



A Painful Path – Part 3

Facing God's Plans with Courage

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We have been studying the life of the Apostle Paul in the book of Acts, and we certainly have seen that his life provides a template of sorts for our own lives, particularly in Chapters 20 and 21 in the sense that he was there leaving Miletus after talking to those leaders of the church in Ephesus going on a boat on the Aegean Sea across the Mediterranean heading to Jerusalem. And what he admits in Acts Chapter 20 beginning in verse 22, is that he knows that the Holy Spirit has made clear to him that there's going to be hard times ahead. He says I don't know what's going to happen to me. I don't know the details, but I know the general forecast and that is it's going to be a painful path. And we've seen that as Paul says I'm not going to turn back from the painful path, but I just know it's going to be painful.

And of course, as Christians, we sit here 2,000 years after Christ has commissioned us with winning people to himself through the gospel, and he says things like this: "In this world," you know, "you're going to have tribulation." I mean, this is the forecast. As a matter of fact, he says this in Matthew 24, he says, "You're going to hear of wars and rumors of war." So in our case, if you want to update the language, you're going to see these things on your laptop screen. You're going to see wars playing out. And you're going to see and hear commentators talking about the rumors of what's next and where this war can go next. And as we see these kinds of things develop, he says, you're also going to see "famines" and you're going to see "earthquakes" and you're going to see "pestilence" because "kingdoms are going to rise against kingdoms and nations against nations." And your world that you're going to live in is going to be war-torn and you just need to know that's going to be a part of the forecast.

And more than that he tells his followers, you just need to know that if they hated me, well, they're really going to like you. Remember that verse? No. They hated me. You know, that's the problem. If you're a follower of mine then they're not going to like you. They're going to hate you. There are going to be hard times for Christians. Now, we don't know the details. Just like Paul in Acts Chapter 20 verse 22, I don't know the detail. I don't know what's going to happen next. But I just know the Holy Spirit has warned me there are difficult times coming. "Affliction and imprisonment," we know, very specifically for Paul, that was going to happen. And yet he marches forward with determination.

Now, when he gets to Jerusalem, we saw this in the last ten verses we studied the last time we were together, we saw that he ran into some conflicts within the community of believers. The Jews who were believing Christians in Jerusalem under the leadership of James, the senior preaching pastor there, the main leader of the church, he brought Paul in and you remember he had some conflicts here. People were misunderstanding him. And so we saw last week you're going to have these struggles and conflicts within the body of Christ. And we set out last week saying, what can we learn from Paul as to how to mollify those, how to mitigate the tension, how to defuse things, how to leave our sacrifice at the altar and go and make peace with our brother. How do we fix that? So the sermon was about that, it was about repair, about fixing, about trying to smooth things over.



On the ten verses we run into today, starting in verse 27, we don't have any of that. We got struggles and conflicts, but they're not the kind you can smooth over. These aren't kinds that we can somehow say, well, if you use this tactic, then you won't have these conflicts. Matter of fact, these are the necessary conflicts that Paul had been warned about in the previous chapter. We even saw at the beginning of this chapter when we started in Chapter 21, we had Agabus talking very clearly about what's going to happen to the Apostle Paul, and it's going to be bad in his case, the specific forecast that he's going to be arrested. And that's what happens in our texts today.

I think we have a lot to learn because Paul does it with the kind of perspective that he had in other cities when he'd been arrested. He'd been arrested in Philippi, you might remember, and he was found there after being beaten and imprisoned in stocks in the dungeon there of the prison in Philippi and he was singing songs, worship songs, giving thanks to God, praising God in the middle of it all with a bloodied back. And we think, well, that's the challenge, isn't it? It's one thing to say, well, there are wars breaking out in the Middle East. We're seeing it on our screen. We're hearing everybody pontificate about what might happen next. And it's easy just to say, well, what I want to do is just turn it all off. And some of you Christians out there, that's your strategy, just turn it all off, put your head in the sand, I don't want to think about it, I don't want to talk about it and you just want to move on.

You certainly don't want anybody telling you, well, this is the kind of thing that can happen in a conflict like that one where particularly it's religiously driven, when that's really what it is from the Muslim Brotherhood into Hezbollah in the north and the Muslim Brotherhood turning into Hamas in the Gaza and having all of this kind of thing. Wow. This is really driven by some theological differences, ultimately, really, that embedded in their, not just philosophy of life, this isn't just political and military, this has to do with things that run deep, things that we traffic in as Christians saying, well, here's what we believe, here's what we do, here's what we hold to. And then just to know, wow, could it be that there's conflict coming for us?

Particularly when you see in London and in Sydney and Chicago and L.A. and New York, people on the streets and they're saying things you think, well, this is crazy, this is wild. People are backing people cutting people's heads off and kidnaping old people and decapitating babies. Really? Is this, I mean, what kind of world are we in? Well, we're in the world Jesus said we'd be in, kingdom against kingdom, nation against nation. We're going to see wars, hear of wars and rumors of wars. And we just need to understand that we are going to necessarily need to keep our eyes open because we can't put our heads in the sand. We shouldn't turn it off.

Now, not for any macabre interest in what's going on should we be affixed to our laptop screens. But we certainly should recognize that this is exactly what Jesus said would happen. And yet, in the middle of all that, he said, "Do not be alarmed for these things must take place." So we need to be able to say if I'm a Christian and the Spirit of God lives in me, how do I go about looking at the world and understanding that as a Christian, I'm marching down a path which we know, he said, and we looked at this passage last week in the Sermon on the



Mount, there is a road that is narrow and it will be a road filled with hardship. It's a hard road. How do we do that with this fruit of the Spirit, bearing fruit in the Spirit? Just look at the first few with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness. How does that exude from my life? How do we do that?

Well, part of it is being aware of the tensions, knowing the necessary conflicts that I cannot avoid, and then being able to say I know I find the blessedness of God, that's an important word we'll look at later, that is going to allow me to walk through this in step with the Spirit so that I can hear the rest of the verse that I started with quoting from the gospel of John, "In the world you have tribulation. But take heart; I've overcome the world." How can I live in that hardened place?

So let's look at these ten verses we've gotten to, verses 27 through 36 of Acts Chapter 21. And let's work through this particular section where the fulfillment of what Paul knew was coming comes to fruition. And it's an ugly scene and it all starts with him going up there after that Nazirite Vow that we studied last week, he's under this vow, trying to mollify and smooth out things with the Christians there. And so he's doing some things that let them know, well, he's not dismissing everything about Jewish customs and all that.

So he submits to all that. But as he's going up to the temple, verse 27, "When the seven days were almost complete," are you with me on this? Follow along. "The Jews from Asia." Now, these weren't the Jews from Jerusalem but the Jews from Asia. They had traveled there for the feast, just like Paul was traveling there, wanted to get there in time for all the activities that were going on in Jerusalem. And they had come and they'd followed him and they knew who he was. He had a reputation there throughout Asia, which included Ephesus, for instance. And they saw Paul, they "recognized him in the temple, and they stirred up the whole crowd and they laid hands on him."

This isn't like Ezra or Nehemiah laying hands. This isn't like Barnabas, you know, in Antioch. They laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and sent them off. We're talking about this is like they're dragging him out by the scruff of his neck to be able to want to beat him up, and they're going to beat him up. Verse 28, they're calling for help. You can imagine this scene. "They cried out, 'Men of Israel, help'" Why? "Because this is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place." These are the first three things that he says. These are the primary against the people. Who are the people? The Jewish people, the Jewish people of Asia, the Jewish people of Jerusalem, Judea, the Jewish people. And the law. What law? The Mosaic Law. The law of Moses. And against this place, Jerusalem. This temple.

He's preaching against all those things. That's the accusation. And then a subset of the first one against these people, the bottom of verse 28, well, "Moreover, he's even brought Greeks into the temple and he's defiled this holy place." How dare he bring a Greek into the temple? That would certainly be an offense to the people. The people realize, the Jews, they see themselves as specially gifted just by the sake of their DNA to be walking around in the inner courts of the Temple Mount. And they're saying, look at how he's sinning against us, how he's



taken our sensibilities of Jewish primacy and he's bringing a Greek into this. He's bringing some Gentile into the Temple Mount.

Now, the way that Luke responds to this next lets us understand that it didn't even happen. But that's what they thought, right? "For," verse 29, "they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city." Now these are Asian Jews. They probably kicked him out of their synagogues. Some of them were probably from Ephesus, which is in Asia, and they are now saying, we know that guy, we know who he's with, we know he's not a Jew, he's obviously a Gentile. He's from Ephesus. And they saw him in the streets and now Paul's here. I mean, he and Trophimus they've been attached at the hip. Clearly, he's brought him in here. They suppose that Paul had brought him into the temple.

So we assume from Luke's statement here, the recorder of this particular scene, that he was not in there. But nevertheless, we'll talk about that in a minute. That's what they thought and so what did they do? Well, let's go full-blown riot time now, verse 30. "Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul," that's kind of laying on of hands we're talking about here, "and dragged him out of the temple and at once the gates were shut." Now, if you really defiled the temple that's what people were saying. We got some cleanup to do. We got some ceremonies to do, close the gates. Do not let him in. Don't let anybody else in. Why? "As they were seeking to kill him." We certainly don't want to kill him in the lobby of the church. Let's drag him out, shut the church up, so to speak. And let's drag him out there. Let's kill him.

"Word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion." So the Romans were in charge of the district, right? The Jews were given a lot of latitude to do their thing, particularly in the temple area. But the Romans were peacekeepers at this point. I mean, they were the occupying force there. They want to make sure everything was copasetic on the Temple Mount and they see this riot breaking out. So they're concerned and the head honcho sees it all happening. "So he takes soldiers and centurions." So people who were in charge of hundreds of Roman soldiers, where centurions in charge of 100. "And they ran down to them."

So you can see them just flanks of these Roman soldiers going down with all their Roman gear on and they're coming down to the area just outside the Temple Mount. "And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul," because they thought, oh, here are the guys with swords and spears. "Then," verse 33, "the Tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains," exactly as Agabus had illustrated with taking Paul's leather belt off and binding him up hand and foot. Well, now we have him bound with two chains, hand and foot we're assuming, and "He inquired who he was and what he had done."

Verse 34, "Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another," kind of chaotic, "and he could not learn," the head honcho couldn't learn, the head honcho of the Romans could not learn the facts because of the uproar. "So he ordered that he be brought to the barracks." We've got to get him into the booking desk. We got to figure out what's going on. We got to



talk to this guy. Verse 35, "And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd." If he is really bound in his feet, you can see what a slow process it would be to get this guy as they're trying to drag him with his hands tied behind his back up the steps into the barracks.

And so they're like, man, people are beating on this guy. It's like what we saw in the horrific scenes of the trucks going through Gaza with the dead bodies of the Jews this last week, as people are spitting on them and beating them and desecrating corpses. You can just see the mob that just wants blood in this. And a much more civilized crowd in this case but just as violent in this particular scene. They wanted Paul's head on a platter and they were going after him. And so the "soldiers had to pick him up because of the violence of the crowd," and they had to carry him. "For the mob," verse 36, "of the people were crying out, 'Away with him,'" which sounds just like Luke 23, the same kind of chaotic din of voices yelling and screaming, saying about Jesus, away with him, away with him, "crucifying him!" This is a chaotic, demonic scene going on here as Paul is dragged out and they just are absolutely furious and violent about beating him up and they want him dead. They tried to kill him.

Now, Paul had been warned this kind of thing was going to happen. He didn't know the details, but he's heading toward some tough times. And I know we don't like to think about it because we've been in peacetime in America in a nice little enclave of peace and serenity. But in a lot of places around the world, Christians are targeted. It's not just the Jews who are targeted, which we have great sympathy for, right? Because we understand the covenantal promise is, according to Romans Chapter 11, that these covenant promises to Israel they're irrevocable. It doesn't mean that they're saved individually. But we do know the nation, God's not done with the nation of Israel yet. And there is that promise that in that last day all of Israel in that generation are going to be saved. There's going to be a massive turn to Christ. And so we watch them very carefully, because as the sons of Abraham genetically, we know they have a special place in God's program.

So we Americans, we kind of get on the edge of our seat watching what's going on over there. But when we think about it, really, just like in verses 27 and 28, this is really a doctrinal dispute, as I said. It really comes down to what the Koran says, what the Hadith say, what the Imams teach about the reality of the Jews and why they hate the Jews and why they teach their children to hate the Jews. We recognize this is really embedded in a theological discussion about the reality of the hatred ultimately that Muhammad had for the descendants of Abraham and the reality of what they want to do to wipe the nation of Israel off the map. That's the reality. And so we see this vitriol that is driven ultimately by a kind of a theological angst and violence.

And that's the kind of thing that makes us swallow deeply, because we recognize that the People of the Book who are identified in the Koran, for instance, we think about people theologically driven willing to take up arms against their opponents, that it's not just the Jews that were called the People of the Book, the infidels, in the Koran or in the Hadith, or how it's taught by those who take their religion seriously. It's also the Christians, right? This is the sixth to seventh-century religion. Of course, Christianity was in full swing at that point. And



there was this hostility about providing in the world an empire of Islam. And so anything that stood in the way, Christians and Jews, they should be subjugated and if they're not willing to be subjugated and to pay the tax, they are to be obliterated.

And if you sit here and don't feel some sense of, wow, it's crazy. They're coming now for the Jews and they're at Harvard and all of the Ivy League schools standing up in their silly, complete asinine thinking about how this all works as you see signs like Queers for Palestine and you realize they don't know what they're talking about. And yet this demonic din of voices that are saying things about the reality of what's going on there because of a marxist kind of thinking about oppressor and oppressed. And that's a whole another sermon. But the reality of us going, don't you know that if we really had this play itself out it would go far beyond Israel and it would be turned as well to Christians.

Christians, if we do not convert it's the world of the Kingdom of Islam and outside of that it's all jihad. It's all this struggle to establish Islam outside of the picture of what they see as Sharia law, as the dominant culture of all of Islam going from the religious leader on down. And we think, well, wait a minute, could this be a possibility for us? You know, I thought we were kind of winning this thing in America. Seem like things are good. And all I'm here to do is to say, well, let's just at least realize theology matters. And your theology matters.

Because when Islam says and it's not just Islam, but let's just start there and they say, "Oh, we believe in Isa, we know that Jesus was a prophet, just like Moses, just like Abraham we'll claim them all. But when it comes down to it, we know Isa was a prophet of God, but he was not the Son of God. And he certainly didn't die on a cross and he certainly didn't die for your sins and he wasn't resurrected from the dead. So the core of your Christianity, we're going to gut that and throw that in the trash disposal here. And we're going to say to you that the real prophet that comes and supersedes Isa, Jesus, is Muhammad, and he's the greatest of all prophets. You ought to listen to him. And it doesn't matter if he contradicts what Jesus said, it doesn't matter if he contradicts what you've learned in the Old Testament. He is the final voice, listen to him."

And you're saying, "Now wait a minute. This is a theological response to say, well, Jesus didn't teach that. I'm going to believe what Jesus said. I do believe Jesus died on the cross. I believe that Jesus was buried, and I believe that Jesus rose from the dead." You're in instantaneous conflict. There's friction there in that. And there will be something we cannot avoid. We cannot mollify. We cannot mitigate it. We can't in any way paper over the problem because theology matters and we're not relativist. We believe if someone says "A" is not "B," well then you can't say "A" is "B" because that's not true. That's not reality. That doesn't comport with reality.

So when it comes down to it, I can't say Jesus rose from the dead and you say Jesus did not rise from the dead. And I can't say Jesus is the Son of God and you say, no, he wasn't the Son of God. I can't say well Jesus died on the cross for my sins. No, Jesus did not die on the cross. We can't both be right. Even though most people think religion is about going to 31 flavors and picking whatever flavor you like. You understand that's how they think. Ask Oprah



about this. Right? It is all about you just picking your favorite flavor. You like Rocky Road, I like vanilla. You like your own thing. That's fantastic because all roads lead to more calories and good tasting times and that's all that matters. That's the philosophy of many people in the world.

But we're saying, no, we're not relativists. This is all rooted in history. This is about a God who exists and he has spoken and has revealed himself. And these things will not harmonize. And I don't have to talk about Islam to talk about it not harmonizing. I can get in my car, drive out here to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and I can say what you're saying about Christ is not what Christ said about Christ. What you're saying about God is not what God said about God and you with the pearl of great price or the doctrines and covenants or what you think Joseph Smith was or what this book is, that we need another testament of Christ, we're saying, no. There's no way for us both to be right. We cannot both be right. We are at odds.

And when they say in verse 28, "This man is teaching everyone everywhere against this people the law and this place," I'm going to say there was some truth to that. Because they understood, the Pharisees, that the law was a means by which I can be made right before God. Read the book of Galatians, read Romans Chapter 2. All these understandings of the Pharisees, like in Philippians Chapter 3, they understood the law to be the thing that justifies you. If I keep the moral laws of God, I can be right before God. And Paul says that's not true. "All of my righteousness is like rubbish," he says in Philippians 3.

You cannot be justified by the works of the law, Romans Chapter 4. It doesn't matter if you're circumcised or not, book of Galatians, you cannot try to trust in any of the law and think you're going to be made right with God, you're not. And the Pharisees taught that you could. He knows, he confessed that that's the way he thought as a Pharisee of pharisees. And when it came to the place, let's just think about the place. The temple that they were sitting there in the shadow of is the place that God himself tore the veil from top to bottom, not from the bottom to the top, from top to bottom, the moment Jesus breathed his last and died. And this thing, as the book of Hebrews says, has now become functionally obsolete.

Now, can you use a warehouse or a theater or a bowling alley to worship God? And you can. Can you worship on the Temple Mount? You can. And Paul was doing that. He was doing it in large part to kind of smooth out things and iron out the wrinkles with the believing Jews in Jerusalem under James' direction. But when it comes to is this the place where God dwells? Paul knew, no. And what about access? Does it really matter that we got the court of the Gentiles and now we got the court of the Jews, the court of the women, the court of the men? We have a place where only the priests can go. And we have only a place where the high priest can go once a year on Yom Kippur. But did any of that really matter anymore? Paul made it clear that's not it. Even circumcision itself means nothing. First Corinthians Chapter 7. It means nothing.

Paul believed that and in a sense they had a case against him and it was true. Did it matter that they were descendants of Abraham when it comes to being right before God? Paul says



it doesn't matter. That's the whole point of Romans Chapter 2. When Jesus said they were saying, well, we have Abraham as our father, and Jesus said, you know, "God can raise up children of Abraham from rocks." That means nothing. What matters is the faith that Abraham had and you need to have that faith and "if you had believed Moses, you would believe me." And it's not about you just saying, "Well, I'm a child of Abraham, so I'm okay."

So in a sense, that was a knock theologically at the people. It was a knock theologically at the law. And it was a knock theologically at the place. And I don't care what you say, if you stick to the Bible, every religion is going to have a problem with you saying things like this is the truth. And it's not just that it's the truth like some Eastern religions where it doesn't matter what truth you have, we'll all end up being okay, right? Those are the guys with the Coexist stickers on the back of their cars. This is all fine, copacetic, it doesn't matter.

We're saying things like this: that Jesus taught very clearly in John Chapter 14 verse 6 that he is "the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him." And Buddha and Muhammad and Confucius and Zoroaster or whoever your latest guru is. No, "No one comes to the Father except through me," Jesus said. That's the message of the Church. Write it down, if you would. We need to just understand this truth, and then we'll have one response to each of these statements.

We need to "Know Christianity Is a Threat to Religions." It's a threat to Islam, it's a threat to Buddhism. It's a threat to every Christian cult that says, "You got to listen to Mary Baker Eddy. You can listen to the Bible, but you've got to listen to Mary Baker. You got to listen to Ellen G. White, you got to listen to Taze Russell or Judge Rutherford or the Watchtower and Tract Society or Watchman Nee or Witness Lee or you got to listen to Joseph Smith or Brigham Young. We're saying this: you got to listen to God. He has spoken. The canon is complete. This is the truth of God. And we're saying "There's no other name under heaven given among men by which you must be saved." Right? That's the truth of the Bible. And I'm stuck with it. So we're going to be at odds.

My assertion of biblical Christianity is going to be at odds with every other religion on the planet because of the exclusivity of Jesus Christ. Now, if that's true, let's just put that sub-point down, because that's the action step. You need to "Be Courageous and Unyielding about Christ's Exclusivity." Jot that down. Christ's exclusivity that "There is no other name given among men by which we must be saved." Why? Because, as he said at Lazarus' funeral, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if he dies, yet shall he live." The reality of our means of salvation is exclusive. It's based on logic and history. And I mean that because logic says I can't tell you this is the way and you say there is another way and I say, well, okay, I guess that makes sense. That doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense logically. It doesn't make sense historically. And we can't give you that.

And religions who give away that particular piece of the pie, then they're done. And I mean that. Just look historically at every church that has said, "I'm going to say there's truth in other religions, not just some truth, there's truth and in other religions that will get you to God and you will be okay with God if you just pick any religion and you're sincere," right? As soon as a



church does that it's just a matter of time. As a matter of fact, the day that the church embraces that and if one day I'm dead and gone, I'm off the stage, some other dude's up here and you guys start saying, well, you know what? Every other religion will get you to God. It's just we're all the same because we don't want to say Rocky Road is the only ice cream you should ever eat. If you get to that place on that day when you adopt that as the position of this church or any other church, the lampstand goes out. It's done.

Now, there are a lot of people who will linger in the dark for a while and we'll turn into bake sales and we'll have the rainbow flag over the back of the pulpit and we'll have all the things that happen with rummage sales and all the high churches that have gutted the gospel by simply saying this really doesn't matter. It's not eternal. There's no threat of anything outside of this. Let's just think of that. Funny how most cult groups like the Jehovah's Witnesses or any group that just says, "We got another prophet and she's making it clear," like Ellen G. White. And so there's no help. Just track how it is with the teaching about judgment. Once you gut the gospel of that and you say it really doesn't matter because here's the deal. If I'm going to be in a group that says believe this and you can go to heaven. And I say, well, what if I don't? And they say, well, you know, you just go unconscious and cease to exist.

Dude, every night at 10:00, I want to go unconscious and cease to exist. Right? I'm okay with that. I'm okay with that. I can save my money, my offering money. I can save my morning time. I don't have to read the Bible every day. Listen, if really what's at stake is me going to beddy-by for eternity in the thing called annihilationism, I'll take it. Right? Instead of going and adhering to all the stuff that you tell me to do. Right? But that's not what's at stake. The number one character in the Bible who spoke more about hell than any other character in the Bible, his name is Jesus. He kept talking about it over and over and over again.

What's at stake is eternity, and there is conscious awareness and judgment for sin, and that lasts forever. "It's appointed unto man once to die, and after that comes the judgment." That's the reality for all of us. Either we're in or we're out. Either we're trusting in Christ and "he's the only name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." And "he is the way, the truth, the life. There's no one who comes to the Father except through him." Or we're going to concede that point and on that date, the lampstand goes out and we start to dwindle like every other church that has done that. And we start to turn into a little group of people with gray hair going, "Well, it sure was nice back in the day when the church was filled."

Or we stick to our guns and we unyielding and courageously say Jesus is the only way. And if we do, we remain right in the middle of what we know is going to bring us conflict, because there isn't going to be a religion that's going to like that. They do not like that. And yet the Bible's very clear. It isn't that we're going to bow to Buddha or Zoroaster or Confucius or any other guru. We're going to bow to Jesus Christ. Every name is going to be subservient to his name, and "at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow of those in heaven on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."



So if you're going to say, well, you really did kind of besmirch our theology by saying the temple really doesn't matter the way it used to and as the book of Hebrews says it's now obsolete. And you know, the law, we used to think this would be the thing that made us right. We're saying, no, that's not. And the people, well, I know that if I'm related to Abraham oh, okay. Well, I'm not saying well, then, in a sense he is teaching something different than that. And so that is going to have to be a friction point between us and every other religion including Judaism. We are friends with Israel in the sense that any friend with God that he's keeping a covenant promise with, we are going to be friends with them. Don't give him a pass on everything. You follow me on this. Right? But we are going to say that's important what's going on the other side of the planet right now.

It's important to us in a way that's not important in other conflicts even though we should care about justice everywhere in the world. What's going on in Ukraine and Russia is different than what's going on in Gaza and in Israel. It just is. And so we just need to understand that for the sake of the promises to the patriarchs. And yet every individual Jew who does not put his trust in the Jewish Messiah he's in threat and peril of eternal judgment. That's what the Bible teaches. And praise God, his promises in the last day we're going to see a great revival there. But until then, we continue to share the gospel and we tell them the Jesus of the Old Testament who came in prophecy and fulfillment in the New Testament is the only way, the exclusivity of the gospel.

And some people sitting here, I know you're like, "Ah, that's old-fashioned." It is old-fashioned. It's old-fashioned but it's true. So we got to get back to that. We got to stick to that. We got to hold to that. And that has to be our unyielding commitment that Jesus is the only way. Needs to be. Has to be. And that's going to cause problems. But that's a problem I can't iron over.

The middle of verse 28, "Moreover Trophimus, man, we think he's up there in the temple." Now, he wasn't based on how Luke said this but they thought he was. And I'm just going to tell you this was more of a kind of an unpacking of the concept in their minds of you're speaking against the people, you're speaking against the Jews, because to them the Jews were superior. If you got the Abrahamic blood in your bloodstream you have a special place in God's economy. Now, Trophimus, man, he's just an Ephesian. He's no one, at least not as it relates to God and God's work in the world.

And I'm just going to ask you the question, what did Paul think about that? Was that barrier that stood between the court of the Gentiles and the court of the Jews on the Temple Mount, was that a barrier that Paul believed in? I mean, let's just find out. Go to Ephesians Chapter 2 with me, Ephesians Chapter 2. We read this recently in our Daily Bible Reading. I just want to remind you of these very important words. Let's drop down to verse 11. Just let these words sink in. Let these words sink in. I want you to think about what this meant to them. This was a knock at their cultural sensibilities. It's all theological but to them Judaism had become much more than a theology. It had become a culture.

The kosher issues weren't just like "We're just keeping the religious law." This is like an important badge and uniform of our cultural superiority. Look at verse 11. "Therefore



remember that at one time." By the way, what's the name of the book I just turned you to? Ephesians, right? So you just picture Trophimus in Ephesus. Hey, "remember at one time," Trophimus and the rest of the Gentiles, "you Gentiles in the flesh," you can see that kind of biting sarcasm can be "'called the uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision," which when you want to think about a piece of flesh right on the end of someone's member, I'm just telling you, it's just stuff. It's just surface "which is made in the flesh like by human hands." What really does that matter? First Corinthians 7 says it doesn't matter.

But they were saying, "Well, you don't have this, you don't have the badge of our culture," which I guess I understand is rooted in the Mosaic law. But this became much more than that for them. "Remember," hey, you Gentiles, Trophimus, "you were at one time separated from Christ," this Jewish Messiah and all of his prophecies. You weren't clued into that from your childhood. You didn't know anything about it. You didn't study the Messiah of Judaism in Ephesus. You're "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel." All of God's blessings that he poured out on Israel, you didn't even get the spillover of that. You weren't a part of it. You "were strangers to the covenants of promise." You didn't know about the forgiveness of sins and the washing of regeneration that was going to come from the indwelling of the Spirit. You didn't learn that stuff. You didn't read Jeremiah and Ezekiel. You "had no hope and were without God in the world." That was you, Ephesians, Trophimus, everybody out there in the Gentile world.

And you know what the Jews are going to say at that point? Darn right. Absolutely right. That's who they are. That's why we don't want them in the temple. We don't want Trophimus around here. Don't be bringing him in here. Now, he didn't bring them here, but I just want to ask you, what did Paul really think about the dirty Trophimus, the one who the Jews were saying is unclean? Well, here it comes, verse 13. "But now, now in Christ Jesus," in this new era, "you who were once far off," quote unquote, "have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Christ died on the cross and guess what happened? That temple veil was torn. Access to the temple was given. There it was, that was symbolically showing us that Christ dying on the cross changed everything.

Verse 14, "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his own flesh," in his own crucified body, "the dividing wall of hostility," as the Jews looked down to the Gentiles even if they were proselytized, saying, hey, you just wait here. You can't go through this gate. You can't get into this part. Right? There was certainly more than theology there for them. This was culture. This was cultural superiority. And it knocked at their sensibilities to think that Paul would put his arm around Trophimus as they were attached by the hip in the marketplace eating falafel together. And now all of a sudden, I just imagine, I'm sure he brought his buddy Trophimus into the Temple Mount. This just blew their minds.

And yet, Paul, what does he really think? Here's what he thinks. He thinks that the "abolishing of the law of the commandments expressed in ordinances." Did you read that big pile of words, "the law of commandments expressed in ordinances"? This is the ceremonial aspects of the law, "that he might create in one," all the badges made this distinction "that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace and might reconcile us



both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." The hostility existed as a cultural value. Jews are better than Gentiles, Jews are better, they're pure before God. The Gentiles are unclean. Culturally that was the distinction. And he's just saying gone, abolished. "He came and preached peace to those of you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."

If I put my arm around Trophimus, I was the Benjamite, the Pharisee of pharisees, think Philippians 3, I have all of these credentials as a Jewish superstar. I'm on my way to sitting on the Sanhedrin and I got Trophimus here next to me. A dirty Gentile from the west coast of Asia Minor. And I say, hey, I want to talk to you about this guy. "He is a fellow citizen with the saints and members of God's household." His life, just like mine, "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom," by the way, Christ, "the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy," here's the trigger warning now, "temple." A holy temple.

What? Trophimus in the temple? That's the whole point. We get really mad thinking about Trophimus in the temple. No, he's in the holy Temple, in the Lord, "in him," in Christ, "you're being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." The Spirit's taking Trophimus because of his faith in the Jewish Messiah as a Gentile and he's making him the dwelling place of God.

If I sat there in the mob and asked the people, hey, just stop beating up Paul for a minute. Where can I find the dwelling place of God? They'd all point to the Temple. Right there, there's the dwelling place of God. Paul is saying, think of the cultural sensibilities. This is fingernails on the chalkboard for these guys. Trophimus is the dwelling place of God, a Gentile. I am the dwelling place of God Paul would say, a converted Jew. We are all in this thing as one dwelling place of God, "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets" and all that they taught and all that God used them to say. And the cornerstone himself that makes us right before that God is "Jesus Christ the cornerstone." Oh, by the way, "the stone that the builders rejected," you guys rejected.

So you walking right through the gate from the Court of the Gentiles into the court of the men of the Jews and maybe you're a Levite, you're walking right past and you're going into the court of the holy place to light a candelabra. You get to go in, I'm here with Trophimus and I'm saying he's the dwelling place of God. That just messed up their cultural superiority. It messed up everything about their sensibilities.

Number two, Christianity seems to do that. You need to know that. It's always going to do that. Number two, you need to "Know Christianity Is an Irritant to Culture." There are always things about Christianity that will irritate our culture. Just get used to that. Get used to it. Because the things that you think are good, the culture thinks are bad, and the things that you think are bad, the culture thinks are good. Here Paul did not want Trophimus to be outside of a relationship with God. He did not want him to think he was an outcast. He wanted to say you're a fellow citizen now in God's program. Matter of fact, you are his temple. That's what Paul wanted.



So the things that we think, let's just modernize this now, let's go 2,000 years forward in America, in the West. Here's what I think is good. I think prayer is good. I think prayer is a great thing. I think prayer is something good to call on God, the God, the creator of the universe, the one who created every person in Aliso Viejo. I think it's good for us to pray. To pray for our city, to pray for people.

And even when you had rooms full of young people, let's just say an Aliso Niguel high school English teacher has a classroom full of sweaty adolescents and she says, "You know, I want to start the class just by asking our creator to bless our time together, to let you learn and understand. I just want God to protect you. So let's just bow our heads. If you want to pray, you can just pray along, if not, whatever. But I'm going to start the class with prayer. So let me pray." And I start the class now with prayer.

Would that be a good thing or a bad thing? I'm thinking that's going to be a good thing unless you want to remain a teacher for the rest of your career. Right? But that's a good thing. God would think that'd be a good thing, just like our founding fathers thought it was a good thing. But right now what does our culture say? It's a bad thing. It's a bad thing. But if I take a 270-pound guy, hairy guy, put a midriff on him and put makeup on him and put lipstick on him and put a wig on him, have him shake his fat rear end in front of a bunch of preschoolers at the library and read books to them and gyrate in front of my kids with sexual innuendo, guess what the culture thinks? I think you'd think that's bad, right? The culture thinks that's good. That's very progressive, that's very open-minded, that's very affirming. That's very diverse of you. That's very good.

We are living, by the way, we're starting to live it in a very acute way in our culture in Isaiah Chapter 5, look it up. I make you look it up in your small groups. It's on the discussion questions this week. We are living in an Isaiah Chapter 5 culture where they're saying this used to be thought of as good, but now it's not in the good column anymore, it's in the bad column. Oh, it was good to God and it's good to the few righteous people in the culture but now it's bad in the cultural proclivities and interests and sensitivities. And the bad things guess what? Now we're going to say those are good things. They're in the good column now.

Do you think sexual perversion is a good thing or a bad thing? If you're a Christian and you have any relationship with the living holy God of the universe, you think sexual perversion is a bad thing. You affirm I would trust with God that there are two genders, male and female. I think you would say, well, of course, obviously, duh. Not only does God say that in Genesis. Guess what? Jesus said that in his teaching in Matthew. He created them at the beginning. "Have you not read, male and female he created them?" That's what the Bible teaches. And yet you just like so many people who get transported into that, sometimes immediately from some kind of culture that affirms the right and denigrates the bad, they're put into a culture where they exalt the bad and they denigrate the good.

Like Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah and a guy named Daniel. Do you remember those guys? Daniel Chapter 1. They go into Babylon and you're living in it now and it's increasingly dark,



and you as a Christian are supposed to know that what Christianity does is it upsets the sensibilities of culture, and as culture continues to darken guess what? That friction gets hotter. And now you're going to sit there and they're going to shove stuff in front of you and you're going, "No, I can't do that." They shoved the food in front of those four guys and they said, "We're not going to defile ourselves with the king's food." And that's what they said.

And guess what? It raised the eyebrows of the commander who said, "Well, I don't know about that, man. When my boss hears about that it isn't going to go over well." Here's the deal. You are going to have things that you're going to do because the Bible says them. In the ceremonial law of the Old Testament and in Daniel's time you better eat a kosher meal. That's what God said. Part of the ceremonial law. You better circumcise your kids. You better have fringes on the side of your robes. You better let your hair grow on the side of your head. That's what God asked them to do until the fruition of that came to fulfillment in Christ. Right?

So they did that and they wanted to do that and they weren't going to let the Babylonian culture take that away from them. They were going to do it. If others say, "You can't do it." They're going to say, "We're going to do it," and they were ready to get in big trouble for it. And so Daniel said well test us in this. Now, that's one thing for you to say I'm not going to do what everybody else is doing. The problem is when the powers of the culture turn on you to say you have to do it or else. Have we seen that at all in our culture? Right? Think about it.

Just a couple of Chapters later, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, a.k.a. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are there being told we've erected this big idol. I need all of you to bow down to it. See, when someone has a delusional perversion about their gender and says you need to play along with my imaginary game here and you need to affirm me, bow down to this. But at one time in our culture it was just let people do what they want to do. Whatever they want to do in their bedroom just let them do it. Like a bunch of us say, "Oh, okay, I guess." And now it's like, "No, now you have to affirm it. You bow down to this." Think about this. And if you don't, what did Nebuchadnezzar say? You are going to get thrown into the fire.

Now Nebuchadnezzar is a reasonable guy. Because when he said that and he heard they weren't doing it he said, "Call them in here. Call them in here." Like some of you will be called into your boss' office, into the diversity training seminar up to the front, and something you won't sign, something you won't bow down to. And you're going to be called in just like they were and they'll say, "We'll give you one more chance. We'll give you another chance, we just need for you to sign it. We need you to do that. We need you to affirm this. We need you to bow down to this. We need you to capitulate to what we're telling you is good even though you and your religion, your weird religion, you think is bad. Well, you're going to really upset the cultural sensitivities if you don't bow down to our idol."

And you know what Hananiah, and Mishael and Azariah said. "Sorry. You know God is able to deliver us." I know you're threatening us with the big fiery furnace over there, and I can feel it's pretty warm. I don't want to go in there. But here's the deal. "God's able to deliver us." But even if he doesn't, even if this is the end of our career here, even if we die a fiery death, we just want to tell you we're not going to bow down to your idol. That was their commitment.



I just wonder where your commitment is when you see stuff on your computer screen, you think, wow, that's a serious thing. And you think about bomb shelters, you think about missiles and you think about people being beheaded. And you say, "I wonder what I would do if it really came down to obedience to Christ. I just wonder what I would do." Well, here's what you need to do. Here's the sub-point under number two. You need to be courageously and unyielding committed to, resolved about Christ's commands. Right? So you need to "Be Courageous and Unyielding About Christ's Commands." I'm going to do it. I'm going to do whatever God says. And here's what the Jews can't do and here's what we can't do. We can't bow to idols. We just can't. We're not going to bow to our cultural idols. And you need to resolve in your mind this is an unbending, unyielding commitment. It's a resolve I cannot break.

I read a lot of Christian books and a lot of Christian books I read are just trite. They're terrible. I got one right now I'm being forced to read. And it's really all about making sure that you live your Christian life like a slalom skier. Just get through all the hazards and make sure you don't end up, and even the term was used, I had to highlight the section, that you don't end up in the fire which I thought that was interesting. This is a book with a strategy so you don't end up in the proverbial fire. So do this, do that, compromise here, capitulate there, or do this. Just make sure you don't end up in the fire.

Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah who were probably 16, 17-years-old, looked at the king, the sovereign king of the empire and said, "You can throw us in the fire if you want but we're not bowing down." And they got thrown into the fire because of their commitment to the commands of God. And what's interesting is what happens in that scene, you might remember, is that I'm not trying to get out of the fire if God is going to lead me into the fire, if it's his will that I can't get out of this, I'm going to have to suffer for being obedient to Christ. The neat thing about that story, you might remember, is that Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, looked over there and looked into the fire, and he said, "I thought I threw three guys in there. I see a fourth. And he's one like the son of the gods." Like, what's going on in there?

I just want to tell you here's the whole promise of the Bible, particularly when culture was declining in Isaiah Chapter 5 and in so much of the rest of the end of Judah's history, "I will walk through the fire with you." I will take you through the flood. I will uphold you by my righteous right hand. And I'm going to say this to a group of people where some of you are going to lose your jobs. Some of you paid an inordinate amount of money to go to school to get a career that you will not be qualified to work in anymore if you're holding faithful to Christ. And I'm just telling you that that's the problem. You're going to make a lot less money. You're going to have a messed up vitae on your career path. You're going to say, I cannot do that. I will not do that.

And if I'm saying, well, give me a sermon or like the book I reading to try and kind of mollify that, paper over that, smooth that out. Is there any way to mitigate that harm? I'm just going to say you've got to be like a few teenage boys in Babylon who said, I know God can get me out



of this. I'm not sure how he's going to do it. But even if he doesn't get me out of this, even if I lose my life over this I'm not bowing down to your idols.

Let me show you how to do this and make sure you understand. I'm not asking you to be a jerk. Right? Some may be thinking, "Well, the tone of this sermon, it sure sounds like you're asking me to be a jerk." I'm not asking you to be a jerk. But here is what I am saying. Go with me to First Peter, please, and let me just remind you that the attitude you should have. First Peter Chapter 3 verse 13. Let's start there, we'll go 13 through 17. God is telling us through the pen of Peter here that you need to think about the price that you might have to pay for being obedient to Christ.

And he asked the question, verse 13, First Peter 3:13, "Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?" Because they know that's what some of you are saying. I want a Christianity where I don't have to be a zealot. Well, that's the wrong religion, right? You better pick Buddhism or something else. Because you're going to have to be a zealot for Christ, which means you're going to be committed to doing what is good, zealous for what is good. Keeping Christ's commands.

"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake." Because if I ask who is there to harm me? My boss is there to harm me, right? The industry is there to harm me. Well, "even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed." Right? And I love the way he puts it elsewhere. The Spirit of Christ is going to abide on you, is going to reside on you. It's going to be set on you. You will be blessed just like there will be a Christ in the fire, right? You will have Christ's very presence in the fire. So "have no fear of them nor be troubled, but in your hearts," can you get back to your quiet time? Do you sit there in the morning in your prayer time, in your Bible study, can you just "honor Christ" as the boss, "as the Lord" set up a part in your heart as exclusively transcendently the King "as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you."

How in the world can you think even if you're going to threaten me, Christ can deliver me. But even if he doesn't, I'll be okay. We're done. We're not going to capitulate to the culture. Right? How can you have that? Some say, "Well, I got to take a course on apologetics, obviously." No, that's not what you have to do. I know this is used in apologetics, you know, like a blurb to get in an apologetics class, But it's not that hard. A few teenage Jewish captives can say it to the king of Babylon. Right? We're here about obeying God. We are not going to obey culture.

I'll just quote it for you. I've already quoted the verse preceding it. Acts Chapter 4 verse 12. You remember it said, this is Peter saying "there's no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." The next line says this. It says this. It says, "They were amazed at the boldness of these guys," like how would they get so bold? A bunch of fishermen standing before the top leaders of Israel. Look how bold they are. Set Christ as apart as Lord in your hearts, be ready to say we're doing it for God. And here's what I'm saying. Don't be a jerk, "Yet do it with gentleness and respect."

I don't think Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were saying to King Nebuchadnezzar, "And you know, you're a real jerk. You just take your rules about that. Just take your idol and shove it." I don't think that's what he was saying. I think they were just saying it exactly as I read it, which is very calm. God's able to deliver us but even if he doesn't, we're not going to bow down. I mean, even Daniel respectfully addresses Nebuchadnezzar. "It's not like we're not going to be respectful. But we'd like to keep our jobs. I'd like to stay in... I wouldn't want to be defrocked or I wouldn't want my license removed. But, you know, if you are going to make this the requirement for me to capitulate to something that God calls abhorrent, I just won't. And I'm sorry. I'm still not going to sign it. I'm still not going to go along with it. I'm still not going to agree with your perverse views of how things ought to be in our culture. I'm just not."

"Having a good conscience," which means we're pleasing God in this, verse 16, "so that, when you are slandered," and of course they'll slander you, that "those who revile your good behavior in Christ," because that's what it is, it's good behavior in Christ, "they may be put to shame," and they will one day because guess what? Every person who sees you submit to the Lordship of Christ that is exclusively set apart in your heart as King and you say I'm doing it for the king of the universe and he's in my heart and I am absolutely committed to doing that, one day they are going to bow to that Jewish carpenter who died on a cross. They're going to bow. Every knee will bow.

So they will be put to shame when they say, "Wait a minute, I fired a guy who was being committed to Christ and now I'm starting to realize as I stand before Christ that he is the King. It was better for you to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will. And I hope he gets you out of the problem. I hope you keep your job. I hope you don't get a divorce. I hope you don't have the people turn their back on you. I hope your family doesn't write you off. I hope your neighbors don't sue you. I hope that. But it'd be better for you to suffer for doing what is good "with respect and gentleness" than for doing evil. So don't give in. Right? You need to know Christianity is always going to be an irritant to the culture.

The last couple of verses here, verses 34 through 36 back in our passage. Here is this din of noise, this confusion, this mob it's called in verse 36, the crowd shouting in verse 34. Some are shouting one thing, some another. Here's the deal. Their arguments weren't in place, but they certainly all agreed, we don't like Paul. Just like in Luke 23. Right? We may not have our story straight, but we all hate Jesus. That's what was going on at the crucifixion. And now, just like Jesus promised, "they hated me." If there were some weird conspiratorial mob against me, there will be a weird conspiratorial mob against you.

And I'm not big on conspiracies when it comes to human beings, because human beings aren't that smart. But I'll tell you what, I do believe in conspiracies, Ephesian 6 kinds of conspiracies where "I'm not wrestling against flesh and blood" because most of them are pretty dumb. But I know who's really smart, and that is "the principalities and powers and forces of evil in the cosmic realms" in which I am fighting every day. I got to know what's behind the mob. Why are people trying to kill the agent of righteousness, this missionary? Why? He's right. He's righteous. He's kind. He's good. Why are you trying to kill him? Because that's what Satan does. Satan is all about that.



Just to quote this First Peter Chapter 5 says that Satan is an "adversary and he's roaming around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour." You've heard the verse. You know it, right? Number three, you've got to "Know Christianity Is Demonically Opposed," and you are signing up to be a Christian to walk with the Christian group. You are part of this team now and you just need to know you just earned a bunch of enemies. The invisible realm, the cosmic powers, the forces of darkness, the Bible calls them, they're now pitted against you.

I've used the illustration before. It's like, you know, like when everyone, you know, that was cool was hating on Trump when he was the president. And I said to you, why do they hate Barron, his son? Right? There's awkward little, you know, adolescent son. Why did they hate him? He didn't give a speech. He didn't create one law. He didn't protest against anything. Well, why did they hate Barron Trump? Because he was Trump's son. That's why they hated him. Of course, they hated him because of the relationship. And guess what? You are hated. And I think you need to get to the place where you know that you are so demonically hated that Satan is working, as Paul told Timothy in Ephesus, to take people and hold them captive to do his will against you. That's what Paul said about Timothy, there are people who are held captive. They're ensnared to do Satan's will against Timothy.

It's spider season right now. Have you noticed that? You got spiders at your house? Unbelievable. I don't know what happened. Something happened. You have just explosion. I mean, it's crazy. They're everywhere. So I told you about the office I used to have over here in the 140 building before turning it into kids classrooms. They didn't have any windows. I had windows but I covered them with books. So I couldn't wait to get across the street. I wanted to design a new building, donate a lot of my books to the Compass Bible Institute library, and I can start to open up and have windows. That was kind of one of the things that for 15, 16 years I didn't have windows. I want windows in my office. So now I got windows in my office. I sit in my office most of the day working on my computer most of the day. And so it's great because I get to see the outside world and make sure everything's still going okay out there.

But something happened about eight days ago. A spider. A big spider decided to build a web right out the window where I look every single day. And he's not small. He's huge. He's gigantic. He's hairy. He's in the frame of the window on the outside, so I can't get to him. He's just right there. I get to see his hairy underside. I've seen every hair in his armpits because I've taken my phone. Have you ever used the magnifier in the Apple phone? I've gotten in and I've seen parts of him I shouldn't be looking at and he's huge. (audience laughing) And now I'm starting to have nightmares about this spider that I've called Harry who lives just outside my window. It takes me back to my childhood. The Gilligan's Island episode with that huge spider was blocking the cave. Do any old-timers remember that? I'm experiencing this every day.

And here's what I've learned about spiders. They seem to be very lazy insects. "And, you know, they build great, great webs." He built that web in one night. And he's hanging right there, right where I'm looking. It's like the chip in the windshield of my car, which, of course, you're always going to get. I remember the truck that went by me and the rock came up and



as it came up, I'm just praying it would hit somewhere like on the passenger side. And of course, it hits right here. Not here, not by the vent, not by the mirror, not in front of the passenger. It's right here in the center of my view. My window's chipped right there. I see it every time I get into my car.

Well, Spider Harry's doing the same thing to me. Just when I'm on the screen working hard on a sermon or writing an article or something. And I want to look at the trees and instead it's Harry Spider. I can't roll the windows down. I don't know why they did it this way. I'm trapped in there if anything bad goes down. I can't open a window, I'm on the second story.

And here's what Harry doesn't know. I'm plotting his murder every day. (audience laughing) I'm thinking about it. I'm trying to figure it out. Is there a spigot down there? Can I get a hose? Can I bring a hose from the office? Can I get a Facility person? What can I do? Can I get a basketball? Is it going to break the window if I throw it? How many tries would it take for me to kill Harry? I want to kill Harry really bad. I thought about using an extension pole at my house. Would that work? What am I going to do? Harry stares at me every day. A fat, lazy, hairy insect has no idea I want to kill him. And I thought of several ways to take him out. And frankly, it's just a matter of time until one of my ideas actually works and I go and take that huge insect out. I mean, it's all I want. Now, if you're going to pull for that spider I don't want to talk to you after the service.

But here's the thing. It's exactly how the spiritual realm, the fallen spiritual realm, thinks about you. It would just love to take you out. A roaring lion seeking someone, just looking, thinking, plotting. Now Satan's too big of a cat to worry about you. But he's got a lot of people on his team and those demons are out there. And I'm sure there are demons that know your name and they know the thing you're facing at work, with your friends, with your colleagues, with your neighbors. And just all he wants is to take you down. He wants to take you down. He doesn't want you to stand up for the gospel, not the exclusivity of the gospel. He doesn't want you to stand up for Christ's command. He certainly doesn't want you to keep Christ's command. He wants to do everything to take... This is a demonic problem.

I mean, there's one thing I know about God, First Corinthians 14, he's not a God of confusion. This is confusion. This is a mob. According to John 10, Satan seeks to kill and steal and destroy us. That's all he wants to do and he wants to take you out. So what do I do? Turn to one passage with me. Ephesians Chapter 6. Ephesians Chapter 6. Now, I know you know this passage, speaking of Roman soldiers, you might have thought of it when I talked about the Roman soldiers and centurions. You think about the armor, you think about the armor of God, put on the armor of God. That's all great. And it's good and we need every piece of it. But I want you to know something about the proportions here that you might not have thought about.

Let's just jump in the tail end of this. Verse 16, "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith," I need to trust God and I need to believe what he says and I need to believe his promises, "with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one." So that sounds good. I need that. I got to trust God. "And take on the helmet of salvation," know that I'm safe,



I got to understand the gospel, I got to make sure I'm saved, "and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." I got to know what he says. I got to know what he's revealed. I've got to know his word. Okay. Verse, verse, verse, all these pieces of armor.

But I just want to show you verses 18 through 20, the disproportional emphasis on one spiritual discipline. Look at it. Maybe you haven't noticed this before. Verse 18, "Praying," occasionally, at least for 5 minutes before you go to work, no, "at all times in the Spirit." The Spirit's got agenda items and they're completely diametrically opposed to Satan's agenda for your life. So you got to think about what the Spirit would want based on the information you have from God's word, the sword of the Spirit. You got to trust what he says, and you got to say, I got to know what the Spirit tells me, I've got to pray in keeping with that, praying at all times in the Spirit, right in the lane of what the Spirit wants, "with all prayer and supplication," with all prayers.

So now I have three times: prayer, prayers, praying and prayer and supplication. I got a synonym now for begging God for stuff. "To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication," not just for you, but "for all the saints." Prayer, prayer, prayer, prayer. It's all about prayer. Oh, and Paul says don't leave me out, man, pray for me, verse 19. And pray also for me "that words may be given to me in opening my mouth to boldly proclaim the mystery of the gospel." Wait a minute. That's got you in a lot of trouble, Paul. Don't you know you're in prison because of that? Don't you know you lost your job because you stood up for that? Don't you know you lost friends because you said Christ is the only way? Don't you understand? You don't want to keep talking. Do you want to learn to try and slalom your way through the problems?

No. I want you to pray for me that I would not back down. That even if they're trying to shut me up and put me in prison, I will not back down. Matter of fact, verse 20, that is why "for which I am an ambassador in chains." I love that. It's not that I'm a prisoner in chains, I'm an ambassador. I'm there to represent the gospel, which he says in Philippians Chapter 1 is the reason a bunch of people in the Imperial Roman Guard are getting saved because he's sharing the gospel in prison. "I'm an ambassador in chains," and please pray "that I may declare it boldly." The second time he says it, "as I ought to speak." Keep going. Don't back down. Keep going.

Speaking of old timers, some of you remember Walter Payton, the running back for the Bears. I was living in Chicago like in the height of his career there with the Bears as a running back. Big thing. Walter Payton. Walter Payton. You may not know he was not a big guy. Matter of fact, he was about my size. I mean, the weight was distributed differently in his body, (audience laughing) but he was about my size. And if you think about the NFL, think about a professional athlete, they hire guys a whole lot bigger than that to make sure guys my size don't go very far with the ball. Right? They're big guys out there, linebackers that are ready to take me down.

And so he was up against a lot. And yet Walter Payton in his career, he racked up over 16,000 yards in rushing. I mean, the guy moved the ball for his team a lot. I mean, the Bears



made a lot of wins because of what he was doing and moving the ball forward. Do you know how far 16,000 yards is? It's over nine miles. Nine miles. The total of his aggregate yards equals nine miles of moving forward. Now, someone did the math on this. You know how often he got tackled in that nine-mile stretch of moving the ball down the field? Every 4.4 yards.

Now, if I said, let's go out for a run, you're pretty healthy. Let's go for a run. We're going to run nine miles this afternoon. First of all, you'd be dumb to take me up on that. Well, let's just say you're crazy enough to do that. Now, if you said, "Oh, here's the thing. 300-pound guys are going to knock you to the ground every four yards." Ah... I don't want to do that. You understand that's a bit of what we ought to imagine in the Christian life. Running with endurance the race that is set before you. You've got to have that in mind.

And I love what Proverbs says, it's a great passage. It's a reminder of how the Christian life should be lived. The Old Testament Proverbs 24:16. It says, "The righteous falls," or in this case gets knocked down, "seven times," which is that picture in the poetic language of the Old Testament, like all the time, like perfectly, like fully. He gets knocked down over and over and over again. I love this, "but gets back up." The righteous get knocked down but they get back up.

And you've got to see what you're dealing with, with your friends, with your second cousin, with your family, with your mother-in-law, with your neighbor, with your coworker, with your boss, with your manager, with people who are deriding you, and even the things that you fear when you watch the news. You say what could happen to me if I stay faithful to Christ, right? The Bible says there's going to be trouble. Wars, rumors of wars. A lot going on in the world. "You'll have tribulation. But take heart; Christ has overcome the world." Do not be troubled. These things must take place. Stay faithful. If you get knocked down this week, get back up. Get in a small group. Let us help you off the ground to get back up. Keep running this race with endurance.

God help us all, please, be more faithful to get up, to have the resolve before we get knocked down the next time to say we're going to get back up. Even if they're threatening to annihilate us, that we say O King, you can do whatever you want, you can threaten whatever you want. God's able to deliver us. But even if he doesn't, we are not going to bow down. We're not going to capitulate. We're not going to compromise. We got to stay faithful. Our message is one that is exclusive and our constitution is what you have commanded us. So we're going to live by that. Give us courage. Give us strength. No matter what we might imagine the next thing would be. We don't want to be troubled. We don't want to be anxious. We don't want to be worried. We just want to be faithful. So help us to do that I pray.

In Jesus name. Amen.