



## **Gospel Lessons From the Old Testament - Part 2**

### **The Preservation Through Joseph**

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Well, it was quite famous back in the day, 1938. It was a panic that was caused because of a radio broadcast. Perhaps you remember you've heard it. Orson Welles was putting together and broadcasting a very dramatic and realistic sounding depiction of H.G. Wells' book "The War of the Worlds" which is a book about the invasion of the earth by Martians. Now, you wouldn't think that would be believable, but it was done so creatively that many people apparently believed that the world was actually being invaded by Martians and it ruined their night. If you think about it. Right?

I mean, it would ruin your night if you're sitting there trying to figure out what to have for dessert, putting the kids down. I think it aired at eight o'clock there on the East Coast. And all of a sudden you think that the world is about to end. You hear all of this and now all of a sudden, not only does your dessert not matter, but the weather and sports and the economy and where your kids are going to go to college, none of that matters. What matters now is survival. It instantly put them on a war footing in a battle mentality. And it changed a lot for them in just that one situation. Hearing that all of a sudden there was a battle that they thought was ensuing.

Which, by the way, you would understand that if I just started to say to you something that sounded realistic about the fact that there are an armed band of combatants who are bloodthirsty who have just surrounded this area, they came into Aliso Viejo and they've just about come to the Columbia loop here, and so I'm going to talk to you about a counterattack and how to go about going to rescue our kids from the kids' classrooms. I mean, if I went through all that, I don't know what you're concerned about, the weather or, you know, the temperature or whatever, you would instantly have all those irritants take a back seat to the fact that we've got to survive. We got a battle on our hands.

The Bible, by the way, in the Christian life is hoping that you would take the right perspective on reality, the current reality, which is that we are in a battle and that you need to have a war footing in your life, that you should have a battle mentality in your mind. That is not an unchristian thing to do. As a matter of fact, Christians used to sing songs like Onward Christian Soldiers Marching as to War. They understood something that unfortunately this day we don't quite understand it as well as maybe our grandparents did.

We like to think about being led by still waters following the shepherd into those nice, tranquil green pastures. I get all that. But if you read Psalm 23 where that image comes from, I hope you recognize that even there you are provided a table that is surrounded by enemies. Remember that passage? "You prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies." In the Christian life we have a lot of enemies and we don't like to think in those terms, but we ought to, because if you don't understand the battle that we are involved in, you're just going to set yourself up for defeat and discouragement and disillusionment. You've got to think that we are in a battle. Paul talks about it all the time. The Bible and the New Testament speaks to



this reality all the time. It starts with the kinds of interpersonal relationships that we're going to have with the people we work with, the people in our neighborhoods, our family members. There are going to be some conflicts that we need to wisely and properly engage in that we might successfully succeed in accomplishing the goals that God has for us.

Stephen, you remember the context of this particular sermon. We're here now in Acts Chapter 7 and in Acts Chapter 7, Stephen has been dragged in before the Sanhedrin, the council, the same council that had condemned Christ to crucifixion and had reprimanded and punished their pastor, Peter, at this point. You've got thousands of people in this first megachurch in Jerusalem, and now you have one of the deacons here, one of the leaders, a ministry leaders who is dragged in and he's got to answer to the charges that you're saying that this place is no longer the center of the universe, Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, and that Jesus, this guy you follow, kept talking about destroying this, which of course, he didn't. But that was the charge. He talked about the fact that it would be destroyed. And so you're talking about a kind of relationship with God that is setting aside the customs of Moses. So, you know, what do you have to say for yourself?

We talked about this whole sermon, the longest recorded message in all of Acts, saying you've got to keep in mind these three things. We talked about juggling those. The story itself, which today moves from Abraham to Joseph, the Old Testament figure in Genesis. Then I said, you've got to keep in mind the Christological truths because Steven is teaching about Christ and the gospel in these Old Testament stories, because we want to make those connections, those redemptive connections. And then, of course, we want to look at his defense. How is this defending him against those accusations?

So turn in your Bibles with me to Acts Chapter 7, if you're not already there. We're going to study verses 9 through 16 this morning. He's camping on something which I hope you've been with us in our Daily Bible Reading. We've been reading through Genesis. We finished it up this week and we read in the last twelve chapters or so of Genesis the story of Joseph. This is not Mary's betrothed and later husband. We're talking about the Old Testament figure, the namesake of Joseph in the New Testament.

So follow along with me. Please read this with me as you remember that in Chapter 7 verse 8, we had the patriarchs discussed, which is not just Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but now the sons of Jacob. Jacob is also named Israel. Right? Jacob and Israel. So we've got twelve sons and they're all going to become the nomenclature, the name, the heading for the twelve tribes of Israel all throughout the Old Testament. These are the sons of Israel, the twelve brothers. They're called patriarchs here in verse 9 and those, of course, are Joseph's brothers.

Let's look at this. "And the patriarchs," it says, verse 9, "jealous of Joseph sold, him into Egypt." You remember that. A lot packed into that, right? Your brothers don't like you. You've got these revelations from God about the fact that you are going to play this important role. You even have some visions about the fact that your parents are going to have to bow down to you and rely on you in a way that no one liked. And they all got jealous and envious of



Joseph. They thought he was full of himself and stuck up and all the rest and so they sold him into Egypt. That's not much for good family relations, right? You get sold into slavery.

Here's the great news, though, look at these last five words of verse 9. "But God was with him." God was with him. God's favor rested upon Joseph even though he was having all kinds of conflict in his family. And he goes to Egypt and guess what, he has a lot of conflict there. He calls it here in verse 10, Steven calls it afflictions, "God rescued him out of all of his afflictions." And you remember some of those, don't you? He had plenty of them. He ended up in jail because of Potiphar's wife and her accusation or false accusation. He kept his integrity. He did what was right. He was still in trouble with the officials of Egypt. And not only did his family reject him, now his boss has fired him and put him in prison. And yet it says, middle of verse 10, and God here "gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who" then ends up, here's the turning of events, "made him ruler over Egypt and over his household."

So here he comes through all of this. He becomes the number two man in Egypt and you remember why. He had this vision, this revelation that there was going to be a famine. And so he prepares for that famine. He interprets the vision that Pharaoh had, the dream that Pharaoh had. And so now there is this sense of we can save the economy of Egypt and we can make it through all of this, and the famine now starts in verse 11. "There was the famine throughout not just Egypt, but also in Canaan." And that's where his family who had abandoned him and sold him into slavery were living in tents in Canaan, which would become Israel. And there's a lot of great affliction there, it says.

"And our fathers could find no food." So here was Jacob and his sons, minus Joseph, and they were hungry. "So when Jacob hears that there's grain in Egypt, he sends out our fathers," that's the brothers of Joseph, "on their first visit." And of course, they get grain. And it's a great thing that they provide for them, but they don't know who he is. They don't recognize that Joseph, the one in charge of the grain, is really their brother. "And on the second visit," though, verse 13, "Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh." They actually became so well-known they were given land in Goshen, you might remember, and they were allowed to provide for their flocks and to live and have plenty of grain to live on during this famine.

Verse 14, "And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all of his kindred, seventy-five persons and all." They come down this, covenant clan, the children of Abraham, and they live in Egypt. Verse 15, "And Jacob went down to Egypt and he died, he and our fathers, and they carried them back to Shechem," of all places. Shechem, by the way, is a place that is in Samaria, near Mount Gerizim. And if you know anything about the New Testament theology, you understand how the Samaritans were hated by the Jewish people, both in Galilee up north and in Judea down south. This little middle part here, the West Bank, occupied territory today, we call it. This area was a place that you had a lot of animosity. That's why the story of the Good Samaritan is such a big deal that the Jewish people were going to the story, the character, the Good Samaritan was going to care for the Jews because they hated the Jews.



So all this conflict. Well, we're about to see the whole focus of the book of Acts move into Samaria. Remember Jerusalem, Judea, the gospels, then they're going to go to Samaria and that's where he's reminding them, hey, that's where they were buried. They came back to Shechem and they laid them in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem. Of course, Abraham had bought two burial plots, one near in Hebron, east of Mamre, this cave that he bought. And then he also got this place here in Samaria.

So we've got a shift again of geography. Remember the whole point about. "You think this place is not as important as we think it is, Steven? And Steven's going to respond by the glory of God appearing to Abraham in Mesopotamia, Babylon, of all places. Right? Early pre-Babylonian Mesopotamia. And now he says, let's think about the next patriarch who gets so many chapters, airtime in Genesis. All of this is happening in Egypt and God is delivering his people here through Joseph in Egypt. Then he lays the bones of the patriarchs in Shechem in Samaria, of all places. So we're hitting all around Jerusalem and Judea. And of course, that's not going to make the Jewish council very happy at all. So you can see a little bit of his defense in even how he chooses to focus on Egypt and Shechem, Samaria and earlier in Mesopotamia.

Now, I just want to think about the early church as it relates to Joseph. The early church was being ostracized and there was a lot of envy and jealousy, just like there was against Christ. Remember the Sanhedrin delivered him up to be crucified because the Bible says they were jealous of him. Why? Because he had throngs of people sitting at his feet and listening to him teach. Well, these were the teachers of the law and people were learning more about the law from Jesus. Well, now we have the megachurch that's meeting on the Temple Mount and they're paying more attention to the sermons of this Galilean preacher with an accent than they are to the teachers of the law and the Pharisees.

So there's a lot of this underlying jealousy. And he ties the person of Joseph to the same situation that the early church is going through, Steven and Peter and Phillip and John and all the rest. They're being the objects of scorn from the leaders because they're thinking you guys are getting far more press time and airtime than we are. Look at the crowds that are forming to listen to you guys speak about the Old Testament realities coming to fruition in Christ. And the whole point here is that you need to recognize that's what happened even to Joseph. I just want to show you again in verses 9 and 10 that all of this is a set of unjust afflictions upon someone on whom God's favor rested. Affliction, jealousy, opposition, being ostracized, and yet God favored them. That conflict is one that we're going to have our entire Christian life.

You want to talk about conflict. You want to talk about war footing and battles. The battles are going to be a battle of ideas in our generation because we are going to hold up a body of truth, a corpus of truth, and we're going to say to the world, this is what's true. This is what you should believe. This is what you should know as reality. You should see reality through the lens of these Scriptures that we're preaching every weekend at church. That's the truth. And they're going to reject that. There's going to be hostility, opposition to that.



And so we need to make a decision. Are we going to acquiesce to the culture, whether it's the latest polls or the latest trends on ethics or morality or sexuality? Do we just go along with all that or do we stand firm on what's true? If we stand firm on what's true and we maintain our integrity, if we're allowed to be the conduit of God's wisdom and favor in our conversations, in our affirmations, in our resolve and our purpose, then we're going to have a kind of conflict that we just need to get used to in life. You've got to choose whether you're going to be popular, as so many have often said, or whether you're going to be faithful to Scripture.

Number one, if you're taking notes, it would be good for us to just put it this way. We need to "Prefer God's Favor Over Your Comfort," prefer God's favor over your comfort. Because you could be much more comfortable if you just shut your mouth this week at work. Right? You can be really comfortable if you never share what people see as political positions that are nothing more than the expression of your biblical theology. I mean, think of one of those contentious political issues of all, the concept of the sanctity of life. Right? Think about that. You cannot go through life-affirming the truths of Scripture and not have that kind of battle, that hostility, that opposition coming upon you if you're going to be faithful to the truth of God's word.

I want to make it as clear to you as I can from a passage of Scripture that maybe you haven't looked at lately, First Corinthians Chapter 2, that reminds us why we have so much conflict. So turn with me, please, turn with me to First Corinthians Chapter 2. Take your Bibles, your phones, your iPads, get to First Corinthians Chapter 2, please, and let's look at this text together and see if we can't understand why you might have conflicts this week and why you've got to be ready to be the odd man out at the office and in your family perhaps, as you stand up for what is right.

Here's the reason. First Corinthians Chapter 2, look at verse 12. The whole point and the difference between Christians and non-Christians is the Spirit of God, that's the difference. Look at verse 12, "We haven't received the spirit of the world. We've received the Spirit who is from God." Now, maybe you haven't and if you haven't, then you fit in just fine in this world. But if you're a Christian, the Bible says God has started a relationship with you that now is an intimate relationship with God himself and he says, "I'm putting my Spirit within you. You now have contact with me. Your prayer life is real. Your worship is real. Your illumination of reading Scripture is real." All of that happens now because you're a Christian.

You don't have the spirit of the world. That means you're always going to be at odds with the polls in this world. The spirit of the world, no. Spirit of God, yes. Why? "That we might understand the things freely given us by God." That's the reality that makes the problem in every conversation we have with a hostile world and a hostile culture. And that is we're holding up something that they don't agree with. There's always that contention, that argumentation.

Now what we do, and just like Paul and the apostolic man, verse 13, "We impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit." That's the problem. I'm talking about





things that come from God and they're saying, "Well, I want to talk about things that come from human wisdom. This is what we think, the origins of my thinking, the philosophical thoughts of the world, they come from us." And we were saying, "No, there's a God and he has revealed himself, stuff we wouldn't otherwise know. He has brought his truth to the world, in Christ and in Scripture and now we read that, we understand that and we affirm that." And that's going to be a problem. It's not taught in human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit.

"And we interpret spiritual truths to those who are spiritual." And if that works out in a place like this where hopefully we're about, I don't know, 75% Christians here this morning, I would think, real Christians, I can speak to you about the truth of God's word and it will all be copasetic. We'll not have problems. We'll not have conflicts because I'll proclaim the word and you'll go, "That's right." The old word for that was amen. They'd say, "Amen. That's right. That's a good thing. I affirm that." And we can do that together. That's great.

The problem is we have the natural person, who are the people that you are surrounded with Monday through Friday, "The natural person does not accept," verse 14, "the things of the Spirit of God, they're folly to him." And you know that, right? If I said I'm going to book you on a TV news network talk show and I want you to go there and talk about the world through the lens of Scripture, and you just share that for a segment, for an eight-minute segment on a talk show on some cable news channel. It isn't going to go well. Let me just tell you that ahead of time. I don't care how articulate you are. I don't care how fluently you expose the truth of Scripture. If you're there to talk about the world through the lens of Scripture, which is who we are, sinners, who Christ is, the unique and exclusive savior, who God is, our creator and judge and lawgiver. Right? And the fact that the redemption of Christ is a necessity for all of us. We've got to embrace Christ in our trust and repentance. I can assure you you're going to struggle with that. That's going to be foolishness to the world.

Why? Because it says, middle of verse 14. "He's not able to understand them." Why? "Because they're spiritually discerned." Like Paul, he has a physical set of scales fall off of his eyes, which is a great metaphor for the problem that we all have, according to Second Corinthians 4, we can't see the truth until God pulls that blindness away. I mean, that's a John 9 picture of the fact that we can look truth right in the eye as non-Christians and we don't see it. We don't get it. I'm not talking about arithmetic or spelling. I'm talking about the truth of who we are, who God is, who Christ is, how we see the world. We call it a Christian world view.

You don't have that unless you have God's Spirit. And if you have that, well then look at this radical statement here. It says in verse 15, "The spiritual person," you have the spirit in your life, "you judge all things." You can sit there and pontificate on everything and if you're thinking biblically through a biblical lens, you will say the right and truthful things about the world. You can put all those things in the right bucket. This is right. This is wrong. This is moral. This is not moral. This is just. This is unjust. You would have all of that figured out as you reflect the truth of God's word. You can "judge all things," right? But it says, "You are yourself to be judged by no one." Does that sound arrogant? You can't judge me. No, and you're right. That's how it works. If I sit there and get attacked on a talk show, say, for my Christian beliefs, really, you can't judge me. You can try and you can do what you do and you



can condemn me and say I'm a fool. You can stumble over what I say as it becomes a stumbling block, as it says in First Corinthians 1. Right? But in the end, your opinion of me does nothing to the truth. You can't say anything against the truth ultimately.

And yet I can sit here and say this is right and this is wrong only insofar as I reflect what God has revealed in the pages of Scripture. Why? Because we've got the mind of Christ, verse 16, "Who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ." We have the ability to discern and judge all things as strange as that may sound to your ears. And that's the reason we're going to have conflict. That's the reason we're in a battle of ideas all the time. It doesn't take long to get into a conversation with someone who is not spiritually appraising the truth to have a difficulty in that conversation.

Stephen is here being rejected by the powers that be in Jerusalem. He's being ostracized. He's soon going to be killed and murdered at the end of the chapter. Right? But in reality, the favor of God rests on Steven, just like it rested on Joseph, even though Joseph was ostracized and excluded and sold into slavery.

Turn with me to Hebrews Chapter 13, that picture is one that the writer of Hebrews paints so clearly and poetically in Chapter 13 of Hebrews. He says that's what you need to see in your own life and you need to willingly say, "I am able to see that though I'm rejected by the world, I'm embraced by God. And therefore, I'm going to say I am willing to ally myself with Christ."

Verse 10. Hebrews Chapter 13 verse 10. "We have an altar..." This is beautiful because Stephen certainly would have no rights to the altar, right? They control, they're the trustees of the Temple Mount. "We have an altar from which those who serve the tent," the Tabernacle or the temple, "have no right to eat." We have truth. We've got a corpus of information, revelation, the words of God, the mind of Christ. They don't have any right to eat that as Psalm 50 says when people take the words of God and cast them behind their back, it says they have no right to even bring the truth of God or the precepts of God upon their own lips. The reality is you don't have a right to the truth if you're not willing to submit to the truth. And it says we've got access to that, they don't.

And this is steeped in the knowledge of the Old Testament. So be careful with Hebrews 13 verse 11. But think this through. "For the bodies of those animals whose blood brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp." You say, "Wait a minute, aren't the animals burnt on the altar inside the camp?" Well, yeah, they are, but not the animals that are slaughtered to put on the hyssop branch so that you would sprinkle clean the elements of the tabernacle or later the temple, or on the day of Yom Kippur when you had to put that blood on the sides of the altar and there on the holy place. That blood, you took the animal that was slaughtered to get that blood and you were to take the carcass of that animal outside the camp and burn it. It was considered unclean. So that picture of taking that animal outside, that was like, OK, we use the blood for a purpose of sanctifying the altar. But now what we're going to do is take this carcass and just we're going to reject it, put it outside the camp.



Look at verse 12 now. "So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood." What a great poetic parallel there, right? Christ's blood makes me right before God. The death that he incurred makes me acceptable before my creator. His body was rejected outside the gates of Jerusalem, literally and geographically, and he was scorned and ridiculed. And it says therefore I got a choice to make. Where am I going to stand? Verse 13. "Therefore, let us go to him," Christ, "outside the camp," which of course, that was the problem, they were being excluded by the powers that be, "and let's bear the reproach that he endured." And that's where many of us aren't willing to go.

Some of you right now sitting here will not stand up for Christ this week because you don't want to bear the reproach that he bore. And the Bible says you got to make that decision. Am I willing to say I want God's favor on my life to the extent that I'm going to be uncomfortable in relationships that I have with people in this world? Are you willing to go outside the gate? Because as Jesus says in John 15, there was a lot of animosity toward him and you think you as a servant are going to be greater than the master? Are you as a pupil greater than the teacher? He says you've got to know that if they rejected me, they're going to reject you.

Now, that's not in every single situation, as we'll see in just a minute, because there were 75 people who were preserved specifically through Joseph's work. And there were a lot of people on the Temple Mount in Stephen's ministry and Peter's ministry who were being saved. But the culture at large rejected them. But am I willing to go outside the camp and endure and bear the reproach that he went through?

Because like we saw last week, verse 14, "We have no lasting city here." I thought the city of Jerusalem was what it was all about. Well, the city is not our city here, right? "We seek a city that is to come." Therefore, we can, just like we did in our singing just a moment ago, we can "Through him then continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name." You sang about Christ this morning. The priests, the high priest, everyone who rejects Christ on the Temple Mount, sitting there judging Steven could not judge Steven because Steven had embraced God's solution to sin and had enthroned Christ as Lord in his own heart. And in reality, he could judge them, they couldn't judge him because he was willing to stand with Christ even though they rejected him. He bore the reproach that he bore and he realized the city that we're all about is a city that's much bigger than a physical Jerusalem in Israel in the first century or in any time.

Prefer God's favor over your comfort. Perhaps I prolong that longer than I ought to because I preach that often. But you've got a choice again this week to decide whether you going to be popular or whether you'll be faithful.

Back to our text. Remember here in Acts Chapter 7, verse 11, that Joseph becomes the hero not just to his family, but he becomes the hero to the culture. Just glance through this again, there is a famine that came through Egypt and Canaan. Great affliction, couldn't find food. Jacob hears about grain in Egypt. He sends his children, the fathers, the patriarchs, to go to Egypt. On the second visit, Joseph, who's the brother there who is now in charge of the place, made himself known to his brothers. And they all embraced and he wept. Remember the





story this week we read? Joseph's family became known to Pharaoh, and Joseph sent and summoned Jacob and said, "Come on, guys, I can save you from the famine. Come here, come into Egypt. I know you'll be sojourners in this place, but you'll be safe." And 75 persons in all, they all came down to Egypt and they dwelt together. And that's the picture of the saving of this patriarchal line from Abraham.

Joseph ends up being a great blessing to them. He ends up being, as the subtitle of the message says, the preserver of the people of God. Now, since we're already talking in terms of arrogant statements, right? We're talking about the fact that no one can judge Christians, but Christians can judge everyone else. Judge them "Krino" is a Greek word. I can make decisive judgments. I can say things that are true and right and I can make distinguishing features. I can make distinguishing decisions and affirmations and evaluations of them.

Let's add this statement here. When it comes to our Christianity, just like it was with Steven and Joseph, we need to recognize the value that we hold to the world in which we live. I put it this way, number two, you ought to "Remember Our Value to the World." And I know you don't feel that because you think, well, I don't want to think of ourselves that way because it seems to defy all logic. I mean, look at us here, a church. I mean, if we are scorned, if we are ridiculed, if we are ostracized, if just simply talking about our sexual ethics would put us in trouble and at odds with most of the world, here's what we need to understand. We still are a huge value to the world, just like Joseph was to Egypt, even though there were many things about the Israelites that the Egyptians despise, they were still greatly benefited by those 75 people and in particular by Joseph.

I want you to think about Steven in that regard too. Steven is there preaching on the Temple Mount. What did God think of the Temple Mount? What did God think of Jerusalem? Well, one of the reasons he's being accused of their leader despising Jerusalem is because Jesus kept saying things like this, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem. You who kill the prophets." Right? Or he would say things like this. One day you're going to be surrounded by enemies and they're going to build ramparts and destroy you. Or they would say, look at this great temple here in Jerusalem. And Jesus would say, "There's not one stone that's going to be left upon another." I can see why they thought Jesus was mad at them and their temple. I get that. And, you know, in reality, he was.

He said this in the gospel of Luke. He said, "I came to bring fire." Right? Judgment. He says, and "O, that it were already kindled." Even this morning in our Daily Bible Reading in the Gospel of Matthew, he has this recurring sense of how long am I going to have to put up with you? Here's the holy one living among us and they don't have faith. They can't have trust. They don't do what's right. They rebel. God sends prophets to them. And while he's loving and he says, "I would like to take all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and I'd like to put them under my wings like a hen gathers her chicks but you would have none of it." You wouldn't do it. So here's the thing. My judgment is left for you and you're going to be judged.

Well, why isn't he judging Jerusalem right here? Well, the Church is there now, that's why. They are a preserving agent in Israel. They're a preserving agent in Jerusalem. Matter of fact,



here's what happens. They end up pushing the Church outside of Jerusalem, and sure enough, in a matter of just a couple of decades, Jerusalem gets destroyed. Matter of fact, that's a paradigm that we see throughout the Bible. We as a Church become a preserving agent. Here's how Jesus put it, he says, "You are the salt of the earth." Right? And salt, if it's not salty, it doesn't do anything. But if it's salty, then it works. Of course, there were no refrigerators in the ancient world, so everyone bought salt and they would pack their meat in salt and it would preserve it. Right? The chemical process that takes place with packing salt, it keeps that from spoiling.

And the idea of the church being filled with people who are called salt means that we have a preserving kind of role in this world. Matter of fact, if you're note-taking, you might want to jot down Second Thessalonians Chapter 2. If you start in just about verse 9, you'll see in that passage how the Church itself is a preserving agent in the whole world. Matter of fact, if you read Second Thessalonians Chapter 2 be sure to remember and scan your mind through Revelation Chapters 6 through 19. That is the worst period of history. Jesus said this is a tribulation like there has never been on earth and never will be. That's tribulation. The word "tribulation" by the way, it's a word that shows up in our passage here is the word "Thlipsis," and in Greek, that means "to be pressed upon."

The Bible says in the book of Revelation, God is going to press upon the world a great tribulation, God's wrath, they're going to shake their fist at God and say the day of God's wrath is coming. We want the rocks to fall on us. The great anger of God and of his Lamb, they've come upon us. Well, right now it's not coming upon the world and you know why? Second Thessalonians Chapter 2 says because there's something "restraining" that here. The work of his Spirit through the Church is restraining that kind of corruption in society. And if every Christian, even in our society, were to leave this country, I guarantee you that is going to accelerate even further and in a more dramatic way, not just the self-deception that leads to all kinds of self-corruption, but the kind of corruption that comes from God's judgment.

Remember the Old Testament when he said if there were just 10 righteous people in the city, would you spare it? And you know as he goes through that whole discussion, of course, the assumption is, well, he would have. And the point is Christians, even in a home, preserve that home. First Corinthians Chapter 7 says one Christian in a marriage, you got one Christian in one household, there is a preserving effect that that one Christian has. And churches across our land in this country preserve this country from the kind of judgment that God would bring on it if we weren't here. We are salt.

And in this world, the Bible says when the Church is removed, then there will be this man of lawlessness who is going to be unveiled and the world will circle around him, and the world, you can read about it in Revelations Chapters 6 through 19, all hell will break loose and it'll be the worst time the world has ever seen. What keeps that from happening? Us. Just like Steven and Peter and Phillip and John, they were keeping Jerusalem from the judgment that was coming. And so it was for Joseph. Look what he did, what good was given to Egypt because of Joseph's ministry. Even though they don't like us.



Jesus said you're salt and what's the second metaphor he uses in Matthew 5? Salt and light. Light. There's another value that we bring to the world in that picture, it's illuminating, it shows things that weren't previously shown. It's like a flashlight in the darkness. You can't see something. You shine a light on it, you see it. And Jesus says this. This is the problem with people, John Chapter 3, when it comes to light, "they don't like the light because when they get into the light, their deeds are exposed." Right? And they don't want to be seen for who they really are. They like to do things in secret. They don't like people to really know. They don't want the assessment of their lives to be negative. And if you step into the light, well, then there's an exposure of your life and that's really hard.

And yet, how good is that? Well, you wouldn't be sitting here. You would not be saved. Your name would not be written in the Lamb's Book of Life if you didn't have your life exposed by the light of the truth of the gospel. Thankfully, someone came and shared that light with you. Right? That's our role. Matter of fact, let me take you to this passage real quick. Ephesians Chapter 5. Ephesians Chapter 5, "We are light," and to think about Matthew 5, "We are light shining our good works before people so they'll see our good works." That's one part of it. But even that, you know how that goes when you do the right thing at work and no one else does the right thing, do they cheer you on for that? No. But it's the right thing to do, and sometimes people like Joseph's family who get converted, what happens? They do end up "glorifying our Father in heaven," which is where that passage goes in Matthew 5.

But look here at Ephesians Chapter 5. When you see the way this is described, your life and my life being not only deeds, but words. Light. Verse 8, "At one time, you were in the darkness," and you lived like darkness, "but now you're light, you're light in the Lord." Therefore, you ought to "walk," you ought to live "as children of light." And what does that look like? Just like in Matthew 5, it says right here, look at verse 8, "walk as children of light," verse 9 defines it. "The fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them."

There's the problem. It's not just that I'm living a life that puts your life in some kind of conscience-stricken situation where I don't like the fact that you're the goody-two-shoes in the office. Now, if I actually expose that the way you filled out that expense report is wrong, if I'm exposing that by my words, that's even worse. I mean, actually, that's really rough. That's the part that causes even greater conflict. Verse 12. "Now, it's shameful even to speak of the things they do in secret. But when anyone is exposed by the light, it becomes visible for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says," look at this phrase, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Well, your job at camp is in the morning, at 5:00 in the morning, take a big flashlight, go into the bunks and wake everybody up by shining the light on their face and saying, "arise from the sleep O sleeper." Right? That would not be a fun job to have. You would not be popular. And yet we are called not only by our lives to stand in contrast to the world, but we're now supposed to say what you're doing is not in concert or congruent with the truth of God's word. That's called evangelism, right? That's called having the Spirit work through us to convict the



world of sin and righteousness and judgment. There's sin and righteous. The contrast and the fact that when my life falls short of the glory of God, it's judgment worthy. That's a hard thing to do. We do it diplomatically. We do it carefully. We do it logically. We do it all the ways we can to make it as palatable as possible. But there's no way to tell the truth about their lives without making it be like this. Like I'm shining light on you, in this case, Christ on you, to wake up from the dead.

Salt and light, that's our value to the world, if you want to summarize it with two analogies, to preserve the world and to restrain the world from God's judgment and evil. And you do that by your very presence in your everyday life. And you've got to speak up and live up, live a way that shows the righteousness of God in what you do, the good works that God calls you to, and then you put words to it and call people to repentance. Thankfully, that is what Stephen and all the rest of the early Church were doing in Jerusalem, restraining the judgment of God on that place, at least for a time and making truth visible in people's lives.

Poetically, at the end of this passage, at least this section about Joseph in verses 15 and 16, he talks about the bones of the patriarchs being taken to Shechem. Shechem, of course, is in the middle of Canaan. Canaan was the Promised Land. It's interesting that the whole point of them going to the Promised Land didn't happen until after they die. Then they really couldn't enjoy it because they were just a corpse. Right? But that's the poetic connection to our lives that we are going to the Promised Land, just like we saw in Hebrews Chapter 13. We're looking for a city that's beyond this world. Our citizenship, to put it in terms of Philippians 2 is in heaven. We're looking beyond this life. We're looking for a city that has an architect and a builder who is God. And that's the picture that we always try to relay when we preach the Bible, that it's about "the then and there" and not the "here and now."

Number three, I'd put it this way as we think about the death of the patriarchs and then they get to the Promised Land, I would say to you and emphasize it as firmly as I can, that you and I need to keep our eyes on the end, look to the end, "Keep Looking to the End." And the end is not when you get your baby, when you get your house, when you get your retirement, it's when you get to your reward.

And the only way to be able to traverse the difficulties of living in opposition to our culture and to see that as OK is to have the mindset of the apostle Paul as he sits in prison in Philippians 1 and says, you know, "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain." That's why he can say I've got courage even if I'm sitting here in this prison and I might die here, "God is going to be glorified in my body, whether by life or by death," because my life is about there and then. The false teachers, as he says in Philippians Chapter 3, they have their mind set on earthly things but our citizenship is in heaven. It's about the then and there.

So I'm focused on where we're going and we've got to keep our mind set on where we're going. And the whole point of Joseph and the patriarch's living as a little enclave in Egypt was that that was not their home, they were sojourners, just like Abraham in Mesopotamia. They didn't get what was promised until they died. And you won't get what's promised until you die. We're going to come back here because God's going to give us a resurrected body, as it says



in Philippians 3, he's going to "transform your lowly body to be like the body of Christ by the power that he has to subject everything to himself." And when he does subject everything to himself and there's no conflict with culture anymore, he's going to give you a resurrected body and we're going to establish the reign of Christ on earth because he'll be here personally to do that and we'll be his agents. That's coming, but that's our hope, so much so that it should transform everything about how we feel about the difficulties of being at odds with our world.

Patriarchs dying in Egypt made me think of a man who died in Egypt in 1914. He was willing to look at this world and say, I'm going to have hostility in this world, even though I could have comfort. It's a lot like we'll see with Moses' life. I can enjoy all the riches of Egypt, but instead I'm willing to bear the reproach of Christ. The guy I'm thinking of is William Borden. Bill Borden was saved at Moody Church in Chicago. His pastor was Reuben Archer Torrey, who came out here later to L.A. and started the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. You know it as Biola. And Tory was preaching about eternal things and because Borden's mom had become a Christian, she starts dragging him to church in Chicago and Bill Borden becomes a Christian. Well, if the name sounds familiar, by the way, talking about riches, it's because his family owned the Borden Dairy Company, which is a 165-year-old company. You probably bought their dairy products. It's got the cow and the, you know, the sunflower on it. Not quite as cute as the Chiquita Banana logo, but...

Borden, it said, was a millionaire by the time he was a teenager in high school. When he became a Christian in Chicago, he had a million dollars that were funds that were at his, I mean, he could spend them however he wanted. He becomes a Christian and he realizes that it's really not about this life, and he says and he writes in his Bible apparently, so it goes, that he wrote in his Bible that there'll be "no reserves." And the point is, I'm putting myself all in for Christianity. And that means that everything, my money, my resources, my life and my future, I'm going to live it for God. No reserves.

He graduated from high school, his parents gave him a trip around the world. I don't know what your parents gave you when you graduated from high school. But he goes around the world and he sees the world. Well, he becomes saved in Chicago and he cared about lost people and he was active in sharing his faith. But when he went around the world, he thought, man, there are people here who haven't even heard the name of Christ. And his heart is inflamed with a desire to do missionary work.

He comes back home after that trip around the world, he enrolls at Yale University and he starts to study, of course, that was his responsibility. He came from a well-to-do family, of course. Very rich family, millionaires. He develops his mind, but he wants to study God's truth, and as he does, he says, I want to care about people's spirits, their hearts. And he started a prayer group as a freshman in high school. It happened to be the year his dad died and now all these opportunities opened up for him to take over the business and to be involved in a very lucrative dairy industry. But he started a prayer group. There were 150 students at Yale who met with him every week to pray in his freshman year.





By the time he was a senior, Yale at that time in the early 20th century, had 1,300 students at Yale. He had by his senior year 1,000 students every week meeting in his prayer group. I mean, almost the whole campus. And he cared about the lost and he prayed for the lost and he shared the gospel. And he saw as he got near the end of his college career, he said, you know, I know there are lots of opportunities, people were seeking him. He was sharp. He was intelligent. He was rich. He was influential. They were trying to get him into all these endeavors. His family certainly, of course, said, you know, the family business is here. We need your help. But he remembers what he wrote in his Bible. "No reserves," he then wrote, "no retreat." I'm not going back.

And he said, I'm going to not go back from my commitment to see my life as one engaged in the battle of ideas, tearing down every stronghold that raises itself up, every opinion, every lofty opinion that raises itself up against knowledge of Christ. I want to be engaged in the battle of ideas and I want to know God's word. So after Yale, he went to Princeton to go to seminary. So he enrolls at Princeton, much more conservative back in the day, I should say. And he's studying at Princeton. And he's getting just more and more convicted that he needs to go to the mission field. He develops a heart for China and in particular a subset of China, the growing Muslim population in China, and he wants to reach them and preach to them. And he sees that as his life's mission.

So he graduates from Princeton and he says, "I got to learn the language and then I'll get to China." On his way to China, he goes to Egypt, goes to Cairo. He's on his way to China. His language studies had begun. It said he died in Egypt, he did. He was there just a short amount of time. He was 25-years-old. He contracted spinal meningitis and within two weeks, he was on his deathbed.

And the story goes that he wrote in his Bible, in the margin in the gospel of Mark, "no regrets." He knew his life was over. But he knew what he had done instead of pursuing what he was going to pursue, which everyone expected him to pursue, a life of comfort and convenience and kind of fitting in. He said, "No, I'm going to engage people in the preaching of the gospel, and I'm going to do it in a foreign land." He never even made it to the foreign land. He died in Cairo, Egypt. He's buried there.

I think of what he could have and what he ended up having, an influence on so many people for spiritual good. And it's not that he didn't use money for good. He did. When he was on his deathbed, he directed a million dollars to be given to the China Inland Mission and a million dollars to Moody Church and a million dollars to Moody Bible Institute. I mean, he gave a lot of money to see those institutions move forward, all of them for good.

But he knew that what really mattered was the eternal things and he knew where he was going, and like the apostle Paul, he recognized that to live is Christ, as long as he had a chance to live, fruitful labor. And he was glad. No regrets about that investment. But he also knew that to die is gain. And sometimes I see stories like that and I recognize how poetic it is. That while he had a whole life mapped out of ministry, he gets to meet his Lord in a matter of decades, at 25-years-old. I think God just graciously bringing him into his presence.



The Borden Dairy Company, by the way, filed bankruptcy last year. Which reminds me of that statement that Jesus made that when earthly mammon or wealth fails, and it will, what we should be concerned about is receiving people into eternal dwellings, I just think that was Bill Borden's focus in life. Right? "I care about the eternal dwellings, not the mansions that I can have in the suburbs of Chicago." I hope that you're reminded of that willing engagement in a war footing, an evangelistic salt and light kind of engagement with the culture that says what really matters is what I can do for eternity, not what I can do for the next 10, 15, 20 years here on earth that is about my comfort and convenience. Put your focus in the right place. Keep looking to the end. Remember our value to the world, which isn't us amassing a lot of things for our own comfort. It's about being salt and light and preferring God's favor over our comfort.

Let's pray. God, we need help in our world as we get increasingly engaged in a kind of conflict with our culture that reminds us how needful it is that we stay focused on eternal things. Help us, please, give us strength and courage. And most importantly, give us that eternal perspective, as Paul said, the things that we see, they're transient, they're passing away, but the things we don't see are eternal. Help us to be so committed to those things that we can't wait to be in your presence. Like Paul said, it would be far better, he uses that word far better. Thank you, God, that we have growth to accomplish. We have a long way to go to get to that place. And certainly it'll make all the inconveniences, even if it were prison, like the apostle Paul, being no big deal. We can be inconvenienced and irritated as we know what the goals and objectives are to keep us focused on those this week I pray.

In Jesus name. Amen.