. Men will not be the head of their homes; they will not work, keep their word, or fulfill their responsibility. It is like that old joke about the men who died and went to heaven. There were two lines. One said, "For hen-pecked husbands," and it was a very long line. The other

said, “For all husbands who were not hen-pecked,” and there was one man standing in it. Peter came up and asked him what in the world he was doing in that line. He said he did not know; his wife had just told him to go over there.

We have today in this society a loss of true manhood. We have sired a generation of adults, men and women unhappily, who are selfish, mean, despicable, worthless, and characterless. No longer are we men of our word. No longer are we men of chivalry, courage, and valor. No longer are we men of principle, truth, and righteousness.

We have forgotten the principles that made our nation great and made our families and individuals strong.

Look in your Bibles at 1 Corinthians chapter 16, verse 13. Here is a command from God: “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”

Biblical Command to Be Brave Men

The Greek word for men literally means to make brave or to be as brave men. One such man of bravery, courage, valor, integrity, and character was Calvin Shepard Crozier of Texas. His story displays his character most vividly.

Calvin Crozier's Background and War Service

Calvin was a Confederate soldier on his way home to Texas after the war was over. He was traveling in September of 1865. Calvin Crozier was born in Brandon, Mississippi, in August of 1840. I have also seen the year of his birth as 1839, so there is probably no way to determine exactly whether he was born in 1839 or 1840. The year does not really matter that much, but whichever year was his real birth date means that he was either twenty-five or twenty-six years of age at the time of his death.

Calvin was reared and educated in Galveston, Texas. He was living in Dallas, Texas, when the War of Northern Aggression broke out, and he enlisted in Good's Battery of the Light Artillery, 1st Texas Artillery, also known as Douglas' Battery.

During the war, Crozier transferred to a company raised by Richard Gano. When this unit joined John Hunt Morgan's brigade, it was called the 3rd Regiment, Morgan's Brigade, or the 7th Kentucky Cavalry.

Calvin Crozier had a sister, Mrs. Mary S. Rogers of Bloom, Texas, and she wrote this: "Our father was too old and feeble to go to the war, but he had five sons and two sons-in-law who served through the war. My husband was a private in General Gano's command three and a half years. My brothers served in Texas regiments and all went safely through the war except one brother who was wounded in the battle of Pleasant Hill."

It is absolutely astounding that five sons of one man and two sons-in-law went through the entire war with only one of them being slightly wounded. Can you imagine that? On the other hand, some of you will remember the message I preached a few years ago on Manse Jolly, the South Carolina Avenger. Manse Jolly lost five brothers during the war. Four of them were killed in battle, and one died in an army hospital.

If the war was over in April of 1865, why was Calvin Crozier on his way home in September of 1865? Surely he should have been home much earlier. The answer is simple: Crozier was captured during Morgan's Kentucky raid and sent to a northern prison camp. He was held there until the war ended. In fact, he was quite ill during his confinement and was unable to travel until September of 1865.

When John Hunt Morgan was raiding not only out of Kentucky but into Ohio, Calvin Shepard Crozier was captured at Syracuse, Ohio, on July the 20th, 1863. He was imprisoned at Camp Douglas, Illinois. On March the 2nd, 1865, he was transferred to Point Lookout, Maryland, another northern prison infamous for its mistreatment of prisoners. He was there only a week or two before finally being sent to Virginia on March the 10th, 1865.

That means he spent two years at Camp Douglas, located in Chicago near the shores of Lake Michigan. Camp Douglas was the northern prison camp with the highest mortality rate during the entire war. It is known as 80 Acres of Hell. The History Channel program of that title is an expose of Camp Douglas, and it is a pretty

decent one. The first prisoners arrived there in February of 1862. Conditions were so bad that one in every five prisoners within those walls died.

Punishment by officials and guards was extremely, unusually cruel. Confederate soldiers were purposefully and deliberately starved to death. Their rations were either cut until they could not live or taken away altogether. Many men were deprived of blankets and literally froze to death during severe weather. Prisoners were regularly deprived of clothing to prevent escape. Some had nothing but sacks, with holes cut for the head and arms; they had no other clothes.

Very few had underwear at all. Blankets needed to offset the winter weather in the North were confiscated from the few individuals who had them. The weakest Confederate prisoners simply froze to death. The Chicago winter of 1864 was extremely devastating. The loss of 1,091 Confederate soldiers in four months was due to freezing to death, the highest death rate of any northern prison for a four-month period. Nearly 1,100 soldiers froze to death. There is no way of knowing how many Confederate prisoners actually died and were murdered at Camp Douglas.

But I have seen the minimum given at 6,000. In fact, if you watch the History Channel presentation of Camp Douglas, if a black Confederate walked into the prison, usually he was shot down on the spot by other black Yankee soldiers. A lot of times the guards played games at shooting Confederate soldiers. It was indeed a very horrible experience. Point Lookout, as mentioned earlier, was either just as bad or worse, but thankfully Crozier was only there for a short period of time.

Thus you can see why he was delayed in going home. He was very weak and had to have time to recover his strength. Finally, Crozier was on his way home. The war was over; he had recovered from his long spell of sickness and was going home in anticipation of meeting the loved ones he had not seen in four years. Can you imagine what it must be like to be away from your wife, sweetheart, mother, father, brothers, and sisters for four years?

There were no cell phones. Most telegraph lines were torn down. If you wrote a letter, it may or may not get through, and it might take a month or two months to arrive, if then. Can you imagine the anticipation of thinking, "I'm finally getting to go home. I'm finally going to see my family"? I would imagine that thought runs through the mind of every soldier. Those in Vietnam wanted to come home; those in Iraq and Afghanistan want to come home. There must be a great deal of anticipation. Additionally, one article I read on Crozier said that, as he was coming home, he again fell sick in North Carolina.

And a good Samaritan took him in, nursed him back to health, and sent him on his way.

Calvin Crozier had two companions traveling with him: Amid Price and Amid's younger brother, Clem, also called Ben. In one account, the name is spelled Amid. I suppose he was Clement Benjamin. Clem, or Ben, was only fifteen. He had met his brother and Crozier in North Carolina and was simply traveling home with them.

They took the train as far as possible. When the line ended, whether because the tracks had been destroyed or for some other reason, they walked, and then took another train. Ben Price said:

"When these two men, Crozier and his brother, Amid, left Raleigh, North Carolina, in September of 1865 for their respective homes, I joined them. And our trip was uneventful until we reached the interior of South Carolina. The railroads were torn up in places, and we sometimes had to walk from one point to another."

It was obviously very slow going as they came home. There is a discrepancy concerning a charge given to Calvin Crozier in South Carolina, though it is not a large discrepancy. Around Orangeburg, South Carolina, a gentleman placed two young ladies, journeying in the same direction, under Crozier's care and custody.

The Incident on the Train in Newberry, South Carolina

Some say that the gentleman was the depot manager of the railroad. There is no way of knowing exactly who it was. There is also a

discrepancy as to how many young ladies were committed to his care. Some say one, some say two, some say three or even more. The Calvin Crozier murder site in Newberry, South Carolina, plainly states that there were two young ladies under his charge.

Regardless of how many there were—one, two, three, or four—it does not really matter. Calvin had taken charge of them and had agreed that he would get them safely to their destination. So chivalry was certainly not dead in the South at that particular time. Everything went well until they reached Newberry, South Carolina. They walked to Austin and there took a train going west until they reached Newberry on the night of September 7, 1865. Then either there was some obstruction on the track, or the train temporarily left the track, and Crozier, the young ladies, and Amid had to stay on the train overnight.

There was a lack of hotel rooms in the area, and they were forced to remain on that train. I do not know whether it had sleeper cars or merely regular cars, probably just regular cars. They made themselves as comfortable as they could for the night. While they were resting quite peacefully, members of the 33rd U.S. Colored Troops, under the command of Colonel Charles T. Trowbridge, entered the car and became unruly and offensive, to the point that the young women became offended and afraid.

Crozier then asked the black soldiers to leave the train. They refused, and a fight broke out. Crozier had a small pocketknife. He ejected one of the black soldiers without difficulty, but the other one really wanted to fight. With his pocketknife, Crozier cut the black soldier slightly on the neck and then got him out of the train.

These black soldiers were under the command of Colonel Charles Trowbridge. You may remember the message I preached on Manse Jolly, the South Carolina Avenger. Manse Jolly also had a run-in with Colonel Trowbridge. You will find that Colonel Trowbridge was indeed a very wicked man. Here are Trowbridge's own words concerning his meeting with Manse Jolly: "After I had my breakfast, I stepped out on the porch, leaving my pistol in my room."

"Went up, rode Jolly to the edge of the sidewalk and said, 'My name is Manse Jolly, the man you're looking for. Now take me if you

can.' And with that, Jolly rode off." Trowbridge could not and did not want to catch an armed man, for Jolly was certainly armed, though he had no difficulty with unarmed men.

A more detailed account of the fight is given in the History of Edgefield County from the Earliest Settlements to 1897. I am reading it verbatim because of the language: "A more detailed account of the fight is given and it is stated that the coach was invaded by two half-drunk soldiers cursing and using indecent language. Crozier called upon them to desist, directing their attention to the presence of the ladies. They replied they didn't care a damn. One attempted gross familiarities with one of the ladies. Calvin ejected him. The second Negro interfered. There was a struggle in the dark. One Negro fled unhurt and the other with a slight cut ran toward his camp yelling, 'I'm cut by a damn rebel.'"

Crozier's Self-Sacrifice and Murder

The soldiers then returned with more of their cohorts, intent on getting the man who had fought them. However, in their anger, animosity, rage, and frustration, they seized the wrong man: Jacob S. Bowers, superintendent of the Greenville and Columbia Railroad. When they grabbed him, they immediately planned to lynch him.

Stop and think. Calvin Crozier could have escaped death by flight, evasion, or silence. They had the wrong man and were going to hang Mr. Bowers. When Crozier learned what was happening, he would not allow it. Crozier was not only a southerner; he was also a man who understood principle and responsibility. Without hesitation, he stepped forward and identified himself as the one who had fought the two black soldiers, declaring that Mr. Bowers had nothing to do with it and was not even there.

Calvin Crozier not only spoke the truth; he took responsibility for what he did, regardless of the consequences. It is amazing in this day and time that no one is responsible for anything unless it is good. Look in Washington, D.C.: the Democrats blame the Republicans, the Republicans blame the Democrats, the executive office blames Congress, and Congress blames the judicial system. Everything happens, and no one is responsible. Well, Calvin Shepard Crozier

was not that kind of man. He not only spoke the truth; he took responsibility for his acts.

In 1 Corinthians 16:13, when the Scripture says, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong,” the word for men means to make brave and to be as brave men. Crozier certainly revealed his bravery and valor because he was not afraid to take responsibility for his actions, and he was not afraid to die.

Circumstances never make or break a man; they just reveal him. If you really want to know what your character is and what kind of principles you hold, get into trial, tribulation, and pressure. Let your life depend on something, and you will know exactly what you are made of. Evidently, Calvin Crozier was made of a different metal than most people today. There were a number of eyewitnesses to what happened to him.

One of them was W. M. Fenton. He said:

“I was then a youth of 15 years and was living at Newberry when the brave Crozier yielded up his life so that another might not suffer. The memory of that day is a tragedy never to be forgotten. The war had ended and the soldiers of the disbanded Confederate Army and parole prisoners were passing through South Carolina to their homes in the West. Among them was Calvin Crozier, a Texan who arrived at Newberry on September the 7th, 1865, and was delayed there overnight.

“He had some ladies under his care, and as hotel accommodations were very meager, they decided it would be best to pass the night in the car on which they had traveled. Late in the night, some Negro soldiers under the command of Colonel Trowbridge, who had arrived at Newberry that day, entered the car where Crozier and the ladies were under his care, were quietly reposing, and they made themselves very offensive to the ladies. Crozier requested them to leave, but they refused to do so, and a difficulty arose. In the scuffle which followed, one of the Negroes was slightly cut by Crozier with his knife. The regiment to which they belonged was encamped in a graveyard near the depot, and very soon after the difficulty occurred, a number of them appeared at the depot bent on avenging the one who had been dealt with by Crozier.”

In their madness, they seized Mr. Jacob S. Bowers, then the general superintendent of the Greenville and Columbia Railroad, and, despite his many protestations, were about to lynch him. When Crozier learned what they were about, without a moment's hesitation he presented himself and acknowledged that he had wounded the Negro soldier. He was at once taken, tied, and taken to the camp mentioned above, where he was shot to death by the fiends.

His body was thrown into a shallow grave, and they danced in ghoulish glee upon his new-made grave. The officers of the Negro regiment, principally white, were appealed to in behalf of Crozier, but in vain. Trowbridge, the colonel of this regiment, was heard to declare that he took upon himself all the responsibility for the act. Prince Rivers, a Negro and an officer in the same regiment, wishing to save Crozier's life, begged him to deny that he was the man who had the difficulty with the Negro soldier, but he refused.

Seldom, indeed, do we find such heroic self-sacrifice as is recorded of the noble Texan. He might have gone free to his far western home had he permitted an innocent man to suffer. However fondly he may have dreamed of arriving at his Texas home, Galveston, and greeting loved ones there, he gave it all up and laid down his life that another might live. No ignoble spirit could have acted as he did.

Such a death must work forgiveness for many misdeeds and shortcomings, and where he now sleeps must be holy ground. His body remained where he was buried by the Negro soldiers until 1891, when the people of Newberry had him buried at Rosemont Cemetery and erected an enduring monument to his memory. In erecting this monument, they honored themselves.

There were several accounts of what actually happened. Some were eyewitness accounts; others were simply based upon eyewitness testimony. The state newspaper wrote: "Crozier was tried, condemned, and shot without the sanction of law, and it all transpired in the night." Please understand what happened late at night: before daylight, Crozier was murdered.

What kind of trial or military tribunal can take place in the dark of night through, say, six o'clock in the morning? The answer is none.

The newspaper account stated: “Crozier was tried, condemned, and shot without the sanction of law, and it all transpired in the night. We were powerless to help him with this regiment of Negro soldiers under the direction of a federal colonel as brutal in his instincts as the horde at his command. The infuriated creatures, men and women, after Crozier's death crowded about the depot cursing and vowing that they had had some white blood that morning and they were going to have more. Crozier, after his identification as the man who cut the Negro's throat, was hurried away. Some town official was notified and an attempt was made, but a feeble one, of course, under the condition of affairs then, to give Crozier a proper and legal trial. But before anything could be done, he was shot. Crozier had an uncle who lived in Galveston, Texas, and relatives in the other parts of the state.”

“While at his grave, just before he was shot, he wrote Amid Price a note giving his uncle's address and asking him to write his uncle the cause of his death. He stated in this note that it was hardly day yet and he could scarcely see to write.” His sister said that she had searched through all of his belongings and had never found this note, yet the newspaper stated that the note was indeed written.

The Newberry Herald wrote: “The right man however promptly appeared declaring Bowers innocent and gave himself up. A part of the squad was for instantly shooting him, but others objected and insisted on taking him to headquarters. He was taken before the colonel, that is Colonel Trowbridge, and acknowledged what he had done and said that he would do the same thing again.

“He was then told that he must die. He was taken from camp a few yards and a hole being dug, he was ordered to kneel. The deceased is said to have been a most estimable young man, brave and generous, and was shown by giving himself up when he might have escaped. During the morning on Friday, our citizens had the body taken from the hole where it was only partially covered, and placed in a neat coffin, preparatory to the internment, which was done in the afternoon.”

"A very large, respectable, and sympathizing procession of ladies and gentlemen, following it to its final resting place in the graveyard."

The state newspaper then published an eyewitness account by Mr. George A. Langford. Concerning the murder of Calvin Crozier, Langford said he was within 30 feet of the soldiers when they fired and about the same distance from Crozier when he fell:

"Crozier was caused to turn around facing the south, and he stood erect and folded his arms across his breast. Five Negro soldiers were lined up 30 feet in front of him, their officer to the right of the soldiers. The command was given to fire, and the rain of lead poured into Crozier's breast, each of the five balls taking effect between his arms. He fell instantly."

"And while he was struggling in the agony of death, the Negro officer walked up to him and sent a pistol ball speeding through his brain, saying with an oath, 'Now you will lie still.' Crozier had fallen into the ditch behind him. And with their feet the Negro soldiers raked the leaves over his body. It was clear morning in September shortly after sunrise."

Mr. Langford puts the time a little before seven o'clock. Another account says he "was summarily shot to death and buried on the spot in a shallow grave. The Union soldiers danced gleefully on the new grave." Another report says "he was heard in the nighttime to the bivouac of the regiment to which the soldier belonged, was kept under guard all night, was not allowed communication with any citizen, was condemned to die without any form of trial, and was shot to death about daylight and the following morning his body was mutilated."

Aftermath and Injustice

There is a huge problem with all of this. Here are eyewitness accounts: Calvin Crozier had been shot and murdered. You say, “But he cut the throat of the Negro soldier.” Yes, he did. But the Negro soldier whose throat was supposedly cut and who supposedly died was Private Mills. Not only was he not dead, but he reported for duty

the next morning. It was just a slight cut, something that a band-aid could cover.

Private Mills was not dead. Crozier, therefore, an innocent man, had been brutally murdered by angry Union soldiers. Colonel Trowbridge, the troop's commander, said that he believed Crozier had killed Private Mills instead of merely injuring him. Remember, Trowbridge was the one who said that he took full responsibility for the act. When the facts became known, Lieutenant Colonel Trowbridge was court-martialed on the charge of murdering Calvin Shepard Crozier.

Would you like to take a guess at the outcome? He was acquitted.

Major General Charles Devens, a Union officer from Massachusetts, believed that Trowbridge should be punished. He could not understand how such a blatant act of murder could be excused in a military tribunal until he learned that Brigadier General William T. Bennett had been appointed to the review board. Bennett had previously commanded the 33rd United States Colored Troop, and Trowbridge had served under him. One officer looking out for another officer found him not guilty.

General Devens was incensed, irate, angry, and upset. He requested that the board reconsider its findings. He wrote: "The execution of Calvin Crozier seems to me to be an act without form of law or justifiable cause. That Crozier had committed an act worthy of death is not now even pretended in the defense. How then can this officer who caused him to be executed be held guiltless? It is earnestly urged on this court martial that this act is one which ought not to go entirely unpunished."

They reconsidered and still acquitted him. Devens signed his last order on the subject November the 21st, 1865, stating, "The findings of the above case are disapproved." He continued, "Calvin Crozier was executed summarily by Lieutenant Colonel Trowbridge for the murder of Private Mills, 33rd United States Colored Troop, who was not murdered but is today alive and well."

"It was, in my opinion, a most unjustifiable act and indicates a weakness in yielding to momentary clamor and excitement unworthy of a brave and judicious officer." He stated that he had

requested reconsideration, but the board had adhered to its decision. Therefore, he was compelled to order Trowbridge's release. The state newspaper added: "The deceased is said to have been a most estimable young man, brave and generous, as was shown by giving himself up when he might have escaped."

"During the morning of Friday, our citizens had the body taken from the hole where it was only partially covered and placed in a neat coffin preparatory to final internment." The account continued: "They took him then with that large procession to its final resting place."

On April 24, 1890, the Newberry Observer published this plea: "Now fellow citizens, let us do what ought to have been done long ago and put a marble headstone at the grave of this brave Texan to preserve his name and memory. There is no need for a costly monument. All subscriptions for this purpose will be acknowledged under the head of the Crozier Fund."

The response was overwhelming. Consequently, they not only took up his body and carried it to Rosemont Cemetery, but erected a handsome monument, which receives special attention from the ladies of Newberry every Memorial Day. The inscription reads: "Calvin Crozier, born at Brandon, Mississippi, murdered at Newberry, South Carolina, September the 8th, 1865," followed by these lines:

"Rest on, embalmed and sainted dead, dear as the blood you gave, no impious footsteps here shall tread the herbage of your grave, nor shall your glory be forgot, while fame her record keeps, or honor points the hallowed spot where valor proudly sleeps."

It is a beautiful monument. Sidney Andrews, a citizen of Newberry, wrote concerning the murder of Calvin Crozier: "In the Newberry District, a case has recently occurred in which the Negroes took justice into their own hands. It appears that in a car which was standing on the track were three or four women and two rebel soldiers, one of them a Texan. A Negro sergeant had occasion to enter the car and was roughly ordered out by the Texan. He responded to the effect that he knew his own business and should

mind it. The two rebel soldiers therefore seized him and undertook to thrust him out."

He resisted, and the Texans stabbed him, inflicting what was supposed to be a mortal wound. In an hour, the two rebels were caught by the Negro soldiers of the regiment to which the sergeant belonged. Three hours later, the Texans had been tried by a drumhead court-martial, shot, and buried.

As to the military murder of the Texan soldier at Newberry—for it was indeed, in truth, a murder—it was not shown, nor could it be shown at the drumhead court-martial, that he had acted in an unjustifiable manner. The ladies in the car were under his protection, and the Negro sergeant was an intruder. Being an intruder, Crozier certainly had the right to put him out if he could, since he would not go without it.

Calvin Crozier was a hero, and his death was one of the finest instances of self-sacrifice of which I've ever heard or read. It was some time after the difficulty was over before any arrest was made. Then the colored soldiers arrested the wrong man, a man who knew nothing of the difficulty and was not present when it occurred—an employee of the railroad. They were about to deal with him summarily when Calvin Crozier, the Texan who stabbed the Negro, then at large, unrecognized, and possibly able to escape entirely, voluntarily made himself known and surrendered himself to certain death to prevent another—a stranger—from suffering for what he had done.

To the honor of Prince Rivers, who was an officer at the time in that colored regiment and was afterwards somewhat well known in Edgeville, be it said that he wanted to save and tried to save Crozier from the doom that awaited him. The people of Newberry have honored themselves by erecting a monument to the memory of Calvin Crozier.

Applications: Manhood, Love, and Christ's Sacrifice

Here is a man who gave himself for another. Manhood is not age-related; it is character-related. I would not hesitate to say that I know very few fifty- and sixty-year-old men who would do what this

twenty-five- or twenty-six-year-old man did. Calvin Crozier had biblical manhood because biblical manhood deals with integrity, right and wrong, character, principles, and righteousness. He was willing to do what was right and then willing to face the consequences for doing that which was right.

He reminds me of Martin Luther. When Martin Luther was called before the Diet of Worms in Worms, Germany—the Parliament—there sat the Emperor Charles V, the Pope, and all the Cardinals.

They were asking Luther to deny his writings. What did Luther say? "Although I'm convinced by plain Scripture, I cannot do this. I can't go by the councils because they are councils of men, and they disagree. I can't go by what someone else says. My conscience is bound only to the Word of God. Here I stand. God help me. I can do no other."

That was Crozier's position: "God help me, I can do no other. I'm only going to do what's right. If it costs me my life, I will do what is right." There was a time in this country when men believed that some principles were worth dying for—not just worth fighting for, but worth dying for. That's why we have this country. Our forefathers pledged their lives, their liberty, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

Manhood is not age-related; it is character-related. The second application is this: John 15:13 tells us, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend." In 1 John 3:16, the Bible says, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Notice what the Scripture says: "Hereby perceive we the love of God." Why? Because He laid down His life for us. Real love is not just words; it is action and conduct. We know that God loves us, not just because He told us that He loves us, but because He gave His only begotten Son, and His only begotten Son laid down His life for us. Scripture says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

I can understand how one man could be willing to lay down his life for his friend. But Calvin Crozier laid down his life for a stranger whom he did not even know. He knew what was right, and he did it. We can understand how much greater it is to lay down your life for a stranger.

Thirdly, I want you to think with me for a moment and see the fullness, greatness, beauty, majesty, and marvelous grace of Jesus Christ, who laid down His life for His enemies. The Bible says in Romans 5, verses 7 and 8, "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commended His love toward us in that while we were yet enemies, sinners, Christ died for us." We may have been His people by election, but we were sinners by imputation and by practice. Being sinners, we were at enmity with God according to Romans 8, verses 6-8. Our Lord loved us and laid His life down for us while we were yet sinners. It is possible for a man to die for his friend, a stranger, and even a good man, as Scripture says. But Christ laid down His life for sinners. The greatest sacrifice is the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made on behalf of His people.

Calvin Crozier was indeed a Texas martyr. But Jesus Christ is a living Savior.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We are so thankful that You have given us illustrations and examples of men of integrity, character, and principle. Father, enable us to emulate them and have the godly character in our lives that we need. May we ever praise Thee and glorify Thee for Thy so great salvation given to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. We are thankful that You loved us and gave Yourself for us even while we were yet sinners, in our sins and rebellion. You have saved us, regenerated us, convicted us, converted us, and brought us to Thyself, for which we give Thee all the glory, honor, and praise. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 12

Death Holds No Fear for the Child of God

March 7, 2012

Our Scripture verse is Psalm 48:14, but I am going to read the entire psalm because I will make comments on it before I come to verse 14.

"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge.

"For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together. They saw it, and so they marvelled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple. According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness. Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments. Walk about

Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

Introduction: The Reality and Fear of Death

Death is the subject that everyone avoids. However, it is a reality and an experience that everyone must face and go through until the Lord returns. The simple truth is that we will never get out of this world alive. We must die. It is an unpleasant subject for many people because it is shrouded in mystery and fear. It is a mystery because none of us have experienced it previously. We do not know what to expect. Though I have read many accounts of people dying, we still do not know what to expect personally, and consequently most of us do not relish the experience. Death is also fearful for most people because they do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, and they do not know what is beyond the grave.

I believe that most people—I'm talking about unbelievers now—really suspect deep down that there is indeed a God, that they will face Him, and that they will have to give an account for their actions. Consequently, they are very fearful. Yet, on the other hand, they do not believe in Him enough, or believe His Word enough, to repent. Somehow, they hope that God is not, that He is not a just God, and that He will not call them into account.

The Wicked's Attitude Toward God and Death

Hold Psalm 48, but look in your Bibles at Psalm 10, and you will see the attitude of such individuals. Begin reading there with verse 2. "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 hateth. The wicked through the pride of his countenance will not seek after God. God is not in all of his thoughts."

"His ways are always grievous. Thy judgments are far above out of his sight. As for all of his enemies, he puffeth at them. He said in his heart, I shall not be moved, for I shall never be in adversity."

Now skip down to verse 11. After he says he is never going to be in a difficult place, he says this concerning God: “He has said in his heart, God hath forgotten. He hideth his face. He will never see it.” In other words, if there is a God, the wicked somehow thinks that God will forget their sins, or that God did not see their sins. And if that does not work, verse 13 says: “Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it.” In other words, if You did see, God, it really does not matter, because You are not really going to judge me. So that is the attitude of the wicked.

They know, in one sense, that there is a God and that He is going to judge them, but they hope with everything in them that He will not. Likewise, those who merely pretend to believe God and offer Him lip service only shall find themselves damned under the judgment of God, without any hope whatsoever. Job said in Job 8:13, "So are the paths of all that forget God, and the hypocrite's hope shall perish."

In Job 27:8, Job asked, "For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?" He may have gained respect, awards, and everything else, but what is his hope when God takes away his soul? The answer is that he has no hope. Scripture affirms in Hebrews 10:31, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God."

I certainly would not want to fall into the hands of the living God apart from the grace, mercy, and love found only in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet those who die without Christ must face alone the righteous, holy, just wrath and anger of a sovereign God. No one will be there to help or encourage them.

In light of this, do you realize that Job refers to death as the king of terrors? In Job 18:14, speaking about the wicked, he says, "His confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and he shall bring them to the terrors of death." He shall bring them to the king of terrors. He is talking about death. In Job 24:17, we read, "For the morning is to them even as the shadow of death. If one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death."

For the unbeliever, death is the king of terrors. Thankfully, there is a vast difference between believers and unbelievers—between those who are truly Christian and those who worship the one true and living God through Jesus Christ in spirit and in truth.

Believers Delivered from the Fear of Death

Before looking at Psalm 48, turn to Hebrews chapter 2. I am sure that especially the young people, and many of the adults, have seen not only the bumper stickers but also the caps and clothing line bearing the words, "No Fear." That slogan is very applicable to the child of God, because for the child of God there is really no fear in death.

In Hebrews 2:14-15, we read concerning Jesus Christ: "Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he"—that is Christ—"also himself likewise took part of the same, that he"—that is Christ—"through death might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Notice that the Bible says we were in bondage through the fear of death. Verse 14 says that the devil has the power of death, but this does not mean that the devil has power to kill and destroy at his pleasure.

That is not the interpretation of the passage. It means simply that the devil was the first introducer and seducer to sin. He brought death into the world by seducing Adam and Eve to sin. Thus, in John 8:44, our Lord says concerning Satan, "He was a murderer from the beginning." Satan tempts men to sin. It is not a sin to be tempted; even Christ was tempted. But when men yield to sin, Satan accuses and condemns them for it, then terrifies and frightens them with death. Our Lord tells us in Hebrews 2:15 that, for the child of God, He has delivered us from the fear of death.

Why do men fear death? The answer is simply because it is indeed an unknown experience. But there is another answer as well.

The answer is because we know that we are sinners. We know that we have sinned and violated God's law. We know that God's wrath is real and genuine, and that we must face the judgment of God. Even as believers, although we have been saved and our sins are forgiven,

we are embarrassed to think of our sins before God and wish that we had never committed them.

But think about an unbeliever, someone who does not know God. How miserable their lives must be and how terrifying their thoughts must be when they realize that they must die, face the wrath of a holy God, and give an account. Then they find that they are unwilling to do the first—that is, to die—and unable to do the second—that is, to give an account. No wonder men everywhere wish to dismiss this subject from their thoughts. No wonder no one likes to think about death.

No wonder we like to deny it. Yet the reality of death is on every hand. People die every day, and cemeteries are everywhere. Although many unbelievers would not tell you the truth, secretly their souls are probably tormented, and they must evidently be in perpetual anxiety.

But for the child of God, Scripture says that we have been delivered from the fear of death through the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is important to understand that we have been delivered from the fear of death, not necessarily from the actual experience of death. We must die physically, but we may die without fear. There is a great difference.

Fear brings bondage. The Bible tells us in Romans 8:15, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption.” “Whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” For the child of God, we have not received the spirit of bondage to fear. We have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry to our heavenly Father, “Abba.” The Hebrew word “Abba” means Papa, Father.

That is why the Bible tells us in Galatians 5:1, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” We have been delivered from the bondage of fear. We no longer have the fear of death.

He Is Our Guide Unto Death

We may not want to die, long to die, or even desire to die. Yet as believers, we should be unafraid to die. There is a difference. If I were to ask you how many of you want to die, raise your hands. Nobody is going to raise their hands. Nobody wants to die, yet we know we are going to die, and we may die unafraid.

He Is Our Guide Unto Death (Psalm 48:14)

Look again at Psalm 48:14, the passage that got my mind churning the other day: “For this God is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide, even unto death.” The first point today is this: He is our guide unto death.

Before commenting on the latter part of this verse, consider the first part: “For this God is our God forever and ever.” Which God is the psalmist referring to? He is the God revealed throughout Psalm 48. That is why I read the entirety of Psalm 48 earlier.

In verses 1 and 2, He is the great Lord and the great King, greatly to be praised, the One who is the joy of all the earth, whose habitation is pure holiness. In verse 3, He is the God who is our refuge. In verses 4 through 7, He is the powerful sovereign Lord who distresses kings and is beyond their control. He is the uncontrollable God who does as He pleases, only as He pleases, and always as He pleases.

None can thwart Him, stop Him, or hinder Him. He is the eternal, everlasting God whose decrees come to pass and whose purposes stand. He is full of lovingkindness, righteousness, and judgment, and He deserves all the praises of the earth. His city is secure, His stronghold is safe, and He shall endure forever.

We learn the truth of Proverbs 18:10: “The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous runneth into it and is safe.” This is the God who is our God forever and ever. He is immutable, the unchanging God, the One who has promised never to leave us or forsake us. Hebrews 13:5 says, “For I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.”

It is this God who is our guide even unto death. Do you realize that the child of God needs nothing more for this life than the confident assurance that the eternal God is our guide even unto death? We will never be forsaken by Him, nor placed in any position, circumstance, or situation without Him, His accompaniment, His person, and His power. Our sovereign God, by His own hand, will lead, guide, and direct us even unto death. What possible fear could arise?

Stop and think about this. I have a friend who will probably come up and visit. He lives down in Florida, is about six feet four or five inches tall, and is an ex-Marine—big and strong. If I were going into a bad part of town, I would want him to accompany me. I probably would not have too much to fear, because not many people would want to attack him or anyone near him.

If I would feel confident having that friend near me in a bad part of town, how much more confidence should I have in knowing that the sovereign God of heaven and earth is with me and has promised never to leave me nor forsake me? In Psalm 32:8, God has promised, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way that thou shalt go, I will guide thee with mine eye." He has told us in Psalm 37:23, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and he delighteth in his way."

Isaiah 30:21 says, "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when you turn to the right hand and when you turn to the left." What has God promised? He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. He is going to be our guide even unto death. David said in Psalm 48:14, "For this God is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide even unto death."

This God who is our God will not forsake us even when our family forsakes us. David said in Psalm 27:10, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." He will not forsake us even when our friends forsake us. Job said in Job 16:20, "My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God." Again, Job complained in Job 19:19, "All my inward friends abhorred me, and they whom I loved are turned against me."

Everyone knows about Job's afflictions, sufferings, and tribulations. Yet although Job's friends turned against him and his loved ones forsook him, God never forsook him. James 5:11 says, "Behold, we count them happy who endure. You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord that he's very pitiful and of tender mercy." God sustained and upheld Job through everything, and in the end He doubled everything that Job had at the beginning.

This God who is our God is not going to forsake us even if our family forsakes us, even if our friends forsake us, or even when the entire world forsakes us. In John 15:19 our Lord said, "If you were of the world, the world would love his own. But because you're not of the world, but I've chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

In His high priestly prayer, our Lord said concerning His own, "I pray for them. I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me out of the world, for they are thine." He will never leave us. He will never forsake us. Family may forsake us, friends may forsake us, and the entire world may forsake us, but He will never leave us or forsake us.

He has promised to be our guide even unto death. How will God guide us? He guides us by the counsels of His Word. We need to understand the Word, study the Scripture, and learn to apply the Scripture. He guides us by the counsel of His words, by the influences and promptings of the Holy Spirit of God, by providential interpositions, and by special help in times of trouble, trial, tribulation, and persecution.

He helps us by shedding light upon our path, opening our understanding, and lighting in our minds the things that are going on around us. Do you not remember that passage in James chapter 1? "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." He guides and leads us by giving us ministers and friends to rebuke us, reprove us, admonish us, teach us, and encourage us.

God guides and leads us in the smooth places, on the rough roads, in the turbulent seas, through the mountainous passages, and during

times of persecution and heartache. There is never a time when the child of God is left alone or left to himself. This God is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide even unto death. He never forsakes us. He never leaves us.

He Is Our Guide In Death (Psalm 23:4)

He is not only our guide unto death; He is our guide in death. Look at Psalm 23:4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." "For thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." Our God is not only our guide unto death; He is also our guide in death. He is with us. He never leaves us. He never forsakes us.

We must also remember that our Lord has already been through death. He has not only experienced it; He has conquered it. He knows the way through, and we must trust Him to lead us.

Interestingly, the grave is called the land of the shadows of death. When we speak of the shadow of death, it usually refers to the distresses people experience when they are under apprehensions of immediate death or approaching immediate death. In Scripture, they are called the terrors of the shadows of death. Look in your Bibles, since we are close there in Psalms. Go back to the book of Job, to Job chapter 10 and verses 21 and 22, and look at what Job said.

We are talking about the shadows of death. Job says, "Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death. A land of darkness as darkness itself and of the shadow of death without any order where the light is darkness." So he speaks about the shadow of death. Then turn over to Job 38 and look at verse 17, because God is asking Job some questions. He tells Job to gird up the loins of his mind and answer Him if he is a man and knows all these things. God asks him, "Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? Or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?"

I do not want you to raise your hand, but I do want to ask you a question. Have you ever read Pilgrim's Progress? If you have not, you need to. I remember the first time I ever read that book; I can

tell you exactly where I was. I was preaching in Birmingham, Alabama, and staying down in the basement of a private home. I had been reading that book, and after church was over that night, I finished it. It was about midnight, and I was still reading. When I came to the point where Pilgrim crossed that river and entered the Celestial City, I started shouting.

I woke the people up. I said, "Yes!" They asked, "Were you having trouble down there?" I said, "No, I was just having a Baptist fit. That's all there was to it."

I want to read you just a couple of paragraphs about Pilgrim and Hopeful entering the river, the river of death. You have to read the entire book. This is the portion where they are approaching the Celestial City, but they have to cross the river of death. Here it is: "Then they addressed themselves to the water and entering, Christian began to sink. And crying out to his good friend, Hopeful, he said, 'I sink in deep waters.'"

"The billows go over my head, all his waves go over me." Then said the other, "Be of good cheer, my brother. I feel the bottom and it is good." Christian answered, "Ah, friend, the sorrows of death have compassed me about, and I shall not see that land that flows with milk and honey." A great darkness and horror then fell upon Christian, so that he could not see before him. Hearing also, in a great measure, he lost his senses, so that he could neither remember nor orderly talk of the sweet refreshments he had met with in the way of his pilgrimage. All his words tended to show that he had horror of mind and heart, fearing that he should die in that river and neither obtain entrance at the gate.

Hopeful perceived that Christian was troubled by thoughts of the sins he had committed both since and before he began to be a pilgrim. He was also troubled with apparitions of hobgoblins and evil spirits, for ever and anon he would intimate such by his words. Hopeful had much to do to keep his brother's head above water. Sometimes Christian would be quite gone down, and then rise again, half dead. Hopeful endeavored to comfort him, saying, "Brother, I see the gate and men standing by to receive us."

But Christian answered, “It is you they wait for, for you have been hopeful ever since I knew you.” “And so have you,” said Hopeful. Christian replied, “Ah, brother, surely if I was right, he would now rise to help me. For my sins, he hath brought me into this snare and hath left me.” Hopeful said, “My brother, you have quite forgot the text where it is said of the wicked: ‘There are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm. They’re not in trouble like other men, neither are they plagued like other men.’ These troubles and distresses that you go through in these waters are no sign that God has forsaken you, but are sent to try you, whether you will call to mind that which heretofore you have received of his goodness and live upon him in your distresses.”

Christian was in a muse for a while. Hopeful added, “Be of good cheer, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.” Christian broke out with a loud voice, “Oh, I see him again. And he tells me, ‘When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.’” Then they both took courage.

"And the enemy was after that as still as a stone until they were gone over. Christian therefore presently found ground to stand upon. And so it followed that the rest of the river was but shallow. And so they got over safely." Wonderful. What a wonderful picture of death. And yet they got over safely. Look back carefully at Psalm 23:4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

"Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." In reality, Christians do not experience real death; we experience the shadow of death. Do you understand that a shadow is not reality? If I am standing in the shadow of a tree, am I in the tree? If I am standing in the shadow of the tip-topmost branches of that tree, am I in any danger of falling out of the tree? The answer is no, because the shadow is not the reality.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Jesus Christ has taken the sting out of death for us. Look at verse 54: "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. Watch, O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin

is the law. But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Who took the sting, or the stinger, from death? Jesus Christ did. We experience what is known as the shadow of death; we do not experience the sting of death. The Lord Jesus Christ has ripped the stinger out of death for His people.

As we turn back to Psalm 23, consider a quotation from Charles Haddon Spurgeon on verse 4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." "For thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." Spurgeon wrote: "'Yea, though I walk,' as if the believer did not quicken his pace when he came to die, but still calmly walked with God. To walk indicates the steady advance of a soul which knows the road, knows its end, resolves to follow the path, feels quite safe, and is therefore perfectly calm and composed."

The dying saint is not in a flurry. He does not run as though he were alarmed, nor stand still as though he would go no further. He is not confounded or ashamed, and therefore keeps to his old pace. He keeps walking. Death in its substance has been removed, and only the shadow of it remains. Someone has said that where there is a shadow, there must be a light somewhere, and so there is. Death stands by the side of the highway in which we have to travel, and the light of heaven shining upon him throws a shadow across our path. Let us rejoice that there is a light beyond. Nobody is afraid of a shadow, for a shadow cannot stop a man's pathway even for a moment. The shadow of a dog cannot bite. The shadow of a sword cannot kill. The shadow of death cannot destroy us. Let us not therefore be afraid, for “thou art with me.”

This is the joy of the Christian: “Thou art with me.” The little child out at sea in the storm is not frightened like all the other passengers on board the vessel. It sleeps in its mother's bosom. It is enough for it that its mother is with it. It should be enough for the believer to know that Christ is with him: “Thou art with me.” In having thee, I have all that I can crave. I have perfect comfort and absolute security. “Thou art with me.” I shall not fear.

There is no fear in death for the child of God. He is our guide unto death. He is our guide in death. Listen carefully: He is our guide through death. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow

of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."

He Is Our Guide Through Death

Christ did not bring us out of our sins to leave us in the penalty of our sins. He said of the Israelites in the Old Testament, He brought them out that He might bring them in. He brought them out of the bondage of Egypt that He might bring them into the promised land. Likewise, Christ has not brought us out from the world of sin and left us in wretchedness and to die. No, He brought us out that He might bring us in.

How could it be otherwise? Consider the theological implications of this statement. Turn to Isaiah 53, verse 11. I want you to see the absolute certainty, surety, and assurance given us in this verse. Christ died for His people. "He shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied."

"By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities." He shall see the travail of his soul. He shall—not he might, not he may, not he hopes—see the travail of his soul. Not one for whom our Lord died is going to be left in the valley of the shadow of death. He leads us up unto death, in death, but always through death, because He's going to see the travail of His soul.

Jesus Christ says, "My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." Verse 29 says, "My Father which gave them me is greater than all and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

I've never forgotten something that I heard years ago. I was coming through Atlanta, Georgia, from preaching somewhere, probably about one o'clock in the morning, and I was trying to stay awake. I was listening to the radio and found an old black preacher preaching on this text. When he said, "My Father which gave them me is greater than all. No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one," he said it only the way he

could say it: "When you are saved, you are in the hand of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is in the Father's hand. And no man can pluck you out of His hand."

He said, "God the Father won't pluck you out of His hand. God the Son won't pluck you out of His hand. God the Spirit won't pluck you out of His hand. And come to think of it, them's only three that can do any plucking anyhow." And that's the truth: "I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my Father's hand."

He shall see the travail of His soul. No one's going to pluck you out of His hand. In John 17:24, our Lord prayed in His high priestly prayer: "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world." What did our Lord just pray? He prayed for all whom the Father had given Him, all for whom He had died, that they might be with Him wherever He was.

How many of our Lord's prayers were unanswered? Zilch. Zero. None.

Here are the positive facts, and I could multiply these facts, but these three are sufficient: Christ shall see the travail of His soul. No one is able to destroy or pluck from His hand His own people. He has prayed that we would be where He is. It is impossible for the grave to hold us. It is impossible for death to hold us. We have to go through.

You have to remember that Jesus Christ is our head. We are His body. Hebrews 6:18-20 says, "That by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us. Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, which entereth into that within the veil, whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

Who is Jesus Christ? He is our hope. Jesus is our forerunner. He has already entered into the holiest of all within the veil. Since we are in His body, we certainly shall be with our head. Just as surely as

God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and just as surely as He is seated at the right hand of God, just as surely will His people be there.

Here is another reason why the grave cannot claim us and death cannot hold us. Revelation 1:18 shows us why. Our Lord says:

"I am he that liveth and was dead and behold, I'm alive forevermore. Amen. And have the keys of hell and death." Death does not even have the keys to its own house. The grave has been opened because Jesus Christ holds the keys. Our Lord always brings us through death. He is not only our guide unto death and in death, but through death.

Paul gives us assurance and certainty: "For we know"—we do not hope, think, or wonder; it is not a maybe—"that if our earthly house"—that is, this tabernacle, our body—"were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." If our physical bodies dissolve, we have a spiritual body. "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven," that is, with our heavenly body. "If so be that being clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle"—this earthly body—"do groan, being burdened. Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

"Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also has given us the earnest of his Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body"—a physical body—"we're absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We're confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, to be present with the Lord."

We understand and know that to leave this realm of earthly trouble and woe is to enter the realm of heavenly bliss, where time and trouble will be no more. We drop our earthly body only so that we may receive a heavenly body. Death for the child of God is no more than sleep—not that we sleep forever, never, never, never, but death is likened to sleep.

How many of you are fearful of going to sleep at night? You shouldn't be. Why should you be? Get out and work in the field all

day, and at night you will find that sleep is welcome relief for its rest. For the child of God, death is likened to sleep—a rest. We drop our earthly body, receive our heavenly body, and to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Scripture says that those who sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.

When it comes our time to die, when it comes our time to enter into the river of death, we may say with Isaiah in Isaiah 25:9, "And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God. We have waited for him and he will save us. This is the Lord. We have waited for him. We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Let me make a couple of applications. First, take comfort in the fact that we are never forsaken and never alone. Whatever we face in life or in death, Christ, who is our Comforter and our Guide, is always with us.

Applications: Comfort and Fearlessness

Therefore, we shall not fear. “I will fear no evil.” Why should you, when Christ, the sovereign God, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, God of Gods, is there with you? A homily against the fear of death, written in 1547, says:

“To fear no evil then in the valley of the shadow of death is a blessed privilege open to every true believer. For death shall be to him no death at all, but a very deliverance from death, from all pains, cares, and sorrows, miseries, and wretchedness of this world, and the very entry into rest, and a beginning of everlasting joy, a tasting of heavenly pleasures, so great that neither tongue is able to express, neither eyes to see, nor ear to hear them, no, nor any earthly man's heart to conceive them. And to comfort all Christian persons herein, Holy Scripture calleth this bodily death a sleep, wherein man's senses be, as it were, taken from him for a season, and yet when he waketh he is more fresh than when he went to bed. This is the bodily death, a door of entering into life, and therefore not so much dreadful, if it be rightly considered, as it is comfortable, not a mischief, but a remedy unto mischief, no enemy but a friend, not a cruel tyrant but a gentle guide, leading us not into mortality but to immortality. Not to sorrow and pain but to joy and pleasure and that to endure forever.”

"For this God is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide, even unto death." George Berger said: "This God is our God forever and ever. What a portion then is that of the believer? The landlord cannot save his fields. These are mine forever and ever. The King cannot save his crown. This is mine forever and ever."

These possessions shall soon change masters. These possessors shall soon mingle with the dust, and even the graves they occupy may not long be theirs. But it is the singular, supreme happiness of every Christian to say, and have a right to say, "This glorious God, with all His divine perfections, is my God forever and ever." Even death itself cannot separate me from His love.

If He be our God, He will be our guide, our faithful, constant guide, to show us our way and lead us in it, even unto death, which will be the period of our way and bring us into our rest. He will lead and guide us to the last. He will be our guide above death, guiding us so as to set us above its reach, so that it shall not be able to do us any real hurt. He will be our guide beyond death, conducting us safely to happiness on the other side of death, to a life where there shall be no more death.

If we take the Lord our God, He will conduct us and convey us safely to death, through death, and beyond death, down to death, and up again to glory.

In 1 Corinthians 3:21-23, the apostle says, "Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours. And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." The Sovereign God who has given us all things in Jesus Christ will not leave us to ourselves. He will bring us unto death, in death, through death, and beyond death, for He is King of kings, Lord of lords, and God of gods.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee, praise Thee, and thank Thee, Lord, that Thou wilt never leave us or forsake us. Thou art our guide even unto death, in death, through death, and beyond death, and we praise Thee. Help us to meditate upon these things and to be thankful. Help us to be fearless by trusting in Thee

and relying upon Thee through the grace and mercy that we find in Jesus Christ our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 13

The Perfect Enemy

May 9, 2014

In 1 Samuel 28:15-19, Samuel said to Saul, “Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?” Saul answered, “I am sore distressed, For the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore have I called thee that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.” Then said Samuel, “Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?”

“And the Lord hath done to him as he spake by me, for the Lord hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it unto thy neighbor, even to David. Because thou obeyest not the voice of the Lord, nor executes his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the Lord done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover, the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me. The Lord also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hands of the Philistines.”

Introduction: The Search for the Perfect Soldier

Governments are fighting in terms of time, resources, and materials to make the perfect soldier. There have been many movies concerning the universal soldier or robotic soldiers. Many have endeavored to make men into the most perfect fighting machine, either through drugs, electronics, or enhancement of some kind. Those of us who are a little bit older remember the TV series The Six Million Dollar Man. There have also been movies such as RoboCop, an individual who has been rebuilt and comes back with superhuman strength and abilities, as well as Superman.

Why all these movies about someone superhuman? Why are governments putting so much money and time into trying to make the perfect soldier? Because they want to develop what is known as the perfect enemy. The perfect enemy happens to be an undefeatable foe. He is the one who absolutely never fails, and he always wins.

The truth of the matter is this: There already exists a perfect enemy. Governments should immediately stop their tests and trials and save the taxpayers countless amounts of money, because the perfect enemy is none other than the sovereign God of heaven and earth.

The Perfect Enemy

God's Perfection in All He Is and Does

God our Heavenly Father is the most perfect being. There are no faults, blemishes, failures, imperfections, or disabilities in Him. He is perfect: entirely perfect, wanting nothing. His nature is perfect. The more simple and uncompounded any being is, the more perfect he is. God is Spirit, the most pure, simple, spiritual, and uncompounded being, and therefore He is the most perfect. No perfection is wanting in Him. He is the perfect Lord, the perfect Savior, and the perfect Redeemer. He is also the perfect enemy. Whatever God is, He is absolutely perfect. As God is perfect, so is His work. Whatever God does, He does absolutely perfectly.

For instance, Deuteronomy 32, verses 3 and 4, says, “Because I will publish the name of the Lord, ascribe ye greatness unto our God.

He is the rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." He is perfect, and His work is perfect. In Ecclesiastes 3:14, Solomon said, "I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him." If nothing can be put to it and nothing can be taken from it, obviously it is perfect. All of God's works are like God Himself: absolutely perfect.

Men seldom consider God an enemy, and they seldom consider Him the perfect enemy. Most people ignore God. The few who do not ignore Him curse and defy Him. Yet sooner or later, those who curse and deny Him will not only meet Him as an enemy; they will meet Him as the perfect enemy.

In 1 Samuel 28:16, our text, Samuel said, "Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?" Before proceeding any further, let me answer a question. Here is the answer: I don't know.

The Context: Saul and the Witch of Endor

Now the reason I said that is simple. If you look at the context of our text, Saul has gone to the witch of Endor. He has asked her to call up Samuel, and it was during this time that this word is spoken. Most people really want to know if the witch actually called up Samuel or if it was Satan deceiving Saul. Let me say it like this: if it was Samuel, the witch did not call him up. He would have been sovereignly sent of God to rebuke Saul. If it was Satan, then he was masquerading as Samuel.

Consider what 2 Corinthians 11 says concerning Satan: "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transferring themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel! For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works."

The scholars that I read—and I checked a number of them—are divided on the subject. There are some who actually think that this is Samuel, not that the witch called him up, but that God sovereignly

sent him. There are others who say, No, this is not Samuel, and they give their reasons, saying that this is Satan impersonating Samuel. The scholars are divided on the issue, and I must add that, in the study I did, there are pros and cons both ways. However, I think there is a passage that might indicate, in all possibility, that it was Satan masquerading as Samuel.

For instance, consider this passage: "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it, and inquired not of the Lord, Therefore he slew him and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse."

But I want you to note what they said here: "He also slew him for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit."

I understand that God could have sovereignly sent Samuel regardless of the witch, because the witch was surprised as well when she saw Samuel, and she immediately knew that Saul had deceived her. Yet Scripture is telling us that God slew Saul for this. In Leviticus 19:31, God condemns individuals who have familiar spirits, wizards, and witches.

The Bible tells us that Saul died for three transgressions. Notice these three transgressions: number one, his disobedience to God; number two, consulting a witch; and number three, failing to inquire of the Lord.

Go back to 1 Samuel 28:6: "And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." How can Scripture say that he did not inquire of the Lord when the Bible says that he did inquire? The explanation of this apparent discrepancy is found in the fact that inquiring of one who had a familiar spirit is absolutely forbidden in the Word of God. It is totally antagonistic to inquiring of the Word of God.

Moreover, Saul received no answer when he inquired of the Lord by dreams. First of all, dreams would be an immediate revelation to himself. Nor did he receive an answer by Urim, which would usually have been through the high priest who had the Urim and the Thummim and the Ephod. Then the Bible says, neither by

prophets—that is, no seer like Samuel or any other prophet had spoken the Word of God to him.

The fact that Saul supposedly inquired of the Lord but received no answer should first of all have humbled him, caused him to abase himself, and caused him to search himself to find out the reason and the cause why God would not speak to him. Scripture is telling us that God did not answer Saul either by ordinary means or by supernatural and extraordinary means. Saul had forsaken God, and therefore God justly forsook Saul.

Since God had become Saul's enemy, if it was truly Samuel who came up, what would make Saul think that Samuel could help him or would help him in any way whatsoever? Samuel was God's prophet. Samuel was God's man. If God was against Saul, obviously Samuel would have been against Saul as well. Now look again at 1 Samuel 28:16.

The Bible says, "Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord has departed from thee, and become thine enemy." Let me tell you what the word enemy means. It means enemy. It means adversary. It means a foe. Why did God become Saul's enemy? The answer is because Saul had become God's enemy.

Why God Became Saul's Enemy

You remember I told you that Saul died for three transgressions. One of them is named in 1 Samuel 15. God had sent Saul on a mission, and Saul was to utterly slay all of the Amalekites. Of course, he did not. He spared Agag, and the best of the oxen, and the best of the sheep. Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying, "It repented me that I have set up Saul to be king; for he has turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments." And it grieved Samuel, and he cried unto the Lord all night.

Saul had turned back, disobeyed, and rejected the word of the Lord, and God rightly rejected him. As Samuel turned about to go away, Saul laid upon the skirt of his mantle, and it rent. And Samuel said unto him, "The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine that is better than

thou. And also the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for he is not a man that he should repent." God had become Saul's enemy because Saul had become His enemy by disobedience, rebellion, and transgression.

It is true that everyone is an enemy of God by nature. We are enemies of God by sin, by depravity, and by our corrupt nature. The apostle Paul said in Romans 5:10, "For if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Notice what he said: "if when we were enemies." In Colossians 1:21, he said, "And you who sometimes were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now be reconciled."

So it is true, in a very general sense of the word, that all men, by nature, are the enemies of God. But it is quite different when someone is not only an enemy by nature, but exercises and displays a perpetual hatred for anything holy, righteous, and godly. This kind of enemy not only denies God, but seeks to displace Him and dethrone Him.

The Nature of God's Enemies

The kind of enemy we are talking about now is someone who is willing to be God Himself, but is not willing for God to be God. He will curse God, reproach God, and speak wickedly, arrogantly, and rebelliously against God. He constantly and consistently takes God's name in vain.

The Bible talks about this special kind of enemy. In Psalm 74:4, the psalmist said, "Thy enemies roar in the midst of thy congregation. They set up their enzymes for signs." What do God's enemies do? They roar in the midst of our congregation, that is, in the midst of God's people, and they set up their enzymes, or their standards, or their banners, for signs. "We're the rulers. We're the conquerors. We're the ones who are defying God." They are boastful, proud, and arrogant.

In Psalm 89:51, the Scripture says, "Wherewith thine enemies have reproached thee, O Lord, wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of thine anointed." God's enemies do not reproach His

people only; they reproach God as well. David said in Psalm 139:20, “For they speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain.”

Taking God's name in vain is more than using His name as a byword or speaking lightly and flippantly about God. Roderick Meredith wrote on the Ten Commandments, and this is what he said concerning the Third Commandment: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.” The Third Commandment deals with God's name, His office, His position, as the great sovereign ruler of the universe. Every name or title of God reveals some attribute of the divine character. In studying God's Word, we learn new facts about God's nature and character with each new name by which He reveals Himself. In other words, God names Himself what He is.

There are a multitude of names of God in the Bible: El Elyon, El Shaddai, Jehovah, Adonai, besides the Rock, the Shield, and all of these things. Each of these names of God reveals something about the character of God.

If men use the name of God in a way which denies the true meaning and character of God, they are breaking the Third Commandment. You do not have to curse and use God's name lightly and flippantly to violate it. All you have to do is represent God as something that He is not. When you talk about God being the mighty God, if you then refer to Him as someone who is not mighty, or act as if He is not mighty, that is taking the name of God in vain.

The word El Shaddai literally means the many-breasted one, or the all-sufficient one. If you try to act as if God is not the all-sufficient God, and live as if God is not the all-sufficient God, you're taking God's name in vain. You're representing God as being something that He is not. So He said, “Thine enemies take Thy name in vain.” Now I want you to know the fact: God does have enemies. His enemies may curse, reproach, and profane His name. They may fight, transgress, and rebel against His law. All of their fighting is useless and in vain. His enemies do not understand that they are fighting and rebelling against the perfect enemy, the sovereign God of heaven and earth.

Even as God's people, we must realize that God is the perfect enemy. Israel learned that the hard way. If possible, we should learn by observation and education and not by experience. Isaiah 63 and verse 10 says, “But they, that is Israel, rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit, therefore He was turned to be their enemy and He fought against them.” Can you imagine the sovereign God of heaven and earth fighting against you? I'm just simply pointing out that God fights against all those that fight against Him.

God as the Perfect Enemy: Six Attributes

I want you to consider with me today, very quickly, how God is the perfect enemy. First of all, God is the perfect enemy because He is always prepared. He cannot be caught off guard. There are no unguarded moments with Him. God has an armory and He selects His weapons for use against His enemies. Jeremiah 50 verse 25 says, “The Lord hath opened his armory and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation. For this is the work of the Lord God of hosts in the land of Chaldeans.”

The Lord hath opened his armory and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation. God has an armor, and He is always prepared. Psalm 7:11-13 says, “God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he, the wicked, turn not, he, God, will whet his sword. He, God, hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death.” He ordained his arrows against the persecutors. God is already prepared. He is always prepared.

Psalm 45:5 says, “Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies, whereby the people fall under thee.” God does not have to get prepared to fight. It does not matter where man goes to war or what battles he faces; there is always a period of preparation. God does not have to have a period of preparation. He is the perfect enemy because He is always prepared.

Secondly, God is the perfect enemy because He is all-powerful. That means He is omnipotent. Omnipotence speaks of God's power. Psalm 62:11 says, “God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God.” Power belongeth unto God.

Psalm 18:13-15 shows us the power of God: “The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the highest gave His voice. Hail stones and coals of fire. Yea, He sent out His arrows and scattered them, and He shot out lightnings and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen, the foundations of the world were discovered at thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils.” Notice, God has all power. Stephen Charnock, many years ago, an old Puritan, wrote a book on the attributes of God. If you do not have that book, you should get it.

Stephen Charnock said concerning God's omnipotence: “The power of God is that ability and strength whereby He can bring to pass whatever He pleases; whatsoever His infinite wisdom may direct, and whatsoever the infinite purity of His will may resolve. As holiness is the beauty of all of God's attributes, so power is that which gives life and action to all of the perfections of the divine nature. How vain would be the eternal counsels if power did not step in to execute them. Without power, His mercy would be but feeble pity. His promise is an empty sound. His threatening is a mere scarecrow.”

God's power is like Himself: infinite, eternal, incomprehensible. It can neither be checked, restrained, nor frustrated by the creature. Daniel 4:35 says, “He doeth according His will in the inhabitants of heaven and in the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand or say unto Him, What doest thou?” Power belongs to God and to God alone. There is not a creature in the universe that can have one atom of power except that which God delegates. God's power is not acquired, nor does it depend upon recognition of any other authority. It belongs to Him inherently.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, “God's power is like Himself, self-existent, self-sustained. The mightiest men cannot add so much as a shadow of increased power to the omnipotent one.” He sits on no bolstered throne and leans on no assisting arm. His court is not maintained by his courtiers, nor does it borrow its splendor from its creatures. He is Himself the great central source and originator of all power.

How can the finite prevail against the infinite? How can the enemy to whom God gives power prevail against Him who is the

owner and the possessor and the giver of all power? Do you remember how Jesus Christ stood silently before Pilate in John chapter 19? In verses 10 and 11, Pilate said to Christ, “Speakest thou not to me?”

“Knowest not that I have power to crucify thee, or power to let thee go?” Our Lord looked at him and said, “Thou couldst have no power at all, except it were given thee from above. Therefore, those who deliver me unto thee has the greater sin.” Pilate said, “I have power. I can do what I please.” Our Lord said, “You could have no power at all, except it were given thee from above.” The only reason any enemies of God have any power at all is because the sovereign, omnipotent God of heaven and earth allows them the puny, finite amount of power that they consider so great. The God who allows the power can disallow it. The God who gave the power can take the power. It is true.

“It is in Him that we live and move and have our being.” According to Psalm 66 and verse 9, it is God who holds our souls in life. He is the perfect enemy because He is the all-powerful enemy. He cannot be defeated or overthrown.

Third, He is the perfect enemy because He is all-knowing. That means He is omniscient. The omniscience of God refers to His complete and total knowledge of everything: everything possible, everything actual, and everything past, present, and future. Arthur W. Pink wrote, “God is omniscient. He knows everything: all events, all creatures, the past, the present, and the future.” He is perfectly acquainted with every detail in the life of every being in heaven, earth, and hell. He knoweth what is in the darkness. Nothing escapes His notice, nothing can be hidden from Him, and nothing is forgotten by Him.

Well may we say with the psalmist, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.” His knowledge is perfect. He never errs, never changes, and never overlooks anything. Neither is there any creature that is not made manifest in His sight; all things are naked and open under the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. The wicked cannot plan without God's knowledge of their plans. Every secret counsel that the enemy takes,

God already knows. How foolish, how stupid it is to fight against God.

You know what He said in Ezekiel 11 verse 5? “Listen, I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them.” You cannot even think without God knowing what you are thinking. David said in Psalm 139, verses 1–6, “O Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising. Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all of my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it all together. Thou hast set me behind Him before and laid Thy hands upon me.” Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high; I cannot attain unto it.

You remember what God said in Genesis 6 and verse 5? “And God saw the imaginations of the hearts of men that they were only evil continually.” There are no secret counsels against God. His omniscience cannot be curtailed or defeated. He is the all-knowing One. He is the perfect enemy, because He has all knowledge.

Fourthly, He is the perfect enemy because He is omnipresent. The omnipresence of God simply means that God is everywhere at one time in the totality of His person. There is not a place where God is not. How can you slip up upon or surprise someone who is everywhere? Besides the fact that He is omniscient, He already knows you are there, your thoughts, and what you are trying to do. There cannot be any surprise attacks against God. You cannot strike on His blind side, for He does not have a blind side. Since God is omnipresent, He is everywhere at once in the totality of His person. You cannot slip up upon God.

But the reverse is also true: you cannot hide from God. God knows exactly where you are. Psalm 139:7–12 says, “Whether shall I go from thy spirit, or whether shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall uphold me. If I say, Sure the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day. The darkness and the

light are both alike in thee." You cannot hide from God. The Bible says in Psalm 21:8, "Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies, and those that hate thee." You cannot slip up on God, and you cannot hide from God. God is omnipresent.

He's the perfect enemy. Micah 5 and verse 9 says, "Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, all of thine enemies shall be cut off." Notice what God said: all of thine enemies shall be cut off. You remember how, in the book of Revelation, the captains and the kings cried to the mountains, "Fall upon us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne"? It doesn't matter. Let the mountains fall upon you; you still cannot be hidden from God. He's the perfect enemy. He's omnipresent.

You can't slip up on Him. You can't attack His blind side, for He does not have one, but He knows exactly where you are and what you're doing at all times. He can find you.

Fifthly, God is the perfect enemy because He is eternal. God had no beginning and therefore He has no end. Listen carefully: the eternality of God is a comfort to His people and a terror to His enemies. Men fight and die in time and in history. God never dies. God is eternal. God created time. He existed before time, and He will continue to exist after time ceases. Since God is eternal, it means therefore He cannot die, and therefore He is unconquerable. It is impossible to kill God. It is impossible to dethrone God. It is impossible to overthrow God.

Psalm 73 is the psalm of Asaph. He is talking about how his feet were almost gone and his steps had well nigh slipped when he was envious at the foolish, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. He says, "For I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked, For there are no bands in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain, violence comforteth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with the fatness; they have more than their heart can wish. They are corrupt and speak wickedly concerning oppression. They speak loftily."

Now watch what the wicked do: “They set their mouth against the heavens and their tongue walketh through the earth.” They'll curse God and curse anybody else. “And they say, How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?” He says, “Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world. They increase in riches.” Now, look what He says.

“Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocence.” In other words, I have been doing what is right, biblical, and holy, and I have been suffering. Yet look at the wicked and how they prosper. “For all the day long have I been plagued and chastened every morning. If I said, I will speak thus, behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children.”

“When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I therein.” Surely, God has set the wicked in slippery places and cast them down into destruction. They are brought into desolation as in a moment, utterly consumed with terrors. They are as a dream when one awakens; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

The eternality of God ensures that His enemies will be eternally hated and despised by God, who is the perfect enemy. Let us suppose—not that this is true—that there were no hell, no torments, and no punishments. If every enemy of God, throughout eternity and every moment of every second, received only a fresh baptism in the eternal hatred and despisement of a holy, righteous, sovereign, omnipotent God, that would be hell in itself. To be eternally despised by God is hell.

Someone objects, “But God does not hate.” Yes, He does. The God of love hates perfectly. Psalm 5:4 says, “For thou art not a god that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight. Thou hatest all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing or lying. The Lord will abhor or hate the bloody and deceitful man.”

Those who die in their sins and in rebellion against God shall never cease being His enemies. The eternality of God means that He never ceases to be, yet all His enemies must die and face Him as the

perfect enemy. He will be their enemy throughout eternity. Sixthly, God is the perfect enemy because He is implacable.

He is incapable of being placated apart from Jesus Christ. The perfect enemy cannot be placated. He does not give mercy. He cannot be appeased or pacified. The perfect enemy is one who does his duty, doing that which is right and holy and just without hesitation. Do you know how God becomes the implacable, eternal enemy of men? Because they hate, despise, and reject His only begotten Son, who was the propitiation that God sent, and the only one who could placate, appease, and satisfy Him.

Romans 3:24–26 says, "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are passed through the forbearance of God, to declare, I say at this time, His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." The word propitiation means to appease, to placate, and to satisfy. Jesus Christ is the only one who could appease, placate, and satisfy the wrath and justice of God. But when Jesus Christ is spurned, refused, and rejected, there is no other sacrifice for sins.

The Bible says in Hebrews 10:26, "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." Those who reject and despise Jesus Christ have no other sacrifice for sins. He is the only one. Therefore, when those who reject Jesus Christ face God, their perfect enemy, He will be implacable. He cannot be appeased, satisfied, or pacified, for the only appeasement is found in Jesus Christ.

God is the perfect enemy because He is just. He is the just God. Deuteronomy 32:4 says, "He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He." He is perfect justice, and He issues it without apology. He will face His enemies and repay them to their face. Deuteronomy 7:9–10 says that the Lord is "the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations," and "repayeth them that hate Him to their face, to destroy them."

He will not be slack to him that hateth Him. He will repay him to his face. God is just, and God is implacable outside of Jesus Christ. He will give everyone exactly that which they deserve: that which they have worked for, earned, and merited. When they get it, they will wish they had mercy.

But God is just. In Isaiah 59 and verse 18, the Word of God says, "According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies. To the islands, He will repay recompense." God is just. We need to understand the truth of Hebrews 10 and verse 31, when Scripture declares, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God." It is exceedingly fearful to fall into the hands of a living God who is the perfect enemy. Whatever God is, He is perfect.

Application: Perfect Savior or Perfect Enemy

I want to make some applications. Turn to Psalm 2. I hope you can understand this passage now in light of what I have just preached to you. The truths explained and declared today should further elucidate Psalm 2, verses 1 through 4: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? 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 courts from us." In other words, let us rebel against God, do our thing, and hate God.

Verse 4 says, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision." I do not care how the wicked rant and rave, nor about their plans, schemes, and conspiracies. If the entire world, along with every demon out of hell, united in rebellion against the sovereign God of heaven and earth, it would occasion Him no uneasiness. He would simply laugh and see how foolish and stupid people and demons are to fight against the perfect enemy, who is undefeatable, unconquerable, and cannot be overthrown. God is the perfect enemy.

Men will either face God as the perfect Savior or the perfect enemy. God has provided salvation for His people, but He has also provided justice for His enemies. Each individual will bow to Him, either in salvation or damnation, but they will bow.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Even His enemies will bow and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, that Jesus Christ is the propitiation, the Savior, the Redeemer, and the Lord of glory. They will confess, but it will not do them one bit of good, because the sovereign God of heaven and earth, who is the perfect enemy, will give them justice and pay them to their face. Yet they will have to confess that they should have loved Him, served Him, honored Him, and worshipped Him.

I do not want any should-haves in my life. I want to do it. I want to honor Him, worship Him, glorify Him, and obey Him, because I desire and want Him as my perfect Lord and Savior, not as my perfect enemy. God is perfect, and everyone will face Him either as a perfect Savior or as a perfect enemy.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to You this day. We thank You for Your love, grace, mercy, goodness, and kindness. O Lord, show us who Thou art. Encourage us. How could we ever be fearful of man when we know that Thou art the perfect God and the perfect enemy to those who hate Thee and hate Thy people? May we trust in Thee, lean upon Thee, and glorify Thee through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 14

The Hope For The Southern Christian Cause Or Last Man Standing

February 10, 2016

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Kings 22:1-28 (KJV)

Introduction and Scripture Reading

> And they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel. And it came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah came down to the king of Israel. And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria? And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead? And Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses. And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four

hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear?

And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so. Then the king of Israel called an officer, and said, Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah. And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, having put on their robes, in a void place in the entrance of the gate of Samaria.

SCRIPTURE READING - 1 Kings 22:1-28 (KJV)

And all the prophets prophesied before them. And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron: and he said, Thus saith the Lord, With these shalt thou push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them. And all the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the king's hand. And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth: let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good. And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak. So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?

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 house in peace. And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil? And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord

> sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?
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> And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him. And the Lord said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also: go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the Lord hath spoken evil concerning thee. But Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah went near, and smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee? And Micaiah said, Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself.

The Hope for the Southern Christian Cause or Last Man Standing

"And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; and say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace. And Micaiah said, If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you."

The Principle of Hope

General Robert E. Lee said: "Everyone should do all in his power to collect and disseminate the truth, in the hope that it may find a place in history and descend to posterity. History is not the relation of campaigns, and battles, and generals, or other individuals, but that which shows the principles for which the South contended, and which justified her struggle for those principles."

I want to deal with what I am going to call the principle of hope. Everyone needs hope, and in one sense of the word, everyone has a hope. It may be a false hope, or it may be a hope without a foundation, but everyone basically has a hope. False hopes, like the

hypocrite's hope, are designed for failure and destruction. In the book of Job chapter 8 and verse 13 the Bible said, "So are the paths of all that forget God; and the hypocrite's hope shall perish."

Then in Job 27 and verse 8 the Bible says, "For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?" So a false hope does absolutely no one any good at all. The truth of the matter is Christians are the only ones that have a real genuine hope. The reason is that Romans 15 verse 13 tells us that our God is indeed the God of all hope.

Jesus Christ is the basis and the foundation of our hope. Hebrews chapter 6, beginning with verse 19, says, "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."

"Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." Now go back to verse 19: "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast." God has given us an anchor in the Lord Jesus Christ that is sure and steadfast. If there was ever a day that we needed hope, it is today, now in our time and age.

Consider the facts. Christianity is cursed, condemned, and castigated by most everyone. Our Christian culture is assailed, assaulted, and attacked. Our history and heritage are under constant, continual, and consistent revision and rewriting. Even the Confederate battle flag is defamed, despised, and destroyed. The liberals, leftists, progressives, communists, fascists, and Marxists seem to be enjoying their program of destruction and devastation.

Political correctness and hatred for anything that reeks of freedom, liberty, independence, character, and common sense seem to be advancing, not just daily, but hourly. If you want to be discouraged, depressed, downtrodden, and downhearted, all you have to do is look around at the circumstances. It is at such a time as this that we need the truth of God's Word.

Look in your Bibles to Romans chapter 4 at the hope Abraham had, and note how this hope was absolutely contrary to circumstances, situation, and sight. God had promised Abram and Sarah a child. Abram was 100 years old, and Sarah was 90. Romans

4:17 says, "As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations, before him whom he believed, even God."

Now watch: "who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." God says things that do not exist, He calls as if they already exist; only God can do that because God is all-powerful, and God did bring them into existence. Verse 18 says of Abraham, "who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be."

“And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.” If Abram had wanted to look at circumstances, all he had to do was look at himself and his wife. Yet he knew that God had promised him a son.

The Bible said he hoped against hope. In other words, he knew that whatever God promised, God was able to perform. That is certainly true. I want to inject a little biblical hope into your life based upon the truth of God's Word. All is not lost. The wicked do not win. Truth will not always be on the scaffold while lies are seated upon the throne. God still reigns; He is still sovereign, and He is controlling everything. As I have said before, everything is going wrong just right.

The Word of God says in Psalm 76:10, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.” Only enough evil and wickedness will ultimately redound to God's honor and glory; that which will not redound to His honor and glory He will restrain.

The context of this message of hope lies in a web of deceit, dastardly deeds, and destruction. In 1 Kings chapter 22, Ahab was on the throne in the kingdom of Israel.

The Context of Deceit and Wickedness

Ahab was the vilest, wickedest king in the Northern Kingdom period. No one excelled him in wickedness. The Bible says in 1 Kings 21:25, "But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." True, Jezebel stirred him up, but he was the one who did it. The Bible said he sold himself to work wickedness.

Ahab was a tyrant, a murderer, a blasphemer, an idolater, and a pervert. His programs, his lust, and his desires showed that he had no real interest in the people; he believed that the people existed only so that they might serve him. The description of Ahab makes you think of our modern-day politicians, does it not? There are so many parallels between Ahab and modern-day politicians that it is mind-boggling.

To make matters worse, in 1 Kings 22 Ahab was joined by godly Jehoshaphat, king of the Southern Kingdom. Jehoshaphat not only compromised but sinned in joining affinity with Ahab, and he was thoroughly rebuked for his sin. In 2 Chronicles 19:1-2, the Bible says, "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 was thoroughly, absolutely rebuked. Jehoshaphat did not escape with just a rebuke. He suffered, and so did his children and his grandchildren. That is a different message, but it does prove that we reap exactly that which we sow.

The interesting thing about Jehoshaphat in 1 Kings 22 is that, at one point, he exhibited sound understanding and judgment, while at another instance he seemed almost completely insane. You have to understand that compromise with evil does indeed rob one of common sense. When we compromise with evil, we lose.

In context, Ahab wants to reconquer and possess Ramoth-gilead. The Syrians had captured it and controlled it, but Ramoth-gilead originally belonged to the children of Israel. In fact, it was a city of refuge. Joshua 21:38 says, "And out of the tribe of Gad, Ramoth in

Gilead with her suburbs, to be a city of refuge for the slayer; and Mahanaim with her suburbs."

Ahab wants Jehoshaphat to help him, asking, "Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?" He then asks, "And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Wilt thou go with me to battle to Ramoth-gilead?"

Watch what silly, stupid Jehoshaphat said: "I am as thou art, my people as thy people, my horses as thy horses." Spiritually speaking, neither Jehoshaphat nor his people were like Ahab and his people. At this time, Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah were still true to the covenant and still true

Jehoshaphat's Foolish Agreement and the False Prophets

Jehoshaphat had turned to the one living God who had revealed Himself, the Lord Jesus, or Yahweh as He is known in the Old Testament, while Ahab and the Northern Kingdom were idolaters. So when Jehoshaphat says, "I am as thou art," he is not; and when he says, "My people as thy people," they were not. He may have counted horses, but he could not truthfully say that he and the people of Judah were just like Ahab and the people of Israel. Our forefathers knew that we were a different people.

There has always been a difference between the people in northern England and southern England—not New England, but England, from which many of our people came. Consequently, many folks from northern England settled in the northern colonies, while many southern Englanders, a lot of them of Scots-Irish descent, settled in the South. They were two totally different groups of people.

It is interesting that Robert E. Lee and some others referred to the folks in the North as "those people." All he was acknowledging was that there was indeed a difference. When I use the word Yankee, understand that it does not refer to everyone who lives in the North. Originally, it referred to the New England states. Moreover, it refers to someone with the mentality of humanism, greed and corruption, tyranny, and despotism. When you think of a Yankee, you can think

of the Clintons. They may not live in the New England states now, though they did have a place in New York. You can think of all those people because they are Yankees in that sense of the word.

You must also understand that many people in the North were Copperheads who sympathized with the South and were actually on the side of the South. But the point is simple: there is still a very real difference between the North and the South. A Bible-believing Southerner is not anything like a humanistic Northerner who hates God or the Word of God. We certainly have nothing in common with Washington, D.C., and many people in the North have nothing in common with Washington, D.C. One of the problems we have had in the South is this.

A lot of Southerners have been reconstructed. They've come to think like a Yankee and to desire what they desire. So, I made up my mind a long time ago: I will not be reconstructed. I will not deny my faith. I will not deny my ancestry, my history, or my heritage. By the grace of God, I am not like those humanists, and by His grace, I never will be. You have to make up your mind that, as a Christian, you're not going to be like that. You will have to persevere in that difference, and you must maintain your biblical and even your cultural heritage and history.

It was interesting that Jehoshaphat said, "I am as thou art and my people as thy people." What Jehoshaphat should have done first was consult with the Lord, but he did not.

Now that he has agreed to help Ahab, he asked, looking in verse 5, "And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray thee, at the word of the Lord today. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." So he said, "Somebody inquire of the Lord." Why did he not inquire of the Lord before he consented to go with Ahab? But he did not.

Now, of course, here is what has happened. All of these prophets, all of these state prophets, state preachers, are saying, "Hey, go up, go up, go up. You're going to have victory." Jehoshaphat noticed

something was wrong. Verse 7 says, "And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him?" The false prophets were using another name for God; they were not using the covenant name of God. Jehoshaphat recognized this. He recognized that these were not God's preachers. So he asks, "Is there not here a real prophet of God that we might inquire of Him?"

Ahab's Hatred for Micaiah

Look in verse 8: “And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so.”

Notice that Ahab says, “There is yet one man,” just one. What happened to all the others? Why is there just one prophet of God in the entire northern kingdom? The answer is that Ahab and Jezebel had either expelled them or murdered them. In 1 Kings 18:4 we read, “For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.” Here are a hundred who have been hidden by Obadiah, but notice that Jezebel “cut off the prophets of the Lord.”

In 2 Kings 9:7, Jehu is being anointed king of Israel in order that he might wipe out Ahab and his crew. God says, “And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel.” So they murdered them—murdered them.

Notice also, back in 1 Kings 22, the unhidden anger, hatred, and malice exhibited toward Micaiah. In verse 8, “And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him.” He not only announced his hatred of Micaiah publicly; he announced that hatred to Jehoshaphat, who had asked for the prophet of God. So Ahab could care less. Who knew that he hated God and he hated God’s prophet?

Listen carefully: Our enemies not only hate our history, our heritage, our culture, our flags, our monuments, and our symbols. They hate us. The Southern Poverty Law Center, which is not Southern by any stretch of the imagination, and in no word and no wise are they in poverty, will list anything that is Southern and anything that is Christian and label us as morbid, hateful, racist maniacs.

We're hated for who we are and what we represent. It is impossible to have a new world order as long as you have a people who believe in liberty, freedom, independence, states' rights, and historic biblical Christianity. We are a hindrance to them, a roadblock to them, standing in their way. And they hate us.

It should not shock or surprise us, because our Lord said in Matthew 10:22, “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake.” It should be counted an honor to be hated by those who hate Jesus Christ and the truth.

Look back at verse 8. After Ahab expresses his unhidden and undeniable hatred for Micaiah, he tells us why: “And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him,” and here is why, “for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.” He said, “I hate him because he never prophesies anything good concerning me.”

How could anyone prophesy or speak well of, about, or concerning an absolutely, positively evil man? Remember, he had sold himself to work evil more than anyone else, and there is a curse upon such. Isaiah 5:20 says, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” So how could he speak good of Ahab? How could he prophesy good concerning Ahab?

How many of you could speak good or prophesy good things concerning our modern-day politicians who have violated their oaths, sold their souls, dishonored their marriage vows, perverted their lives, destroyed the Republic, enslaved our people, and denied our history and heritage? There might be one or two, or three or four

at the most, about whom we could say a few good things. But as a whole, could we speak well of them at all?

Jehoshaphat's Silence and Micaiah's Mockery

Most condemn themselves by their own unfaithfulness and by their greediness. Interestingly, Jehoshaphat, who was a godly man, let a perfect opportunity to set the record straight slip by him. After Jehoshaphat had asked for Micaiah, Ahab said concerning him, “But I hate him, for he doth always speak evil concerning me. He never prophesies anything good concerning me.” All Jehoshaphat said was, “Let not the king say so.” He should have said, “Do not talk like that.”

What Jehoshaphat should have done was stick his finger in Ahab’s face and say, “Let me tell you something, you reprobate. God is the one true and living God, and Micaiah is a representative. Do not talk against Micaiah, and do not talk against God.” He should have done that, but he did not. All he did was simply say, “Let not the king say so.” He missed a perfect opportunity to set the record straight.

Silence is consent. Silence is betrayal. Consider Psalm 50, beginning at verse 16. God says to the wicked: “But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee.” Then God says, “When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers.”

How can a man consent to thievery or be a partaker with adulterers if he is not actually committing adultery or stealing? The answer is that he sees it, knows it, and says absolutely nothing. He sins by silence, and his silence is a betrayal of the truth. When Ahab says, “There is yet one man,” Jehoshaphat says, “I still want him.”

In verse 9, the king of Israel called an officer and said, “Hasten hither Micaiah the son of Imlah.” How did Ahab know where this prophet of God was? Did not the Holy Spirit lead these people hither and yon? Of course He did. When Elijah confronted Obadiah, he said, “Go find thy master and tell him Elijah’s here.” Obadiah answered, “Oh, no.”

He said, “The Lord may take you some other place. And when I come back with Ahab, he'll kill me because you're not here.” “No, no.” He said, “I'm going to show myself to him today.” How did Ahab know exactly where Micaiah was? And how could Ahab get him to Jehoshaphat promptly?

Here is the answer. Look in verses 26 and 27. Verse 26, 1 Kings 22: “And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace.” Carry him back. He was already in prison. He had him in prison. He knew where he was because he had thrown him in prison himself. Now he sends him back with more afflictions.

When they sent to get Micaiah, the man who went after him—look in verse 13—said, “And the messenger that was gone to call Micaiah spake unto him, saying, Behold now, the words of the prophets declare good unto the king with one mouth. Let thy word, I pray thee, be like the word of one of them, and speak that which is good.”

In other words, be politically correct. Tell him what he wants to hear. Give him good news. Do not be someone who rocks the boat or stirs up trouble. Verse 14 says, “And Micaiah said, As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak.”

After that, Micaiah came into the presence of Ahab. When Ahab asked him a question, Micaiah mocked and insulted him. “So he came to the king. And the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear? And he answered him, Go, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king.” He said this in such a way that Ahab knew he was mocking him. “And the king said unto him, How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?”

Ahab got the message. You cannot honor a dishonorable man. It is true that we must honor the office of authority because it is established by God, but you cannot honor a dishonorable man who is in that office and who is indeed a tyrant and a pervert. Ahab

understood this mockery, sarcasm, and insult, and so he adjured him, saying, “Tell me nothing but the truth.”

There were prophets of God who did indeed mock kings who were perverts and tyrants. In 2 Kings chapter 3, you have the king of Edom, the king of Judah, which was Jehoshaphat, and the king of Israel, who by this time was Jehoram, the son of Ahab. They were going to make war against Moab, but they ran out of water and thought they were all about to die. “But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by him? And one of the king of Israel’s servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah. And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the Lord is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.”

“And Elisha said unto 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.” Get to Baal. Go to those Baalistic prophets. “And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the Lord hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab. And Elisha said, 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.”

Let me spell it out for you. Here is what he told King Jehoram: “If you were on fire, I would not spit on you, I would let you burn up. The only reason I’m gonna do anything is because of Jehoshaphat.” He does not honor a dishonorable man. Obviously, if you are going to honor someone, they have to be honorable as well. Now, if you go back to 1 Kings 22, watch verse 16. “And the king said

Ahab said unto Micaiah, “How many times shall I adjure thee that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord?” I laugh every time I read that verse because in my mind I can hear Micaiah saying, “You want the truth? You can’t handle the truth. I’ll tell you the truth and you won’t even believe me. God is gonna kill you. God’s gonna wipe you off the face of the earth. He’s had enough of your perversion, your blasphemy, your idolatry, and your tyranny. You’re going to die.” He did tell him that.

"And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son; And say, Thus saith the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace." Micaiah said, "If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me. And he said, Hearken, O people, every one of you."

The Last Man Standing

Ahab said, "There's one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah," the last man standing. One man, and one man only, who stood and spoke the truth ended the tyranny and the wickedness of Ahab and his government. Stop and think about that one man.

Ahab said something very true in verse 8, though he probably did not realize it: "And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah." Micaiah was a man. He was a fighter, a champion of the cause, and a servant. The Hebrew word for man here means not only a man distinguished from a woman, but also a champion and a servant. The name Micaiah literally means "who is like God." Micaiah, then, was a servant of the Most High God. He was a fighter and a champion.

When Ahab said there was one man, the number one in Hebrew means one, just one. It is the same word used in the Shema Israel in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord." Micaiah was a singular man.

He was alone, and yet he stood for truth and righteousness. He stood when no one else would stand or could stand. It is kind of like when God said concerning John the Baptist in John 1 and verse 6, "There was a man." Micaiah was a man who was willing to forsake all for the cause. He was willing to walk away from everything and willing to suffer. One of our problems is that we are too materialistic.

We tend to think that things will make us happy, satisfied, complete, and successful. But the truth of the matter is this: We brought nothing into this world with us, and we are not going to carry anything out of this world with us either. It is not things. Life is more than raiment. Life is more than food. Life is more than things.

Micaiah was a man who was willing to be in prison for the faith and for the sake of the truth.

Prison holds no stigma for you if you are in prison for the right reasons. The biggest thing against prison is the stigma that you are a jailbird, that you have been in prison. There is not a person in this room that wants to go to prison. I do not want to go to prison. But when you stop and think, John the Baptist was in prison, our Lord was arrested and in prison, and the Apostles were in prison. The Apostle Paul was in prison I do not know how many times. In fact, he wrote Timothy in 2 Timothy 1 and verse 8 and said, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner."

Then he goes on to say, "but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God." So if Timothy is a partaker of the afflictions, he might get in prison as well. There is no stigma to being in prison if you are there for the right reason. You look at all the Confederate soldiers who were imprisoned in Elmira, Point Lookout, and many other northern prisons. Yet they were there not because they were fighting to preserve slavery, but because they were fighting for independence and states' rights and actually defending their homeland.

Micaiah was a man who was willing to suffer. He spoke the truth even though he was sent back to prison and fed with the bread of affliction and with the water of affliction. Like Nathan Bedford Forrest, when Micaiah spoke, it could not be misunderstood. And so he said, "If you come back in peace then the Lord has not spoken by me. You are not coming back Ahab, at least not alive, you will be dead."

Our generation would do well to heed the words of Robert L. Dabney, an eminent theologian, scholar, author, pastor, and chief of staff to Stonewall Jackson. Speaking to the students at the commencement of Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia on June 15, 1882, Dabney addressed those who wanted to bury the past:

Principles Do Not Die

"It behooves the New South in dismissing the animosities of the past to see to it that they retain all that was true in its principles or ennobling in its example. There are those pretending to belong to this company who exclaim, 'Let us bury the dead past. Its issues are all antiquated and of no more practical significance. Let us forget the passions of the past. We are a new world. Its new questions alone that concern us.' I rejoin or answer, be sure that the former issues are dead before you really bury them. There are issues that cannot die without the death of the people, of their honor, their civilization, and their greatness.

"Take care that you do not bury too much while burying the dead past, that you do not bury the inspiring memories of the great patriots whose actions, whether successful or not, are the eternal glory of your race and section, the influence of their virtues, the guiding precedents of their histories. Will you bury the names and memories of a Jackson and Lee and their noble army of martyrs? Will you bury true history whose years are those of the God of truth?"

Let me mention something: principles do not die, and principles do not have funerals. Do you realize that the issues we are facing and fighting against today in this country are exactly the same issues our Confederate ancestors fought against from 1861 to 1865, and the same issues our colonial ancestors fought against in 1776? Nothing has changed.

It is still about liberty, independence, and freedom, against tyranny and despotism. The issues are still the same. The Christian cause and the Southern cause are all rolled into one. The North sarcastically gave the South the title "the Bible Belt" because we adhered to Scripture. It was a term given to us in mockery. Although not everybody in the South is a Christian, and certainly not everybody believes the Bible, historically there have been more godly people in the South than in the North. While the North went into transcendentalism, rationalism, and humanism, we stayed with Scripture. One of the problems we have in the South now is that a lot of Southern people have been reconstructed.

The Need for Men

They have learned to think like the humanists and like those who disbelieve Scripture. Thus, the problem in the Christian cause and in the Southern cause is exactly the same: We do not have men who are fearless and unafraid, men who will stand and speak the absolute truth and let the chips fall where they may. We do not have men willing to sacrifice, suffer, and die. We do not have men like Lee and Jackson, Ewell and Stuart; we do not have men like Micaiah, Elijah, and Elisha. Where are the men? Look at Europe. All the women are being raped and robbed, nobody is doing one thing, and it is coming here to America.

Listen to what Robert E. Lee said. The words he spoke in the past are just as true today. He was talking then about the war of northern aggression, but apply them to our truth and our situation today: “Our country demands all of our strength, all our energies. To resist the powerful combination now forming against us will require every man at his place. If victorious, we have everything to hope for in the future. If defeated, nothing will be left for us to live for. My whole trust is in God and I'm ready for whatever He may ordain. At present, I am not concerned with results.”

"God's will ought to be our aim, and I am quite contented that His designs should be accomplished and not mine." The truth is this: "The march of providence is so slow and our desires so impatient. The work of progress is so immense and our means of aiding it so feeble. The life of humanity is so long and that of the individual so brief that we often see only the ebb of the advancing wave and are thus discouraged."

"We must expect reverses, even defeats. They are sent to teach us wisdom and prudence, to call forth greater energies, and to prevent our falling into greater disasters. It is history that teaches us to hope."

Principles do not die. Principles do not have funerals. E. Benjamin Andrews, who was the president of Brown University and himself a Yankee veteran, said this: "The question of greatness is a relative thing, and we in America—but if any American father were asked which of our great men he would most want his own son to

resemble, that father, if he were wise, would be compelled to answer Robert E. Lee." That is amazing coming from a Yankee soldier. Micaiah was the last man standing. Will you be the last man standing? Will you be the Micaiah, the Lee, the Jackson, the Ewell, the Stuart?

Conclusion and Prayer

Why should we trade our manhood, our history, our heritage, and our truth for a bowl of governmental humanistic pottage? What we need in the South, in the North, in the East, and in the West is men—men who are faithful, who believe the Scriptures, and who stand for truth and righteousness; men who will not put up with wickedness and ungodliness; men who will stand determined, will fight, and fight in faith and in obedience to the Word of God.

We need to pray that God would give us men. God uses little things and is pleased sometimes to use single men. He used Noah. He used Daniel. He used John the Baptist. You have heard it said, "God and one man is a majority." That is really not true. God is a majority in Himself, but He is pleased to use men, and He can use one man. Do you realize there is hope in this country as long as God is on the throne and there is one man standing?

God can use that one man to bring down the corruption and the wickedness and the perversion, just like He used Micaiah to bring down Ahab and his kingdom.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. And Lord, we admit, confess, and acknowledge how desperately we need men in this country. That You would make us men and fill us with divine integrity and virtue. Make us faithful. Make us godly. Make us holy. Make us submissive. Make us more conformed to Your Word. Help us to honor Thee in all that we say and do. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 15

Disasters, Repentance And A Fig Tree

December 18, 2016

Introduction: Disasters and Divine Sovereignty

In Luke chapter 13, notice, beginning with verse 1: “There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

“He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of the vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down. Why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung

it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

Did you hear about the cruise ship in China? Divers on June the 2nd of this year pulled three people alive from a capsized cruise ship and searched for other survivors. The media said there was small hope, and they still had over 400 missing people.

The worst natural disaster in history would be the central China floods that took place from July to August 1931, when the Yangtze River overflowed and caused a series of floods. An estimated 3.7 million people died from drowning, disease, or starvation. The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration said more than 51 million people were affected at that time—one-fourth of China.

The worst cyclone ever recorded was the Bhola cyclone, which struck East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, and India's west side on November the 12th, 1970. Flooding much of the low-lying parts, it caused approximately 500,000 deaths. From one cyclone.

Everyone remembers December the 26th, 2004, when that 9.3 earthquake hit the west coast of Sumatra, Indonesia. It sent a tsunami, and they have finally reached an estimate of nearly 231,000 people killed in that tsunami.

We all talk about natural disasters and usually are shocked by them. We refer to them as natural disasters because they are weather related and happen globally. Yet, in the strictest sense, every one of these disasters is divinely ordained. Absolutely nothing happens by accident in a world ruled by the sovereign God of heaven and earth. He controls the weather and everything else. He does it in floods, droughts, and plagues.

Job 37, verses 9 through 13, says: "Out of the south cometh the whirlwind: and cold out of the north. By the breath of God frost is given: and the breadth of the waters is straitened. Also by watering he, that is God, wearieth the thick cloud: he scattereth the bright cloud: And it is turned round about by his counsels: that they, that is the clouds, may do whatsoever he commandeth upon the face of the world in the earth. He causeth it to come, either for correction, or for his land, or for mercy."

So Job 37 tells us that God has absolute control of the weather. Now Amos chapter 4 reveals that not only weather-related judgments, but all other kinds of judgments, are under the hand of God as well. In fact, in Amos chapter 3 and verse 6, Amos asked these questions: “Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? And shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?” The evil there, of course, is talking about the disasters. So when you look at Luke chapter 13 and verse 1, you can understand, in one sense, the natural inquisitiveness about this disaster. Look at verse 1.

The Galileans Slain by Pilate (Luke 13:1-3)

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. This evidently was a very recent occurrence, and the people were shocked by what Pilate had done—or were they? They certainly wanted Christ to know about this incident.

Galilee was in the northern kingdom, above Samaria. The Sea of Tiberias, or the Sea of Galilee, was the scene of many episodes in the New Testament. Why, then, were these Judeans telling Jesus Christ specifically about these Galileans? Why would Pilate murder them? The Galileans were under the jurisdiction of Herod, not Pilate. When they came into Judea, into Jerusalem, and into Pilate's jurisdiction, he killed them, mingling their blood with the blood of the sacrifices they were offering.

Why would Pilate do that? Pilate and Herod were enemies; they did not get along. Pilate took advantage of these Galileans when they came into his jurisdiction. He could have slaughtered them out of spite toward Herod. Moreover, he could have suspected them of some crime, or framed them for some crime, and then murdered them. The Galileans were pretty well known as a wicked people.

Through their mutual hatred and persecution of Jesus Christ, Pilate and Herod became friends. Hold Luke chapter 13, but look in your Bibles to Luke 23. Evidently, many individuals have been reconciled to each other through the persecution of Christ, or Christians and Christianity in general. Luke chapter 23, verse 1:

"And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him, that is Jesus Christ, unto Pilate."

They began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King." Pilate asked Him, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" He answered, "Thou sayest it"—tantamount to our saying, "You said it, buddy." Pilate then said to the chief priests and the people, "I find no fault in this man." But they were more fierce, saying, "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place."

When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean. As soon as he knew that Jesus belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself was also at Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad, for he had long desired to see Him, because he had heard many things of Him and hoped to see some miracle done by Him. He questioned Him in many words, but Christ answered him nothing. The chief priests and scribes vehemently accused Him. Herod and his men of war set Him at nought, mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate. The same day Pilate and Herod became friends, having previously been enemies. They became friends over the persecution of Jesus Christ.

When we return to Luke 13:1, we must ask why this incident was so important to the inhabitants of Jerusalem: "There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." Why would these Judeans tell Jesus Christ about this incident? Why would they even think that it would excite or interest Christ?

Now, remember carefully that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, which is in Judea, in the southern kingdom. Where was He raised? In Nazareth. Do you happen to know where Nazareth is? Nazareth is in lower Galilee, in the northern kingdom, above Samaria. Thus, although Christ was born in Bethlehem, He was a Judean, in the tribe of Judah and in the country of Judea, but He was actually raised in Nazareth in Galilee. Jesus Christ is a Galilean.

Now you have to ask yourself this question: Were these individuals taking a swipe at Jesus Christ? Were they insinuating that Christ might be wicked, like those people whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices? Or could they have been trying to infuriate Christ and make Him react in a revolutionary manner? Remember, He was from Herod's jurisdiction and not from Pilate's jurisdiction.

Do you know that Jesus Christ had at least one disciple who was a zealot? Luke 6:15 says, "Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes." The zealots were a people with an insurrectionary and revolutionary movement against the Roman Empire, and one of these zealots was a disciple of Jesus Christ, one of the twelve. Were they then trying to infuriate Jesus Christ against the Romans? I do not know.

I will give them the benefit of the doubt. Let us say that these people were genuinely shocked at what Pilate had done and that there was no ill intent in conveying this information to Jesus Christ. Let us suppose that they were endeavoring simply to inform Christ about what had recently happened. Yet in informing Christ, there was an obvious implication and assumption on their part.

Look at verse 1 again: "There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." They displayed the tendency to think that those who suffer catastrophic deaths are greater sinners than others and deserve what befell them. To show that this was their assumption, notice our Lord's answer in verse 2: "And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?"

In other words, they surmised that wicked things happened to wicked people. These Galileans, they assumed, were exceedingly wicked; therefore, this catastrophic event happened to them. The fact that these men had been slain in this manner seemed to prove that they were very great sinners. Since they knew that Galileans had a tendency to be wicked, they assumed that these were very, very wicked individuals and therefore deserved such a devastating death.

We have to remember that extraordinary afflictions and judgments do not always, and are not always, the punishment of extraordinary sins. Extraordinary punishments are not always the punishment for extraordinary sins. Our Lord assured them that it was not right to draw such a conclusion respecting these men. The fact that these individuals came to a sudden and violent death was not, and is not, proof that they were, and are, peculiarly wicked.

The same thing happens today. Just because the plane crashes and four or five hundred people are killed does not mean that those people were exceedingly wicked. Just because someone gets blown up by a bomb does not mean that those individuals were exceedingly wicked. No, not at all. Our Lord said, "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?" Watch His answer: "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

Our Lord is saying that sinners—all sinners, every kind of sinner, big sinner, little sinner, great sinner, and not-so-great sinner—everyone needs to repent.

Repentance is the Greek word metanoia, which literally means a change of mind. If I am heading east and repent, I turn and head west; I am going in the opposite direction. If I repent, I change my mind about God, Christ, sin, and obedience. In other words, I go in the opposite direction from that in which I was headed before. Our Lord says, "Unless you repent, you shall likewise perish."

It is like those Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, who turned to God from idols to serve the one true and living God. They were heading toward the idols, but they repented, turned from the idols to the one true, living God, and then served Him.

This will become apparent shortly. In verse three, our Lord says, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Our Lord is saying this specifically to these Judeans. They said, "Did you hear about these Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices?" Our Lord said, "Do you think that these men were sinners exceedingly? Do you think they were very, very wicked people and they deserve such a thing? I tell you, no, but except you repent, you shall likewise perish."

Five Implications of Jesus' Response

Let me give you five implications of what our Lord has said here. The first is this: repentance is the only solution to perishing. If one does not repent, he perishes. There is no alternative. It is either repent or perish. If an individual does not repent, he is going to perish.

Secondly, to perish means far more than just to die. The word perish literally means to declare that one must be put to death, to be lost, to be ruined, to be destroyed, or, metaphorically, to be given over to eternal misery in hell.

Thirdly, he states clearly that unless these Judeans repented, they would likewise perish. The word likewise literally also means in like manner. So he says, “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall in like manner perish.”

Fourthly, the deaths of those who died in such a violent manner should be a cause of alarm to each one. Why? We know that God judges sin. We also know that we must die.

Have you ever stopped to think about this? I have. How we die, when we die, and where we die are all totally up to God. We have absolutely no choice in it; it is in His hands. We are taught, however, that sin, especially wicked, vile sins and immorality, always brings the judgment of God. In Ephesians 5:3, our Lord says, “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” There are some things that really bring the judgment of God.

So obviously we are sinners. And if we do certain things, what God is saying is that we can expect a more powerful judgment. Here is the fifth thing that we are to learn from this: we should learn from God's judgments in the lives of others. They came telling Him about those Galileans. Our Lord said, “Suppose ye that these were sinners above

all the others? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

I am not going to tell you that I am successful in doing this; I do my best. There may have been a day that I missed that I do not remember. But for the longest time, every day, I have thanked the Lord for His protection, His preservation, life, health, and safety. I continue to ask that His protecting hand and His safety be upon us.

When they came to our Lord and said, "Did you hear about those Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices?" He said, "Suppose ye that these were sinners above all the others? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." What is He saying? We have to learn how fragile, how frail, and how brief our lives really are.

Hold Luke 13, but turn in your Bibles to Psalm 90. Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses, and I want you to see what he teaches us in this Psalm. "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told." We spend our years as a tale that is told. Alice and I sat around this week talking with some friends, reminiscing about when our children were little and about things that happened, and talking about our grandchildren in the same way. This is a tale that is told. It is over, gone, and done with; it cannot be recalled.

Then verse 10 says, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten," that is, seventy. "And if by reason of strength they be fourscore years," that is, eighty years, "yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath." Here it is: "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

Looking around at everybody else, seeing how their lives are cut off in midstream, so to speak, we had better ask God for wisdom to number our days, because we are going to die as well.

In Luke 13, as we see in verses 1 through 3, they came to our Lord and said, "Did you hear about these Galileans, whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices?" Our Lord said, "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered

such things?" Yes, they had a disastrous and catastrophic death, but that did not mean that they were great sinners.

The Tower of Siloam (Luke 13:4-5)

He said, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Now look in verse 4 at what our Lord does. After speaking in verse 3, He says, "Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?" Then He repeats, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

I want you to understand the implications of His answer. He points out that there was a tower that fell on eighteen men in Jerusalem. These were Judeans. Listen carefully. If you think that these Galileans were exceedingly wicked and deserved such a violent and catastrophic death because they were great sinners, how do you explain the death of those eighteen Judeans on whom the tower in Siloam fell?

In other words, it is easy to say, "Look over there at the North Koreans. Look what is happening to them." But we can also point back and say, "Look what is happening here as well." Our Lord's answer is a reproof against those who pass judgment upon the character of others and who judge hastily and contemptuously. What did our Lord say in John 7:24? "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment."

Jesus was teaching in Jerusalem, and Jesus was in Judea. John 8:20 says, "These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple." He was in Jerusalem. The tower of Siloam was in Jerusalem. The blind man whom He healed in John 9 was in Jerusalem. In John 9:7, He sent him to the pool of Siloam and said, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.)"

He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing. The Judeans viewed themselves as superior to all others. Why? They had the temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the offerings, the law, and the worship of God. Yet our Lord was saying: If you are superior, more righteous, and not as wicked as those Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, why did such a catastrophic

event happen to you? Are you going to conclude that those eighteen on whom that tower of Siloam fell were great sinners exceedingly as well?

The Tendency to Think Others Need Repentance More

Christ said, “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” Thus, not only were those Judeans recipients of disasters; our Lord said that unless they repented, they would likewise perish.

There was another implication in their question. When they asked about the men whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices, they displayed the tendency to think that others needed to repent more than themselves. Is that not equally true with us? We look at corrupt politicians, big government, Obama, Pelosi, Reid, and Schumer. We look at other mobsters, murderers, and rapists and think, “Boy, do they need to repent!” Obviously, yes, they do need to repent. But that does not mean that we do not need to repent.

How many sins does it take to make an individual a sinner? One. How many sins does it take to bring the judgment of God against you? One. Those people who suffered that great disaster may have been considered sinners exceedingly, and they probably needed to repent a whole lot more than others thought they needed to repent. But do you understand the principle that if you violate God's law in one point, you are guilty of violating the whole law? James chapter 2, verses 10 and 11, says: “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.”

All you have to do is violate God's law on one point, and God says you are guilty of all. No matter how light or heavy, flippant or serious our sins are, we are all sinners, and we still need repentance.

Those who think they do not need repentance need it the most, because self-righteousness, pride, arrogance, and haughtiness are all sins. Do you realize the implication? “I do not need to repent. Ed needs to repent, but I do not.” Really? Our Lord said in Luke 5:32, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” When you

think that you do not need to repent, you are declaring yourself righteous and cutting yourself off from the salvation of Jesus Christ. Christ came to save sinners; He did not come to save the self-righteous.

The Parable of the Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9)

None of us has any problem understanding Luke 13:1-5. We understand the tendency and assumptions of those people. But how are verses 1-5 connected with verses 6-9? What relationship does a fig tree have with disasters, catastrophes, and repentance?

In verses 6-9, Christ spoke this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of the vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

Note something in the context of Luke 13:1-5: our Lord is talking about Israel as a whole. The Galileans were from the northern kingdom, and the Judeans were in the southern kingdom. Catastrophes happened to both the northern and southern kingdoms. In the Bible, Israel is compared both to a vineyard and to a fig tree.

Isaiah 5:1 says, "Now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes." Verse 3 continues: "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard."

He asked what more could have been done. Isaiah identifies the vineyard. Skip down to verse 7 if you want to know who the vineyard is: "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment,

but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry." Hosea 9 and verse 10 speaks of Israel. Hosea 9 verse 10, God says, "I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness;"

Hosea says, "I saw your fathers as the firstripe in the fig tree at her first time: but they went to Baalpeor, and separated themselves unto that shame; and their abominations were according as they loved." Note that there is a vineyard and a fig tree. He said, "I found your fathers as the fig tree."

In Luke 13:6, Christ speaks this parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in a vineyard." We already know who the vineyard is and who the fig tree is. The fact that this fig tree was planted in a vineyard meant that it had the very best soil. Moreover, it was dressed and nourished. It had every care that could be given to it, but it did not bear fruit.

For three years the owner came looking for fruit from this fig tree and found none. He said, "Cut it down." The vine dresser said, "Lord, let's give it one more shot. Let me dig about it and dung it. Let's go for another year. If it bear fruit, well; if not, then cut it down." How many years did the owner come looking for fruit? Three. How many years did Jesus Christ walk on this earth in Israel, in ministry? Three. In those three years, did He find any righteousness, obedience, or judgment? No. They hated Him, despised Him, and crucified Him. Scripture says in John 1:10, "he came unto his own, and his own received him not."

Connection to Israel's Judgment in 70 A.D.

One commentator said, "The fig tree is Israel and God comes seeking fruit in them and finding none." He found none, and the sentence thereof upon it is, "Cut it down." He not only found it useless, but His vineyard was encumbered by it. Romans 2:24 says, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you." So cut it down.

"Lord, let me just dig about it and dung it. Let's give it a temporary reprieve." Just because judgment is not executed immediately, and just because there is a temporary reprieve, does not mean that judgment is not coming. Christ then directs us to Luke

20:9, where He continues through verse 19, showing what our Lord is saying.

SCRIPTURE READING - Luke 20:9-19; Luke 13:2-5 (KJV)

Then began he to speak to the people this parable: A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time. And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard. That is the father sending the son. But the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty.

And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. It may be they will reverence him when they see him.

But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid.

And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people. And they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them.

What did our Lord say? “I'll destroy you and give the vineyard to someone else. Why cumbereth it the ground? Cut it down.” Now go back to Luke 13. When they tell our Lord about these Galileans, He said, “Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?” Now watch verse 3: “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” And, talking about those on

whom the tower in Siloam fell, He said, "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

The word likewise means in the same manner: you will die catastrophically, die tragically, and be destroyed in a similar manner. When our Lord speaks here, He undoubtedly refers to what would befall Jerusalem when He cut it down.

These people came to Christ believing that the Galileans were really bad sinners. He said, if you reason that way, what about your own people upon whom the tower of Siloam fell? When our Lord said, "Except ye repent, ye shall likewise perish," He was speaking to these Judeans. In 70 A.D., when the Romans came, many Judeans died in the temple while offering sacrifice. Their blood was mingled with the blood of their sacrifices.

Luke 21:20-24 says: "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

They fell by the edge of the sword, just as Pilate murdered those Galileans, and were led away captive into all nations. Those people perished exactly the way Christ said they would because they refused to repent. The same truth is applicable today: "Except you repent, you shall perish."

Applications

Applications for Today

Repentance is the only ground on which we can come to God through Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are the two sides of one coin. If a man truly repents, he has faith; if a man truly exercises

faith, he has also repented. Repentance is basically self-judgment and self-condemnation. It is saying, “Lord, I’m wrong. I’m wicked. I’ve done wrong. I’ve done wickedly. I’ve thought wrong and wickedly, and I want to change my course. I’m not going to think and act that way anymore.” The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 11:31, “If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged of God.”

Repentance is the fruit for which God is looking in the lives of sinful and rebellious individuals. God is not looking for good in any man, because there is no good in any man; He is looking for repentance. The thought of these Judeans was, “Those Galileans must have been really bad men because of the judgment that fell upon them.” Our Lord said, No. What happened was a warning to you: “Except ye repent, ye shall likewise perish.” According to Josephus, the Jewish historian, these people did not repent. In the overthrow of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, over a million Jews perished, and the streets actually flowed with blood. What did our Lord say? “Except ye repent, ye shall likewise perish.”

Disasters, tragedies, and catastrophic events should not only impress us with the need and necessity of repentance; they should lead us to repentance. When we see such things happening, they should remind us of our sins, rebellion, and disobedience to God. We should understand that the wages of sin is death, that we all deserve to die, that eventually we will die, and that we will face the Judge of all the earth. There is certainly no better time to seek God’s gift of repentance than now.

Simply because some sinners are not smitten instantly and immediately does not mean that they have escaped judgment. The vinedresser said, “Lord, let it alone just a little longer. Let me dig about this fig tree. Let me dung it. Let me try one more time.” If it bears fruit, wonderful; if it does not, cut it down. Jerusalem and Judea never made it forty years past the death of Christ, and God cut it down. You know, the Bible says in Romans 9:22, “What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.” God let it alone another thirty or forty years, and then He cut it down. In the book of Nahum, the word of God says this: “God is jealous,”

“And the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.” God's not going to acquit them. Just because He does not smite them instantly does not mean that they have escaped.

If the fig tree represents Israel as a nation—and it does—you have to remember that God Himself instituted that nation originally. That nation, which God instituted, failed to submit to and honor His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and God cut it down. Do you think God is going to hesitate to destroy any other nation that dishonors His Son, rejects His law, and tramples His Word under their feet?

Consider this argument from Romans 8:32: “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” Now, He that spared not His own Son. We know that Jesus Christ was absolutely innocent. He never committed the first sin, but our sins were imputed to Him; our sins were charged to His account.

If God was ever going to be lenient with anyone, if God was ever going to let sin escape in any manner whatsoever, do you not think He would have at least spared His only begotten Son when sin was imputed upon Him? But He did not. He spared not His own Son. If He did not spare His own Son when sin was charged to His account, what makes you think that you can get away with sin? What makes a nation think that it can escape sin and the judgment of sin? It cannot. It cannot.

Except ye repent, ye shall likewise perish. Disasters, repentance, and a fig tree—all connected. Father, help us in the name of Jesus Christ to bow to Thee, to honor Thee, to worship Thee, and to glorify Thee. We ask for Thy divine gift of repentance, because repentance is the gift of God. Help us to love Thee and live for Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 16

Holy Desires

January 11, 2017

SCRIPTURE READING - Nehemiah 1:5-11 (KJV)

Introduction and Scripture Reading

Turn to Nehemiah chapter 1. We are going to read verses 5 through 11 to give you the context. Actually, the message is going to be coming from verse 11.

“And I said, I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments. Let thine ear now be attentive and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now day and night for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee, both I and my father's house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandest by thy servant Moses. Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandest thy servant Moses, saying, If you transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations.

> “But if you turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them, though there were of you cast out into the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there. Now these are thy servants, and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name. And prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man, for I was the king's cupbearer.”
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> Many years ago, I preached through the book of Nehemiah, and it certainly was a blessing indeed. But back in October, I was in a conference, and I was preaching, and other men were preaching as well. One of the pastors took Nehemiah chapter 1 and spoke on it. However, he did not speak on verse 11. But since it is a very small chapter, he read all of the verses. As he was reading the verses, I was following along in my Bible, and I got to verse 11, and just something jumped out at me. I thought, well, let me check into this.

The Universality and Vanity of Desires

I looked at that phrase, "who desire to fear thy name," and I immediately thought of desires. Everyone has desires. They are multitudinous and variegated. Desires are absolutely fundamental to life. In Ecclesiastes chapter 12 and verse 5, Solomon makes it plain that when you no longer have desires, you are dead. He says, "Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fear shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail. Why? Because man goeth to his long home, and mourners go about the streets."

What Solomon is saying is, if you no longer have any desires, you are dead. Death ends desires. Very few individuals have ever had the opportunity to satisfy all, or even most, of their desires. Solomon was an exception. Not only was he a king, but he was an exceedingly rich king as well, and he could do just about whatever he wanted to

do. In fact, he did so, and he pronounced it all as vanity and vexation.

In Ecclesiastes chapter 2, beginning with verse 8, he said, "I gathered me also silver and gold and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces. I got me men singers and women singers and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me, and whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them."

"I withheld not my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor, and this was my portion of all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on all the labor that I had labored to do, and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." Solomon was one of the few individuals who had the opportunity to satisfy most of his desires, and yet he pronounced all of that vanity and vexation.

Everyone has desires, but few have what I would call holy desires. Some desires may be holy, but unhappily, most are not. The unsaved, the heathen, and the pagans may have desires just as the saved do. Hopefully, there is a huge difference between the desires of the pagans and the desires of the saints. However, in some areas, our desires are the same, whether we are saved or unsaved.

When we are tired, we desire to rest, saved or unsaved. When we are hungry, we desire to eat. When we are sick, we desire to be well. In that sense, we have some common desires with the lost, but there should be a huge difference as well. Nehemiah and those who were with him had a very different desire: “We desire to fear thy name.” The heathen and the pagans, those who are lost, have absolutely no desire to fear the name of the Lord.

Three Categories of Desires

Have you ever had a desire to fear the name of the Lord? If so, how do you know that it was a real, genuine desire? When we think about desires, we could break them down into three areas: a natural desire, an unnatural desire, and a supernatural desire.

A natural desire is what I have already mentioned. We all desire sleep and rest, food, love, and friendship. It does not matter whether we are saved or unsaved; we have those natural desires. Secondly, there are unnatural desires. An unnatural desire is that which is against nature.

SCRIPTURE READING - Romans 1:21-32 (KJV)

It is that which is perverted. For instance, hold Nehemiah chapter 1, but turn in your Bibles to the book of Romans chapter 1, and let's begin reading there in verse 21. And I want you to notice as we read this passage there are a lot of other things mentioned, because usually when you talk about Romans chapter 1 you immediately think of the perversion of sex. But notice if you would there are far more perversions mentioned.

And this would be what you and I would call an unnatural desire. But notice verse 21, Romans 1 verse 21, "Because that when they knew God, that is, they knew who He was, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. Notice what they did foolishly, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things." So let me just put it bluntly like this. Idolatry is a perversion. Idolatry is unnatural because it is a violation of the one true and the living God. So notice verse 24, "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lust of their own heart to dishonor their own bodies between themselves." So God just turned them over to their base desires, "who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever."

So they live for themselves, not for God. "For this cause, God gave them up into vile affections, for even their women to change the natural use into that which is against nature. And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with the men, working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves

> that recompense of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient."
>
> Now, I want you to pay close attention in the next several verses. "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents. Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful, who, knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them." Now the interesting thing is this, when he is talking about perversions and that which is unnatural, he talks about all of these sins and then he talks about covenant breakers and without natural affection.

You do not have to read long on the internet or in a newspaper before you find some son who has murdered his father and his mother. In fact, I just read this past Thanksgiving about a grown son who not only murdered his mother and father, but chopped them up and tried to dispose of their bodies. You are talking about being without natural affection, which is a perversion, and being disobedient to parents.

Especially younger children want to obey; they want to please. But as we get older, we become more perverted. That is when we want to do our own thing and our own will. The interesting thing about Romans chapter 1 is that there are many perversions and unnatural things that God is talking about here. While not all unsaved people have what we would call an unnatural desire when it comes to sexual perversions, all unsaved people desire to do that which is wicked and wrong. The reason is that they glory in that which is contrary to God, as well as in that which satisfies their flesh.

For instance, the Apostle Paul said it like this in Philippians 3 and verse 19: "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." God talks about the wicked and says that their god is their belly. That means

they are interested not just in eating, but in satisfying all their lusts and desires. David, in Psalm 10 and verse 3, describes their wickedness: "For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire and blesseth the covetous whom the Lord abhorreth" or whom the Lord hateth. When you think about wicked men, especially those who are powerful and rich and can seemingly do whatever they want, you have to understand that all the desires of the wicked are ultimately going to fail.

The Fate of the Wicked's Desires

Where is Pharaoh? Where is Joseph Stalin? Where is Mao Zedong? Where is Pol Pot? Where is Idi Amin? These were men who were very powerful, very wicked, and very wealthy, yet they are now dead and in judgment. If they could not accomplish what they desired with all their power and money, then obviously we who do not have that power and money are not going to fulfill our desires either.

The truth of the matter is this: everything that the wicked do is ultimately going to fail. Psalm 112:10 says, "The wicked shall see it and be grieved. He shall gnash with his teeth and melt away. The desire of the wicked shall perish." Ultimately, everything about him is going to perish.

Proverbs 21:25 says, "The desire of the slothful killeth him, for his hands refuse to labor." Then the next phrase says, "he coveteth greedily all the day long." Notice again: "The desire of the slothful killeth him, for his hands refuse to labor."

In just about every town that I have ever passed through, been in, or lived in for any period of time, there is always a corner where men sit around all day long, smoke cigarettes, drink coffee, and drink I do not know what all they do. You can go there, and usually they are there morning, noon, and night. I have seen them with trash barrels burning in the night, sitting around doing what, I do not know.

Then a new car goes down the road, and they say, "I sure would like to have one of those things." Or they see a truck or some new tractor. But they will never, ever have anything like that because they refuse to work. They refuse to save. There is indeed a Biblical work

ethic. I am not preaching on a Biblical work ethic today, but the point I am trying to make is very, very plain.

The Bible says, “The desire of the slothful killeth him, for his hands refuse to labor.” He desires, but he will never get out and do what he is supposed to do. Moreover, Habakkuk chapter 2 and verse 5 deals with the king of Babylon, who was attacking God’s people. The Bible says, “Yea, also because he transgresseth by wine, he that is the ruler, is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and keepeth unto him all people.” Even wicked rulers are never satisfied with those whom they rule. They always want to rule over more.

When you stop and think about the desires of the wicked, you have to understand that their desires are absolutely contrary to God and contrary to the desires of the saints of God. David prayed against the desires of the wicked. So should we.

You may ask, “Why in the world should I pray against the desire of the wicked?” Here is my question: Do you want the wicked to prosper? Do you want the wicked to conquer? Do you want the wicked to dominate? Why should any saint of God want the wicked to reign? Think of George Soros, the Illuminati, the Clintons, the CFR, and the Trilateralists. Why would I want them to have their desire, their will, and their way? I would much prefer God’s will and God’s way.

When we pray as our Lord taught us, we are praying, “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” Therefore, we are praying for the destruction of man’s kingdoms, the overthrow of man’s will, and the establishment of God’s will.

Psalm 140:8 contains a specific prayer request by David: “Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked. Further not his wicked device, lest they exalt themselves.” David specifically asks God not to grant the desires of the wicked or allow them to further their wicked device, because ultimately they will exalt themselves even against God, as well as above God, if they could.

Psalm 7:9 gives another wonderful prayer request, one that every child of God should be interested in inculcating in daily prayers: “Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end. But establish the just, for the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins.” Here is a prayer request that the wickedness of the wicked would come to an end and that God would establish the just. Of course, the Just One is the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom, but those who follow Him are just as well. Here, then, is a wonderful prayer request to pray against the wicked.

We have talked about a natural desire and an unnatural desire. Whether or not it is a perversion in the sense of a sexual perversion, it is unnatural in the sense that it is against God, against life, and against other people. Now we are coming to what we call a supernatural desire. I would define a supernatural desire as one in which God is involved, or one that would never be apart from God's grace and God's mercy.

Supernatural Desires and God's Work in Believers

When we desire that which is good and godly and holy and scriptural, it is a desire that God has worked in our lives. By nature, we do not desire to please God; we desire to please our own flesh and satisfy our own lusts. If there is anything in us that is holy and godly, then God put it there. The Apostle Paul said in Romans 7:18, “I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.” Likewise, in Ephesians 2:3, speaking of the saints, he says, “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath even as others.”

You have to understand that man is totally depraved. Total depravity simply means that depravity reaches every area of our being: our mind, body, will, emotions, intellect, and desires. There is nothing left out when you talk about total depravity. So, if there is anything in us that is good and holy, it has to be because of God and God alone.

In Isaiah 26 and verse 12, the Scripture says, "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us, for thou hast wrought all of our works in us." It is God that works in us. Philippians 2, verses 12 and 13, says,

"Wherefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." I thought it was God who saved us. That is true; it is God who saves us. But why is Paul telling them to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling? Verse 13 answers, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do His good pleasure." God is the one who works it in, and it is our responsibility to work it out.

In other words, we must act upon and apply the grace of God in our lives. Let me say it pointedly: God is not going to live for us. He expects us to act out what He places in us. He gives us holy desires, yet it is our responsibility to nurture them and use them for His honor and glory.

With that in mind, go back to Nehemiah 1 and look at this prayer request. In verse 11, Nehemiah said, "O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant and to the prayer of thy servants who desire to fear thy name, and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man, for I was the king's cupbearer."

The Meaning of Desiring to Fear God's Name

Nehemiah is praying and asking that God would hear and answer his prayer, not just for himself, but also for these other servants who desire to fear thy name. The Hebrew word for desire here is kaphets, which literally means to desire, to favor, to delight, and to have pleasure in. He says, "Lord, here is a group of people that have pleasure in your name. They desire to fear thee."

Think about the implications here. Here were men who delighted in, gloried in, and had a heart's desire to fear the name of the Lord. Where are the Christians today who really, genuinely, truly desire to fear the name of the Lord? They have actual pleasure in it. They enjoy it. They love the Lord, and they really desire to fear His name.

Where are the pastors today who really desire to fear the name of the Lord? I mean desire to fear Him more than they fear their people, more than they fear the government, and more than they

fear their denominational leaders. You have to remember, here was a man who gloried in and delighted in fearing the name of the Lord.

It was the wise man Solomon who said in Proverbs 29:25, "The fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe." The truth of the matter is that whenever we fear man, we are already ensnared. It does not matter who the man is, whether he is a fellow believer, a governmental agent, or someone with a gun. Whenever we fear a man, we have been ensnared.

What did our Lord say in Luke 12:4-5? "And I say unto you, friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that they can do no more. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him which after he is killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him." He is saying that we need to fear God. So Nehemiah and his friends had a desire to fear God.

The word fear here is the Hebrew word yore, which means to reverence, to fear, to stand in awe, to revere, to be afraid of, and to have honor and respect for. They were saying, We delight in, glory in, and have pleasure in honoring You, respecting You, and glorifying You.

Evidence of Holy Desires: Application of Truth

This is what Nehemiah is asking: "Lord, hear my prayer. Hear our prayers. Because we're not praying this for our benefit. We're praying this because we fear your name. And we want to honor you and glorify you. We want your blessings so that we will not dishonor you."

Matthew Henry said this on verse 11: "They desire to fear thy name. They're not only called by thy name, but really have a reverence for thy name. They now worship thee and thee only. According to thy will in heaven, all of all the discoveries are pleased to make of thyself, and they have a desire to do."

Have you ever stopped to think about the Christian life? The Christian life, in reality, should be one that has a constant and continual desire to fear the name of the Lord. We should have in our lives a consistency in wanting to obey Him, submit to Him, honor Him, and glorify Him. In fact, the word Christian basically means to

be Christ-like. What did our Lord say in John 8 and verse 29? “For I do always those things that please Him.”

So let us think about our desires. We can only really worship God if we have holy desires. We can only accomplish things if we have holy desires. That is what Nehemiah is saying. In Psalm 37, verse 4, the Word of God says, “Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” Look at that: “Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” Obviously, this verse does not mean that God is going to give us or grant us wicked and ungodly desires. God is not going to violate His Word. God is not going to go contrary to His nature and dishonor His own person. No. The truth of the matter is that, if we are really delighting in the Lord, we are not going to desire anything that is contrary to Him.

So he gives a word here and says, “Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” If you really desire to be holy, if you really desire to be godly, if you really desire to be obedient, if you really desire to be submissive, God said, “I’ll give you the desires of your heart.”

Now, let me explain it a little further. Look in Psalm 34, and let us begin there with verse 12. Who in this room would love to live a long, good, and healthy life? Everybody is going to raise their hand. I never will forget. I have a sermon, and I use this as an opening illustration. I have a cousin.

My cousin was one of those likable individuals. He and some other men were standing around talking about dying and death. They all stated that they wanted to die of old age, except my cousin. He said, "I don't." They asked, "How do you want to die?" He said, "I want to be shot and killed by a jealous husband when I'm 150."

He was saying that he not only wanted a long life; he wanted quality as well as quantity. God is telling us here how to live a long life if we will observe what He says in Psalm 34 and verse 12: "What man is he that desireth life and loveth many days that he may see good?" Everyone in here wants that.

God says if you want to live long, see many days, and have a good life, "Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.

Depart from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth."

So if you do not want to be cut off, God says you be obedient, godly, and holy; you do that which is right; you keep your tongue from speaking evil and guile; you depart from evil, do good, seek peace, and follow it. I know that we should live a healthy lifestyle.

A physical healthy lifestyle is certainly helpful, but unless you have a spiritually healthy lifestyle, physical health means absolutely nothing. I am all for eating healthy and avoiding junk food and fast food, and I despise it. But I am not counting on my broccoli and asparagus to help me live a long life. I am counting on the Lord and obedience to Him.

The truth of the matter is this: God already knows our desires. In fact, He knows everything about us, and He knows whether or not those desires are in line with the Word of God. Psalm 38:9 says, “Lord, all my desire is before Thee, and my groaning is not hid from Thee.” We cannot fool God, nor can we hide our desires from Him. No, all my desire is before Thee.

David said in Psalm 21:1–2, “The King shall joy in thy strength, O Lord, and in thy salvation, how greatly shall he rejoice. Thou hast given him his heart’s desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips. For thou preventest” or precedest “him with the blessings of goodness. Thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked a life of thee, and thou gavest to him even length of days forever.” The truth is that when God and God alone is our whole desire, we will bring our lives into greater conformity to His Word.

As I begin this message, have you ever really had a desire to fear God’s name? How would you know whether or not it was a real and genuine biblical desire? The answer is this: application of truth is the evidence that we really desire to fear His name. The application of His truth is the evidence that proves we really desire to fear His name.

In Psalm 73:25, I want you to notice what Asaph says. It is an interesting statement: “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.”

“Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.” Is it wrong for me to desire my children, for my children to desire fellowship with their parents, or for me to desire my wife, or my wife to desire me? No. But God must be first and foremost in our lives.

We should love Him supremely and first. Let me challenge you to do something: when you awaken each morning, before you ever get out of bed, think, “Lord, I want to tell You today that I love You. I want to love You first, foremost, and supremely. Help me to love my family, my wife, my husband, or my children, whoever it is, the way You have ordained that I love them. But help me to love You first, foremost, and supremely.”

Then, of course, thank Him for His grace, mercy, and compassion, and for letting you live through the night. When we tell our wives, husbands, children, or even our animals that we love them, we can say, “I love the Lord first.” The Bible does say, “The righteous man regardeth the life of his beast, for the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.” We can love our animals too—our children, our second children, that is for sure.

Here is an important question in light of verse 25, where Asaph says, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.” In light of this truth, how do I pray? How do I pray so that my desire would be to fear His name? How do I conform my life to this? How do I apply this truth?

Generally speaking, we might answer as Peter did in John chapter 21. Our Lord asked Peter three times, “Peter, do you love me more than these?” Finally, the third time, Peter was grieved, the Bible says, and in verse 17 he said, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.”

It is true that God is omniscient. God knows our love, our desires, the depth of them, the quality of them—He knows everything. But are there specific prayer requests we could make that would enable us to fear the name of God in our everyday lives? The answer is yes.

Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 19. Then go to Psalm 119, and hold Psalm 119 because we will come back to it. Consider these verses that you could incorporate into your prayers, asking the Lord to enable you to fear His name better. Notice Psalm 19, verse 12.

David asks, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." Have you ever asked yourself, "Why in the world did I do something like that? That was the stupidest thing, the dumbest thing that I've ever done"? Who can understand his error? You do things, and then the next thing you know you ask, "Why did I do that? I mean, that was absolutely stupid." So he says, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults."

Do you realize that every one of us has secret sins and secret faults? We do not know them; that is why they are secret. David wanted to be cleansed from those things.

Then he says, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over me, then shall I be innocent, and then shall I be upright and I shall be innocent from the great transgression." He asks that God would cleanse him from secret faults or sins, and then says, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins."

What is a presumptuous sin? It is something you do that you know is wrong. It is not a sin of ignorance or a secret sin. It is like, "Thou shalt not steal." I know God says, "Thou shalt not steal," but I want that bottle of water anyhow, so I am going to take it. That is a presumptuous sin. God says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." That does not matter to me; I am going to do this anyhow. That is a presumptuous sin.

Our errors and secret sins lead us to these presumptuous sins, and David is praying against these sins in his life. Look in your Bibles to Psalm 119, and hold this passage because we are going to come back. I want to pick out two verses. The first is verse 5: "Oh, that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes."

That is a pretty good prayer request, is it not? “Lord, direct my ways to keep thy statutes. Cleanse thou me from secret sins. Lord, I don't want to do anything except ask you to direct my steps, that I might keep your statutes.” The Bible says that the ways of a man

have been ordained by God and that God delights when that man obeys Him. Obviously, this would be a good prayer request.

Look at verse 80 of the same psalm, Psalm 119: “Let my heart be sound in thy statutes, that I be not ashamed. Let my heart be sound in thy statutes.” If we are sound in the Word of God, then obviously we are not going to be wandering from the way.

Psalm 141 is a tremendous passage. In fact, let us begin reading with verse 1 and read through verse 4: “Lord, I cry unto thee, make haste unto me, give ear unto my voice when I cry unto thee. Let my prayer be set before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”

Here is his specific request: “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth. Keep the door of my lips.” Let me ask you, has anyone in this room ever said anything that they wished they had not said? Oh, yes. “Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth. Keep the door of my lips.” Then verse 4 says, “Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity. Let me not eat of their dainties.”

I don't even want to be around them, much less partake of them. “Incline not my heart to any evil thing.” That sounds like “lead me not into temptation,” does it not? So there is a specific request.

Let us go back to Psalm 119, because I want to read in this psalm the first sixteen verses. I want you to follow me and look at them, seeing how each of these verses is actually a tremendous prayer request. Psalm 119 begins, “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.” First of all, the blessing is upon those who walk in the law of the Lord, and they are called the undefiled. “Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.” Now wait a minute. When He says, “Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with a whole heart, they also do no iniquity,” that does not mean that they are not sinners, nor does it mean that they do not slip up and fall short in sin.

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 119:3-16; Nehemiah 1:11 (KJV)

When He says, “they also do no iniquity,” the word iniquity refers to lawlessness. We cannot be lawless if we are walking

according to His ways and keeping His commandments. So he says, “They also do no lawlessness, they walk in his ways. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes. Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy commandments. I will praise thee with uprightness of heart when I shall have learned thy righteous judgments. I will keep thy statutes, so forsake me not utterly.”

Now, I told the young men, here is something that they should remember. And then I said, here is the middle-aged man, something they should remember. And then the old man, something they should remember. Watch verse nine. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word. With my whole heart have I sought thee. Oh, let me not wander from my commandments. Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee. Blessed art thou, O Lord, teach me thy statutes. With my lips have I declared all thy judgments of thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of all thy testimonies as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts and have respect in thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes. I will not forget thy word.”

Do you realize that when you pray these things, you are in essence asking God to enable you to fear His name? Now let me make just a couple of applications. I want you to look back to Nehemiah chapter 1 and look at verse 11. This is the thought that really hit me. When he said, “O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant and to the prayer of thy servants who desire to fear thy name and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant, this day.”

Applications and Conclusion

"And grant him mercy in the sight of this man, for I was the king's cupbearer." The first application is this: if we really and truly desire to fear His name, God will hear our desires and grant the request. Look in your Bibles to Psalm 10. Hold Nehemiah, but look at Psalm 10:17: "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble. Thou wilt

prepare their hearts, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear." "Thou hast heard the desire of the humble." God not only hears; He prepares, or establishes, our hearts. He also causes His ear to hear.

In Proverbs 10:24, the Bible says, "The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him, but the desire of the righteous shall be granted." The desire of the righteous shall be granted.

So let me ask you a question: Do you think that God is really more interested in you obeying Him than you are in obeying Him? Certainly God is more interested. If you come to Him and say, "Lord, I want to fear Your name. I want to obey You," God is not going to say, "No, I do not want you to do that." No. What did He say? "The desire of the righteous shall be granted." As long as we desire that which is right, holy, and godly, He will grant it to us. He will give it to us, just as you are going to do that for your children and grandchildren. As long as they want to do what is right, let them have it; that is no problem. A truly godly individual, and a truly godly and biblical desire, is always in line with God's will and God's Word.

Where are the Christians who genuinely desire to fear the name of God? Where are the pastors who genuinely desire to fear the name of God? Our country is still in turmoil and, I believe, on the verge of destruction. We are in trouble and ending up to our neck. But have you ever stopped to think what some committed Christians and pastors, even a few, could really do?

In Acts chapter 17, verse 6, this was said about those early Christians: “Those that have turned the world upside down have come hither also.” Wouldn’t you like to turn the world upside down? Wouldn’t you like to see our Lord and His truth reigning? Would you not like to see righteousness, holiness, peace, and the absence of war? Of course. “They that have turned the world upside down have come hither also.” Do you realize that our Lord initially took twelve men and did exactly that?

So the question is, are you going to be one of those individuals who genuinely desires to fear God’s name? If so, it will be evidenced in your prayer, your obedience, and your faith. Nehemiah said, “Hear my prayer, and hear the prayer of these thy servants who desire to fear thy name.” If you read the book of Nehemiah, you will

see that God heard that prayer and granted him all of his requests. We have to learn to fear the name of the Lord, and we must desire to fear the name of the Lord.

I thought about the passage in 1 Timothy chapter 3 where the Bible says, “He that desireth the office of a bishop desireth a good work.” So you can desire biblically and scripturally. Interestingly enough, sometimes the very word translated as lust in the Bible is also translated as desire. There is a good connotation and an evil connotation. You remember our Lord said to His disciples, “With desire have I desired to eat this last meal with you.” Actually, it is epithumia, the same word used for lust: “With lust have I lusted to have this last meal with you.” There can be a good desire, and there can be an evil desire. Our desire should be to fear His name and to honor Him in all that we do.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. We ask You, Father, for a holy desire: enable us to fear Thy name, to live in obedience, to live in faith, to submit to Thee, to worship, serve, and honor Thee, and to be a blessing, Lord, to each other, to our neighbors, our friends, and the lost. Enable us, Heavenly Father, to please Thee. We bow before Thee and worship Thee, and Thee alone, in and through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 17

A Primer To Predestination

October 4, 2017

A Primer on Predestination

Introduction and Personal Testimony

In Romans 8:28-39, the Bible says, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.

“For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called, and whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, them He also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who

also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.

“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Years ago, when the Lord first saved me and called me to preach, I had a hunger to really know the Scripture. So I put myself on a schedule and read the Old Testament all the way through every month. I read the New Testament all the way through every week. I did it over and over and over.

I finally went to the pastor under whom Alice and I had really gotten converted. At this time, he had been in the ministry for over 30 years. I said, “You know, I've been reading my Bible, and there are some words that come up that I don't understand. It bothers me, and I'd like you to explain them to me.” He said, “What words are they?” I said, “Well, they're the words predestinate, predestination, elect, election. I don't understand those things, and I just need you to explain them to me.” I have never, ever forgotten his response.

Here is what he said to me: First, there are some things in the Bible we are not meant to understand. Second, there are some things in the Bible that kill our soul-winning zeal, so we just leave them alone. Being a young Christian and just called into the ministry, I said, "You know, it seems to me that if God reveals something in His Word, He means for us to understand it. And secondly, it appears to me that any soul-winning the Bible kills ought to be killed anyhow."

Then he went one way, and I ended up going the other way because I wanted to be absolutely honest with Scripture. The truth of the matter is, I could begin today by asking several questions: "Are you predestinated?" Or, "Do you comprehend the word predestination?"

The truth is, absolutely everything is predestinated, simply because nothing happens by accident in a world ruled by God. God did not accidentally create the world, create man, or save you. Everything that God does, He does on purpose. God did not accidentally allow you to live to the age at which you are now. He did not accidentally give you grace, mercy, and goodness.

The Comprehensive Nature of Predestination

It was not an accident that you heard the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, repented, believed, and trusted in Jesus Christ. Everything that God does, He does on purpose. All these acts are gracious evidences and manifestations of God's predestination.

According to our text, many doctrines are connected to the doctrine of predestination, such as foreknowledge, election, providence, and adoption. If you take the entire context of Romans chapter 8, you will also notice that perseverance and glorification are connected to the doctrine of predestination. It is impossible to understand any of these doctrines apart from predestination. Moreover, it is impossible to separate any of these doctrines from predestination because they all stand or fall together. Accurately speaking, election is a branch of predestination; however, it is more limited and more specific.

Predestination, of course, would cover all creatures and all things and all events, while election would be restricted to what you and I would call rational beings, such as angels and humans. The Bible teaches that everything was predestinated by God from all eternity. God has sovereignly ordained and immutably determined the history and destiny of each of His creatures. That is true.

Everyone understands that we were born according to God's decree. God is the one who allowed us life and gave us life, and we were born when God determined that we should be born. The Bible says in Job 7:1, "Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? Are not his days also like the days of a hireling?" God, then, has determined our days; each one of us has an appointed time. There is an appointed time to be born, and there is an appointed time to die.

Job 14:1 says, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down. He fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." Job continues, "And dost thou open thine eyes upon such an one, and bringest me into judgment with thee?" The question follows in verse 4: "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." Then, concerning man, he says, "Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee. Thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass."

God has ordained our boundaries. He has ordained our years, our months, our days, our hours, our minutes, and our seconds. Not one of us can go beyond the boundaries that God has ordained. God, then, has ordained and predestined everything.

God's Decree and Human Limitations

The decree of God is His purpose or His determination in reference to future things. If you are going to understand predestination, you have to understand it in light of God's eternal decree.

Now listen very carefully as I explain something to you. I am going to show you in the Bible where the Bible talks about God's purpose. The word decree is also in the Bible, and I will quote that Scripture momentarily. Whenever we talk about God's decree or God's purpose, it is always singular in the Bible. Yet whenever you hear theologians, pastors, or Christians talk about these things, they speak of the decrees of God. Pick up any systematic theology book, and when you come to the doctrine of God, it talks about the decrees of God. The Bible says it is singular, but we say it is plural. Now how is that?

It is very simple: you and I cannot think or comprehend the way God thinks or what God comprehends. When you and I think, we do so in succession; we do one thing at a time, and one thing follows another. No matter how hard you try, you cannot think about more than one thing at a time. God is not like that. God's mind is infinite. He is omniscient. He knows everything, and He knows everything instantly. All God had to do was have one purpose or one decree, and that one purpose and one decree would entail absolutely everything. Since we cannot think like that, we speak of the decree of God in this

area and the decree of God in that area, and thus we speak of plurality.

But the Bible says in Acts chapter 15 and verse 18, "Known unto God are all His works from the beginning." God knew from the beginning everything He was going to do. Now look in your Bibles—hold Romans 8—but look to Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 11. You will see this word occur a number of times in Scripture. Ephesians 3:11 says, "According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." First, it is an eternal purpose, which means whatever God purposed, He did so in eternity past. It had nothing to do with time. This eternal purpose was a purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Comprehensive Decree of God

God's decree is revealed to us in many passages under a variety of terms. The word decree is used in Psalm 2:7, where God says, "I will declare the decree." In Ephesians 3 and verse 11, we read of His eternal purpose. In Acts 2 and verse 23, we read of His determinate counsel and foreknowledge. In Ephesians 1 and verse 9, we see the mystery of His will. In Romans 8 and verse 29, it specifically says that He did predestinate. In Ephesians 1 and verse 9, we read about His good pleasure, and in Ephesians 1 and 11, we read about the fact that it was His counsel. He did what He did according to the counsel of His own will. God's decree, then, is referred to as His counsel to demonstrate that it is consummately wise.

It is called the counsel of His will to show that He was under no obligation, no constraint, and no coercion. He did what He did simply because He needed and wanted to do that. God did not do anything for any reason outside of Himself. The decrees of God, then, relate to all future things without exception.

Whatever is done in time was accomplished; it was indeed foreordained before time. Whatever is done in time was foreordained before time. Whatever is accomplished in time was predestinated in eternity. God's purpose, or God's predestination, concerns everything, whether it is great or small, whether it is good or evil.

God's Sovereignty Over Evil

We cannot make God the creator of evil in the sense that He is the creator of good. We can say that God is the orderer and controller of evil. But evil does not proceed from God the way good proceeds from God. God's decree is totally, absolutely comprehensive.

If there is anything outside of God over which God does not have control, then God is not God. That thing is God. Whatever God does not have control over is God. Therefore, God has to have control over evil, or else He would not be God Himself. When it comes to sin or evil, God is not the author of evil, the infuser of evil, or the instigator of evil. But God is the controller of evil because God is sovereign.

James 1:13–15 says, “Let no man say when he is tempted that I am tempted of God. For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man.” God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man. “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed: Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” Thus God says that evil and sin come from our own lust; they do not come from God.

Now look in your Bible at Isaiah 45:7. This is a verse that everyone undoubtedly and inevitably brings up, and we certainly need to understand it. Let us begin reading with verse 5, so that you can see God in the context. In this passage He is dealing with Cyrus, but notice what He says concerning Himself to Cyrus: “I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me.”

"I girded thee though thou hast not known me." That is, God has control over Cyrus. He raised him up and put him as king, even though Cyrus did not know Him. Verse 6 says, "That they may know from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the Lord and there is none else." And now God says, "I form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create evil. I the Lord do all these things."

You and I do not have any problem with the light, darkness, or peace. But He says, "I the Lord form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create evil. I the Lord do all these things." How can the Bible in this particular passage say that God created evil? We

have already said that God is not the author of sin. God is not the author of evil. You have to understand that God created evil by definition.

What do I mean by definition? It is God who determined what is good. When He created the world, He beheld everything that He made, and behold, it was good. It is God who determines that which is right and holy and pure. If God determines that which is right, holy, and pure, anything contrary to that is, by definition, wicked, wrong, and evil. That is how He created it. He created evil only by saying, "This is what is good; this is what is holy." If you do anything contrary to this, then you are doing that which is evil.

That is why in Amos 5:15 God says, "Hate the evil and love the good." Because we know what good is, we automatically know what evil is, because evil is contrary to that which is good. So God controls everything; He even controls sin.

God certainly controls evil. If anything is out of His control or acts apart from Him, then God would not be God, because God would not be omnipotent. You say, "Why is there sin? Why is there evil? If God is sovereign, could not God stop sin?" Of course He could. But Psalm 76:10 tells us, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." So the question is, how much evil, and how much sin, is there going to be in the world?

The answer is going to come back just enough that it will redound to God's honor and God's glory. And what will not redound to God's honor and God's glory? God will restrain.

Consider Abraham and Sarah. Abraham went down into Gerar, where Abimelech was king. Sarah was indeed a very beautiful woman. If I am not mistaken—and I could be—but I think at this particular time Sarah was probably closer to seventy, so she had to be exquisitely beautiful. Genesis 20:1 says, "And Abraham journeyed from Thence toward the south country, and dwelt between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar. And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She is my sister. And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said unto him, Behold, thou art a dead man for the woman which thou

hast taken, for she is a man's wife. But Abimelech had not come near her."

Abimelech said, "Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? Said he not unto me, She is my sister? And she, even she herself, said, He is my brother. In the integrity of my heart and in the innocency of my hands have I done this." And God said unto him in a dream, "Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart, for I also withheld thee from sinning against me. Therefore I suffered thee not to touch her."

Abimelech had taken Sarah, but he had not come near her or touched her. Why? I have no earthly idea. Maybe God gave him a case of the 24-hour virus. I don't know. But since Abraham was the father of all who believe, and since Jesus Christ was to come through him, it would not honor God for Sarah to be defiled. Therefore God sovereignly restrained Abimelech. Abimelech said, "If I had known she was a man's wife I wouldn't have taken her." He said, "In the innocence of my hands, in the integrity of my heart have I done this." And God said, "Yes I know. That's why I restrained you. That's why I held you back."

You are going to ask me, “Well, if God could do that in this instance, could He not do that in every instance?” The answer is yes. Then you will ask, “Well, why does He not do so?” I will show you in just a moment.

Turn in your Bibles to Exodus, chapter 34, beginning at verse 21. God demanded that all the male Israelites appear before Him three times a year for the seven annual feasts. Many times the women and children went as well. Sometimes they could not go, but God did demand that the men appear. God says, “Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest. In earing time and in harvest thou shalt rest. And thou shalt observe the Feast of Weeks, and of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end.”

“Thrice, that is three times in the year, shall all your men children appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel.” They were to go to Jerusalem. Notice verse 24: “For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders. Neither shall any man desire thy land,

when thou shalt go up to appear before the Lord thy God thrice in the year."

Here is my question. All the men were required to go up to Jerusalem before the Lord. The women were not required, but many of them went, and the children often went as well. Obviously, someone would have to stay behind to take care of the farm and the animals.

What would keep those dispossessed heathen from forming an insurrection while all the men were in Jerusalem—those who were not killed when the people came in and conquered the land, many of whom were made slaves? What would keep these dispossessed people, who had lost the land and everything else and had been made slaves to the Israelites, from attacking, raping the women, killing the women and children, and trying to reclaim the land?

God said that as long as Israel was obedient to Him and doing what He commanded, they would not only not attack; it would not even come into their minds. They would not even desire to have their land back. Remember, these were heathen. God has sovereign control over every man.

You remember Proverbs 21:1: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord like rivers of water, he turneth it whithersoever he willeth." If God could restrain a man like Abimelech, and if God could restrain those heathen nations, could He not do this today? The answer is yes. Why does He not do it then? We have to go back to Psalm 76:10: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise the Lord, and the remainder of wrath shall he restrain." In other words, God says there is going to be just enough evil and just enough sin that will ultimately redound to His honor and His glory. How can sin redound to God's honor and God's glory? Just stop and think about this.

If God showed mercy all of the time and was merciful under every situation and every circumstance, who would know anything about His justice? Who would know anything about His holiness? Who would know anything about His righteous anger and wrath? God is saying that whatever happens when it comes to the wrath of man will ultimately redound to His praise and His honor. So God did indeed predestinate all things.

Look back in your Bibles to Romans 8:29. He says, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate." The word predestinate here is the Greek word proorizō, which literally means to predestinate, to determine before, to ordain, to decide beforehand, and to decree from all eternity.

Definitions and Senses of Predestination

Whatever happens in time was ordained from eternity. That means we have to pay attention to what happens in time. There is a reason for a torn rotator cuff. There is a reason for everything. The Westminster Confession says, "God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will freely and unchangeably foreordain whatever comes to pass." The Westminster Confession is saying that God freely and unchangeably foreordained everything that comes to pass. When you stop and think about it, if God did not predestinate and if God did not foreordain, the only things left would be luck, chance, fate, and fortune.

Fortuna was a false goddess. That is where we get the word fortune from. Without God's sovereign predestination, all you have is humanism.

The Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith says it like this: “God hath decreed in himself from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things whatsoever comes to pass. Yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin, nor hath fellowship with any therein, nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established which appears his wisdom in disposing of all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree.”

It would take five or six different messages just to expound that one paragraph, because every one of these sentences is basically taken from the Word of God. When we talk about predestination, everyone believes in it, really. I do not care if you are a Calvinist, an Arminian, or something else. You have to believe something about it because it is in the Bible.

The argument, then, is not over the doctrine of predestination; the argument is over who does the predestination. When you say, “I believe the Bible,” you are going to have to come out with this: God has predestinated everything. If you do not believe the Bible, then you have to believe that man predestinates and man controls. Men are content with the doctrine of predestination as long as they are the ones controlling it and doing it.

What many people do not understand is that propaganda, social welfare, public education, and a host of other governmental programs are nothing more than predestination. It is man's attempt to control the attitudes, actions, and lives of others. Everybody believes in it; they simply disagree as to who does the predestinating.

John L. Girardeau was a Presbyterian preacher in the nineteenth century who pastored mainly in Charleston, South Carolina. He was a theologian and author, and he gives an excellent definition of predestination. He says, “Predestination in the Scriptures and in theological treatises has two senses. One wide and general, the other narrow and special. In the wider general sense, it signifies the decrees of God terminating either efficiently or permissively on all beings, acts, and events.”

“The universe, intelligent and unintelligent, is the object. It is the plan according to which God creates and governs all finite beings and all their properties and actions.” So he is saying that when you talk about predestination, you have to consider it in two senses. The first is wide and general, and the second is narrow and specific. He then begins to explain what he means by wide and general: it signifies the decrees of God terminating efficiently on all beings, acts, and events in the universe, intelligent and unintelligent. So let me explain it.

Look in your Bibles to the book of Matthew, chapter 10, beginning with verse 29. “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?” That means they are prolific and cheap. “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your father, but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear you not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows.”

The interesting thing is that when you look at verse 29 and He says, “one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father,” the Greek word for fall there does not necessarily mean to die. When we read that, that is exactly what we think of. Two sparrows are sold for a farthing; you capture them, sell them, somebody kills them and eats them. That is what we think about. But He said, “one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.”

The Greek word can mean to thrust down or to die, but it also means to descend from a higher place to a lower place, literally, to light on the ground. So it could be read like this: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not light on the ground without your Father.”

I want you to think about this. I do not know whether you have ever watched sparrows, but we have bird feeders. I have had one outside my office window for the longest time, and we have them outside the front-room window, so we watch them all the time. If you have ever seen these little sparrows around a feeder, they are up and down constantly—on a limb, jumping to the ground to peck, back up into the feeder, and then somewhere else. When you stop and think about it, this word means that not one of them can light on the ground, much less die, without your heavenly Father. God sovereignly controls the up and down, the ascent and descent, of each one of those sparrows. Not only does He control it, but each ascent and descent was ordained before the world began.

Nothing happens by accident in a world ruled by God. Those sparrows do not accidentally glide onto a limb or accidentally go down to the ground to get food. God sovereignly ordained it, and God sovereignly controls it. Look at what else He said. Notice, if you would, in verse 30: “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” Now, it is true that God has more difficulty counting the hairs on some people's heads than others. I made a joke about that, but please understand this: God also sovereignly controls the loss of our hair. Not a single hair can fall without God's sovereign control, which also means that God ordained it before the foundation of the world.

Everything is under God's direct and sovereign control. When you comb your hair, bring the comb back, and see those three hairs, that

was ordained before the foundation of the world. God knew you were going to comb your hair. He ordained those three hairs to come out; He ordained the means, and the means was you combing your hair.

Girardeau goes on: “In the narrow or special sense, talking about predestination, it signifies the decrees of God terminating on the destinies of men. In the last sense predestination is by Calvinistic theologians regarded as a generic decree including under it election and reprobation as specific decrees. The former, predestinating some human beings without regard to their merit to salvation in order to the glorification of God's sovereign grace. The latter, foreordaining some human beings for their sin to destruction in order to the glorification of God's retributive justice.” He is talking about election and reprobation. Reprobation is a doctrine clearly taught in Scripture, and it is easily explained and illustrated.

Yet it is one of the most hated and despised doctrines imaginable. Why? Because it clearly evidences and teaches that God does not owe man anything. The only thing God owes man is justice. God does not have to predestinate or ordain anyone to destruction, because that is where they are already going. All God does is pass over them and withhold His grace.

Here is an illustration. In 1 Samuel 17, David went out to fight Goliath with a sling. He stopped at the brook and chose five smooth stones. What did David do to the rest of the stones? Nothing. He left them as he found them. All he did was select five. If God had not chosen some to be saved, none would be saved.

What did the Apostle Paul say? “Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a remnant, we should have been made as Sodom and Gomorrah.” If God had not chosen some, none would be saved. Reprobation is the opposite of election; it is simply God passing over.

Consider this illustration. Alice and I are grown, all our children are grown, and all our grandchildren are grown. We have three great-grandchildren and one on the way. Suppose I said to Alice, “All of our children and grandchildren are grown, and it is kind of lonely around the house. Let us go down to the orphanage and adopt three

children and raise them as our own. We will feed them, clothe them, educate them, support them, and take care of them."

And that's what we do. We go down, select three children, adopt them, and raise them as our own. Everybody is going to say, "Isn't that wonderful? They didn't have to do that. They didn't know those kids. Isn't it wonderful that that old couple went down and adopted three kids?" No one is going to say, "Those dirty, rotten, stupid, stinking grandparents, they left 45 in that orphanage." Really?

How many did I owe anything to? Not one. I could have left them all in the orphanage. The very fact that I chose three was out of my mere grace and mercy. It is the same thing with God. The very fact that He saves any is His grace and His mercy. He did not owe that to any of us. That's why the Bible says, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

Predestination as the Work of God the Father

The act of predestination is the work of God the Father. Anytime you look at predestination in the Bible, it is always the work of God the Father. In John 17, verses 5 and 6, Jesus Christ, in His high priestly prayer, says, "And now, O Father, glorify Thou me with Thine own glory, with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was, I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world. Thine they were, and thou gavest them me, and they have kept thy word."

Did you hear what he said? You chose some before the foundation of the world, and you gave them to me. He said, "Father keep them for they are Thine." In John 17, verse 9, He said, "I pray for them. I pray not for the world but for them which Thou hast given Me for they are Thine." So here is a group that was given to Jesus Christ. That is why in Romans 8, verses 28-30, He says, "And we all know that everything works together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." Those who are called according to His purpose, singular.

He goes on to talk about predestination. Let me show it to you again. Look in your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 1, and let us begin reading there with verse 3. Watch carefully:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as He has chosen us in Him, that is in Christ, 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 pleasure of His will."

Skip down to verse 11: "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance being predestinated according to the," what? "Purpose, of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will."

Then turn right over to 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. Notice verses 1 and 2: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia." Now watch verse 2: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ, grace unto you and peace be multiplied." But note, if you would, that phrase: elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Anytime you read about predestination in the Bible, it is always an act of God the Father.

Secondly, very quickly, we must discuss the subject of predestination. In distinction from the decree of God in general, predestination has reference to God's rational creatures only, in the specific and limited sense that Girardeau spoke about. Most frequently, of course, it refers to fallen men. First of all, let me just say that predestination includes all men, both good and evil.

Predestination Includes All Rational Creatures

Look in your Bibles to Acts chapter 4, verses 26 and 28. I cannot think of a better illustration than this. I will give you another one, but this is a fine one, in reference to Jesus Christ. Now the question I would ask you is this: Was the death of Jesus Christ foreordained by God? Was everything about the death of Jesus Christ foreordained by God? And of course the answer is yes.

"The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ." Here is a whole group of people that are against Jesus Christ. "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou has anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, gathered together." What did they do? "For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."

Was it an accident that Pontius Pilate was the governor at this particular time? Was it an accident that Herod was on the throne? Was it an accident that those Israelites or Jews were around at that particular time? Was it an accident that the Gentiles were there? No, no, no, no. Here were wicked men who hated Jesus Christ, who were not willing to obey God, who did not want to obey God, and yet here is what God did: God took their wickedness and worked out what He foreordained concerning Jesus Christ.

Look around today, and you will find people fighting against God and fighting against Jesus Christ. The only thing they can do is work out what God has already predetermined before the world ever began. Their fighting is futile and useless and worthless. It is. This includes both good and bad men. Romans chapter 9 shows us once again that it includes both good and bad men. "And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac, for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth. For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth. It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid."

"For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, that my name might be declared throughout all the

earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

Now notice this: God said, "For this same reason I raised up Pharaoh." Was Pharaoh responsible, answerable, and accountable to God? God said He foreordained this; He raised him up for this very purpose.

Stop and think about it. How many times did Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh and say, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go"? And what did Pharaoh respond? "I know not the Lord. Neither will I let Israel go." In other words, "I do not recognize God. I am not going to do it. I am my own god; I do my own thing."

Yes, he was answerable. Yes, he was fighting against God, but all he did was work out God's eternal decree. Therefore, God's predestination includes both good and bad men. It also includes both good and bad angels.

The Bible not only speaks of holy angels in Mark 8:38 and Luke 9:26; it also speaks of wicked angels who kept not their first estate in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. There are some elect angels. The Apostle Paul told Timothy, in 1 Timothy 5:21, "I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels, that thou observe these things." If there are elect angels, then obviously there are some angels who are non-elect.

How, then, do we conceive of the predestination of angels? There are only two things that you can say. Either God gave some angels perseverance and grace along with that which He created them with, and did not give it to other angels, or God placed some angels on an immutable footing, one that cannot change, and placed others on a mutable footing, which could change. But they were created holy.

May I remind you that Adam was created holy and righteous, with knowledge, and yet he was mutable. He could change, and he did change, just like these angels. There is a difference between angels and men. God did not choose a definite number of angels out of a mass of fallen angels. Moreover, angels were not predestinated in Jesus Christ as the Mediator. They stand in relationship to Him as He is their head, but angels cannot be saved and are not saved the way you and I are saved.

Christ as the Elect and Predestinated Mediator

Someone says, “Well, I do not like this doctrine of predestination.” Really? If you do not like the doctrine of predestination, you do not like the doctrine of salvation. Even Jesus Christ, our Mediator, our Lord, the God-man, is referred to as the elect of God. He was also predestinated by God to be the Mediator.

Isaiah 42:1 says, “Behold, my servant whom I uphold, mine elect, and whom my soul delighteth, I have put my spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.” This passage is quoted in the New Testament in reference to Jesus Christ, so we know that it is speaking about Christ.

"He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench. He shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail, nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth, and the isles shall wait for his law."

In verse 1, God calls Jesus Christ, "my servant whom I uphold, mine elect." According to Ephesians 1:3–6, God chose us in Christ. God elected us in Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ is God's elect, we are God's elect.

Paul has been preaching on Mars Hill. He is concluding his sermon and telling them that God demands that people repent. Acts 17:31 tells us why: "Because He, that is God the Father, hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man, that is Jesus Christ, whom He hath ordained. Whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." Just as surely as God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, there is going to be a judgment. The Bible says that He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained.

The word ordained is exactly the same Greek word found in Romans 8, translated predestinate. God not only elected and chose Jesus Christ to be the God-man; He predestinated Jesus Christ to be the mediator and the God-man. Obviously, if you do not like the doctrine of predestination, you do not like the doctrine of salvation,

because our salvation is tied to the election and predestination of Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:28 begins what is known as the golden chain of salvation: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His what? Purpose." Then: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called. Whom he called, them he also justified. Whom he justified, them he also glorified."

If you are in the purpose of God in verse 28, you are in the foreknowledge of God in verse 29. If you are in the predestination of God in verse 30, what did God do for you? He called you, He justified you, He glorified you. All of those are past tense. So if you are in that golden chain at the beginning, you are in that golden chain at the end, because there are no broken links in the chain of salvation. None whatsoever.

It is sure, it is certain, it is absolute. The reason it is sure and certain and absolute is because we had nothing to do with it. It has reference to Jesus Christ, who is our mediator, who is the God-man, who is our Redeemer, who is our Savior. He was God's elect, He was predestinated, we were chosen in Him, and we were predestinated in Him.

Look at 2 Timothy 1, verses 8 and 9. 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." Now look at verse 9: "who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own what?" "Purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

When one denies predestination, he also denies salvation. Because we were predestinated in Jesus Christ, we were chosen in Him, we were blessed in Him, and we were given grace in Him. Without predestination there is no salvation.

Practical Implications and Comfort

Secondly, predestination does not make us automatons; it does not make us puppets. We are responsible and accountable creatures, and we will face God in judgment. If you are a puppet, you are not accountable or responsible. The truth of the matter is, we do what we do because we want to do it and desire to do it, and we are answerable. Those men who crucified Jesus Christ did not do it to honor God, please God, serve God, or fulfill His Word. No.

They did what they did because they hated Him and despised Him. Men today who fight against God do so because that is what they want to do. They are still answerable and accountable to Him.

You cannot use predestination as an excuse to sin. You cannot say, "The reason I did this is that I was predestinated to do that." God may have predestinated everything, but there are second causes, secondary causes, or contingencies. God knew that was true, but you are the one who did it. You are responsible and accountable. When you think of the doctrine of predestination, think of salvation. Without it, there is no salvation and no glorification.

All these doctrines stand or fall together. The one thing that will make all our afflictions, trials, and tribulations bearable is understanding that God ordained them. Whatever He ordains in eternity comes to pass in time, and it is for our good and our glory. Therefore, we are to learn from our trials and afflictions and submit to Him.

I talked with a young lady yesterday who is going through an excruciating trial. The only thing that is truly consoling in a time like that is the sovereignty of God, knowing that God is in control and can use whatever He wants for His honor and glory. He alone can work it out. I would much rather depend upon God's predestination than man's predestination.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth, and we ask that You would help us to rejoice in Thy truth and in Thy Word, and help us to understand, comprehend, believe, and submit. In the name of Jesus Christ, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 18

The Great Blessing

August 28, 2018

Introduction: The Great Blessing of Loving Christ

The title of the message is "The Great Blessing"—being able to love the Lord Jesus Christ. First John 4:19 says, "We love Him because He first loved us." Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you love the Heavenly Father, His Word, His servants, His ministry, and His people? Have you ever considered the great blessing involved in God allowing us to love Him? For the past several months, this passage has been on my mind. We need to stop and think: the world hates the Lord Jesus Christ.

In John 15:18 our Lord said, "If the world hate you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you." Moreover, He said, "But this cometh to pass, that it might be fulfilled which is written in their law, They hated Me without a cause." There is absolutely nothing in Jesus Christ that merits or draws forth the world's hatred. They hate Him freely, willingly, deliberately, and without cause or reason.

The World's Hatred of God

Whoever hates the Lord Jesus Christ also hates the Father. It is impossible to maintain one attitude toward Jesus Christ and a different attitude toward the Father. Our Lord said, “If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father.” Whoever hates the Lord Jesus Christ hates the Father.

The Greek word for hate in this passage is miseo. It means not merely to hate, but to pursue with hatred, to detest, and to despise. Thus they hate Him, detest Him, despise Him, and pursue Him with hatred. Those who hate God love His enemies and all who are opposed to Him. They refuse to seek God and do not desire to know Him. He is not in all their thoughts.

They sin wickedly and lawlessly, speak evil against Him, and plan and scheme to destroy the righteous and anyone they choose. They deny God’s omniscience, judgment, and justice; they deny Him as Judge, Lawgiver, and King. Especially, they condemn His law, His truth, and His people.

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 10:2-11; Psalm 73:8-9 (KJV)

> The Bible 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. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity. His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity. He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent.
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> "His eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones. He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: He

hideth His face; He will never see it." And then the Psalmist says, "Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Thine hand: forget not the humble. Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it." So the wicked then not only hate God, they deny all of His attributes as well.

Asaph in Psalm 73 verses 8 and 9 states this concerning the wicked. He says, "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." So Asaph is saying that they are not afraid to curse God or curse man. Their tongue is a tongue of wickedness and deceit as well. So the Scripture is teaching us that there are a multitude of people who openly walk contrary to God, who hate God, and are free to say so. But what you and I probably do not grasp is there are multitudes more who will never say outright that they hate God and hate God's law, and yet their attitude is exactly the same. They despise Him. They disobey Him. And although they would not speak it openly, the truth of the matter is they hate Him just as much.

A good question to ask at this point, since we know about the hatred, is this: Why are you not among the multitude that hate God? Why are you different? Asaph said in Psalm 73, verses 8 and 9, that the wicked use their tongue; they are not afraid to curse God, and they are not afraid to curse man as well. The multitudes of people not only hate God; many who hate God do so and never say anything about it. In other words, their attitudes are quiet, yet their lives are in rebellion and wickedness as well.

Why Do We Love God?

Why do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? Who made the difference in your life? Why do you wish to love the Lord Jesus Christ and to serve, honor, and worship Him when the multitudes hate and despise Him? Paul asks the same question in 1 Corinthians 4 and verse 7: “For who maketh thee to differ from another?”

“And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” So the question is, who made you to differ? Why are you not one of

those who hate the Lord Jesus Christ? The answer—the only answer that we can give—is found in 1 John 4 and verse 19: “We love Him because He first loved us.”

God's Eternal, Prior Love

Look at that verse momentarily: “We love Him because He first loved us.” The word “first” is the Greek word protos, and it literally means first, or first in time, or first in any succession of things or persons. The Bible says we love Him because He loved us first. Moreover, when it says “we love Him,” in the Greek it is a present active indicative, which means that we love Him now and are continuing to love Him. Why do we love Him now, and why are we continuing to love Him? The verse gives us the answer: “because He first loved us.”

Notice that the word “loved” is past tense. It is an aorist in the Greek, which literally means it happened once and for all. It is an aorist active, which means God was active in choosing to love us. The truth is that God loved us before we could ever love Him. It would be absolutely impossible to have loved God first.

The reason is that He loved us in eternity past, when we had no being except in our covenantal relationship in Jesus Christ. He loved us in time past when He gave us grace in Jesus Christ, and His love was an everlasting love. Jeremiah 31:3 says, "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

Notice what God said: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Since God is eternal, His love necessarily is eternal as well. The word "everlasting" tells us that God is immutable, unchangeable. He loved us in eternity past, He loves us in the present, and He will love us in the future as well. The Bible says, "with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." In other words, the reason we have been drawn savingly to God the Father is simply because God loved us in time past. It was indeed an eternal love.

In Hosea 11:4 He said, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on

their jaws, and I laid meat unto them." Notice the words, "I drew them with bands of love."

First Peter 2:9-10 says, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light: which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." We should give Him praise because He called us out of darkness into His light.

The Everlasting Covenant and Election

Hebrews 13:20-21 says, "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Now, I want to call your attention to verse 20: “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.” The Greek word for “everlasting” is Aionios, and it literally means that which is eternal, that which is without beginning and end, that which always has been and always will be, hence eternal. Note, please, this covenant that God the Father entered into with God the Son, this covenant of grace called the everlasting covenant. It was an eternal covenant.

We are talking now about the blood of the everlasting covenant. Turn to Ephesians chapter 1, beginning with verse 3. I want you to look at what God has done for us in Jesus Christ: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath 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 pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.”

Now, look in verse 4: “according as He hath chosen us in Him,” that is, in Jesus Christ, “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.” So the question is this: When did God choose us? The answer is that He chose us in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world. I hope you are beginning to grasp this statement: “We love Him because He first loved us.” Had He not loved us, He would not have chosen us in Jesus Christ.

In 2 Timothy chapter 1, verses 8 and 9, 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.” Then, in verse 9: “Who hath saved us, and called us with an 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.”

God has saved us and called us with a holy calling—not according to our works. We had nothing to do with it because it was in eternity past. We did not even have an existence except in the covenant of grace. It was according to His own purpose and grace. Notice when that purpose was extended and when that grace was given: “which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

The truth of the matter is that we were loved by God the Father in eternity past, chosen in Jesus Christ in eternity past, and given grace in Jesus Christ in eternity past. Consequently, in time and in history, He drew us to Himself. So we love Him because He first loved us.

One of the greatest, grandest, and most majestic demonstrations of the love of God is that He gave us His only begotten Son. He gave us the Lord Jesus Christ to be our surety, our substitute, and our sacrifice. It was Jesus Christ who appeased and placated the holiness, wrath, justice, and righteousness of God.

Christ as the Propitiation for Our Sins

The Bible says in 1 John chapter 4 and verse 10, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” The word “propitiation” is from the Greek

word hilasmos. It means to placate, to satisfy, and to appease. Here is an angry, just, and holy God who is righteously angry at us because of our sins and the violation of His law.

Jesus Christ, our substitute, sacrifice, and surety, intervened and interposed Himself and sacrificed Himself. He placated, appeased, and satisfied the holiness, righteousness, justice, and wrath of God. We love Him because He first loved us.

John Gill, the great Baptist expositor, said this: “Lest love to God and so one to another should be thought to be of ourselves, and too much to be ascribed to it, the apostle observes that God’s love to us is prior to our love to Him. His love is from everlasting as well as to everlasting, for He loves His people as He does His Son, and He loved Him before the foundation of the world.”

“His choosing them in Christ this early, and blessing them with all spiritual blessings, the covenant of grace made with Christ from all eternity, the gift of grace to them in Him before the world began, and the promises of eternal life to them as soon, show the antiquity and the priority of His love. His love shown in the mission and gift of His Son was before theirs, and when they had none to Him. And His love in regeneration and conversion is previous to theirs, and the cause of it. His grace in regeneration brings faith and love with it, and produces them in the heart. And His love shed abroad there is the moving cause of it, or what draws it first into act and to exercise.”

“And the larger the discoveries and applications of the love of God be, the more does love to Him increase and abound. And nothing more animates and inflames our love to God than the consideration of the earliness of His love to us, of it being before ours, which shows it is free, sovereign, distinguishing, and unmerited.”

John Gill made an amazing statement: “The larger our discoveries of the grace of God to us should inflame us to love Him more.” In other words, the more we realize that we love Him because He first loved us, the more it should make us love Him.

The Covenant of Grace and Christ's Acknowledgment

The everlasting covenant goes something like this: God the Father gave to God the Son a people. God the Son agreed in that covenant to

undertake for them and be their surety, their substitute, and their sacrifice. And God the Holy Spirit agreed to regenerate and convert them and bring them savingly to Jesus Christ.

In John 17, the high priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ, He acknowledges this gift from God the Father. In verses 1 and 2, He says, "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee. As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him." To whom is our Lord going to give eternal life? To as many as the Father has given to Him.

In verse 6 He says, "I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world: Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me; and they have kept Thy word." So He is again saying that God the Father has given Him a people.

In verses 8 through 10 He says, "For I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from Thee, and they have believed that Thou didst send Me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine. And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I am glorified in them." Then, in verse 12, He says, "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled."

In verse 24, Jesus says, “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world.” Notice that Jesus Christ is confessing and acknowledging that God the Father had given Him a people before the foundation of the world, and He is praying for these people.

God the Father gave God the Son to be our surety, our sacrifice, and our substitute. The Apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians chapter 9 and verse 15, made this statement: “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.” The unspeakable gift was His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. By unspeakable, he means that words cannot describe the

greatness and majesty of this gift. It is impossible for human lips to explain the grandness of the most glorious episode in history, where God the Father actually gave His only begotten Son.

The Bible says it like this in 1 John chapter 3 and verse 16: "Hereby perceive we the love of God." The word perceive means to comprehend, to grasp, to understand, and to lay hold of. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." The way we perceive the love of God is that He laid down His life for us. It is not merely because He told us that He loved us.

There is only one God, but that one God has revealed Himself in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. When God the Father gave God the Son, He was actually giving Himself. That is why the Bible in 1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16 says, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness. God was manifest in the flesh. Jesus Christ is God incarnate.

It was Philip in John 14 who said to Jesus, "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." What did our Lord say?

The Sovereignty of God's Love

Philip said, "Shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Jesus answered, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." Jesus Christ is God in the flesh.

Now we are talking about the love of God: "We love Him because He first loved us." I want to point out two things concerning the love of God. The first is that it is sovereign. By this I mean that it is uninfluenced. There was absolutely nothing in the objects of His love that drew forth that love. In fact, there is everything in us that would repel His love because of our sin and wickedness.

The Sovereignty and Selectivity of God's Love

There is nothing in the creature to attract or prompt the love of God. We love each other because of something we see in each other. When our grandchildren were young, I bought all the videos of the Little Rascals, and they loved them. In one episode, it was Valentine's Day, and Darla, the pretty little girl, told Alfalfa, with his sticking-up hair, "I want you to be my Valentine." He said, "You do?" She said, "Yes." He asked, "Why?" She answered, "Because you've got personality." He said, "I do?"

So I tell Alice that what I saw in her was personality. That is true. We love each other because we like people and see things in them that we like. But that was not true with God. There was nothing in the creature that called forth or drew forth the love of God.

Why does God love you? Look at what He told His people in Deuteronomy chapter 7, verses 7 and 8: "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you." Why did the Lord love you? Because He loved you. The only reason God loved us is because He chose to love us. There was nothing in us that drew forth or merited His love. Therefore, God's love is sovereign.

He loves whom He wills. Arthur W. Pink made this comment: "The sovereignty of God's love necessarily follows from the fact that it is uninfluenced by anything in the creature. Thus to affirm that the cause of His love lies in God Himself is only another way of saying He loves whom He pleases. For a moment assume the opposite. Suppose God's love were regulated by anything else than His will; in such a case He would love by rule, and loving by rule, He would be under a law of love, and then, so far from being free, God Himself would be ruled by law."

Then he quotes Ephesians 1:4–5: "In love having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." To what? Some excellency which He foresaw in them? No. "According to the good pleasure of His will." We have to understand that the love of God is sovereign. God chooses to love whom He will. As one preacher said years ago, "You

chose your wife, let God choose His." That is a fact: God chooses whom He pleases. So the very first thing about God's love is that it is sovereign. The second thing about God's love is that it is selective.

This is a truth hated and despised by the world and by the humanist. When you understand that God does not love everyone in the same way, it will make you bow in humility before God. The Bible says in 1 John 4:8, "God is love." It also says that God is Spirit, and that God is light. But when you talk about the love of God, you have to distinguish between what I would call a love of benevolence and a special, saving, distinguishing love.

A love of benevolence is a general love. The Bible says in Matthew 5:45, "For He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." That is a love of benevolence. God takes care of the wicked. They may not acknowledge it, but He does. In Acts 14:17 the Bible says, "Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." How many people have their hearts filled with gladness and their stomachs filled with food? Practically everybody. It is true that everybody has gone hungry at one time or another, but we have had more full days than empty days, that is for sure.

That is simply a love of benevolence. In Psalm 145:9, "The Lord is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works." The Bible tells us that God feeds the ravens.

I love animals, and I especially hate to see a young animal suffer. I saw a little fawn dead on the road, probably not weighing fifteen pounds, and thought, "Oh, the poor thing never had a chance to grow up and find out anything about life." But buzzards have to eat like everybody else, and everything else, I suppose, and God feeds them. That is simply benevolence.

This benevolence does not wish wickedness, harm, or hurt upon anyone. For instance, in Ezekiel 33:11, God said, "Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

Now that is a love of benevolence. God's special saving, distinguishing love is reserved for and revealed to His people. Do you know what He said in Amos 3:2 to His people? "You only have I known of all the families of the earth."

Is not God omniscient? Yes. Did He not know about the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Philistines, the Hivites, and the Arkites? Yes. He knew about them. He judged them and destroyed them. But you have to understand what the word "known" means when He said, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." The word "known" there means to love, to choose, to acknowledge, and to have in an intimate way. God is saying, "You are the ones that I know." God knows the heathen, but He does not know them in the same way that He knows His people. When you read Amos 3:2, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," it shows you how that word is used.

When you go to Genesis 4:1, the Bible said, "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord." It is the same Hebrew word. So when God said, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," He was saying, You are the special ones. I have chosen you; you are Mine.

So there is a difference in the way that the righteous are loved and that the wicked are loved. We understand that difference in our lives. I am willing to help anyone. I want everyone to prosper and succeed, and I do not wish harm to anyone. That is the love of benevolence. However, I can say I love my wife. Obviously, I do not love Effie and Lorraine the same way I love Alice. If I did, I would be in trouble on a multitude of counts. But I would protect them as quickly as I would protect Alice. I love your children, but I love my children. I do not want to see your children harmed and hurt, but I have a special love for my children as well. This is a love of benevolence. There is also a special love between believers, more of a familial love, a family love, so to speak.

There is this general love of benevolence. But let me point something else out, something that you may not have considered. Here is a truth that has been greatly neglected. We hear much today about the love of God, but we very seldom hear anything about the hatred of God. Have you ever noticed and thought about this? It is

really impossible to have one without the other. If I love my wife, I hate anything that is going to destroy her or harm her. If I love the Lord, I am going to hate anything that is opposed to Him and seeks to overthrow Him.

The Bible says in Psalm 97:10, and it is a command, “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.” “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil.” Now look at Psalm 139 and see what David prayed, asking God to examine him. Beginning with verse 19, he says, “Surely Thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. For they speak against Thee wickedly, and Thine enemies take Thy name in vain.” He is talking about God’s enemies.

Then, in verse 21, he says, “Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

He is not merely talking about unsaved people in general, but about individuals who hate God so intensely. They work against Him, try to overthrow Him, and destroy His people. “Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? I hate them with perfect hatred.” He says, “I count them mine enemies.” To show the purity of his heart, he then says, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Do you think that our Lord loved Judas in the same way that He loved the Apostle John? Do you think that God loved Pharaoh in the same way that He loved the Apostle Paul? The answer is no. He does not love the wicked in the same way that He loves the righteous. In fact, in the Bible, there are some who are said to be hated by God.

In Malachi chapter 1, notice verses 2 and 3. God says, "I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast Thou loved us?" And God answers, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness."

Now, wait a minute. The Lord said, "I've loved you, yet you say, Where have you loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness." Now go to Romans chapter 9, beginning with verse 10.

Romans 9 verse 10: "And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated."

There was no more reason in Jacob why he should be the object of divine love than there was in Esau. They both had the same parents. They were twins. They were born at the same time. Yet God has said to love Jacob and hate Esau.

I read years ago an illustration Charles Haddon Spurgeon had mentioned. He was going to preach the following Sunday on Romans 9 verse 13, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." After service, a lady came to him and said, "I'm so glad that you're going to preach on that text. I've had trouble with that text for years. It has bothered me." Said Spurgeon, "It has bothered me too, and I've had trouble with it." "Oh," the woman said, "I'm so relieved. I just don't understand how God could hate Esau." "Oh," said Spurgeon.

“That’s not the part that troubles me. I understand how God could hate Esau. I just don’t understand how He could love that lying, conniving, despicable worm Jacob. That’s what bothers me.” We understand that. Some people have tried to say, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated,” means that God loved Jacob more and merely loved Esau less. Really? Let me tell you something, folks.

If loving means destroying a person, his heritage and his property and leaving it for the dragons in the wilderness, thank you. I’d rather not be loved in that particular manner. “Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated.” Look in your Bibles to Psalm 5, beginning with verse 4. The Scripture says concerning God, “For Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with Thee.” Verse 5 says, “The foolish shall not stand in Thy sight: Thou hatest

all workers of iniquity. Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man." The word "abhor" is a strong word for hatred. The Lord will hate, abhor the bloody and deceitful man. So the love of God stands in strong contrast to the hatred of God.

In Revelation 3:19, our Lord tells His people, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." Note the phrase, "as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." "As many as" does not mean everyone. It is a limited number, the same as you found in John 17:2. So He says, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten."

If you can get away with your sin, wickedness, and rebellion, and can never be rebuked or chastened by God, God does not love you in a special, saving, distinguishing way. What does the Bible say in Hebrews chapter 12, verses 7 and 8? "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." Those who are not loved in this special saving way are not rebuked and chastened; they are judged. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." When a person can sin against God constantly and continually, it demonstrates that he is not a real, genuine child of God, for God would not allow that in His children.

Arthur W. Pink said it like this: "Holy Writ knows nothing of the love of God outside of Jesus Christ. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works, so that He provides the ravens with food. He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil, and His providence ministers unto the just and the unjust. But His love is reserved for His elect. That is unequivocally established by its characteristics, for the attributes of love are identical with Himself. Necessarily so, for God is love. In making that postulate, it is but another way to say God's love is like Himself, from everlasting to everlasting, immutable. Nothing is more absurd than to imagine that anyone beloved of God can eternally perish or shall ever experience His everlasting vengeance. Since the love of God is in Jesus Christ, it was attracted by nothing in its objects, nor can it be repelled by anything in them, or even by them."

"Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Since there was nothing in you that drew forth the love of God, there is nothing in you that can repel the love of God. God loved us for Christ's sake—not for our sakes, goodness, righteousness, or works, for we had none. God loved us because He loved us.

Applications: Loving God in Response

Let us make a couple of applications. In 1 John 4:19, he says, "We love Him." Why? "Because He first loved us." Our love to Him is nothing more than a reflection of His love to us. Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun, so our love is nothing more than a reflection of God's love to us. His love is the root and the ground and the foundation of our love to Him. Had He not first loved us, we would have never loved Him. Let that sink in.

When I think of the multitudes of people that hate Jesus Christ, that despise Him, that dishonor Him, that disobey Him, and that refuse to bow to Him; when I think of the multitudes who live their lives totally disregarding His lordship, His kingship, and His claims, all of a sudden it hits me: Who am I that I love Him and want to honor Him, serve Him, obey Him, and bring my life into conformity to His Word? The reality of that thought is absolutely overwhelming. The reality is mind-boggling.

In Ephesians chapter 3, beginning with verse 16, he says, "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

The love of God to us, for us, and in us is deeper than we can imagine, wider than we can conceive, higher than it is possible to attain, and it passes our knowledge. It is impossible to grasp the depth and the length and the breadth and the height of the love of God. When you stop and think that God chose us in eternity past and loved us in eternity past, and that, since God is omniscient, He knew

our sins, our rebellion, our wickedness, our depravity—He knew everything about us—and yet He loved us regardless, it is mind-boggling.

He gave us to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave us grace in Jesus Christ. He not only regenerated us, He converted us. He gave us repentance. He gave us faith. He enlightened our minds. He illuminated our understanding. He preserves us in Jesus Christ. He enables us to persevere in grace and in repentance and in faith. And ultimately, by His grace, He will glorify us. And to think that all this was in His mind before we ever had a being.

Just the thought that He first loved us should make us love Him more, desire Him more, serve Him better, worship Him more frequently, and adore Him in every way of our lives. The next time you think about the love of God or your love to Him, I want you to think of 1 John 4 and verse 19: "We love Him because He first loved us." Had He not loved us, we would never have loved Him.

Tell the Lord that you love Him, but you need to thank Him for enabling you to love Him, enabling you to want to serve Him. For had He not first loved us, we would never have loved Him.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee and we confess, Lord, with John in 1 John 3 and verse 1, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." What great love You had for us in Jesus Christ that You enable us to be Your sons. Father, we do pray that You would help us to love Thee in the way that You have commanded us to love Thee, with all of our hearts, mind, soul, and being. Help us to love Thee, Father, the way Thou dost deserve to be loved. And help us to thank You for first loving us. We give Thee praise and honor and glory in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

He gave us to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave us grace in Jesus Christ. He not only regenerated us, He converted us. He gave us repentance. He gave us faith. He enlightened our minds. He illuminated our understanding. He preserves us in Jesus Christ. He enables us to persevere in grace and in repentance and in faith. And ultimately, by His grace, He will glorify us. And to think that all this was in His mind before we ever had a being.

Tell the Lord that you love Him, and thank Him for enabling you both to love Him and to want to serve Him. Had He not first loved us, we would never have loved Him.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee and confess with John in 1 John 3:1, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” What great love You had for us in Jesus Christ, enabling us to be Your sons. Help us to love Thee as Thou hast commanded, with all our hearts, mind, soul, and being. Help us to love Thee, Father, as Thou dost deserve to be loved, and to thank You for first loving us. We give Thee praise, honor, and glory in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

CHAPTER 19

Without Cause

November 6, 2019

SCRIPTURE READING - Psalm 35:1-18 (KJV)

Introduction: The Pain of Unjust Attacks

Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation. Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul.

Let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt. Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the Lord chase them. Let their way be dark and slippery: and let the angel of the Lord persecute them. For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul. Let destruction come upon him at unawares; and let his net that he hath hid catch himself: into that very destruction let him fall. And my soul shall be joyful in the Lord: it shall rejoice in his salvation. All my bones shall say, Lord, who is like unto thee, which deliverest the poor from him

> that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him?
>
> False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things I knew not. They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into my own bosom. I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.
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> But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not; they did tear me, and ceased not: with hypocritical mockers at feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth. Lord, how long wilt thou look on? Rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions. I will give thee thanks in the great congregation: I will praise thee among much people. Let not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me.

"Neither let them wink with the eye that hate me without a cause. For they speak not peace: but they devise deceitful matters against them that are quiet in the land."

Oftentimes we find ourselves in situations and circumstances in which we view ourselves as victims. We are hurt, disappointed, and oftentimes become angry and bitter. We do not understand what happened or even why it happened. We simply know that it happened, and based upon our understanding, there was no cause for it. Consequently, we have to deal with the situation, and hopefully we can at least deal with whatever it is in a biblical manner.

One thing that hurts the most and is even the most debilitating for a Christian is when we are criticized, belittled, berated, and attacked by another believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. We expect such from unbelievers, but we do not expect it from believers. Yet our Lord said in John 16:33, "In the world you shall have tribulation." The Apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:12, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

The Reality of Christian Meanness

It is unbelievable, and yet absolutely true, that Christians can be just as mean, just as vicious, and just as wicked as anyone else. We oftentimes violate God's Word and do things that are specifically mentioned as things God truly hates. Proverbs 6:16 says, "These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him." What does God hate? "A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among the brethren."

Most of us are not going to shed innocent blood. But certainly we can have a proud look, a lying tongue, a heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that run swiftly to mischief, and we can be a false witness, speak lies, and sow discord among the brethren. These are things specifically that God hates.

It is important to realize that we are capable of these sins. When they are committed against us personally, it hurts, and it is exceedingly grievous.

I want you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 55, so I can begin to set the stage for you to understand Psalm 35. In Psalm 55, David shows how deeply he was hurt when he was attacked by fellow believers. Look what he said, beginning with verse 12: “For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company.”

David said that if it had been an enemy who reproached him, he could have borne it. He could understand that; he knew his enemy hated him. If it had been someone stronger than he who magnified himself against him, David could have hidden himself and withdrawn from him. That was no problem. But what troubled him was that the man who attacked him was his equal, his guide, and his acquaintance. They had taken sweet counsel together and walked in the house of God in company. We understand enemies, but it hurts

grievously when we are attacked and vilified by our brother in Jesus Christ.

Understanding Psalm 35: David's Grief and Prayer

Now let me tell you what Psalm 35 is. Psalm 35 is an expression of grief by David when he is attacked by those who supposedly were his friends. We do not know the exact situation to which Psalm 35 refers. It could have been the treatment David received at the hand of King Saul, Ahithophel, Shimei, or even his son Absalom. We are not told, but we are told very clearly that this is a passage in which a friend has turned on David.

I want to give you a paragraph from Albert Barnes on Psalm 35. Listen carefully, because I think this will be very applicable. He said: “What is apparent in this psalm, the central idea, that which makes it useful, is that it was composed with reference to the treatment which the author received from those who were his professed friends, from those to whom he had shown kindness in their troubles, to whom he had been a

David had a friend and a brother who had now turned against him. In the time of prosperity, they had been his professed friends and had partaken freely and largely of his hospitality. When they were afflicted, David had shown them sympathy and kindness. But when reverses came upon him, they forsook him and joined with his persecutors and accusers. This psalm, therefore, has special applicability to trials of that nature.

It expresses the author's feelings and views regarding his own sorrows as springing from such ingratitude, and his earnest prayer that God would interpose on his behalf—the rolling of the sorrows of this pained and oppressed heart upon the arm of his unchanging Friend, the mighty and merciful God. As occasions similar to those referred to in the psalm not infrequently occur in this world, it was important that the volume of inspiration should furnish an example of how piety is to meet such a form of trial. We are going to face things like this, and this psalm teaches us how we are to face such a trial.

Look at verse 1 and see David's grief and anxiety: “Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive against me: fight against them that fight against me.” Literally, David is praying, “Litigate, O Lord, with them that litigate against me. Contend with those that contend against me.” In simple words, he is asking God to avenge him of his adversaries.

Now look at verses 2 through 9. David unashamedly asked God to do certain things for him. As we read this, ask yourself: Would you make these prayer requests unto God when folks are persecuting you? Look at verse 2: “Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help.” The words mean, “Come and defend me. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul,”

In other words, David is not just saying, “Defend me”; he is saying, “Take out your spear and stop them. Let them know what they are doing.” Now look at the prayer he prays in verse 4: “Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt. Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the Lord chase them. Let their way be dark and slippery: and let the angel of the Lord persecute them. For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul. Let destruction come upon him at unawares; and let his net that he hath hid catch himself: into that very destruction let him fall. And my soul shall be joyful in the Lord: it shall rejoice in his salvation.”

David is unashamedly asking God to persecute those who are persecuting him: “Let them be as chaff before the wind, let the angel of the Lord chase them, let their way be dark and slippery, let the angel of the Lord persecute them.” Why would David pray such a prayer? The answer is found in verse 7: “For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul.” David is saying, “They are persecuting me, and I have done nothing to hurt them. There is nothing in me that draws forth this wicked response from them.”

He says it again in verse 19: “Let not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me: neither let them wink with the eye that hate me without a cause.” The Hebrew word translated “without a

cause" literally means they hated him freely, without a purpose. They hated him undeservedly. David had done absolutely nothing wrong to draw forth their ire, hatred, and bitterness. They were attacking him for no purpose, undeservingly and freely.

It is almost inconceivable for you and me to think that Christians could act in such a manner, but it is entirely possible. This is what I call the hen house syndrome.

The Hen House Syndrome and Biblical Response

I don't know if you know anything about chickens, but you let a chicken get hurt—it could be accidentally, or it could have been in a fight—and just let a little blood be shown, and the other chickens will come together and peck that one to death if possible. I've often said this is the way it is for Christians, seemingly. We're about the only ones who try to destroy our walking wounded. When one gets down, instead of trying to help, it seems we always try to hurt. But the Bible tells us what we are to do.

It is easier to criticize and condemn than it is to actually help. The Bible says in Galatians 6:1-2, "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." Then he says, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." What does he mean, "do it in the spirit of meekness, considering thine own self"? If it's not for God's grace, you would be the one that needed to help instead of the one being the helper. That's what he's saying.

So it is much easier to criticize and condemn than it is to humble ourselves and help someone. Criticism and condemnation are, in one sense of the word, an act of the flesh. Humility and obedience are an act of the spirit. Even as Christians, we still have this battle between the flesh and the spirit.

Galatians 5:13 says, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Now watch verse 15: "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not

consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

Interestingly enough, for years I have wanted to preach a message on Galatians 5:15, where the Apostle Paul says, "But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." I've never preached the message that I wanted to, but I've already got the title.

In my mind, “Cannibal Christians.” That is exactly what we end up doing. Paul said that if we are not careful, we will bite and devour one another and be consumed one of another. Rancor, ill will, bitterness, harshness of spirit, meanness of mind, fleshly pride, arrogance, haughtiness, hatefulness, condemnatory attitudes, unwillingness to serve, and know-it-all attitudes will ultimately devour and destroy. We desperately need the mind of Jesus Christ in every area of our lives. That is why the Bible says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”

David's Innocence and Compassion

David was being condemned and attacked undeservedly. He says, “False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not.” They rewarded him evil for good to the spoiling of his soul. I certainly understand that, and I can identify with it. I have had people express to others what I believed and what my positions were, though I did not even know them. I had never spoken to them, and they had never spoken to me.

Yet they were experts on what I believe. It is absolutely insane. I had to write one man a letter after he made a number of statements. Everything he said was an absolute bald-faced lie. I had never met the man in my entire life or spoken to him, and yet he was telling people where I had been and what I had done. I had never been to any of those places and had never done any of those things.

This is what is happening here. David says, “False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things which I know not.” It amazes me that Christians, and especially preachers, can be so crass, fleshly,

and insolent as to declare what someone believes without ever consulting that individual. The best way to know what I actually believe is to ask me.

If I want to know what Joshua believes, I can ask him, and he can tell me. I have no right to go around saying, "Well, Gary believes this," when I have never even talked to Gary about it. This is what David is saying: "I've had charges laid against me. I knew nothing about them. I was totally ignorant of them."

Moreover, he says, "They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul." David was a sinner, just as you and I are sinners. But the truth is that, in this instance in Psalm 35, David was innocent. Everything they were doing was without a cause. Every time David tried to help them and do that which was good and holy, they turned around and rewarded him evil for his good.

Here was David's attitude toward them: "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth. I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into my own bosom. I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother."

David was sincere and just. He sought to help them not only through prayer, but through fasting and prayer. He demonstrated his love for them as a friend and brother, and he even went farther, saying that he mourned for them as one mourneth for his mother. Everyone knows what it is like to lose a mother. My mother has been dead for years, and I still think of her; it grieved me when she died. I still think of my father. David was truly, genuinely compassionate and concerned, and he was grieved for these individuals.

He said in verse 13, "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled myself with fasting; and my prayer returned into my own bosom." What does that mean, "my prayer returned into my own bosom"? Literally, he is saying, I prayed with my head sunk into my bosom. In other words, the prayer that went out of his lips, his breath came back and hit him in his own stomach. It was the earnest prayer of someone genuinely bowed down with sorrow. It is much like 1 Kings 18:42, when Elijah prayed. The Bible says he cast himself upon the ground and put his

face between his knees and prayed. This is what David is saying: my prayer was genuine, my prayer was real, and it was truthful.

Henry Ainsworth said it like this in reference to this statement: “I wished no worse to them than to myself. Let me receive of God such good as I pray for them.” In other words, David said, “I’m willing to take from God whatever I pray for them.” Obviously, he was genuinely sincere. There was no shallowness in David’s prayer, no emptiness, and no hypocrisy. His concern and compassion for these people were absolutely genuine. His actions clearly demonstrated his attitude. He was not wicked. He was not ungodly. He was biblical. He was right, and he was holy.

The Enemies' Response and Our Two Options

Now, what was their response to David’s biblical attitude and actions? Look at verses 15 through 17: “But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not; they did tear me, and ceased not: with hypocritical mockers at feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth.” They got together and talked about David. They slandered him, mocked him, ridiculed him, criticized him, and condemned him. With their teeth, they literally tore him apart. He was unaware of all their talk, but that is exactly what they were doing. They gathered themselves together against him.

I usually tell people, when someone says, “Well, you should hear what old so-and-so said about you,” that I have two responses. First: “Well, if they really knew me the way God does, they’d probably say worse things than that about me.” Or, “As long as they’re talking about me, they’re leaving some poor widow woman alone.” But this is exactly what David is saying. David said, “Boy, they

They get together, and all they are doing is ripping me apart, and they do not cease. They do not stop. Now, let me point something out. We cannot control what people think or what people say. There is no way in the world I can control what Steve thinks or what David says. Nor can we make people like us or love us. Inevitably, in a sinful world with sinful people, people are going to misinterpret; when they misinterpret, they misunderstand; and when they misunderstand, they misjudge.

But there are two things that we can do, and both are scriptural and biblical. First, we may live in such a way as to prove them wrong. Our lives, attitudes, and actions are to demonstrate that they are gossipers, slanderers, and liars. We have to be obedient, even if they are disobedient.

Here is an illustration. If Steve stood up in this room and cursed me to my face, and everyone heard him, would that give me the right to stand up and curse him back? The answer is no. Simply because Steve does wrong does not give me the right to do wrong.

There is a biblical way to handle his wickedness and wrongness. Romans chapter 12, verse 17, says, "Recompense to no man evil for evil." Or, do not pay evil back with evil. "Provide things honest in the sight of all men." That is what I mean by living holy and obediently. Then he says, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Now watch verse 19.

"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, what are you to do? 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."

So God says, if someone does you wrong and is wicked toward you, and he is hungry, feed him. God does not say to go out and buy him a big steak, but He does say, "Feed him." If you have peas, share the peas with him. If he is thirsty, give him whatever water you have. "In so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head." Heaping coals of fire upon one's head is equivalent to repaying evil with good.

Years ago, I heard about a woman who came to her pastor for counseling. She was criticizing and condemning her husband, and they were having problems. The pastor leaned back, looked at her, smiled, and said, "Well, have you tried heaping coals of fire upon his head?" That is, returning good for evil. She said, "No, but I tried hot water. That don't work either."

The Bible says, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." The first thing we can do is live obediently and honestly and

prove them to be liars, slanderers, gossipers, and worthless individuals. The second thing we can do is appeal to God.

If you go back to Psalm 35, look at verse 17. David asks, “Lord, how long wilt thou look on? Rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions.” “Lord, how long wilt thou look on?” Lord, how long are You going to let this continue? You know that I am innocent in this; You know that they are persecuting me without a cause. You know my heart, my motives, and everything about me. So, Lord, please do not let this continue. If you skip down to verse 22, watch it again.

He says, "This thou hast seen, O Lord: keep not silence: O Lord, be not far from me. Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, even unto my cause, my God and my Lord." So he is asking God to intervene, to interpose Himself. David is doing two things: first, he is going to live his life wholly and rightly and do that which is good and obedient; secondly, he is appealing to God.

When we appeal to God for help, we need to be innocent. We need to be righteous. We are unrighteous if we are guilty, and we merely condemn ourselves by appealing to God. First John 3 explains this very clearly: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him." Then, in verse 20: "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."

If we come to God guilty and know that we are guilty, and our heart is condemning us, God's greater than our heart. God knows that. If you want to come to God with confidence, you come innocently, you come in righteousness. If you can come in righteousness and your heart does not condemn you, we have confidence that God is hearing us and God is going to answer and impose Himself on our part.

Each of us has been accused wrongly, without a cause. Each of us has been attacked wrongly and without a cause. So what makes Psalm 35 so applicable for us? Have you ever stopped to think why God allowed certain things to be put in the Bible? Here is David

being attacked by professed friends and brothers. There is something that you and I must benefit from in this passage. There is something that we must apply to our lives.

The Greater David: Jesus Christ

What are the applications we are to make? While I have been talking about David in Psalm 35, since David wrote Psalm 35, there is the greater David in view. The greater David is the Lord Jesus Christ. Hold Psalm 35 and turn to Matthew 22.

Beginning with verse 41, our Lord asks the Pharisees, "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?" What think you of the Messiah? Whose son is he? They said unto him, "The son of David." Then he said unto them, "How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?"

No man was able to answer him a word. Neither did any man from that day forth ask him any more questions. Our Lord says, "What think you of Christ?" "He is the son of David." "If he is merely the son of David, how is it that David in Psalm 110 said, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit down on my right hand'? If he is his Lord, how is he simply the son of David?" What he is showing these Pharisees is that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is not merely the son of David in a physical sense, but he is the true Son of David, and he is God incarnate. Matthew 1:1, the very first verse in the New Testament, says, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." Jesus Christ is the true Son of David. Solomon was a physical son, but Jesus Christ is

Jesus Christ is the true Son of David. Luke 1:32 says concerning Him, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David." Jesus Christ, therefore, is greater than Solomon. Solomon was merely the physical son, but Jesus Christ is the true Son because He is the true inheritor of David's throne.

Our Lord said in Matthew 12:42, "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it:

for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." He says the same thing in Luke 11:31. Jesus Christ is greater than Solomon. Why? Because Solomon was simply a physical son, while Jesus Christ is the true Son of David and the true inheritor of David's throne.

Whatever is said of David in Psalm 35 is applicable to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, because Jesus Christ is the true Son of David. Psalm 35:11 says, "False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not." That was true not only of David the king, but also of the greater Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 26:59-60 says, "Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death. But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none." Notice that they were seeking false witness. At last, two false witnesses came and said, "This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." The high priest then arose and said unto Him, "Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?"

Here were false witnesses coming and laying to our Lord's charge things which He knew not. That was true of the physical David, but it was true of the greater David, the Lord Jesus Christ, as well. Psalm 35:19 says, "Let not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me: neither let them wink with the eye that

When David said that they were persecuting him without a cause, he meant that they hated him and persecuted him freely. There was no purpose in it. In other words, there was nothing in David that drew forth and merited their hatred.

The same is true of the Lord Jesus Christ. Psalm 69:4 says, "They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away." This verse is used in the New Testament concerning Jesus Christ. In John 15:22-25, our Lord says, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them

the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause."

The same truth from Psalm 35 and Psalm 69 is now applied to Jesus Christ in John 15:25. There was nothing in Jesus Christ that merited or drew forth the hatred of these wicked people. They hated Him freely. They hated Him for no purpose. They hated Him without a cause. Jesus Christ was and is the sinless Son of God.

These people mocked and ridiculed Jesus Christ. They lied against Him. They slandered Him. They crucified Him. But Jesus Christ used the two options that are revealed for us in Psalm 35. What did He do first? He lived a perfect life in obedience to His Father, in obedience to the law, demonstrating that these people who were persecuting Him and lying against Him were slanderers, gossipers, and wicked, wicked people.

He said in John 8:29, "And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him." Our Lord did always those things which pleased his Father. You remember what he said in John 8:46? He looked at those Pharisees and said, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" Here I am; charge me with a sin. Show me where I have sinned, where I violated. They could not do it. Our Lord lived a life of holiness and obedience, proving that his enemies were wicked and wrong, and that they were lying and slandering against him.

The second thing he did was appeal to his Father. Hebrews 5:7–9 says, "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared. Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."

Our Lord not only lived a holy, godly, obedient life; he also appealed to his heavenly Father. Christ used both of these methods to reprove and rebuke the gainsayers. We should do so as well.

An interesting study is to go through the book of Psalms and note how often David claimed God as his defense. In Psalm 7:10 he said, "My defense is of God, which saveth the upright in heart." In Psalm 62:6, he says, "He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defense; I shall not be moved." In Psalm 94:22, he says, "But the Lord is my defence; and my God is the rock of my refuge." Over and over in the Bible, David claims God as his defense. God is his defender.

Applications: Reaping What We Sow and Attacking Christ

It is his responsibility to live wholly and righteously and godly. In His time, God will vindicate David. He will demonstrate who is lying and who is not lying.

I want to make two applications and tie this together for you. I want you to think about this, and I am going to be honest with you: I preached this entire message really just to get to my last application. Here is the first application: We must understand that whatever we sow, we will reap. Inevitably, whatever we sow is going to come back upon our own heads. If we lie, we are going to be lied upon. If we slander, we are going to be slandered. If we gossip, we are going to be gossiped about.

Look first at Psalm 9, verses 15 and 16: “The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken. The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.” God says, “The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made. They fell into their own pit. The net which they hid, their own foot is captured. The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared by the work of his own hands.” Inevitably, it is going to come back on us.

Now look in your Bibles to Psalm 35, at verses 6 and 8: “Let their way be dark and slippery: and let the angel of the Lord persecute them. For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul.” Now watch verse 8: “Let destruction come upon him at unawares; and let his net that he hath hid catch himself: into that very destruction let him fall.” We

have to understand that whatever we do to others is ultimately going to come back to us. We are going to reap that which we sow. Usually, when you sow, you reap more than you sow.

Here is the second application. Here are some concluding questions. I want you to think about this. Before I ask them, turn in your Bibles to Matthew 25 and be ready. Listen carefully. Would you lie about the Lord Jesus Christ? Would you criticize and condemn the Lord Jesus Christ?

Would you dare to impugn His motives? Would you gossip and slander about Jesus Christ because He did not hold the same views that you hold? Or would you try to condemn His understanding in light of your finite understanding? Would you make yourself the bar of justice and right instead of submitting to Him and His Word? Would you say that you were the determiner of right and wrong, and of right doctrine and wrong doctrine, and not Jesus Christ? Would you hate Him, vilify Him, or denounce Him? Would you separate from Him?

You might say, "No, no, no. I would never do any of those things." My response is: Really? We do it every day. Look in Matthew 25:40: "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

Jesus Christ is our Head, and we are the body. You touch my body, and it affects my head; you touch my head, and it affects my body. Whenever we attack each other, we are attacking the Lord Jesus Christ. We are one according to His Word. We have never really understood the implication of attacking a fellow believer and trying to degrade, destroy, or denounce him. Whatever we do to that believer, we do to the Lord Jesus Christ. Without cause.

Jesus Christ does not deserve any of our trash, wickedness, ill will, anger, or vindictiveness. Whatever we give to another believer, we give to the Lord Jesus Christ, and He does not deserve any of our wickedness. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow before Thee. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth.

We pray this will sink down into our hearts, so that we think very clearly before criticizing and condemning. Lord, help us obey and

humble ourselves to help, not destroy. In Jesus Christ's name, we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 20

The Good Part

May 19, 2021

Introduction: The Phrase 'The Good Part'

It came to pass as they went, that he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was cumbered about with much serving, and came to him and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore, that she help me.

And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.

I wonder how often you and I have used the words “the good part.” We talk about food and the good part of it. The heart of a watermelon is the good part. When you think of a cantaloupe in South Georgia, after you get all the seeds and cut it in half and put a big dip of vanilla ice cream right in the center of it, the center of the

cantaloupe is the good part. We also think of the icing on the cake as the good part.

When you think of a meal, you think of all the trimmings that go with it. It is almost impossible to think of a Thanksgiving meal with just a turkey, because you think of all the trimmings and everything that goes with it, which makes the turkey good. So the good part is actually the trimming and not necessarily the turkey.

When we are talking about books, and perhaps have read the same book, we begin discussing it, and the very first thing we want to discuss is the good part. The same is true when people watch movies. Usually the good part is where the bad guy gets beaten into the ground by the good guy and the good guy triumphs. Of course, the good part of a joke is the punchline. You can think of the good part in many things, but have you ever really considered the good part of life?

Each one has trials, tribulations, troubles, adversities, testing, and failures, yet amidst all those things there are certainly good parts to life. We reminisce, recollect, and think of all those good parts. There is a good part to being a baby, to childhood, to being a teenager, to being an adult, to being married, and to getting older. There is even a good part to dying if you are a child of God, because the Bible says, “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” So we do not get rid of the good parts even when we die. But here is another thought.

Martha's Commendable Service

This is what really prompted me as I read this passage this past week. I believe that many Christians rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ and are saved by His infinite grace, yet they truly miss the good part of salvation. Most Christians cannot even give you the essence of salvation. They simply refer to salvation as living forever. Salvation is not simply living forever. It is true that there is an eternal aspect to salvation, but that eternal aspect is far more than merely living forever.

In Luke chapter 10 and verse 38, the Bible tells us, “Now it came to pass as they went, that he entered into a certain village, and a

certain woman named Martha received him into her house." According to John 11 and verse 1, that certain village was Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem. It was the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Mary and Martha were sisters, and Lazarus was their brother. Evidently Martha was the older sister and, in all probability, she was a widow, because both Mary and Lazarus lived with her.

If you look in verse 38 again, it says, "Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house." Evidently, the house belonged to Martha, and Mary and Lazarus were living with her. The Bible says that Martha received Him into her house, and the word "received" means literally to receive as a guest. Martha, then, received Jesus Christ as a guest into her house.

Martha has been condemned and castigated for her service, yet such service in those days was not only necessary and needful; it was also expensive and could be downright dangerous. So let us consider Martha's commendation before we get to her condemnation. When you stop and think about Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, the Bible says that Martha received Him into her house. Hospitality in those days was absolutely needful and necessary.

There were no Holiday Inns in those days and no Motel 6 where they would leave the light on for you. If you did not get into a home, you usually had to sleep out on the street or something like that. Our Lord did not even have a home, at least not during His ministry. He certainly had a home as a young child, and He lodged with Peter and the other disciples. But in Luke 9, beginning with verse 57, we read: "And it came to pass that as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest." And Jesus said unto him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." In other words, He did not have a particular house or home as far as you and I would know. Therefore, it was absolutely needful and necessary that hospitality be extended in those days. Moreover, it is absolutely needed and necessary that hospitality be extended in our day and time as well.

Let me give you some Scriptures, and I want you to think about these. The first is Romans chapter 12 and verse 13: “distributing to

the necessity of the saints, given to hospitality." Every child of God is to distribute to the saints as they are in need and to be given to hospitality.

In 1 Timothy chapter 3, qualifications are given for a bishop or pastor: "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach." I have said this before, and I am going to reemphasize it today. If I had to, I could go down the list of every requirement for a pastor and show you where every Christian is required to have the exact same attribute in his life, with one exception: "apt to teach." The pastor must be apt to teach, but everyone else must be blameless, sober, and given to hospitality as well.

In Titus chapter 1 and verse 8, again speaking of the pastor, the Bible says, "but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, and temperate." These characteristics are to be in a pastor preeminently because he is to be an example to others, but the same requirements are required of every Christian, with the exception of being apt to teach. First Peter chapter 4 and verse 9 simply says, "use hospitality one to another without grudging."

Every child of God is required to use hospitality without grudging. It was needful and necessary in those days to extend hospitality to others, just as it is needful and necessary in these days. Moreover, it was expensive, especially in reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus usually never traveled alone. He usually had His twelve disciples with Him, and sometimes more than the twelve as well. I am sure Martha would probably never have winced or even considered the expense involved in providing a meal for our Lord and His disciples.

But another thought occurred to me as I read this: the visit could have been a surprise visit. Martha may have thought, "I am not as prepared as I should be." Of course, there were many things that could enter in.

If you will talk to Alice, she can give you firsthand information about what it is like to feed twenty to twenty-five people three meals a day for two or three days in a row. It is not only expensive; it is pure hard work.

Even Robert has brought food from time to time. The last time, he said, "Wow, I didn't realize we were going to have this many people. I've got to do something else." Sometimes, even when you know how many will be there, they consume much more than at other times. Then you still have to make a run to town and cook more.

One of the funny things is that Dr. Holmes's mother is 101, and last week she was out raking yards. But at 100 she told her son, Dr. Holmes, "Tom, I just can't cook for a large crowd anymore." So I looked at Alice and said, "Sweetheart, I'll excuse you from cooking for a large crowd when you reach 100. But until then, you need to keep it up." Obviously, yes. Here was Christ; here were His disciples.

It was an expensive meal, I am sure, to feed all those people. But in commending Martha, it was not only needed and necessary, and not only expensive; it was also dangerous. Jesus Christ was a wanted man, in the sense that the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians hated Him and wanted to put Him to death. In John chapter 11, He raised Lazarus from the dead. Once Lazarus was raised, they wanted to murder not only Jesus Christ but Lazarus as well. They wanted to get rid of all the evidence. Martha should therefore be commended in a strong sense of the word: she was doing what was needed and necessary. It was expensive and probably dangerous as well.

Martha was also a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Look in Luke chapter 10, verse 39: “And she had a sister named Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet.” Now note, “which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His Word.” “And she had a sister called Mary which also sat at Jesus' feet.” The implication is that Martha sat at Jesus' feet. She was being instructed. She was being taught.

She was sitting there listening. She was hearing the Word of God until it came time to serve a meal. And then she arose.

If you look back at verse 39, the Bible said, “and she had a sister called Mary which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word.” The Greek word for “heard” is the word akouo. Interestingly, it is an imperfect active indicative. Here is what it means: Mary kept on hearing. She kept on listening. When Martha arose to go take care of the meal, Mary just sat there and kept on hearing and kept on listening. Pay attention to verse 39 again: “and she had a sister called

Mary which also sat at Jesus' feet." Hold Luke 10, but look in your Bibles to the book of Acts chapter 22. There you will find and discover that it was the method of teaching for students to sit at the feet of their masters or at the feet of their ones who was doing the teaching, the teacher. Notice in Acts chapter 22 and verse 3 what the Apostle Paul said concerning himself.

Martha's Distraction and Complaint

Paul said, "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God as you all are this day." But note his words: "I was brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel." I sat there as a student. I was being taught by this teacher, by this master. Obviously, Mary and all the others who were listening to our Lord were sitting at His feet.

Martha, after she got up to leave in order that she might prepare the meal, became upset and disturbed because she was left to do all the work alone. If you have never fed twenty or twenty-five people by yourself, it is indeed a lot of work. It is very difficult to feed a large crowd. Look what she did. In verse 40: "But Martha was cumbered about with much serving and came to him and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me."

Pay close attention to the word "cumbered." The Bible says that Martha was cumbered about with much serving. The word literally means to be drawn around; it means to be distracted, driven about mentally, overoccupied, and too busy about something. Martha was basically out of her mind over what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. In other words, "I need help. I just can't get everything done. This is simply driving me crazy."

Here is the interesting thing. Verse 40 says, "but Martha was cumbered about with much serving." The Greek word for "serving" is diakonia. It is where we get our English word "diaconate" and ultimately "deacon." It refers to an office, but this word is repeatedly translated in the Bible as "ministry." Literally, verse 40 says, "but

Martha was cumbered about with much ministering." She was indeed ministering.

Now, you remember Acts chapter 6. That is where the first deacons originated and why that office was developed: there was a complaint among the Grecians that their widows were being neglected in the daily ministration, that is, the daily feeding of them. The Apostle said, "It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God and serve food. So look you out seven men of honest report, full of faith and full of the Holy Ghost, whom we may appoint over this matter." Those first deacons ministered by waiting on tables, by serving food.

It was just that simple. This word refers to ministry. It is even used of our Lord Jesus Christ, for He said in Mark chapter 10, verse 45, "For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many."

We have, then, this understanding: Martha was indeed commendable, and what she was doing had a commendation in the sense that it was needful and necessary. It was expensive and dangerous. Yet her condemnation also comes in verse 40. "But Martha was cumbered about with much serving, and came to Him and said, Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me."

Jesus' Gentle Reproof and the One Needful Thing

I can see this now. Martha, especially being the older sister, comes to our Lord and says, "Look at this. All of this is left to me. That's my sister. She's younger. She's probably just as capable or more capable than I am. Lord, bid her, or literally command her, that she help me." Our Lord, instead of doing what Martha asked, took Mary's side. Look at verses 41 and 42: "And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is needful. And Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Note that He said, "Mary hath chosen that good part."

John Calvin points out both the commendation and the condemnation of Martha: “Though the hospitality of Martha

deserved commendation and is commended, yet there are two faults in it which are pointed out by Christ. The first is that Martha carried her activity beyond proper bounds, for Christ would rather have chosen to be entertained in a frugal manner at a moderate expense than that the holy woman should have submitted to so much toil. The second fault was that Martha, by distracting her attention and undertaking more labor than was necessary, deprived herself of the advantage of Christ's visit. The excess is pointed out by Luke when he speaks of 'much serving,' for Christ was satisfied with little. It was just as if one were to give a magnificent reception to a prophet and yet not to care about hearing him but, on the contrary, to make so great and unnecessary preparations as to bury all of his instructions."

"But the true way of receiving prophets is to accept the advantage which God presents and offers to us through their agency. We now see the kind attention of Martha, though it deserved praise, was not without its blemishes. There was this additional evil that Martha was so delighted with her own bustling operations as to despise her sister's pious eagerness to receive instruction."

This example warns us that, in doing what is right, we must take care not to think more highly of ourselves than others. Martha comes to our Lord saying, "Lord, look at me. I'm running hither and yon. I have to do this and that, and I'm doing it all by myself. There's Mary just sitting there doing absolutely nothing. Lord, bid her, command her to get up and help me. Look at me; I need help."

That is exactly what Calvin is pointing out. Usually, when we are the most active, and especially when we are more active than others, we like to call attention to the fact. That is pride, and that is natural.

Martha was making greater provision for her guests than was needful, and consequently she required Mary's help. Jesus tenderly reproves her for her anxiety and her superabundant provision and asserts that only one thing was needful. Some interpret this as meaning that only one dish, or one course, was needful. We do not need a seven-course meal or a twelve-course meal. We can get by without all of that. Mary has chosen the good part, and it shall not be taken away from her.

The Good Part Chosen by Mary

There is an implication in that. If Mary had chosen the good part, and that was not to be taken away from her, then Martha's part was going to be taken away from her.

How could that be? Was not Martha doing what was needed and necessary? Yes. Was it not expensive? Yes. Was it not dangerous? Yes. How, then, could her part be done away with? Here is how: Jesus Christ came to die. He was going to be crucified. There was going to be a limitation on how many times she could have Him in her home. Moreover, Martha was going to die as well, so there would come a time when Martha could not entertain anyone or extend her hospitality to anyone whatsoever. Thus, her part, although necessary, would soon be over.

What Mary did was choose the advantage of Christ's company. She chose to spend her time listening to Him and hearing Him rather than preparing a supper for Him. Mary sat down at our Lord's feet with the intent not merely of listening and learning, but also of obeying His instruction. Mary's heart was tender and humble; she was a contrite individual.

Isaiah 57:15 says, "For thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." God said, I dwell in the high and holy place. Yes, I do. But I also dwell in the heart and spirit of the contrite and humble ones.

The best dish, the best meal, the ultimate dessert, is nothing more than fellowship with Jesus Christ. Martha may have provided many excellent dishes and a wonderful meal, but the best part was indeed the spiritual food received by Mary and all the others who sat at our Lord's feet. The best part of the fellowship was Jesus Christ Himself. The Bible says in Proverbs 10:21, "the lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for want of wisdom."

Biblical Foundation: Receiving God's Word

Our Lord made use of every possible minute while He was there in that home, taking advantage of every opportunity to teach others.

Even when Martha rose to prepare the meal, He kept on teaching. He was feeding them with knowledge. Mary had chosen the good part, as our Lord said.

Deuteronomy 33, beginning with verse 1, gives us a tremendous passage: “And this is the blessing wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. And he said, The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from Mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.” Now watch verse 3: “Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand.”

“And they sat down at his feet; everyone shall receive of thy words.”

Pay close attention to verse 3. The Bible says that He loved the people. How do we know that God loved His people? How do we know that God loves us? According to Deuteronomy 33 and verse 3, He demonstrated His love by giving them His Word. The way He has demonstrated His love toward us is by giving us His Word.

First, He has given us the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says, “Herein is love, not that we loved Him, but He loved us and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins.” Not only has He given us the living Word; He has given us the written Word. Therefore, we are to sit at the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ and receive His words. You see, the good part is actually being taught by Jesus Christ.

The main distinguishing aspect between a saint and a sinner is this: the saint receives the Word of God. A sinner will not receive it, but a saint receives the Word of God. What does the Bible say in verse 3? “Yea, he loved the people, all his saints were in thy hand. And they sat down at thy feet; everyone shall receive of thy words.” Everyone who is genuinely saved by the grace of God will receive the Word of God.

John 17, of course, is the high priestly prayer of our Lord. Look at what our Lord says concerning those whom the Father has given unto Him: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all

things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me."

What did our Lord say? "I've given them the words which thou hast given unto me, and they have received them." In other words, the main difference between the saint and the sinner is the saint is going to receive the Word of God.

The Priority of Being with Jesus

So the questions that you can ask yourself right now are very simple: Have you chosen the good part? Have you and are you now sitting at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you receiving his word? Are you applying his word to your life? Are you obedient in that which he's teaching you? Have you been with the Lord Jesus Christ?

When I ask this question, have you been with the Lord Jesus Christ? I am not asking that facetiously. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Acts, chapter 4, because you are going to see that everyone can tell when you have been with the Lord Jesus Christ. The way they can tell is because He does indeed make changes in your life. Notice, if you would, Acts chapter 4 and verse 13. The Bible says, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men," that is, they were not trained in the law like those who judged them, so they considered them unlearned and ignorant. "They marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

If you get along with the Lord Jesus Christ, it will show in your life. You cannot hide it, because He changes your life. It is impossible to hide the fact and reality that you have been with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let me ask you a question, and I am asking this for a purpose: Do you know why the Lord Jesus Christ chose His disciples? Here is what you will answer: "Of course, I know why the Lord Jesus chose His disciples. He chose those disciples that He might send them forth to preach." That is part of the answer, but not the whole

answer. It is part of the truth, but not the whole truth. The Lord chose His disciples for more than sending them forth to preach.

Mark 3:13-14 says, "And He goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto Him whom He would, and they came unto Him." He sovereignly called whom He would, and they came unto Him. Why did He call them? Verse 14 says, "And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach."

What was the first reason that Jesus Christ called His disciples? The answer is so that they should be with Him. You see, the first part, the good part, the best part, is that they should be with Him. Do you realize it is useless to preach if you have not been with the Lord Jesus Christ? It is useless to try to witness unless you have His fellowship, His blessing, His authority, and His power.

You cannot have that without being with Him. He ordained these twelve, calling them, number one, that they should be with Him. If we claim to be disciples of Jesus Christ, we have to ask ourselves: Have we been with Him? How often have we been with Him? Do you long for His presence and fellowship with Him? How in the world can people say that reading and studying the Bible, prayer, and worship are boring? They are not boring. They should never be neglected, and they will not be neglected if you are with Him and He is with you.

I have heard many professing Christians say, "But I do not understand the Bible." My response would be, "Really?" I know that no one has perfect knowledge or understands everything, but it is amazing to me how so many professing Christians understand so little. I will tell you how you can understand the Bible.

Understanding the Bible Through Intimacy with Christ

Before I do, let me give you an illustration. I have written three books, and I encourage you to read them if you have not. If, while reading them, you have a question or there is something you do not understand, all you have to do is ask me, because I wrote the book. I know what I meant, what I was trying to say, why I placed that

scripture where I placed it, and why I placed that illustration where I placed it.

With that in mind, look in Mark chapter 4, beginning with verse 33. Here is how you can understand the Bible: "And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it." Our Lord will teach us as we are able to hear it. But, "without a parable spake he not unto them." "And when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples."

You say, "I do not understand." Get alone with the Author of the Book. He will explain it; He will expound it. Do you remember Luke chapter 24, where the Bible says, "He opened their understandings that they might understand the Word of God"? The problem is that we have neglected the good part of salvation: personal fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I can hear another objection ringing in my ears: “But I really do not have the time. I really don't have enough time. My time is so tied up. I'm in such demand, and things are happening all the time.” Well, I certainly understand that, because I get calls day and night. I was up at 2:30 this morning, and we were without power until about 10:30 this morning.

Now, here's the point: Do you realize that everyone has the exact same amount of time? There's only twenty-four hours in a day. You have time to eat, sleep, go to the bathroom, play, watch television, and work. In other words, everybody has twenty-four hours in a day. It's not that we do not have enough time. What it means is that our priorities are not right.

Eternal Life Defined as Knowing God

Who do you love the most? What do you love the most? Our Lord says Mary’s chosen that good part. I pointed out in the introduction that there are lots of Christians who never really enjoy their salvation. They miss the good part. The good part is intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Now, go back in your Bibles to John chapter 17, to that high priestly prayer of our Lord. Notice beginning with verse 1. Our Lord is praying: “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to

heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: as thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. 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's not just simply living forever. If you define eternal life as living forever, then those who are doomed and damned for eternity live forever as well, and that's certainly not life. Our Lord said, "This is life eternal, that they may know thee, the one true and the living God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Wow. Knowing God the Father through Jesus Christ is eternal life.

The word "know" is from the Greek word ginosko, which means to know, to understand, to learn to know, and to get a knowledge of. The word "know" is also a Hebrew idiom for sexual intercourse: "And Adam knew his wife and she conceived a mere child." It refers to a personal, intimate knowledge. You remember what our Lord said in the book of Amos: "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth." Really? He created all the other nations. Did He not know them? Of course He did. He judged them. Did He not know their sins? Of course He did. But when He said to Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," He was saying, "You are the only ones I have had a personal, intimate relationship with. I have given you My covenant. I have given you My law."

Eternal life begins in time and in history. You do not get eternal life when you die. If you do not have eternal life before you die, you are not going to have it after you die, because eternal life is a personal, intimate relationship with God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is fellowship with Him and learning from Him. If you are not enjoying that now in time and history, what makes you think you are going to enjoy it in eternity? Eternity will be nothing more than forever learning about our great God and Savior, never fully comprehending Him, because only God can comprehend God. For eternity, we will fellowship with Him, learn about Him, worship Him, honor Him, and glorify Him. If you are not doing that now and enjoying it, what makes you think you would enjoy it in eternity?

Look back at verses 41 and 42 of Luke chapter 10. After Martha says, "Lord, bid her get up and help me," Jesus answered and said

unto her, “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.” Our Lord said one thing was needful. That one thing is Jesus Christ Himself. Mary knew this. Mary knew that Jesus Christ was her all in all. Her good part, that good part, He said, shall not be taken from her. Why?

Applications: Choosing the Good Part Today

Because it is eternal life, it is a picture and evidence of eternal life here on earth. Mary was in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, honoring and worshiping Him, and it would never be taken away from her, because that is what eternal life really is. Martha’s honors passed away because our Lord was crucified and then, of course, she died as well. There would never again be the possibility of entertaining Christ in her home. But Mary’s continued. The good part Mary chose was continued personal fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

She was His disciple and sat at His feet. The good part of Christianity, the good part of being saved, is prizing the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word. The difference between Martha and Mary is this: Martha was concerned about what she could do for Jesus Christ; Mary was concerned with what Jesus Christ could do for her. Mary wanted everything Jesus Christ would give her. She understood that receiving the Word of God and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ in her heart and mind was far greater than receiving Him into her house. Preparing her heart to receive His instruction was far better than preparing a meal for Him. So she continued to sit at His feet, learn from Him, and glorify Him.

We need Marthas in the ministry. We do need servants. However, it is our intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ that makes our ministry acceptable.

Many Christians labor under a delusion. They think that the busier they are in the things of God, the more holy they are. Really? Martha was busier than Mary, but busyness did not equal holiness. Stop and think about the average church today. It will have you there Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, usually for Tuesday or Thursday night visitation, and sometimes on Friday

night for a family night or something for the teenagers. How could a man who works forty to sixty hours a week have time for himself alone or for his family to teach them? What we have done is equate activity with holiness, righteousness, and godliness when it is not. We endeavor to keep everybody so busy that they do not have time to think, pray, or do anything.

It is more important to attend to the instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ than to be engaged in the affairs of the world, or even in what you and I would call the ministry. It does you no good to be engaged in the ministry if you are not fellowshipping with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The cares of this life are dangerous, even when they seem most lawful and commendable. What could be more lawful and commendable than preparing a meal for the Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples? And yet our Lord says, "Martha, no. You're too troubled. You're cumbered about with too many cares. We do not need this." Our Lord reproved her because she was the one who got up and left Him in order that she might serve.

It is proper, timely, and seasonal when we must lay many things aside and attend to our own souls and spiritual welfare. Our Lord asked this question in Matthew 16:26: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his own soul?"

In other words, the world is going to pass away, and everything in it. That which is going to continue is our intimate, personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The good part of life—the good part of the Christian life—is Jesus Christ. Do not miss the good part. Do not sacrifice it for all the glitter of the world, or for all the praise and glory of man. The good part is Jesus Christ Himself. Just as Mary chose to sit at the feet of Jesus Christ, we must continue to sit at His feet, soak in His words, apply them to our lives, live in obedience, and glorify and honor Him.

That's the good part, and it will never be taken away from us. Mary chose the good part. What part do you choose?

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. We ask You to help us choose the

good part. How often we have neglected Thee. Thou didst say in Jeremiah, “My people have forgotten me days without number.” Lord, may we not forget Thee. May we not sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the immediate. May we take the time to enjoy the good part of our Christian life. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 21

It Is Impossible To Stop God

June 27, 2023

Introduction: The Insanity of Fighting Against God

Matthew 27:62–66 says, "Now the next day, that followed the day of preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch."

Let me begin with a statement, and I think I will try to prove it from Scripture: the world and the wicked are insane, because fighting against God is insane. It is absolutely impossible to prevail against Him.

One principle given to us in warfare is that we must know our enemy. In fact, our Lord taught that. Hold Matthew 27, but turn to

Luke 14. There our Lord taught that we must not only know our enemy, but also know ourselves, which is another rule of war. In Luke 14:31–32, He said, "Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace."

Our Lord is saying, You had better know the power of your enemy. You had better know your own power and strength. You had better know what he can do, and also what you can do. The interesting thing is that so many today are fighting against God and hold God as their enemy. If one is really and truly going to fight against God, he should make a study and at least find out some things about Him.

God's Attributes That Make Him Unstoppable

A cursory reading of the Bible will show you a number of truths concerning God. First of all, you are going to find out that God is absolutely sovereign. That is, He is King of kings, Lord of lords, and God of gods. Daniel 4 and verse 35 says, "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

So God is absolutely, totally sovereign. He is the only sovereign. Even that verse says that He cannot be stopped.

The second thing you are going to find as you read through the Bible is that God is solitary. By that I mean He alone is God. There is no other God whatsoever. So the Bible says this in Isaiah 44 and verse 8: "Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any."

Then, to Cyrus, in Isaiah 45 verses 5 and 6, He said, "I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me." Then He said, "I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else."

So God is the absolute sovereign and solitary God. Again, He said in Isaiah 45 and verse 21, "Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me."

Anyone who simply reads the Scripture should find out that God is sovereign and that God is solitary. There are no other gods. So that means He alone is sovereign.

Thirdly, anyone who reads the Bible is going to discover that God is also omnipotent. That is, He is absolutely all-powerful, which means therefore He cannot be defeated. He cannot be thwarted. He cannot be stopped. He cannot be overthrown. Isaiah 46 and verse 10 says, "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

Certainly God is going to do all of His pleasure. In Job 9 and verse 12, the Bible

Job says, "Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou?" In other words, when God gets ready to move, there is absolutely no one and nothing that can stop Him. So God is not only sovereign and not only solitary; He is omnipotent.

But there is another truth: God is also omniscient. That simply means that He is all-knowing. The Word of God says in Job 42 verses 1 and 2, "Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee." Isn't that amazing? No thought can be withholden from thee. It does not matter what you think, how secretive you plan, or how deceptive you believe you are. The truth is that there is no thought that can be held from God—not one.

Psalm 139 is one of my favorite passages, and I am sure it is the favorite of many people. We have a dear friend who now lives in North Georgia; he used to be in our church locally, and Psalm 139 was his favorite passage. In that Psalm, we read about the omniscience of God, beginning in verse 1: "O LORD, thou hast

searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it."

What did David say? "You know my downsitting and mine uprising. You understand my thought. You know everything about me. There's absolutely nothing that I can hide from you." And in Ezekiel chapter 11 and verse 5, God said to the people, "I know every thought that comes into your mind." Yea, every one of them. Can you fight against someone who knows every thought in your mind? Moreover, God said in the book of Ezekiel, "I know your thoughts even before they enter into your mind." God knows what you are going to think before you ever think about it, because God is omniscient.

If I am going to fight against God, I have to know my enemy. I would have to know that He is sovereign, solitary, omnipotent, and omniscient. But I would also have to know that He is omnipresent. The omnipresence of God simply means that God is everywhere at one time in the totality of His being. Put these things together, and you will see why I said it is absolutely insane.

Absolutely stupid to fight against God. How in the world can you defeat someone who is omnipotent, sovereign, and has been the solitary God forever and ever? He had no beginning. He has no ending. How can you defeat someone who has all power, who is omniscient, or who is omnipresent?

You cannot slip up on God's blind side because He does not have one. You cannot plan, scheme, deceive, or use diversionary tactics because He knows every thought. You cannot surround Him because He is omnipresent, everywhere at one time in the totality of His being. When you are trying to fight against God, you are fighting a losing battle. You cannot stop Him, hinder Him, thwart Him, overthrow Him, or deceive Him. All you are doing is wasting your breath, time, and energy, and you will end up defeated and destroyed. It is impossible to fight against God.

I could continue with many of the attributes of God, but I think you understand what I am saying. It is insanity to fight against God. We are poor, finite, weak, anemic, dying creatures, while God is the eternal, majestic, sovereign One. How puny our efforts are when we think we are going to fight against God! If every individual who has ever lived, is living, or shall live, and every demon out of hell, joined hands against God, they would occasion Him no uneasiness—not at all. No individual, or combination of individuals or things, can overthrow God.

Let me show you. Hold Matthew 27, but turn in your Bibles to Psalm 2. This wonderful psalm shows the rebellion of man and God's reaction to it. The psalm begins with a question.

Psalm 2: The Rebellion of Man and God's Response

“Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?” Something that is vain is useless and worthless; it will not work. The people here include the kings and the rulers. “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed,” that is, the Lord Jesus Christ, “saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.” In other words, they are going to rebel against God and fight against Him. They do not like the limitations He has placed upon them, so they will break every law He has given and do as they will.

Here is the response: “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.” Yet, in spite of all the rebellion, God says, “Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”

“Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”

For those who want to fight against God, the wise thing is to kiss the Son: make peace with Him, submit to Him, and cease fighting against Him. That is the wise thing to do, and it is exactly what the psalmist says should be done.

The Plot to Stop the Resurrection (Matthew 27:62-66)

This text shows how insanely stupid it is for men to try to corral God, to control God, or to overthrow God. In one sense of the word, when you look at this text, it is humorous—not that it is ha-ha funny, but it shows how religious wickedness and political wickedness plot together in order to try to stop the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Herodians are working with the Roman governor. Thus, the religious heretics, the religious elite, and the political elite come together, not only basically to murder Jesus Christ, but also to make absolutely certain that He does not rise from the dead.

The point is this: it is impossible to fight against God, because they cannot stop Him. They cannot overthrow Him, no matter what is going to happen. Shortly, according to Psalm 2, the Father is going to have them all in derision. This text also demonstrates for us the extent and depth of sin and wickedness, and men will

Men will go to great lengths to retain their power and control. If they were willing to murder the Son of God to retain power and control, do you think you are something special and they would not kill you to retain power and control? These people will even attack God Himself.

Look in your Bibles at John chapter 11, beginning with verse 47. This is a very informative text: “Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council.” First of all, the chief priests were the Sadducees. Now we see the Pharisees, and now we have a council. Undoubtedly, the Herodians were in it as well. “And they said, What do we? For this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.”

One of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, “Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.”

Notice again verse 47: “Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles.” In other words, What are we going to do? We have to do something. This man is doing many miracles. They could not deny those miracles because they were done openly and seen by multitudes. Had they not been done openly and seen, it would have been easy to deny them. But now it was impossible to deny them. So they asked, “What in the world are we going to do?”

Then verse 48 says, “If we let him thus alone”—that is, if we do not do something—“all men will believe on him.” They would think that was bad, but here was something even worse: “and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.” If they did not act, they would lose their power, position, and control. The Sadducees controlled the temple, the Pharisees controlled the people, and the Herodians were basically in agreement with the Roman government. So everyone was involved in working out this problem. What were they going to do? They had to do something, or they would lose their place, position, and power.

“And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” He said the solution was very simple: we kill Him. It is better for one man to die than for all of us to lose our positions and power; better for one man to die than for the whole nation to perish. So we will simply kill Him.

What do we do? They had to do something. These people knew what was really going on. They truly knew the truth, but they were not interested in truth. Just like Jeroboam of old, who was willing to introduce idolatry into the land to retain his place, position, power, and kingdom, these people were willing to deny the truth and deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in order simply to preserve themselves and their power. Moreover, they were willing to murder: We will just kill Him.

The Hypocrisy and Wickedness of the Leaders

Now I want to show you their absolute hypocrisy. Look in your Bibles at Matthew chapter 27, verse 3: “Then Judas, which 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, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.” Notice these people. When Judas saw that he had not only betrayed our Lord, but our Lord was

The Bible says that Judas repented himself. That was not real, genuine repentance; it was not repentance from God. He brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests, saying, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” The innocent blood—the only One who was innocent. “I betrayed the innocent blood.” And they said, “What is that to us? see thou to that.” You talk about cold and callous.

Here was a man who realized what he had done. The religious leaders responded to his confession, “What is that to us? We got what we wanted. He is condemned. He is dead. We do not care anything about you.” Judas threw down the thirty pieces of silver. What did they do? The chief priests took the silver pieces; they did not leave them lying on the floor. They said, “It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.”

What? They took it out of the treasury to give a man to betray the innocent Man and have Him murdered, but now it was not lawful to put it back because it was the price of blood? That is sheer hypocrisy. It was lawful, according to them, to take it out to betray the Son of God, but not lawful to put it back in. So they bought the potter’s field.

They had no qualms about violating the sixth commandment to rid themselves of an adversary whom they hated, but they had qualms about putting the money back into the treasury. They were nothing but hypocrites. Now that Christ had been murdered by them, they wanted to make sure that He did not rise from the dead. Vain and foolish men often think they can stop God, overthrow Him, or overpower Him. So go back to Matthew chapter 27 and look at verse 62.

This is hypocrisy to the nth degree. “Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation…” The day of preparation was the day before the Sabbath. Thus, verse 62 happens on the Sabbath: “Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation,” which would be the Sabbath, “the chief priests and the Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.”

First, the day following the day of preparation was a Sabbath day. They had no qualms about violating their interpretation of the Sabbath in order to meet with Pilate, conspire, get a plan going, and make sure that there was absolutely no resurrection.

Secondly, note what they called Jesus Christ. In verse 63 they said, “Sir, we remember that that deceiver said…” The word for deceiver is planos, meaning a deceiver and vagabond, a tramp, and an imposter. They were calling Jesus Christ an imposter—someone who deceives, someone who is a fake and a fraud.

Third, they truly understood the words of Jesus Christ. They knew exactly what He meant when they said, “Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.”

In John chapter 2, verse 19, Jesus said, “Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body.” They understood exactly what He meant. Matthew chapter 12 makes it exceedingly plain: “Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and

adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

They knew exactly what our Lord meant when He said in John, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The leaders did. The Sadducees knew, the Pharisees knew, and all those scribes understood. They knew. But here was the problem: they knew that what He had been saying was basically true, and now they feared exceedingly that He was going to rise from the dead. They had to make sure that did not happen.

How were they going to do that? Look back to Matthew chapter 27, verses 64 and 65. They said to Pilate, “Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.” They asked Pilate to make the sepulchre absolutely secure until the third day. Their professed fear was that the disciples would come and steal His body, so that people would believe He had risen from the dead.

Such an incident was hardly likely. The likelihood of the disciples stealing His body was absolutely impossible. Why? Remember what happened in the garden when they came for Jesus Christ. Here was a huge band of armed men, and what does the Bible say? “Then his disciples forsook him, and fled.” They left Him; they ran away. They acted as if they had been defeated and were cowards. You must also remember that they had only two swords. Peter said, “Lord, here are two swords.” Our Lord said, “That’s sufficient.” So here was a group of men with only two swords. What could they do against a Roman army, a Roman legion, or any large group of armed men?

Moreover, when you read John 21, Peter returned to fishing. He said, “I go a fishing.” Thomas and some of the others said, “We go with you.” The disciples were dispersed, and the likelihood of their stealing the body of Jesus Christ was practically impossible. Now let me point something else out: if the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus Christ, do you think that they would have been willing to die

How can you explain the change in their demeanor and in their persons after the resurrection, if they knew it was an absolute fraud, hoax, and deceit? Before, they were cowards, but now they are courageous. Peter stood up to all these Sadducees, Pharisees, and chief priests and said, "You have taken by wicked hands, and have crucified the Lord of glory." He was accusing them of murder. He surely had not done that when they came after him. Now there was a total, absolute change.

All the preaching and teaching was now with power, the Bible says. These people said in verse 64, "Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first."

What they called the first error was the disciples' preaching and teaching concerning Jesus Christ—that He was indeed the Son of God. They said the second error would be that, if the disciples stole His body or it somehow went missing, people would genuinely believe that our Lord had been raised from the dead. Pilate therefore said in verse 65, "Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can." Now note, if you would, "Ye have a watch: make it as sure"

I want to give you a quote by Matthew Henry. He gives an interesting observation on this. Why would Pilate say, "Make it as sure as ye can"? Here is what Matthew Henry wrote: "I am apt to think that by this time Pilate had some talk with the centurion, his own officer, of whom he would be apt to inquire how that just man died, and whom he had condemned with reluctance."

You remember that centurion? When our Lord gave up the ghost, the curtain in the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and there was an earthquake. That centurion said, "Surely this man was the Son of God." Matthew Henry is saying that Pilate probably had opportunity to talk with this centurion, who gave him such an account of those things as made him conclude that truly He was the Son of God. Pilate would give more credit to him, the centurion, than to a thousand of those spiteful priests who called Him a deceiver.

"If so," Henry continues, "no marvel that he tacitly derides their project in thinking to secure the sepulchre upon Him who had so lately ripped the rocks and made the earth to quake." Tertullian, speaking of Pilate, said, "in his conscience, he was a Christian." It is possible that Pilate might have been under such convictions at this time upon the centurion's report, and yet never be thoroughly persuaded or converted, any more than Agrippa or Felix were to be a Christian. Pilate may have had some convictions, and so he said, "Make it as secure as you can."

Pilate certainly had an interest in knowing how Jesus Christ died, because Matthew 27:18 says, "For he knew that for envy they had delivered him." He knew that Jesus Christ was innocent, and yet he condemned Him anyhow. He knew that Jesus Christ was completely, totally innocent, and yet he wanted to please the Jews. This is why Pilate said, "Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can." Actually, what he said was, "You have a guard.

"You have Roman soldiers at your disposal." The word "watch" is the Greek word koustodia, from which we derive our English word "custodian." In effect, he said, "You have a watch. You have a custodian's job, so to speak. You are to take care of this situation."

A Roman guard was usually made up of four to sixteen soldiers. In battle, whether there were four or sixteen, they would form a square: four soldiers on four sides. Thus, they defended themselves from every angle and in every area. These Roman soldiers were experienced fighters, and the leaders were trying to ensure that no one could get past them to steal the body.

Yet what they attempted in stopping the resurrection of Jesus Christ actually worked toward exposing their corruption and revealing the truth of His resurrection. The guards could not stop the resurrection; indeed, they were among the first to tell what had happened. They were there. They had firsthand knowledge. They were eyewitnesses.

The Futility of Human Efforts Against God

Once our Lord had been buried, the stone was placed in front of the sepulchre and sealed. Matthew 27:66 says, "So they went, and made

the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch." Sealing the stone meant that they either used Herod's seal or, probably more probably, the great seal of the Sanhedrin. In other words, the sepulchre was sealed by their authority, while soldiers guarded it to ensure that the seal remained intact.

The seal and the guards may have stopped the disciples from stealing the body. They may have stopped grave robbers from entering, and they may have stopped vandals from vandalizing the tomb. But neither the seal nor the guards could stop the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They could not stop God from raising His Son from the dead. They could not stop Jesus Christ from raising Himself from the dead. He said Himself that He had power to lay down His life and power to take it again. You just cannot stop God.

It is impossible. Matthew Henry said, "The wonderful care they took hereupon to secure the sepulchre. They seal the stone, probably with the great seal of their Sanhedrin, whereby they interpose their authority, for who dares break the public seal? But not trusting too much to that, withal they set a watch, to keep his disciples from coming to steal him away, and if possible, to hinder him from coming out of the grave."

So they intended. But God brought this good out of it: those who were set to oppose His resurrection thereby had opportunity to observe it, and did so, and told the chief priests what they observed, who were thereby rendered the more inexcusable. Here was all the power of earth and hell combined to keep Christ a prisoner, but all in vain. When His hour was come, death and all of those sons and heirs of death could no longer hold Him or have dominion over Him. To guard the sepulchre against the poor, weak disciples was folly because it was needless. But to think to guard it against the power of God was folly because it was fruitless and to no purpose. And yet they thought they had dealt wisely. Isn't that astounding?

When the angel rolled away the stone, what did the guards do? They fled. The seal was useless, and the guards were useless. They said, "Well, the guards were asleep, and of course the disciples came and stole His body while they were sleeping." Really? May I remind you that sleeping on guard duty merits the death penalty? No, they were not asleep.

Matthew 28:11 says, “Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.” The chief priests knew what happened. The guards came and told them that Jesus Christ bodily arose from the grave. Then, “when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.” And they promised, “If this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.” So they took the money, and did as they were taught: “and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.”

I want you to see and perceive the absolute wickedness, vileness, and hypocrisy of the chief priests and of the elders. They knew the truth. They received firsthand information from the guards who observed. They knew the truth, and they hid the truth.

Do you realize this is exactly what is happening in our country in America? Those who are supposed to be rulers know the truth. They knew the truth about the so-called vaccine. They knew the truth about January 6th. They knew the truth about everything. And yet they hid it deceitfully and wickedly because they want their power, their control, and their position. It is just that simple.

These people knew that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was real. They knew that He rose literally and bodily from the dead, yet they purposely hid that truth because all they wanted was their position and their power. Since the resurrection is true, it means all of these people are liars and deceivers. It means they are frauds and heretics. It means all of these people are washed up. On their part, they deny the resurrection to the nth degree, even though they knew the truth.

I do not know if you have ever thought, I wonder if these men are thinking now, “Was it worth it?” Obviously, it would not be worth it, because all of those who fight against God ultimately lose. They lose. It is impossible to fight against God.

Applications: Cease Rebellion and Submit to Christ

Let me make a couple of applications. Here is the first one. I am going to give you a quote again from Psalm 2. I want you to hear the

words of the sovereign God of heaven and earth. He said, “Yet.” What does that “yet” mean? If you go back to verses 1, 2, and 3, all these kings, rulers, and people are uniting in rebellion against God. They are fighting against God. Then He says, “Yet”—that is, in spite of all of this—“have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” In other words, you are not going to stop Me. You are not going to overthrow Me or My Son. I have set My King upon My holy hill of Zion.

His kingdom is secure. His dominion is real and genuine. You are not going to stop Him. They could not prevent the Father from raising Jesus Christ from the dead, from ascending into heaven, or from seating Him at His own right hand. They could not prevent God the Father from making Him judge of all the earth, and they cannot prevent Him from sending Christ back to judge His enemies. It is insane to fight against God.

Why did they hate Jesus Christ so much? Why did they want to murder Him and make sure that He remained dead? Because they could not control Him. They could not entrap, ensnare, or deceive Him. They could not get Him to go along with their misinterpretations and misapplications of God's law. He was going to stand for the law of God and for truth. They did not want the law of God, nor did they want truth. Therefore, they hated Him, crucified Him, and did everything they could to hinder His resurrection.

Here is the second application. Since "know your enemy" is a rule of warfare, it should be obvious that those who stupidly and wickedly fight against God do not know Him. If they really knew Him, they would not fight against Him. In Acts chapter 5, when these people were going to imprison the disciples, Gamaliel gave this counsel: "And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

Fighting against God, trying to stop, thwart, hinder, or overthrow Him, is all in vain. Daniel 4:35 says, "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" You cannot stop Him. It is impossible to stop God. We have to learn the

simple truth of Isaiah 46:10: "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." That is true.

What the Resurrection Proves

The resurrection of Jesus Christ proves two things very quickly. First, it proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ was and is indeed the Son of God. I want you to look in your Bibles, first of all, to Romans chapter 1, and look, if you would, at verse 4. Romans chapter 1, verse 4, says, “And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” What did the resurrection from the dead prove concerning Jesus Christ? He was indeed the Son of God. God raised Him from the dead.

Here is the second thing. Before I say that, let me say this: if Jesus Christ had been a fraud, if Jesus Christ had been a deceiver, if Jesus Christ had been a fake, if Jesus Christ had been an imposter, God the Father would have never raised Him from the dead. Moreover, He would have

Jesus Christ did not have the power to raise Himself from the dead. If Jesus Christ was not the Son of God, He would still be in that tomb.

The second thing the resurrection proves is not only that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but also that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was accepted by God the Father and was sufficient. Paul said, "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."

Jesus Christ gave Himself a sacrifice, and that sacrifice was accepted by God. God the Father raised Him from the dead, placed Him at His own right hand, gave Him all dominion, and put

everything under His feet. We know that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was accepted by God the Father, for God raised Him and exalted Him.

When men and women come savingly to Jesus Christ, they throw down their weapons of warfare and rebellion against Him. The Bible says in Romans 5 and verse 1, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God." In other words, we are no longer at warfare with God. We are no longer fighting against God.

Those who come savingly to God the Father, to the Lord Jesus Christ, cast down those weapons of warfare. They bow to Him. They submit to Him. They acknowledge Him. They confess Him. They love Him, and they serve Him. Anyone who is still fighting against God is not a Christian. They cannot be a Christian, because those who come in a saving, repentant mode cast down their weapons of warfare. We are the ones who have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

You look at the turmoil in the world and in America, in the political arena and every other arena. The fact is that men are fighting against God. It is insanely stupid, because God is sovereign, solitary, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He is God. There is no way that a puny, finite, weak, sinful man can successfully fight against God. It is impossible.

The psalmist said it right: “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.” That's what we should do.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. We thank You, Father, that Thou art God, and our God alone. Besides Thee there is none other. We ask for grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 22

Why Do You Love the Father?

October 4, 2024

Why Do You Love God the Father?

Introduction and the Question of Love

In 1 John, chapter 4, verse 19, we read, “We love him, because he first loved us.” It is a very simple verse, one that most of you can quote. The interesting thing is that Alice and I wake up early. A lot of times I wake up at four o’clock in the morning and cannot go back to sleep. Unlike Steve, I cannot make it to nine or ten o’clock in the morning. When I cannot go back to sleep, I simply lie there and pray and think about Scripture or whatever comes to mind.

This past week, I woke up one morning—I forget which one it was—and thought, “I am awake, and I am not going to get up. I cannot go back to sleep, but let me start praying and thinking about a Scripture.” I thought about this verse. Instead of going back to sleep, I lay there and worked this message out in my mind, because the title of the message is, “Why Do You Love God the Father?” The

Scripture says, “We love him because he first loved us.” So I ask: Do you love our heavenly Father? If you love Him, why do you love Him? Do you understand the biblical definition and meaning of love? You must understand that love is far more than feelings or emotions, as the Word of God teaches.

The Biblical Definition of Love

It is even more than affection. The truth of the matter is that many people profess to love Him but, in reality, do not love Him. In the text, it says, “We love him because he first loved us.” The Greek word is agapaō, which means not only affection, but also to exhibit esteem and goodwill toward a person. It means to prize and delight in a thing. Another Greek word familiar to us is phileō, which is also sometimes translated as love. From it we get the English word “filial,” and even “family,” in some sense. Thus we speak of filial love or family love. Augustus Hopkins Strong, a Baptist preacher and the author of Strong’s Systematic Theology and Strong’s Concordance, distinguished between agapē, the verb agapaō, and phileō, which is another verb.

From its supposed etymology, agapaō is commonly understood properly to denote love based on esteem, as distinct from that expressed by phileō, which is spontaneous natural affection, emotional and unreasoning. If this distinction holds, agapaō is fitly used in the New Testament of Christians' love to God and man, the spiritual affection which follows the direction of the will and which therefore, unlike that feeling which is instinctively and unreasoning, can be commanded as a duty. The distinction is important: phileō is instinctive and unreasoning, whereas agapaō follows the direction of the will. Therefore, agapaō can be commanded as a duty. Scriptural and spiritual love is based upon esteem and recognition; therefore, it is a duty and consequently manifests itself in obedience.

In other words, we recognize, admire, and esteem our Heavenly Father because we look at His sovereignty, power, and authority, as well as His grace and mercy. This is why, in the New Testament, we come across passages like John 14:21, where our Lord said, “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me:

and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

Notice what He said: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." When you skip down to verse 24, He said, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." If you love Him, you will keep His commandments. In other words, there is duty based upon esteem. If you do not love Him, you will not keep His commandments; therefore, there is no love and no esteem. That is why 1 John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." Love, then, is duty based upon esteem and recognition.

Love as Obedience to God's Law

Romans 13:8–10 says, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another." He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. The commandments, including, "Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet," and any other commandment, are briefly comprehended in this saying: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Biblical love, then, is obedience based upon esteem and recognition. Affections and emotions would ultimately be involved in one way or another, but primarily it is obedience based upon recognition and esteem. Love to God the Father and love to the Lord Jesus Christ is obedience based upon our esteem and recognition of their persons and their authority. Likewise, we treat our neighbors as He commands us as long as we are obedient to His law toward them. It is an expression of biblical love. When God tells us to love our neighbors and our enemies, He is not commanding us to have affection or emotions for them. He is commanding us to be obedient according to His law toward them.

Now, the question is this: The Scripture says, "We love him, because he first loved us." When you stop and think about that, God first loved us. The Greek word for "first" is prōtos, which literally means first in time or place, or first in any succession of things or

persons. God is telling us that the only reason we love Him is because He first loved us. When did He first love us? How did He love us? Did He love us in a peculiar, specific, and distinct way? In fact, the Word of God tells us that He loved us before the world was ever created. He loved us before we were ever born, before we ever had any existence. His love, then, is not only prior to our being; it is prior to our creation.

God's Everlasting Love Before Time

Look back in your Bibles—1 John—and then go back to the book of Jeremiah, chapter 31, and look at verse 3. Jeremiah 31:3 says, "The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." So God says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love. Therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

The Hebrew word for "everlasting" is olam. It refers to that which is from eternity, that which is everlasting, that which has a continuous existence, that which is perpetual, and that which is never ending. God's love for His people is not off and on. It is not something that is up and down. It began in eternity and continues into eternity. It is a never-ending love.

A couplet I read years ago expresses this quite easily: "Yesterday He loved me, today He's just the same. How long will this continue? Forever, praise His name." We are told, then, that God has set His love upon us from all eternity, from before the foundation of the world. God did not start loving us in time. Time began with creation. He did not begin loving us when we repented and were converted. No, God loved us before the foundation of the world.

Now follow with me to the book of Ephesians, chapter 1. Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians. Look in Ephesians chapter 1, beginning with verse 3. Ephesians 1:3-5 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath 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 pleasure of his will." Notice verse 4, where the

Bible says, "according as he hath chosen us in him"—that is, in Jesus Christ—"before the foundation of the world."

Election and Grace Before the World Began

So before the world was ever created, God chose us in Jesus Christ. In 2 Timothy, chapter 1, verse 8, Paul writes: “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.” We are talking about the power of God. Paul is writing to Timothy, and he identifies this as the power of God. He says that God saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace. Then let us tie these passages together. “Who”—God himself—“who hath saved us, and called us with an 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.”

God chose us before the foundation of the world, according to his purpose. The Bible tells us that he gave us grace in Jesus Christ before the world began.

Titus 1:1 says: “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; but hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour.” He says, “in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.”

So here is my question: If God promised eternal life before the world began, to whom did he promise it? If he chose us before the world began, if he gave us grace before the world began, in whom did he give us his grace?

In whom did he choose us, and to whom did he promise it? The answer is that he gave it to us in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 13:20 says, “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in

every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Note that the God of peace brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. Before the world was ever created, before you and I had any existence, there was an eternal covenant in which God the Father gave to God the Son a people.

You can read that in John 17 for yourself. God the Son agreed to undertake for those people, and God the Holy Spirit agreed to apply the salvation that Jesus Christ purchased. Thus, before the world ever began, an eternal covenant was entered into between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It referred to the people whom God had given to the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is why the Bible tells us in Ephesians 1:4 that we were chosen in him before the foundation of the world. We were given grace in Christ before the foundation of the world, and we were promised eternal life before the foundation of the world in Jesus Christ. So many people want to deny God's eternal election. They say that God chose us only in time, when we repented and were converted. That is not an election.

The Consistency of Eternal Election and Christ's Foreordination

He chose us; the Bible says so very plainly. Look again at Ephesians chapter 1, particularly verse 4: "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." So now I do not know how you can deny that passage. The Bible says explicitly that we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

Some people say, "I don't believe that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world." In that case, you have a very serious problem. What is your serious problem? Look at 1 Peter, chapter 1, verses 18 through 20: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with

the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you."

When you read, "who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world," do you realize that the phrase "before the foundation of the world," and the wording and construction in 1 Peter 1:20, are exactly the same as in Ephesians 1:4? Therefore, if you deny the election of God's people before the foundation of the world, then, to be consistent, you would have to deny the fact that Jesus Christ was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, because the wording and construction are exactly the same. If Jesus Christ was indeed ordained by God the Father before the foundation of the world, then we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

To deny one, to be consistent, you would have to deny the other. Anytime you want to deny the election, predestination, and ordination of Jesus Christ as our substitutionary penal sacrifice, you would also be denying our eternal election; or, if you deny our eternal election, you are also denying that Jesus Christ was chosen by God before the foundation of the world.

The truth is that God did not begin loving us when we repented and came to Him. He loved us while we were sinners. He loved us when we were in rebellion against Him.

God's Sovereign Choice and Human Inability

Before we were ever created, before we were ever sinners, before we had ever transgressed, He knew every sin that we would ever commit. He knew every transgression, every fault, every failing; He knew everything about us. And yet the Scripture tells us that He set His love upon us anyhow.

Romans 5:8 says, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." God knew, when He chose us, that we would be sinners. He knew that we would sin, and He set His love upon us and gave Jesus Christ to us before the foundation of the world.

Do you love God the Father? If so, why do you love God the Father? The Scripture tells us in 1 Peter that Jesus Christ died, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us back to God. And that is exactly what He did.

But consider the question the Apostle Paul asked the Corinthians: "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" Look at this first question: "For who maketh thee to differ from another?"

Why are you not a murderer? Why are you not a rapist? Why are you not a worshipper of the Hindu gods? Why are you a Christian? Who made you to differ? What do you have that you did not receive? God gave us faith. God gave us grace. God gave us repentance. God gave us the ability to come savingly to Jesus Christ. Everything that you and I have relating to spirituality, grace, and mercy, God gave to us. If we received everything from God, why would we glory as if we had not received it? If we had not been given what God gave us, we would be just like everybody else. It is God who made the difference.

I've had family members who were not believers. I've had neighbors who were not believers, and I have friends who are not believers. Who made me to differ? It was God, because He set His love upon us before the foundation of the world. If God had not intervened, if God had not chosen us, there would be no difference. All would be condemned, and all would perish.

Romans 9, beginning with verse 6, says, "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called."

Just because someone was an Israelite did not mean that he was saved. You can read in the book of Hebrews that with many of them God was not well pleased. All of them fell in the wilderness except two. Notice: "They are not all Israel, which are of Israel."

"Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children"—that is, the physical seed—"but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called." That is the child of promise. Then he explains it further: "That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the

children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)"

"It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." That means, perish the thought; do not even think that. "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."

"For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

The conclusion that the Apostle Paul draws in Romans chapter 9 is the same conclusion that Isaiah placed and put forward in Isaiah 1 in verse 9. In Romans 9:29, he quotes Isaiah: "And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha."

Sodom and Gomorrah were totally wiped out. He said, except God had chosen some, none would be saved. So God has done nothing to the reprobate except leave them alone in their sins. On the part of the elect, all God did was quicken us and give us His grace and mercy, so that we desired Him and wanted to come to Him.

In other words, God gives us that which we want because He changed our want-to. God gives the unsaved that which they want because they do not want Him. There is nothing unjust in that whatsoever.

You remember in 1 Samuel chapter 17, David went out to face Goliath, and the Bible says that he stooped down and chose him five

smooth stones from the river. What did he do to the rest of the stones? Nothing. He just left them where they were. But he took five.

That is what God does when He chose us. He simply chose us. He did not do one thing to the rest of the reprobate. They were already reprobate; they were already condemned. God simply chose us out.

Now I want to tie this together. We looked at verse 19, where the Bible says, "We love him, because he first loved us." Now look at verse 10: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Now, wait a minute: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us." When did He love us?

Christ as Propitiation and Expiation

Before the foundation of the world. When did God ordain His Son to be the sacrifice? Before the foundation of the world. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” He not only loved us before the foundation of the world; He not only chose us before the foundation of the world; He gave us Jesus Christ. He ordained Jesus Christ to be our substitute and to be our sacrifice before the foundation of the world.

In God’s appointed time, the Bible tells us in the book of Galatians, chapter 4, “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.” That is what Paul said in the book of Titus: God promised eternal life in Jesus Christ before the foundation of the world. But in due times, He manifested that promise through the preaching of the gospel.

The Bible says, “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.” “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” The word “propitiation” is the Greek word hilasmos. It means to placate, to appease, and to satisfy. Propitiation includes expiation. Expiation means to atone for, to make amends, or reparation in one sense of the word, by the washing away of our sins.

What, then, does it mean when the Bible says that Jesus Christ is our propitiation? It means that God had a righteous, holy anger and wrath against us because of our sins, our wickedness, and our depravity. God sent Jesus Christ, who was perfectly obedient to the law of God, and He gave Himself as a sacrifice to propitiate—to appease, placate, and satisfy—the wrath, justice, righteousness, and holiness of God. In doing so, He expiated, that is, He washed away and atoned for our sins. In this, He reconciled us to God the Father. All our sins—past, present, and future—have been expiated by the sacrifice, the propitiation, of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was God the Father who sent His only begotten Son to be our propitiation.

Expiation must be understood this way: no sinner, nothing unclean, could stand in the presence of God. Therefore, not only must God's wrath be propitiated, appeased, and placated through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, but in that sacrifice there must also be a washing away of our sins.

Romans 3:24 says, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." This is an amazing passage. We are justified freely by grace, and redemption is in Christ Jesus. The sacrifice of Christ addresses both God's wrath and our sins. His death is not merely the appeasement of divine wrath; through it, our sins are washed away, and we are justified through the redemption that is in Him.

Now look at verse 25: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." God is just because he was propitiated through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He can justify sinners based upon that sacrifice, because of the expiation of our sins. But here is what I want to call your attention to: "Whom God hath set forth."

There is a good illustration given to us in the Old Testament. Everyone remembers that on the Day of Atonement, once a year, the high priest went into the holiest of all, but he did not go in without the blood of atonement. He took that blood and sprinkled it on the ark and on the mercy seat. The blood then was a covering for the sins

of the people through the sacrifice of an innocent victim, that animal.

Christ's Sacrifice Foreshadowed and Fulfilled

Those animal sacrifices could not take away sin. All they did was cover that sin until the true Lamb of God came to take the sin away. Hebrews chapter 9 states this very plainly, beginning with verse 6: “Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing.”

The sacrifices under the first testament could not make the one serving perfect as pertaining to the conscience. They stood only in meats and drinks, divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed until the time of reformation. But Christ, being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, entered once into the holy place by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption for us. If the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctified to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

For this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

Now look again at 1 Peter 1, beginning with verse 18. We read this earlier, but see it in light of what has just been said: “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.”

I read those passages to call your attention to Romans 3:25. We are talking about Jesus Christ being the propitiation: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation." The phrase "set forth" is from the Greek word protithēmi. It means to place before, to cause to stand in front of, or to expose to public view. Pro means before or in front of, and tithēmi means to cause to stand. Jesus Christ, therefore, was caused to stand in front of everyone as the propitiation which God had ordained.

Christ Publicly Set Forth and His Joy in Redemption

In Galatians 3:1, the apostle Paul said, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?" The words "set forth" literally mean to be billboarded, to be placarded. Jesus Christ was depicted, portrayed, and painted before them in such a public way that the apostle Paul said, "I don't understand how you could not obey the Lord Jesus Christ. He's been evidently set forth among you."

Jesus Christ was set forth publicly as God's propitiation. He was shamefully stripped, mocked, ridiculed, quipped, blasphemed, and crucified in public view. He was set forth.

Hebrews 12:2 says, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." I understand "despising the shame." When you think of what was done to the Lord Jesus Christ—how He was mocked, ridiculed, and stripped—I understand that. I understand His ascension and glorification, that He is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

But what grabs me in this verse is that "for the joy that was set before him" He "endured the cross." That joy was redeeming His people, saving us. To stop and think that God the Father had delighted in us and God the Son had delighted in us, and that He counted His crucifixion and all the shameful things done to Him as a joy, boggles my mind. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,

despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

In my early morning meditation, I had to ask myself: How can I not love Him? How can I not serve Him? How can I not worship Him? How can I not obey Him? Such wondrous love was manifested by God the Father, who chose us and loved us while we were yet sinners. He knew that we were sinners. He knew we were going to sin.

And he sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be our propitiation. Our Lord said it was his joy that he endured the cross, despising the shame, to redeem us.

Adoption as Sons and Living Through Christ

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." Did you see what I just read? What manner of love! What magnitude of love! What enormous love! The Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God. He not only loved us before the foundation of the world, sent His Son to be the propitiation for us, and expiated our sins; He adopted us into His family, so that we are now the sons of God.

The word "bestowed" is the Greek word didōmi, which means a gift—the bestowal of something on someone of his own accord. So God graciously, on his own accord, adopted us, regenerated us, converted us, gave us repentance and faith, and made us his sons.

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." In him, we live and move and have our being. Our Lord said, "Without me ye can do nothing." Set your affection on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Everything that we are, everything that we do, and everything we should do should be in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to live through him. What was it the Apostle Paul said? "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Conclusion: Humbled Love and Dependence

Think about this when you get home: We love Him because He first loved us. Had God not loved us, we would never love Him, want Him, or desire Him. We would be lost as anyone else, doing our own thing, fulfilling the lust of the flesh and of the eyes and the pride of life.

If you want to be truly humbled before Him, think about this: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." If this ever enters your mind and stirs your heart, you will say, "O Lord, I love Thee, but only because Thou didst first love me and only because Thou didst send Thy only begotten Son to be the propitiation for my sins. For without Thee, I am nothing and I can do nothing."

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee. We thank You for Your Word and Your truth. Lord, impress upon our hearts the greatness of Your love for us: the greatness of sending the Lord Jesus Christ, washing away our sins, and giving Him that we might live through Him. May we praise Thee, worship Thee, and serve Thee. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 23

Second Opportunities - Jonah Series

Part Three of Four

December 1, 2024

Second Opportunities

Introduction and Reading of Jonah 3

In Jonah chapter 3, beginning with verse 1: “And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his

throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.

And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

There is an old saying that opportunity only knocks once. That may be true in relationship to man, but it is not true in relationship to God. Jonah, the runaway prophet, was given a second opportunity to obey God and accomplish the will of God after his repentance. We are all sinners by nature, and we are also selfish by nature.

Oftentimes, we idolize our own thoughts and desires. We idolize them to the extent that we place our thinking and desires above God, His Word, and His will. That is exactly what Jonah did, and it is exactly what we often do. Jonah thought that he knew more than God, and he certainly did not want to see the Assyrians spared.

In verse 1, the Bible says, "And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying…" John Trapp, the old Puritan, said this concerning Jonah 3:1: "Jonah is a sinner and not a castaway. God does not lay him aside, as a broken vessel, or tread him under the dunghill as unsavoury salt, but receives him upon his return by repentance, and restores him to his former employment, gives him yet a name and a nail in his house, yet sends him a second time on his message to Nineveh, and counting him faithful, puts him again into the ministry, who was before a runaway and a rebel."

God Counts Jonah Faithful

The statement that caught my attention was this last part: God sends Jonah a second time on his message to Nineveh, and, counting him faithful, puts him into the ministry. The question automatically

arises: How in the world can Jonah, by any stretch of the imagination, be counted faithful when he ran away from God, ran away from his commission, and did not want to preach what God ordained him to preach?

Let me answer that by asking you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Timothy 1:12–13. The Apostle Paul says, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: But I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.”

The interesting thing about verse 12 is that Paul said Jesus Christ counted him faithful. How could Paul be counted faithful when he himself confesses that he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious? This was before he was saved. Yet after he was saved, too, you cannot say that the Apostle Paul was absolutely perfect. Neither can you say that he was faithful in all things.

He was a sinner just like Jonah. He was a sinner just like you and I are sinners. But the interesting thing about verse 12 is the word "counted." The Greek word happens to be hegeomai, and it means to consider, to deem, to account, and to think. The apostle Paul is simply saying that God counted him as faithful.

The same exact Greek word occurs in two other passages, and they help us grasp its meaning. In Philippians chapter 3, the apostle Paul gives his pedigree and tells us everything that he was before the Lord converted him. Then he adds in verse 7, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."

The Meaning of 'Counted' in Scripture

Paul speaks of his ancestry, his education, and his stature in life. He may also have had money, because the Bible tells us that he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, which surely cost money as well. The apostle Paul said that all these things he valued before his conversion, after his conversion, after he saw the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ, he counted but dung.

Now the question is this: Is ancestry dung? No. Is education dung? No. What Paul is saying is that everything he had, everything

he was, and everything he possessed before Jesus Christ, in comparison to Jesus Christ and His grace and mercy, was counted as dung. It was deemed worthless. It was thought to be worthless. Now the apostle said that God counted him faithful.

Another occurrence is in Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 29, where we read about the Lord Jesus Christ. There we see the same Greek word, hegeomai: "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

Here is the question: Is the Lord Jesus Christ, in His person and work, something to be despised as unholy and unneeded?

And the answer is no. Yet there are some who count His person and His work as worthless and useless. Jesus Christ is still salvation. Jesus Christ is still the Son of God incarnate. Jesus Christ is still the only way to be saved, regardless of people who count Him as worthless and useless. So the Apostle Paul is saying that God counted him faithful; whether he was or not is immaterial. This is what Trapp was saying about Jonah: God counted him as faithful.

The truth of the matter is this: each one who is counted faithful is counted that way only because we are in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, faithful in every area, and the obedient Son of God. We are counted faithful only because of Christ.

Calvin said it like this: “There is here set before us a remarkable proof of God's grace that he was pleased to bestow on Jonah his former dignity and honor. He was indeed unworthy of the common light, but God not only restored him to life, but favored him again with the office and honor of a prophet. This, as I've said, Jonah obtained through the wonderful and singular favor of God. As he had previously fled and by disobedience deprived himself in a manner of all God's… The recovery of his prophetic office was certainly not obtained through his own merit.” What God did was simply restore Jonah. God gave him back the honor as well as the office of that prophetic office.

Here is the point that is exceedingly applicable to us today: God does something very unlike most Christians. God takes the man who has sinned, grants him repentance, restores him, and uses him again. Just because someone sins, God does not necessarily toss him into the garbage can, put him on the shelf, or press him down into the dunghill. No, He chastises him, gives him repentance and forgiveness, and then sends him again in obedience to His command.

Restoring Fallen Saints

In fact, you and I are commanded to do the same. Galatians 6:1-2 says, “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.” And then verse 2 says, “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

We must consider the fact and reality that each of us is weak, sinful, and prone to the flesh. The only reason you and I have not fallen is the grace and mercy of God toward us. I have often said this concerning Christians: Christians are usually the only group I know that try to slay the walking wounded. When a man gets down, it appears that most Christians are ready to stomp him further into the ground. We gossip. We tattle. We do anything and everything other than try to restore the individual.

We are kind of like chickens when they start pecking. When they start pecking one, they will peck until blood comes, and then they continue to peck once they get a taste of blood. Pretty soon, they will just kill the hen there back and on. So that is the way Christians usually work. The truth is, the only reason any of us are left standing is because of the grace, mercy, and patience of God. If God took each one of us, placed us on the shelf, and counted us absolutely unworthy, there would be no one left, because each of us sins, and each of us happens to be sinners. You may not have committed the same sins I have committed, and I may not have committed the same sins you have committed, but we have all committed sin. If God simply set us aside, none of us would ever be blessed or used of God.

We certainly do not deserve it. Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one.” God commands us here to restore a fallen brother. In fact, the word “restore” is a present active imperative. It is an imperative, which means it is a command; it is present active, which means it is something to be done constantly and continually.

The Greek word for “restore” is katartizo. It literally means to make sound, to make complete, and to mend that which is broken; thus, it means to strengthen, to perfect, and to make one into what he ought to be. John Trapp, the old Puritan, said concerning the word “restore,” “It is a metaphor from surgeons and bonesetters who handle their patients tenderly, or from such as take a mote out of one's eyes gently and warily.” John Gill goes a little farther: “The allusion is to the setting of bones that are broken or out of joint which is done with great care and tenderness. Professors fallen into sin are like broken and dislocated bones.”

They are out of their place and lose both their comfort and usefulness. They are to be restored by gently telling them their faults and mildly reproving them for them; and, when sensible of them and troubled by them, by speaking comfortably to them, bringing them again, and resettling them in their former place in the church, restoring them to their former usefulness and good conduct. So this is what the word “restore” means.

In Matthew chapter 4 and verse 21, this same Greek word katartizo is used for the mending of nets. In other words, it is putting everything together the way it should be.

In verse 1 of Galatians chapter 6, he says, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.” He adds, “Considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” When we seek to restore a fallen brother, it is not with a haughty or arrogant attitude—not with, “I’ve never done that,” or, “I will never do that.” The only reason we are not that fallen brother is because of the grace of God to us and in us. God has enabled us to stand and has not allowed that to happen to us. We are just as weak and just as sinful; God has simply preserved us. Therefore, we need to consider ourselves, lest we also be tempted.

Matthew Henry goes farther, speaking about Jonah's restoration: "By this it appears that God was perfectly reconciled to Jonah, that he employed him again in his service; and the commission anew given him was an evidence of the remission of his former

Among men, it has been justly pleaded that the giving of a commission to a convicted criminal is equivalent to a pardon. So it was to Jonah. "And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time." God gave Jonah a second opportunity. He gave him the exact same commission and sent him to the exact same spot. But note what God said: "Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." Jonah was not simply to preach any message, that which he desired to preach, or that which the Assyrians wanted to hear. He was to preach only that which God ordained and commanded. He was to preach the Word of God.

Jonah's Commission and the Preaching of God's Word

One of the biggest problems we are facing in this country is that we have preachers who are not preaching and teaching the Word of God. Jeremiah 23 shows how important this is. God dealt with preachers and prophets who wanted to preach anything and everything other than His Word. He said, "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings."

God said these men were preaching, but He had not sent them. They were prophesying, but He had not spoken to them. If they had stood in His counsel and caused His people to hear His words, the people would have turned from their evil way and from the evil of their doings. Jonah's second opportunity therefore came with the same commission and the clear command to proclaim only what God had given him.

God says, "How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart; which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have

forgotten my name for Baal. The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"

Now watch what these preachers and prophets were doing. He says, "Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that steal my words every one from his neighbour. Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues, and say, He saith. Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the Lord, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness."

"Yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord." The preachers who refuse to preach the Word of God are absolutely worthless. God accuses them of stealing His Word by talking about their dreams, substituting for the Word of God, and taking from the Word of God. He says they are not doing the people any good whatsoever. You look around today at most pulpits, and most pulpits are doing absolutely nothing.

I laugh many times, and I have thought about this for the longest. I try to study every week. I study every day, practically, unless something unusual happens. These messages are very time-consuming, especially when you look at the context, examine the linguistics, and take time to look up all the words and make sure you get the interpretation that is intended in the Scripture. It does take time.

There are no two ways about that. I have often laughed and thought, "Well, Lord, look how long it takes me to bring a message from the Word of God. But how awful it must be, and how long it must take some preachers, to make sure they have a sermon in which they really do not preach or teach anything, and to make sure they do not offend anybody." It must be a hard line and a hard row to hoe to come up with a sermon like that. That is what God is saying is happening in Jeremiah 23. They profit the people absolutely nothing.

In Jonah chapter 3 and verse 3, when God has commissioned Jonah and sent him again to the same city to preach the same message, Jonah is now quite willing and ready to go. The Bible says, "So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown."

Nineveh's Greatness and the Warning of Judgment

Interestingly, verse 3 says, "Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey." Matthew Poole writes, "An exceeding great city, the greatest city of the known world at that day. It was then in its flourishing state greater than Babylon, whose compass was 365 or 385 furlongs, but Nineveh was encompassed 480 furlongs. Her walls 100 feet high and broad enough for three coaches or three chariots to meet and to safely pass by each other. The wall had 1,500 towers on it, and these towers were 200 feet high. And 1,400,000 men were employed continually for eight years to build a wall." Evidently, it was some city.

But this great city was full of sinners. Jonah was to warn them, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." He was warning them of the impending judgment of God unless they repented. Notice verse 4: Jonah is no longer to cry out against the sins of Nineveh, which were great and multitudinous; he is to cry out against its ultimate destruction. If nothing happens, if there is no repentance within forty days, Nineveh shall be overthrown. Forty in the Bible is assimilated into our thinking because we understand it to be a figure of judgment.

During Noah's flood, it rained forty days and forty nights. In the Bible, forty is also associated with humiliation, because Elijah, Moses, and Christ fasted forty days. Of course, forty years elapsed from the beginning of Christ's ministry to the destruction of Jerusalem.

The interesting thing about the word "overthrown" in verse 4, where Jonah says, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," is that the Hebrew word is haphak. It means to overturn and overthrow. John Trapp says that the word properly

notes a sudden, inevitable, and perpetual destruction, such as that which came upon Sodom and her sisters. Jonah was therefore saying, "Yet forty days, and an extreme catastrophic judgment is going to fall upon the city of Nineveh."

Now, in Jonah chapter 3, you will see the absolute sovereignty of God, but I want you to see that sovereignty in relationship to God's mercy and compassion. Turn in your Bibles to two passages while holding Jonah chapter 3: first to Romans chapter 9, and secondly to Matthew chapter 11. Let us go to Romans chapter 9 first and see what Scripture says concerning the sovereignty of God. Begin with verse 14.

God's Sovereignty in Mercy and Repentance

Romans 9, verse 14: "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?" Notice the two words, "God forbid." In the New Testament, those words mean, "Perish the thought." Do not even think that thought or let it enter your mind. Is there unrighteousness with God? Do not say that; do not think that. God forbid. No, there is no unrighteousness with God. And now he explains.

“For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” Mercy is God's to dispose as He chooses, and compassion belongs to God. He displays and gives them as He chooses. “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.” By the way, we do the same thing: we do not help everyone, nor are we sympathetic with everyone. We pick and choose whom we will treat compassionately and to whom we will show mercy. God does the same thing. Look at it, verse 15 again: “For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”

“So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout

all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

It is true that the Scripture says God hardened Pharaoh's heart. It is equally true that the Scripture says Pharaoh hardened his own heart. Man hardens his heart by rejecting the Word of God and the commands of God. But notice: "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee," and God did. He showed His power against Pharaoh and against Egypt. He did not have mercy or compassion upon Pharaoh or upon the Egyptians. Now, why does he say in verse 18, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth"? Now look at verse 19.

"Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" Here's his answer: "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved." So the Bible is teaching us here that God has mercy on whom he will have mercy. He'll have compassion on whom he'll have compassion. And if he doesn't choose to have mercy, doesn't choose to have compassion, then there's not going to be any mercy or compassion given. It's that simple.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is speaking: "Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not." He is rebuking the cities where his mighty works were done because they did not repent. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more

tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee. At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight."

Look at Matthew 11:20–21: “Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”

Our Lord said that if the mighty works done in Chorazin and Bethsaida had been done in Tyre and Sidon, Tyre and Sidon would have repented. Since God knew they would have repented, why were those mighty works not done there?

Now look at verse 23: “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.” Since He knew the people of Sodom would have repented if the works done in Capernaum had been done there, why were those works not done in Sodom?

The answer is the answer our Lord gave in verse 26: “Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.” That is why those mighty works were not done there: it was good in the Father’s sight to leave them undone. The purpose of God and the glory of God reveal the will of God.

When we are talking about Nineveh, God certainly knew that the Ninevites would repent, because God is the giver of repentance. If God does not give or grant repentance, no one will turn from his sins. In Acts 11:18, after Peter related how God had saved Cornelius and his house, the believers in Jerusalem, who had reproached him for entering the house of someone who was not an Israelite, heard

these things and glorified God, saying, “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.”

God granted—God gave—repentance unto life. “Granted” is the Greek word didomi, meaning a gift, something given to someone. God gave the gift of repentance. As He says in 2 Timothy chapter 2, no man will recover himself out of the snare of the devil until he confesses the truth. And he will not confess the truth unless God grants him repentance.

So many people think, “Well, I can repent any time I want to.” That is not true. Sin is a tyrant. Sin enslaves and captivates. You think you can stop, but you cannot. You think you can repent, but you cannot unless God grants you repentance. Anyone who says, “I am going to do this, and it is not going to ensnare me; I can stop any time I want to,” is a fool who certainly does not know the Word of God.

No one will repent unless God gives him repentance. Put this down: man is accountable to repent, responsible to repent, and commanded to repent, but man does not have the ability to repent in and of himself. If God does not give His gift of repentance, no one actually repents.

Now go back to Jonah, chapter 3, and see what happens when Jonah runs through the city preaching, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.” The people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. Word came to the king of Nineveh; he arose from his throne, laid his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. He caused it to be proclaimed throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: “Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God. Yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.”

Nineveh's Repentance and God's Response

Then he said, “Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?” The people believed

God. They certainly believed Jonah, because Jonah was preaching, but they understood that the message Jonah proclaimed was from God Himself.

Thus they actually repented. The evidence was that they fasted, humiliated themselves, sat in sackcloth and ashes, and even made the animals fast by refusing to feed them. The result was that everyone was deterred from his evil way and from the violence in his hands. Repentance involves godly sorrow, godly regret, and godly shamefulness.

I do not know about you, but I am ashamed of my sins. I certainly do not want to brag about them, not by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, I wish I had never sinned. There are many things I wish I had never done. I regret the fact that I am a sinner, that my flesh is wicked and foul. Each of us has a sinful nature; by nature we are selfish and sinful.

The truth of the matter is that each of us needs repentance on a continual basis. The New Testament word repent comes from the Greek word metanoeo. That is actually made up of two Greek words. Meta means “with,” while noeo refers to the understanding and also refers to a change of mind. The noun for mind is nous, and noeo is the verb. Repentance, then, is a change of mind that results in a change of direction and also a change in our thinking.

If I am walking north and repent, I have not only changed my mind about going north; I actually turn around and start heading back south. The truth of the matter is that, when there is repentance, there are several things involved. There is normally a change in thinking, a change in direction, and a change in how we view things we once did. Things we once enjoyed now bring shame. Things we once did happily now cause us to regret having even done them. Repentance includes not only a change of mind and direction, but godly sorrow as well.

Repentance has both a positive and a negative aspect, and both are necessary if there is to be real, genuine repentance. First Thessalonians 1:9-10 says, “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son

from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come." Notice the positive: they turned to God, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son.

Notice the negative: they turned to God from idols. In other words, there was a positive movement toward God and His truth, and a negative turning away from sin, evil, and everything contrary to God. The Ninevites believed God, turned from their sins, and God spared the city. They at least turned to God in a formal manner. It was the later generations that God destroyed.

Earlier, I pointed out that both Nahum and Zephaniah speak about the destruction of Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire. Nahum 3:7 says, "And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for thee?" Zephaniah 2:13 says, "And he will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness."

Yes, it was going to be destroyed, but not right away. The book of Jonah is written probably from 780 to 750 BC, Nahum from 615 to 612 BC, and Zephaniah, who prophesied during the reign of King Josiah, was probably from 640 to 609 BC. Thus, Nineveh probably was spared at least for 150 years. They at least repented, and there was sparing of the city and the people.

Here is the principle God gives concerning the wicked in Ezekiel 33:14-15: "Again, when I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right; if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die." If there is real repentance, restoration, restitution, and obedience, he shall surely live.

Nineveh was spared probably at least 150 years. Remember Genesis chapter 15, when God entered into that covenant with Abraham. He told Abram that his people would be enslaved in a strange country for 400 years, and then told him why: "But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the

Amorites is not yet full." God gave the Amorites 400 years to turn from their sins, but they did not. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He put a sword in their hand and said, "Slay every one of them." Thus God did grant the people of Nineveh repentance at that particular time, and He spared the city for a while.

Go back to Jonah chapter 3, verses 9 and 10, because there is one sticky detail. Verse 9 records what the king said: "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" Verse 10 says, "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

How do we explain the statement that God repented? That expression is used several times in the Bible. We must understand that God does not repent, although the Bible says that He repented. Certainly, this does not mean that God repented in the sense in which He demands that we repent. We are commanded to repent because we are sinners and have sinned against Him. God is infinitely holy; He has not sinned and does not need to repent.

Nor does this include a change in God's purpose. God has no need to change His purpose, because He knows the end from the beginning, and everything that comes to pass He ordained. Acts 15:18 says, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." God therefore knew that these Assyrians would repent before the world was ever created, and He knew that He would give them repentance. So how do we explain this phrase?

Now I want you to listen. Here is what Calvin said, and I certainly agree with him. I think this is the correct answer. John Calvin explained it like this: "The repentance which is here ascribed to God does not properly belong to him." How can he say that? Let me give you a Scripture. Turn back in your Bibles to the book of Numbers, chapter 23, and look at verse 19. Here is what the Scripture says: "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

In other words, God is not going to change His purpose. God is not going to change His mind. There is no such thing. God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent.

Calvin said, "The repentance, which is here ascribed to God does not properly belong to him, but has reference to our understanding of him; for since we cannot comprehend him as he is, it is necessary that for our sake he should, in a certain sense, transform himself. That repentance cannot take place in God easily appears from this single consideration: nothing happens which is by him unexpected or unforeseen. The same reasoning and remark applies to what follows, that God was affected with grief. Certainly God is not sorrowful or sad, but remains forever like himself in his celestial and happy repose."

Yet because it could not otherwise be known how great is God's hatred and detestation of sin, therefore the Spirit accommodates himself to our capacity.

When we read that God repented or that God was grieved, it is an anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism is made up of two Greek words, anthropos, which is man, and morphe, which is form. An anthropomorphism is nothing more than man-form speaking. Calvin said this correctly: since we cannot conceive of God as he is, can anybody explain God? No. We cannot conceive God as he is. We know what the Scripture says about God, and that is all we know. Had God not revealed that, we would know absolutely nothing about him. Since we cannot conceive him as he is, he speaks in language that we understand.

Here is an illustration. My child has done something wrong, and I am going to punish that child. I am going to whip that child. I have the rod in my hand, and my hand is raised, ready to strike. The child shudders and cries, "Daddy, please forgive me. Please, please. I will never do it again. Please, Daddy, I promise you this will never happen again." What am I going to do? Am I going to continue to whip the child or not? I have already gotten from the child that which I want: submission and obedience.

And this is exactly what God did. God threatened, and we put it in language that we understood. They repented, and God says, "All

right, I am not going to chastise you. I am not going to correct you, because you have given me that which I want."

An anthropomorphism is simply man-form speaking. Ephesians 3:11 says, “According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Notice: “According to his eternal purpose,” singular, “which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

You and I think in succession. We think one thought, then a second thought, and then a third thought. God is not like that. God is not like us. He had one thought, or one purpose, and it included anything and everything that ever came to pass in time and history. God does not think in succession as we do. God is omniscient; He is all-knowing instantaneously. Therefore, we cannot conceive or comprehend God as He is. He must speak to us in human language that we can comprehend.

Applications: Restoring the Fallen and National Repentance

Let me make a couple of quick applications. First, are we as interested in restoring fallen saints as God is? Are we ready and willing to restore and heal that which was broken? Every Christian sins. Every preacher sins. There are none without sin. If God laid aside every Christian who sinned, there would not be any left standing. There would be no one to do His will and no one to carry out His commission.

When you stop and think about David, he committed adultery and murder, yet God did not remove him from being king. David deserved to die, and according to 2 Samuel 12, Nathan said, “God has pardoned thy sin, thou shalt not die.” He deserved the death penalty on two accounts, but God gave David repentance and kept him king. David even continued writing Scripture and psalms. How many psalms he wrote after being restored, I do not know. But I do know that he wrote seven penitential Psalms after his restoration that we have in the book of Psalms—seven Psalms saying, “Lord, I’m sorry, I was wicked, I was wrong.” David confessed and condemned the things he had done. The only thing I am pointing out is, if God simply set us aside because of our sins,

There would not be anyone for Him to use, because we have all sinned, and none of us deserve to be used or blessed by God. You have to remember this as well: David was called a man after God's own heart. The sins that he committed were the exceptions, not the rules, because the general tenor of his heart was obedience. The general tenor of our heart should be obedience.

That does not mean that we will not slip up, make mistakes, or sin. We are sinners; we are going to sin. But it does mean that sin has to be the exception and not the rule, because David was a man after God's own heart.

Here is a second application, and here is a quote from Augustine. Augustine says, "The city was saved. What shall we say? Was this the anger of God or rather his mercy? Who doubts that the most merciful Father willed by terrifying to convert and not to punish by destroying? As the hand is lifted up to strike and is recalled in pity, when he who was to be struck is terrified, so it was done to this city."

Will any of God's warnings now move our great Babylon and our great Nineveh to repentance, that it be not ruined? We as a nation are in just as bad a shape as Nineveh and Babylon. We may even be worse. Will we heed God's warnings? Will we heed His word? Will we repent?

Repentance has to begin on an individual basis. God requires and demands that each of us repent individually. We cannot repent as a family unless we repent individually. We cannot repent as a church unless we repent individually and as a family. We cannot repent individually, familiarly, and ecclesiastically and hope to repent nationally unless we begin at the very bottom, with each of our lives. Are we willing to repent individually?

"Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." What if I said, "Yet forty days or 120 days, America shall be overthrown"? God still demands repentance. We must hear and heed God's warnings. Thankfully, God is the God of second opportunities. I did not say second chances, but second opportunities, because God does not put us on the shelf the first time we sin. He grants us repentance and forgiveness and continues to use us, just as He did Jonah.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee. We thank you for your word. We thank you for the fact, Lord, that you are a gracious, merciful, forgiving God, and that you do use us in spite of ourselves. We have to confess and admit, Lord, we do not deserve any of thy blessings, neither do we deserve to be used by thee. But Lord, thou hast been so gracious and so kind, and we praise thy holy name. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Source Notes

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