



How God Works in You – Part 9

The Divine Use of Secular Means

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Well, surely you have heard preachers and others talk about the distinction between the sacred and the secular, sacred and secular. That's an important distinction to make in our minds. The words may be helpful for us to define. The word sacred comes from the Latin word "Sanctus," which is translating the word "holy." And when we're talking about something that is holy we're saying that is, in the most basic sense, set apart. It is set apart, in this case, when we use it in terms of what is sacred, we're talking about set apart for God. Only set apart for God. You are called a saint, which also comes from the word sanctus. You are set apart as God's person. And then God has several things that he sets apart for particular godly purposes, like the Church is set apart for a particular godly purpose. And it is a godly purpose in your life, in your small group, and prayer and preaching and Bible study and just all these things that God gives us are set apart. And then we think about those things in terms of church and all that goes on there. And then there's the secular. And that comes also from the Latin word "Saeculum" which literally means the age or the present, the place, the environment that you're in. And translated more broadly, like the world, this present age, the generation in which we live in is the saeculum, the thing that we would distinguish from the sacred, things that are set apart for God. Right? We think about the Church and the Bible and prayer, things that are godly. And then there are things that are not godly, which is everything else. Right? You think about, you know, Costco, I don't know, the bowling alley, the football stadium, city hall, those are out there. They're not godly things they're just secular things.

When you go to church sometimes they talk to you about, well, you need to think as a Christian and you need to think Christianly all the time. So in your mind we don't want you to bifurcate between now I'm going to live like a sacred person on the weekend, go to church and think like a Christian, and then I go into the world in the secular world then I just, you know, I can put on my secular mindset. And we said, no, no, no, you need to not bifurcate those two. You need to live as a Christian everywhere you go. You need to live as a Christian at Costco as hard as that might be, you need to live as a Christian, you know, at the football stadium, at your office, at City Hall. You live like a Christian all the time. And most of us, we're trying to think about blurring the lines, at least in our thinking that, no, I take my sacred mindset into the secular world. Most of us are well taught in that it's like we figured that out. We got that. What's harder for us, I think as it relates to secular and sacred, is trying to see how God might use one or the other in our lives. Like we think about and even the theologians talk about the means of grace, like preaching as a means of grace, going to church, fellowship. These are things that God utilizes, he sets these means apart to do good and godly things in your life. And we think about that and, of course, I need more time at church, and "we ought to be gathering together and all the more as we see the Day drawing near." These are important things that we do because God uses them for good. He uses these sacred means to accomplish good things in our lives. He works in and through our lives by these sacred things.



What we struggle with is to think that God might use secular things, particularly when we read the Bible in passages like Second Corinthians 4 verse 4 that says that "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers," like the "god of this world, that's a small "g." That means Satan is like doing his thing in this world and it's a sinful environment. It's a secular environment. Or First John Chapter 5 as it ends the book, he talks about the fact that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." It's like, that's secular. Of course that's dangerous. We've got to be careful, and we've got to think, well, this is not God's territory here. So when we think about could God use the secular as some kind of means to work in and through us? I just think that's the harder thing for us to try and compute. Like, how can that be? And yet, if we think about just that equation and then we look at the Bible we start to realize there are plenty of examples of how God uses secular means to accomplish his divine purposes in and through our lives. And that just needs to change the way we look sometimes at secular things. And nothing is more patently secular than when we think about, you know, the kingdoms of this world. You think about "the kingdoms of this world will one day become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ," to quote again, as I always quote Revelation Chapter 11, and we know that it's going to be replaced. So the kingdom of God that's the sacred area and then there's the kingdom of the world. There's this the secular area. And it's hard for us to think that this area that is not God's area, at least it doesn't seem to be God's area, is going to be God's means or tools by which he does something to do good in our lives.

And yet we get to a passage like the one we're studying today in Acts Chapter 23 beginning in verse 24, you start to see that very thing happen, and we kind of miss what's really happening there. And we certainly miss appreciating the way God uses secular means and sometimes even the way we think about those secular means. What should we think of, in this case, the Roman government? Right? What should we think of the Roman government? If I'm Paul, there are lots of reasons think, oh, this is the most godless government. I mean, at least in the Sanhedrin and the Jewish leadership of the first century, I mean, they have this Jewish inculturation and they have some deference to the law of God though they misinterpret it a lot. But the Romans, I mean, the pantheon of gods that they have, and they're just secular. Nothing could be more secular than the Roman government. And yet look at the text that we're going to study today. It starts with a clear description from Luke that the Roman government ends up saving the day when it comes to Paul's life. God is using the Roman government to accomplish his divine purposes in Paul's life. It's not all that unusual, but it's important and it helps us understand how we should view government in general. So in some ways, we're going to take a look at this text, see what happens in Paul's life, and use it as a platform for us to think about things in our day. Because in our day, all I got to do is start talking politics in Washington D.C. or Sacramento and get a lot of you really ruffled this morning about how what a terrible thing this is. Now, is it a terrible thing? It is a terrible thing in many ways. But I want to start to think about even secular government. Nothing is more patently secular than the government, the kingdoms of this world. And think, now, wait a minute, let me think about that in light of how God often uses secular means to accomplish his divine purpose.

Now that's a pretty complicated intro. Is anyone still with me on this? Let's look at the text. Acts 23 verses 23 through 35. The lengthier passage of the sermon will last for several hours



today. Prepare yourself. Let me read it for you and put pieces together for you that will pick up from the context. Really, a lot has started back in Chapter 21 but we turned this into a nine-part series in Chapters 22 and 23 and we called it God's Work In You or How God Works In You. And we've seen a lot of things in the series in the eight preceding sermons that are like no-brainers that God's grace is obviously at work in and through us and God's providence. And so a lot of things God uses to work in and through our lives. We've talked about God's purposes for us, just like Paul had purposes that God had given him and a race to finish. And so we thought about God's work and how we can continue to accomplish God's purpose in our lives, which is a great transferable set of concepts from the study. When we get to this one this one it's the hardest one. Like, how in the world would we ever think about our government serving a proper and divine purpose in our Christian lives in what God wants to do for us? So let's see what we can do with this text. I'm interested to see what's going to happen.

So let's look at verse 23. Reading from the English Standard Version. "Then he," circle the pronoun. Who are we talking about here? You got to go back here in context. We're talking about the tribune. The tribune, we keep using that word. That's the word used in the text here in our English Standard Version. It's describing someone who's in charge of ten centurions. He's in charge of Jerusalem and keeping the peace. Of course, Rome is kind of the overseeing jurisdiction, the leadership of Israel. Israel still doing their thing. They still have the Sanhedrin. But the tribune is the top leader in the region in Jerusalem and he's got ten centurions who report to him and each centurion had a hundred soldiers. There's the word "cent," centurion, 100, and each centurion had 100 soldiers. So he had a thousand Roman soldiers at his disposal there as the tribune. We're going to get his name here in a minute in verse 26, Claudius Lysias.

So "Then he," the tribune, "called two of the centurions," so he's got two of the ten centurions that he oversees. "and he said, 'I want you to get 200 soldiers ready,'" it's a big deal, "with 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night. And also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix, the governor." Now, why is all this happening? Because you might remember where we left off last time. We had 40 Jewish guys who had gone and conspired together to say, we're not going to eat until we kill Paul. And how we're going to do it is we're going to go to the tribune, Claudius Lysias, we know his name now, and we're going to go and ask him to send Paul back to the Sanhedrin one more time.

So he's in Antonia's Fortress over here on this side of the Temple Mount if we're looking at it from the east, and we're going to take him, Paul, who's in the barracks here, and we're to take him across the Temple Mount. We're going to take him to the side where we have the Sanhedrin that meets, the 70 leaders of Israel. And we're going to tell the tribune we messed up last time, we got in a big fight, we were going to tear him to pieces but now we're going to really figure this out. So we're going to send him across that couple of football fields to get to where the Sanhedrin meets. But these 40 guys are going to lie in ambush and they're going to come out, they're going to overpower the one or two Roman soldiers who are going to take him across and these 40 guys are going to kill Paul. That was the plan, they were going to kill



him. Paul's nephew finds out about it, he hears about it because a secret between 40 guys is not much of a secret, so it gets out. And he comes to the tribune, he comes to Lysias and he says, hey, there's a plot to kill my uncle. And he goes, okay, don't tell anybody you said this. I got a response. And here's the response. Okay, we're going to get 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, 200 spearmen, and we're going to take him by night to where he's deferred.

He's deferred and said, I appeal to Caesar. Well, you're going to go to the next level up. And from the tribune in Jerusalem you're going to go to the leader of the whole region in Judea, that's the governor from Rome named Felix. He's going to be succeeded by Festus and we'll learn all that as we unfold the book. But that's the plan. And he gets a letter. He wrote a letter to this effect, and somehow Luke gets a hold of this letter and he gives us the letter. Here it is. "Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings." So that's his name. I'm going to send him to Felix. "This man," Paul, "was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him having learned that he was a Roman citizen." Now, this is the whole point. Why sending to Felix? How can you even appeal to Caesar? Because he is a Roman citizen, which was a surprise to us if we didn't know much about Paul's life, that he pulls out the Roman citizenship card when he's there about to be whipped by the Romans. So he's deferring. We're not going to let the Jews here kill this man who hasn't had a trial. He's a Roman citizen. When Rome is in charge of Jerusalem and Rome is in charge of Judea so we're going to send him to Felix. Okay?

Verse 28, "And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council," the Sanhedrin. "I found that he was being accused about questions of their law." And now the real issue was he was promoting Christ and it was about bringing a Gentile into the Jewish court, which didn't even actually happen. It was a false trumped-up charge. But when it came down to it, he ended up in a whole debate about the resurrection and about the Christ who was resurrected. He's like, I don't know, all their religious stuff. I'm just telling you, when it came down to it, as a Roman citizen and me as the Roman tribune in Jerusalem, there was nothing deserving death or imprisonment. So they want his head on a platter and I'm telling you, there's nothing I can tell you that he's done that deserves death or imprisonment.

So verse 30, "When it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against this man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him." So the soldiers according to their instructions took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris, if you look at your map. Do you see the little map I provided you? You're welcome. At the bottom of your worksheet there. Halfway after you get the high elevation in Jerusalem, you come down. When you start to get to the coastal plains of the Mediterranean, you get to this city, and this is where you're going to have them, some of the people turn back as it says in verse 32, "On the next day they return to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him." So, you know, the hard part where you're going to have people who might ambush them, that's behind them, and off they continue to go to Caesarea.

Verse 33, "When they come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor," to Felix, "they presented Paul also before him. On reading the letter, Felix asked what province he was



from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia," because Tarsus is in Cilicia, on the southern part of what is modern-day Turkey, first century Asia Minor on the Mediterranean, "he said, 'I'll give you a hearing when your accusers arrive.'" So we get your chief priests and attorneys who are going to show up, and they're going to tell us why they want to kill you. Then I'll hear the case. "And he commanded Paul to be guarded in Herod's praetorium."

So Herod's praetorium on the coast of the Mediterranean in a place called Caesarea, named after Caesar, and even Antipatris is named after Herod the Great's father, not that that matters. But all of this is Roman, Roman, Roman, Roman, Roman. And we got Roman soldiers guarding the Jewish apostle who's the Jewish apostle to the Gentiles who's going to accomplish God's purpose, which we've learned in Chapter 9 and many times since, that he was going to bear witness about Christ, the resurrected Christ, to kings and governors. So this is the plan that God has. And in accomplishing the plan when the Jews want to kill him and 40 crazy people want to go after him and aren't even going to eat until they kill him, here are the Roman soldiers now on horseback, guarding him with spears as they take him through the crags and down the mountain. They get him to Antipatris and then on to Caesarea, and he's delivered safely in a massive praetorium there in Herod's praetorium on the coastal, breezy shores of the Mediterranean.

Do you want to talk about God's protection? Right here. God uses the Romans who worship the pantheon of gods, the Romans, to protect Paul to get him down the field moving the ball toward the goal line of Paul being able to say I finished the course. God said I was going to testify before kings, I'm going to testify before kings. I'm going to testify about Christ in Rome. How are you going to get there? They're going to kill you in Jerusalem. I'm going to get there. How does God get him there? He uses the Romans. Do you see how simple that is? I'm just trying to get us to see that. Okay. Well, yeah, God used the Roman officials who didn't know God to get Paul to a place to fulfill God's purpose for Paul. "Yeah, I see that." Well, do you see that? Do you really see that? Could God use Washington D.C. or Sacramento or Santa Ana to accomplish God's will for us? Right? For you?

Is it really that secular government that we always are so frustrated about, that there's so much animus and animosity and frustration and Christians are always complaining about it? Can God use government, the American government, with all of its warts and wrinkles and all the problems to do something to accomplish his will in us as a congregation and in you as an individual. And we'd have to say, well, of course he does. I mean, that's what happens in the first two verses. I mean, centurions surround Paul all because of the protocol of Roman law. But when it came down to it, it's accomplishing God's law, which was God's decreed will for Paul. That's amazing. And I think we need to stop and say that should change our view of even how government functions and how God has chosen for government to function.

Number one, you just need to recognize this. This is an easy observation I hope. You need to do "Acknowledge God's Use of Government." God uses government, secular governments, to accomplish his purposes. That may be hard for you to believe if you were living in Germany in the 1940s. It may be hard for you to believe if you were in the 15th century living under Pharaoh in Egypt. It would be hard for you to believe if you were living in Babylon in the fifth



century B.C. It may be hard for you to believe if you live in North Korea right now or in China. I understand that's hard for people to believe, even for a lot of us now that the temperature in America has changed from colonial America in the wake of the Great Awakening with Jonathan Edwards and all the rest, to now living under, you know, Joe Biden and Gavin Newsom. I know it's a whole new ballgame. And you're thinking, well, how in the world is this part of God's functioning work? Well, God does do his will and function within his decreed plan for us as his people and you as an individual living under a government. Very important for us to recognize.

So turn to a passage I had you look at before in Isaiah 44, bottom of Isaiah 44. And please, just I want you to see the secular and sacred distinction in this passage and how God just reaches across the aisle, so to speak, and grabs the secular and uses it however he wants to accomplish his will for the sacred. That's helpful. I think it can be very helpful. So take a look at it and let's reread this passage with those categories in mind. Isaiah Chapter 44. Let's start in verse 24. "Thus says," Yahweh, "the Lord, your Redeemer." Who's he talking to? Israel, the chosen people of God, the descendants of Abraham, "who formed you from the womb." This nation it came to birth because God chose to do this. "I am the Lord," I'm Yahweh, "who made all things." I'm not only in charge of you as my chosen covenant people, I'm in charge of everything, I made everything. "Who alone?" No one consulted with me, I did it, I "stretched out the heavens, I spread out the earth by myself." And when it comes to people who are liars and people who are diviners and think they're so smart, well, I can "frustrate the signs of the liars," I can make "fools out of the diviners," I can "turn back the wise men," I can "make their knowledge," those smart intellectual elites "foolish." I can do all that with the secular. I can frustrate that. And how about with the sacred? Well, God "confirms the word of his servant," that's the sacred. He "fulfills the counsel of his messengers," his people, "who says of Jerusalem," his city, well, "it'll be inhabited, and the cities of Judah. well, they're going to be built, and I will raise up their ruins." Context. Context. Context.

The context here is the promise was you were going to go into captivity in Babylon. Jerusalem is going to be destroyed. Judah was going to be occupied. Nebuchadnezzar and his armies are going to destroy everything. The promise here, as often happens in the Old Testament prophets as we head toward the fifth century B.C., we recognize this: God says, you're going to go into the doghouse for 70 years, but you're going to come back and you're going to come back and I'm going to establish your children and your grandchildren in the land of Jerusalem again. It'll be rebuilt. That's the promise here. So there's hope for the future of Israel even though this generation is going into captivity.

And you just think about how God saves when it looks like your back is up against the wall, verse 27. Think about the deep, the sea. "Who says to the deep, 'Be dry.'" Oh, I think back to, you know, Exodus and the Red Sea, and "dry up your rivers," I think about Joshua and the Jordan River. Like he does all of these things. God can do that. "Who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd.'" Now, we haven't even gone into the Babylonian captivity yet. We don't even have Nebuchadnezzar destroying things yet. But we have in this passage the leader of the Persians, which is the empire that comes after the Babylonians, so we're 100 years until Cyrus comes on the scene and does this. But here is Isaiah predicting the leader is going to



be used by God to accomplish God's divine purpose for his sacred people. "Who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd.'"

Now wait a minute. No one could be more secular than the Persian king Cyrus. He's secular, he's pagan. But he is going to be God's shepherd. He's going to fulfill God's purpose, saying, "Of Jerusalem, 'She shall be rebuilt' and of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'" So the Persians are pagans, and the leaders of the Persians are actually going to be used as tools in God's hand to accomplish the will that he has for Israel, and he's going to move them down the path of his prophetic plan by pagan kings. He uses secular governments to accomplish his divine purpose. Amazing.

Verse one, Chapter 45, "Thus says the Lord to," his "Māšîaḥ," "his anointed one," māšîaḥ, Messiah, his Christ. That's the word in Greek, his anointed one. "To Cyrus." I mean, you want to talk about the blurring of the lines between the sacred and the secular, right? The secular is Cyrus, and yet you've just called him the most sacred word you can call him, the messiah, right? Jesus is the Messiah. Do you want to talk about sacred? Nothing's more sacred than Jesus of Nazareth. He's the Christ. Well, here's the same word, messiah, the Christ, used of a Persian king. I just that's like wow.

So Cyrus is like your Cyrus, "your shepherd?" He's your guy? He's your anointed? Yeah. Why? Because I've gripped him by the right hand. "Whose right hand I've grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him and gates that may not be closed." So Babylon is the threat. Babylon is fomenting this attack on Jerusalem. And yet there's a king after him. God is going to punish. This is Habakkuk's whole question in the Old Testament. God is going to punish your oppressors and the punisher of your oppressors is the Medo-Persian Empire that's coming after. And Cyrus is actually going to be used, after Darius, to bring the people back to Jerusalem to decree that it be rebuilt. So you're going to have a succession of powers. He's going to subdue nations before him, including the Babylonians, and they're going to take world prominence, and he is going to be used to accomplish my purpose for my people. You need to know this: God is a God who grasped the right hand of the liars and hypocrites who are political leaders or dictators around the world to accomplish his purpose. That may be hard for us to grasp but we've got to understand it starting with the baseline definition of government.

So let's look at it from Romans 13. If I'm going to understand how God uses governments, I got to look at Romans 13, a classic text which I know you're not going to like it because you're post-Covid, you know, rebels. I get it. But you got to look at the passage because guess what? This government in Rome in the mid-first century was pagan. I mean, I know you think about the hypocrisy of our leaders, all that was going on here, and instead of having 16 chapters where Paul is writing the Christians in Rome in the shadow of the authority that has got its heavy hand and grip on the people of God in Jerusalem and in Israel, and saying, here's how you overthrow the government. You don't get one chapter about the overthrow of the government in the book of Romans. You get eight chapters on the gospel, right? And you get chapters 9 through 16 all about how the Church is supposed to get along and live godly lives. And we get one chapter because we can't avoid it. We're talking to Christians living in



the shadow of the capitol, quote unquote, of the Senate of Rome. And what are the instructions you give about the government? It isn't to bash them. It doesn't sound like a talk show. This isn't Rush Limbaugh talk here, right? I think of the old, late Rush Limbaugh. Sorry. "Who's Rush Limbaugh?" You gen-xers, you generation Z-ers. Look him up. We don't get Rush talk here. Right? What we get is this statement. Blow your mind. Look at it.

Romans Chapter 13 verse 1. "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities." People react, "Boo... Boo... Hiss, pastor. Boo... I don't want to do that. No way. We tried that. I'm not doing that." I'm just reading the Bible. Just reading the Bible to you this morning. "Well, it must have been a godly government." It wasn't a godly government, it was the pagan government he was talking about. "Be subject to governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." Some people think, "Whatever. Well, that was before Biden came along, he didn't know Newsom. Right? You don't get it, God. Sorry, sorry. There are exceptions." No, it says "NO authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For the rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain, for he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath," wow! "but also for the sake of conscience." You should know better in your own conscience.

"For because of this you also pay taxes." Boo... Boo... hiss! Pastor, boo... "For the authorities are ministers of God." What!? "Attending this very thing. Pay to all what is owed them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenues are owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor owed." The first-century Roman Christians said, "You do not know where they're spending our tax money, you don't understand. They built this big pantheon of gods. They make people say, 'Caesar is Lord.' You don't understand."

Paul understood. Paul said he'd been arrested by the Romans. He knows. And he's saying, here are the baseline observations about human government, whether we're talking about the Egyptian government, the Syrian government, the Babylonian government, the Grecian government, whether you're talking about the Ptolemaic government, whether you're talking about the Roman government, the American government, here is what it says. Observation number one, our government is instituted by God. Some people counter with, "Well, yeah, back in the day, I mean, back in the day, it was. Yeah, yeah. John Adams talking about God and Christians and all that. Yeah, I get that." No, no, no. Our government right now, along with North Korea, established by God. We have to admit this. This is what the Bible says. No authority except from God. Okay? Pharaoh? Yes, Pharaoh. Nebuchadnezzar? Ashurbanipal? Yes, all of them. All of them. Cyrus? Sure. Darius? Yes. Antiochus Epiphanes? Yes. Caesar? Herod? Pontius Pilate? Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. All of these established by God? That's the first thing we need to observe.



Number two, you need to observe their job description, to punish bad actors. That's the job. They have the ability now with a sword. They have the implements of enforcement. They are supposed to enforce judgment on bad actors. "Well, they're not doing a very good job of it." No, I understand, I understand but here's the thing. You come over to burn my house down this afternoon. I got cameras, man. I'm going to catch you. And if you do it, guess what I'm going to do with that camera footage? I'm going to go to the cops. And guess what the cops still do? They still arrest arsonists. And I hope that they throw the book at you for burning down the pastor's house. Shame on you for even thinking that thought. And you know what the government will do. I think they'll cooperate with me and my sense of injustice, my indignation over you burning my house down today. They're still on that one.

Killing babies, pre-born babies? No. They're intoxicated in this absolute, you know, debauched nonsense. And it's wicked. I understand that, I get it. They don't understand all that is right and wrong, but they still, even for the sake of my conscience, I understand the submission to the government to do things like building highways, having a social safety net which Israel in the Old Testament had and our government has as well, having certain things that they do for us in terms of public service and also allowing courts to be open where I can come and not only use the law to inflict punishment on the criminal who breaks the law, but also civil courts that are open for me to take my own disputes and try and solve. Yes, the government is there for that. Do they do it perfectly? No. Are we doing it better than some countries now? Yeah. Move to another country and find out. Let's move you off to China and see how that goes. But let's take you over to Jordan, or even worse, let's go to Iran or Iraq. We can move into a lot of places where the government is worse in terms of lining up what God says is good and what the government says is good.

And you can sit here and say, well, back in the day when the government was founded, all the good and bad definitions were pretty much the Bible definitions. Well praise God for that. And now we've shifted. But where it overlaps we understand this. The government is still functioning to try and punish evildoers, rapists, pedophiles at least for now. We're still punishing those people. And for that we say, okay, government, it can get a rating B- or C+ whatever we rate our current government, we can say it still functions at least with that basic description from God, you are supposed to punish bad actors. That's what you do.

I preached a whole series about this. You can check those sermons out on the back. We need to understand just war theory. We need to understand how governments work when they interact with each other. We need to understand how it works in terms of our special privileges that they never had in the ancient world, to vote and make decisions about our leaders. All that you can learn about all that. There's a lot to say about that from a biblical perspective. But right now I'm just saying governments are instituted by God, and governments have an assignment to punish bad actors, and they do that at varying degrees of success. Right? And thirdly, this is the part you hissed at, verse 7, "Pay to all what is owed them: taxes to whom taxes are owed." Verse 6, "You also pay taxes." Verse 1, "Be subject to governing authorities." Verse 5, "Therefore one must be in subjection." Here's the third observation. We fund our government, right? Our government is supposed to be funded by people in subjection to the government. Just like children are in subjection to their parents.



Right? And just like there are certain working arrangements where employees are subject to their employers, we as citizens are supposed to be subject to our government officials.

Okay. Now you're really not liking this. We're halfway through and you don't like the sermon. I see it on your face. I am sorry, okay? But it'll get better right now. Go back to our passage. Acts Chapter 23. Let's look at verse 25. I know what you're thinking. I know what you're thinking. I can read your mind and know what you're thinking. Okay? You'll get a little satisfaction reading this next section of the passage. Verse 25. I read it quickly without inflection or comment but let's read it now with inflection and comment. Verse 25, "And he," Claudius Lysias, "wrote a letter to this effect. 'Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. This man was seized by the Jews,'" so Paul was seized by the Jews, "and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and I rescued him." Ding! Right? The gleam in his teeth sparkled, "having learned that he was a Roman citizen." Hey, Roman leader, Roman boss, I, saved him. I saved him for the Jews. I'm sending him over to you. I did that, I know, I know, you want to give me raises. It's okay, I get it, I get it. I did this, he's a Roman. I saved a Roman citizen. I sent him over to you.

Now Luke's told us the real story. Is this the real story? Is this all there was to it? You do remember the crowd on the Temple Mount was wanting to kill Paul, and here they took him they were angry because what were they doing? They had threatened the peace of Jerusalem by trying to kill the Apostle Paul. And here were the Romans, afraid of their own, covering their own butts in all of this. Right? We've got to take this guy out of here. Now, we're going to get... Why are you causing such trouble? Strap him to the pillar. Let's whip the truth out of this guy. That's how this started. Claudius Lysias had demanded that he be whipped. The centurion was about to whip his back when he said, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute. Is it customary around here for you to whip, you know, Romans without a trial? And the centurion ran to Lysias and said, hey, the guy's a Roman citizen. Oh no, he's a Roman citizen. We've arrested him. We put him in chains. We were just about to rip him up, man. Oh, we got to cover our rear end right now. So, let's send him back to the Sanhedrin. Let's see what we find out. We got to figure this out, but we shouldn't have done this, he's a Roman. So, Claudius Lysias made a mistake. He was presumptuous about who he was. He didn't find out whether he was a Roman citizen. He had him locked up, had him in chains, had him just about whipped. He had commanded him to be whipped without a trial.

So, yes. Here's a newsflash. Sometimes politicians lie. (audience laughs) I know. Write it down. Right? Go ahead. I'll give you a minute to write that down. Here's what you should expect. Number two, "Expect Corruption in Politics." You think, "Ah, finally, this sermon is going to get good." Yes, you should expect our politicians to tell us stuff like wear masks and don't congregate together and then go out to the French Laundry and have dinner during Covid. You should expect that. I'm just making that up. That never happened. No, that did happen! That did happen. That's right, that's right. We call that hypocrisy, right? We call that you must not mean what you're saying. We call that what is wrong with you, right? And we can go on and I can talk about a lot of politicians right now. Right?



I don't follow politics as closely as some of you do, but I follow just about enough to see the injustice, the cover-up, the conspiracies, the nonsense, the lying, the cheating. I watch senators come in with hardly anything getting a senator's pay and coming out millionaires. Right? I see that all the time. I see people saying one thing and doing another all the time. I see it, I see it, I see it, and here's why. Because they are, as secular leaders, given a tremendous amount of power. Here's a power I don't have. I don't have this power. Coming up on April 15th, I don't have this power. How much do I want to pay for taxes this year? 3%? All right, do that. I can't do that. I can't do that. The guys in D.C. can figure that out for us. And then they can tell us. They can say here's how much you owe Mike Fabarez, pay this. And guess what? I have to pay it. And if I don't pay it, they have the implements of enforcement and they will come and enforce it.

I got a call from my radio show this week answering questions and a guy calls in and says, maybe last week, calls in and says, "You know, we should not, as Christians be paying taxes. It's not right. The Constitution says, blah blah blah. And he's saying to me like he's informing me of this. And it's like, dude, I've been a pastor for more than a week. I've heard this. I understand. As a matter of fact, I had a whole group in our church, a small group in our church, they were all about this. "We're not paying taxes. It's not right. It's unconstitutional. It's illegal, blah blah blah. La la la la la la la la." And they met with me with all their Bible verses. They came to me, the seminary grad said, "We're here we're you something. We're not going to pay taxes."

And I said, oh, scary. You should pay taxes. I pay taxes. Do you know why I pay taxes? Not only because Romans 13 says it, not only because Jesus picked up a coin and said, here's a denarius, whose inscription is it? And pay to Caesar what's Caesar's. I know the Bible. Jesus said it. The Bible says it, I pay taxes. But I also pay taxes because here's the thing. They have handcuffs and firearms. And recently the IRS hired a lot of guys who can shoot. So I pay my taxes. Not because my tax money is going to the best things that I agree with, but because they have the implements of enforcement. Not only can they tell me how much to pay for my taxes, not only can they tell me how fast I can drive on the interstate, not only can they tell me what the rules are for my house, right? But they have the implements of enforcement. Now you give someone the right to make rules and enforce rules, you got a lot of power. And guess what you expect with that kind of power? Corruption. And you're going to have it.

Here's my point. The more power you concentrate in a few people like, you know, our ruling class in America, right? Or you can go to North Korea or go wherever you want where you've got dictatorships. Or let's go back in the Bible to a guy named Nebuchadnezzar. Do you remember him? And when you get power concentrated, here's what you've got. Self-promotion on steroids. Have you noticed that? And here's what he did, he took the Plain of Dura, set up an obelisk, and put his statue on the top and said everyone's going to..., we're going to play music, everyone's got a bow down to my statue. That's what he had everybody do. Self-promotion is the name of the game if there's power at stake and people want that power. And so they work hard to get that power. And here's the thing about what the Bible says, the virtues of Scripture would say you should not be into self-promotion, you should not



be into selfish ambition. And yet that's the name of the game in secular politics. And so they will engage in all of that.

And then you know what he said if you don't bow down to the idol that I put up in the Plain of Dura? What did Nebuchadnezzar say? Do you remember in Daniel Chapter 3, you will be thrown into the... the lounge where we'll talk it out with you? No, we're going to throw you into the fiery furnace. So here's the other thing they do. They oppressed their rivals, they oppressed their rivals. Maybe Lincoln's debates when he was going to be the president might have been about the issues. It's no longer about the issues. Have you notice that? it's what we called in high school debate class, we call it ad hominem attacks. It's attacking the other person. So we have rival squashing leaders and it's all about attacking each other. That's why you don't like politicians, especially you delicate women who just don't like any of this. You don't want to listen to the news and you're just too civil for it, right? And some of you men, too. But I think a lot of women, I don't want to know.

Here's the thing, we don't like the mudslinging in politics. In an election year, is it hard to just even be conscious to deal with all that's going on in our culture? And I know we hate it but this is the game and this is the nature of secular politics. And there's going to be a lot of that because that's what sinful people do when they're fighting for power. And then you have a group of people like Daniel in Daniel Chapter 6, who believe there is a higher power to whom we submit to. And guess what? It's the religious people, in particular the people who are really connected to the real one and true living God, how about Christians like me and you who are praying to a God where we can say things like, hey, God is the King of kings and Lord of lords? And we say, you know what? If you tell me that Caesar is Lord, I'm going to say, no he's not. He may be my emperor, but he is not the Lord. The ultimate Lord is God. You see anybody with concentrated power and who becomes the threat? People like us. And therefore you have eventually the Christians thrown in the proverbial lion's den.

And we see as our country moves from the overlapping of seeing what's right and wrong. And now the authority of making rules and implementing them has moved over here to where there's still some overlap of what God says is good and what they say is good, and what they say is right, and what they say is bad, and what God says is right, and what God says is bad. And they move this direction the further they move from a foundation of a Judeo-Christian ethic in law, you are going to see increasing persecution against Christians. Look at it in China. Look at a North Korea. Look at it in any dictatorship in the Middle East. You look at it and you see this is exactly what happens. We cannot have a group of people seeing that there's a higher power than government.

And here's the problem. Did you see a CNN interview with that gal who was sitting there saying, "I can't believe these Christians. They think that the rights are derived from God." Did you hear that? No? Like have you read the Constitution? Do you understand the basis for America? Yeah, that's what we recognize. That was the basis for our whole political theory is that we have certain unalienable rights that are given to us by God, and we're just reflecting those and codifying those. Those are our rights they're given to us by God. You can't create them. Well, now we are creating them and our Supreme Court is creating them. And the



whole Senate and legislation in the House is creating them. And when they create them they say you cannot have a belief that there's some external, transcendent creation of rights. And therefore Christians become stuck in the crosshairs of government.

And the more concentration we have of power, the more you're going to see the persecution of Christians. You should expect that corruption in government. But does that mean God does not utilize government? Back to our premise. Go back to our passage. Look at this in verse 25. In verse 25 of our passage we see all of this play out. "And desiring to know the charge which they're accusing him, I brought him down to their counsel. I found that he's being accused about questions about their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment." And when it was disclosed to me that would be a plot against him, hey, I sent him to you at once Felix ordering his accusers." Do you want the high priest to come? Let him come. And he will come in Chapter 24 and then let him lay out the charges. What's wrong? Why do you think this guy needs to die?

Verse 31, "So the soldiers, according to their instructions brought Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horseman go on without him. He came to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. On reading the letter, he asked what province he's was from?" Oh, he's from Tarsus in Cilicia and gives him a hearing. "'I'll give you a hearing when your accusers arrive.' And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod's praetorium. So all of this is steered by God to accomplish his will, which whenever you use the concept of God steering things to accomplish his will for his people, we call that sovereignty. That God is controlling the events of history, the actions of leaders. And I just want us to end with that concept.

Number three, we need to "Remember God is Sovereign," overall. God is sovereign over all including every last leader. Now, I know that raises a ton of questions in your mind. And you think there's no way God is in charge of Gavin Newsom's brain. It's not possible. It's not possible. And I'm saying, oh, he is, and let me prove it to you right now. Go to Proverbs Chapter 21. I couldn't make this any clearer than this. You need to understand this verse and then it will hurt you, but it will help you. Okay? So let me wound and let me heal with this one verse. Here it comes. Proverbs Chapter 21 verse 1, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will."

Now you think this is the truth. The king's heart is really rebellious. It's really hard-hearted. God can't do anything with it. He's done all he can do to try to help Biden but he can't do anything else. What can he do? He can't turn him wherever he wants. That's a lot of people's view of the impotence of God. That God can't control these leaders. They're out of control. "All these leaders are out of control." They're not out of control. Did you brush your teeth this morning? Did you...? Three people brush their teeth. (audience laughing) Did you spit your toothpaste into the sink? Ten of you did. That's good. The rest of you swallowed your toothpaste? (audience laughing) You spit your toothpaste into the sink.

Now, unless you're a barbarian you don't want to come home eight hours later and see your crusty, dried Crest, you know, on the surface of your sink. So I hope what you did after you



spit your toothpaste into the sink is you said, "I need to wash this down the drain," and you did what I did and you turned on the sink and here's the problem. You get, like a three-quarter-inch stream of water that goes right to the center, and then it pools up just about this much, but I spit, maybe you spit more accurately than I do, but I spit the toothpaste everywhere. I'm glad my sink is big. And so here's what I do. I try to take that stream of water in my hand and I try to shoot it all around and get the gravity and that water, get all of it down the sink so that I can come back and look at my sink as beautiful. That's what I try to do, but I can't because that stream of water is so unruly, so hard for me. I mean, I'm just like I can't get the water to go anywhere. It bores a hole right through my hand.

Is that how the stream of water works at your house? You may have hard water but that's not what happens. You're able to direct that water without..., you could do it left-handed. You can take your little kid's hand and put it there and move it around because it's just a stream of water. It's nothing for you to move that around. When we see the hypocrisy and the corruption and the lying and the cheating and the stealing of our political leaders, if you don't think God could just go and change it then you don't know God, you don't know how it works. You don't understand the sovereignty of God. You don't understand how God does things to move the hearts of kings. All you have to do is start thinking through the Bible and you will say, oh yeah, I guess the Bible does say that, everywhere it says that.

I don't know, let's start in Isaiah 44 in your mind, how about Cyrus? He wasn't even born yet. And here we have God saying, I'm going to use him to decide to send your grandkids back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city. I'm going to have him decide to do that. "Well, I don't know. You don't know what he's like. He's going to be really rough to work with." How about this one? Go to Acts Chapter 4. In Acts Chapter 4, which, by the way, is a great response to what you should do when the government is corrupt, right? Sometimes we need to dissent and disobey, just like Peter did here. I mean, let's just start at verse 18. That's a good place to go. "And they called them in," the leaders did, "charged them not to speak or to teach in the name of Jesus." Now, is that going to fly with Christians? No more teaching about Jesus. No more teaching about Jesus.

We planted a church in the suburbs of Amman, Jordan. And I went out there and went to the governing officials and I said, we need to register this church because we figured to have a better time and I knew there were some churches preaching the gospel that were registered in Jordan. I said, please, we want to register. We tried. Pastor Lucas and I worked hard to see that happen. And they said no, no, no. So then we packed up all of our discipleship manuals in Arabic and we took our Arabic speaking. Ah, sorry we're leaving. No we didn't. We said, no, we're going to come and establish a church. And we did. We established a church, an unregistered church. Now an unregistered church then is subject to some scrutiny that registered churches aren't. So Compass Bible Church of Amman, Jordan, that we established years ago, it started with a willingness to say, you know, you're saying we can't teach in the name of Jesus. They weren't saying that adamantly, but like, you're not a registered church, you're not registered to do this. We said we're going to do it anyway. And we did it. And we went on to continue to grow this church. And it went okay for a while. People were getting disciplined, people were getting taught, and then people started getting saved.



When people started getting saved and there were baptisms taking place, the government in Jordan didn't care much for that. So they started sending the secret police to our church and they started sitting in the back. They started keeping track of what was going on in our church and eventually wanting to shut it down they worked hard against us to make threats against our church, eventually threats against the pastor, and then very specific threats against his family. So it became a battle. Now there's going to be a battle when the government tells us to do something that we're not allowed to do by our Lord. And sometimes when they're telling us not to do what our Lord says we're supposed to do we're going to have conflict. And we had conflict. We've had conflict with a lot. We had conflict during our Covid adventure, our fun adventure through Covid, where we said, okay, and we know that's what the law is. We know what Sacramento says but we're going to do this because we know this is right.

And so those are the kinds of things that we do. And often we do that with conflict. But in this particular passage when they say don't teach, their response in verse 19 is, well, if you're telling me to do something that God has told me to do then here's the deal. Peter and John answered, "Whether it's right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than God, you must judge." Which is a no duh thing, right? Duh. Oh God, God outranks you. So we're going to do what he says. "We cannot but speak of what we've seen and heard," not to mention that Christ told us to. "So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them, because the people they were all in favor." A lot of people getting saved there more than we had in Ammon. "So they were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than 40 years old."

Now, verse 23, "When they released them, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said. And when they heard of it, they lifted their voices together to God and they said, 'Sovereign Lord,'" that's important. He's in charge. "Sovereign Lord, who made the heavens and the earth." We're now back to the Isaiah 44 concept. You're in charge of everything. You're in charge of us. You're in charge of the world and "the sea and everything in it. Who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit." Now he's quoting Psalm 2 here, "Why did the Gentiles rage?" Did they think they were really going to fight against God and win? Well, apparently they were doing it "and the peoples were plotting in vain."

It was silly. You can't plot against God and his plans, and "'The kings of the earth set themselves up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his Anointed.'" And this often happens. Here they are saying, no, we're against it, we're against it, we're against it. "For truly in this city," in Jerusalem where Peter and John were preaching, "there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and all the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place. Now, O Lord, look upon their threats, and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together



was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and they continued to speak the Word of God with boldness."

They were going to do what was right and they're continuing to see the church grow under the ministry of the apostles there in the first century. And you had all this taking place when they know everyone is now plotting against them. But in the end, even in the plotting against them like the plotting of Herod to kill the babies in Bethlehem which didn't win, and Pilate to kill Jesus, which did, all of those things, look at it again in this passage, verse 28, it was whatever "God's hand and the plan that he had predestined to take place." So even in the oppression and I can name examples, here's one. How about in the 15th century B.C. in Egypt there was this pharaoh, and the Pharaoh was going to be utilized by God to oppress God's people. And I understand he was a bad guy, by default a bad guy. But the Bible says this: "the Lord hardened his heart."

How hard was it for the Lord to change his heart against the Israelites? Easy. Yeah. Time for us to oppose the people of Israel. God directed the heart of Pharaoh to oppose them. Why? Well, in the end, if you know the macro story, the oppression from Pharaoh to the people of God would result in the showdown which ended in ten miracles that were authenticating Moses as the prophet of God who would write the first five books of the Old Testament. As Hebrews 2 says, those miracles and signs proved his authentication as a real prophet to write the books that our kids are still memorizing in Awana. Those books were the product of what God wanted by taking the heart of Pharaoh and hardening it. That trickles all the way in the relevance to our lives today in the first five books of our Bible, not to mention having a spectacular exodus out of Egypt which made a lot of the kings of the Canaanites fearful. And this was something that God was doing even though it was oppression of the people.

Sometimes it's release of the people to deliver the people. How about Nebuchadnezzar? Nebuchadnezzar was against the Jewish people, but because of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, those four young teenagers, God turned his heart and he punished Nebuchadnezzar, made him be a crazy animal eating grass and ended up saying at the end of it all, God is sovereign, he's able to humble the proud. He does whatever he wants to with the powers of heaven. Sometimes God changes the heart to oppress the people of God. Sometimes God changes leaders' hearts to release any pressure on the people of God.

I think of Ezra's day. In Ezra's day. I mean, Ezra Chapter 6 verse 22. There's this great celebration that God had directed the king's heart to not only favor them but to give them support and to bring them peace. Amazing. God is changing the hearts of leaders. Sometimes he's oppressing his people. Why would God ever change the leadership to oppress the people of God? It is harder for Christians today than it was in the 1940s. Harder. Harder for Christians today. Why would God make it harder for Christians? Let me just ask you in a microcosm question why would God make your life ever hard? Oh well, that kicks into my mind all the verses in the Bible about persecution and suffering. I mean, I can think of the thorn in the flesh, Second Corinthians Chapter 12. I can think of First Peter Chapter 1, trials. They're working perseverance in our lives. I mean, James Chapter 1.



We can go on and on and on and on and see we know in our individual lives God brings in pain, sickness, suffering, trials. And he's doing something with those in a macrocosm of government sometimes, like we have now, America having a government that continues to be corrupted, to put itself ultimately against the people of God, as it will increasingly do unless it turns around soon, we will see the Church go through harder times to accomplish God's ultimate purpose for the Church, just like he does in your individual life. So God is not like, oh, I don't know what to do. I got some really bad guys in charge of the country right now, it's really bad. He's not at all having his hands tied. He's the sovereign God of the universe who's directing the hearts of the kings, sometimes to depose other kings. I mean, think about that in the Scriptures. Deuteronomy Chapter 2 verse 30. Sometimes the kings are used to get enraged at other kings to put justice down in some other country. It happens all the time. America has been utilized by that in geopolitics.

Sometimes in Joshua Chapter 5 verse 1, to have the people of God be respected and God is bringing that kind of sense of favor upon the people of God. Just like we had in the early colonial America in the wake of the Great Awakening. We had God's favor resting on the people of God because of God's work in the hearts of the leaders of our country. You got to remember God is sovereign over all and you cannot ever think this is out of control from God's perspective.

Here's the problem with this sermon. Well, there are lot of problems with the sermon, obviously, but here's the problem I see with this sermon. We start talking about the government, we start talking about its proper role in our lives and understanding that there's a kind of respect that we ought to have, so much so that we're praying for them. First Timothy Chapter 2 verses 1 through 4, praying for our kings and those in authority. Right? That we're hoping as Jeremiah 29 says... Matter of fact, let me end on that passage. Go to Jeremiah 29. We need to have the perspective that though we know the government is not godly, it's a secular as anything can be, right? By definition. It's like human government is secular by definition. We need to remember that we function within it as, I hope, a healthy subculture. Jeremiah 29. Are you there? Jeremiah, by the way, is called the weeping prophet. Isaiah was looking forward down the corridor to what was going to happen with the Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah was living right on the cusp of it. It was about to happen and he saw it happen. He saw Jerusalem fall. He saw the temple burn. Okay.

As he's right on the cusp of all this he's giving instruction to those who would go into exile as prisoners. And here's what it says in verse 4. "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon." If you think about living under the Jewish leaders in the fifth century B.C., you'd think, okay, it's not great, but it's still, you know, Judeo, right? It's still got God's law undergirding what it's doing. It's not perfect. But now I'm going to live in Babylon where they worship all these pagan gods and they don't care about the real God. Well, here's what he says, when you're living under a bad government, "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and don't decrease." Even that, just stop right there. Think about it. If you. say, "Oh it's terrible. I don't know how bad it's going to



be for our kids and then our grandkids. I can't imagine what our great grandkids if Christ doesn't come back. I don't, I don't know, maybe we shouldn't have kids."

One of the great things, by the way, about something like this is if we take it to heart which some Christians in our church are, and I'm all about that, right? When the liberals, they're having dogs and not children. Have you noticed that? I think we might just be tilting the meter in favor of our future just because we're having children. Praise God for that. And that's why our children's ministry should be full. Because we should continue to do this even though we live in a place where you can properly complain for eight hours a day about the government, which I don't want you to. I want you to see its problems but I want you to build houses, live in them, plant gardens, have weddings, marry off your kids, have grandchildren. Verse 7, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile." What city is that? Babylon. Yeah. Babylon becomes the depiction in the book of Revelation as the ultimate enemy of God. Talk about secular, it's Babylon, the spiritual Babylon of the worldly, you know, system. And yet here when you're in Babylon seek the welfare of Babylon and "pray to the Lord on its behalf." We should be praying for America, even if it's sinful, even if it's pagan, even if it's killing, slaughtering our pre-born. You should be praying for its welfare that it would turn around. That good things would happen, that we'd be salt and light. "For in its welfare you'll find your welfare."

This is a great text and maybe we can end with this thought. Let me ask you this. Is your body going to be done away with? Second Corinthians 5. Absolutely. This tent in which I live is going to be done away with. And what do you get? You get a building from God, not made with hands. You going to get a resurrected body. The whole 15th Chapter of First Corinthians is all about resurrection. Is your resurrected body going to be great? Yes. This body not so great. And if it's okay just keep waiting it's going to get not so great. This government. It's not great. What are we waiting for? Revelation 11. "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." What are we waiting for? Every day "your kingdom come," we want the new. We want the King. We want the Isaiah 9 verses 6 and 7 to happen. "This child that is born to us." "Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor." We want that God to have "the government rest on his shoulders." "The extent of his government and of his peace there'll be no end." That's what we want.

But because of that, do we trash our current government? Do we trash and think, oh, this is awful here? No more than you would trash your own physical body now. Some of you even go to the gym and eat salads. Some of you do that. Some of you do. Why? Why? Why? It's just that you might as well be on the 900-pound life episodes, because it doesn't matter. You should eat chocolate cake for breakfast because this body is going to be destroyed and you're going to get a new body. You get the resurrected body. So just trash this body. If your hand hurts, cut off your hand. Well, why would you care? Right? Well, you do care. Why? Because you got to live in it for now. I don't know when I'm going to get this resurrected body. And I don't know when the new government is going to come that's resting on the shoulders of our Christ. I don't know. So I'm going to do the best I can to pray for the welfare of this particular culture.



That's why I'm not running off to another state, by the way. I know we live in Sodom and Gomorrah. Every time I preach somewhere I get asked, "What's it like in the land of fruits and nuts?" (audience laughing) Listen, I understand. I understand we're living in a place that is not the paragon of virtue. But here's the deal. I want to stay here and seek the welfare of California. I want to have churches grow and thrive here. I want to multiply churches here. (audience applause) I want to do all of that because I think God says, no matter where we live, if we live in Babylon we do the best we can in Babylon.

And if we have opportunities, which I shouldn't even have to say this to Christians, to vote, which they didn't have in Rome, they didn't have in Babylon, they didn't have in Assyria, you better get to the polls and vote. You ought to make those decisions and make righteous decisions there and do the best you can. I don't care what kind of corruption there is. I do care, but there's stuff I can't do anything about it. So what do I do? All I can do is say I'm going to seek the welfare of the subculture I'm in starting with my life, my family, my grandkids, my extended family, my church. And I'm going to do the best I can here to have a place where the welfare of God and prosperity and peace thrives. And we will continue to be salt and light until the Lord Jesus comes back. Just like a body, your body. Take care of your body, right? Take care. You can't take your body with your oils and your vitamins and turn it into a resurrection body, right? And I cannot take D.C. or Sacramento and turn it into the kingdom of God. I can't. That's futile. It's going to take a replacement and the replacement is coming. But until then we do the best with what we have. Don't lose heart.

Let's pray. God, help us please in the midst of this world filled with all kinds of things that discourage us, government officials who just really disappoint us and make us angry. And so we should be indignant about injustice, cover-up, lies, cheating, stealing. Yet, God, we pray for our leaders as First Timothy Chapter 2 says, I'm going to pray for them that we can live a quiet life, a dignified life, that the churches can be unmolested by the government. And God as they are we were thankful for our great friends and all these attorney networks of trying to stand up for our freedoms that we should have. And God, if we lose those we'll continue, and even in the midst of Babylon, to seek the welfare of our lives, our families, our churches, our communities, that we might do what we can to take the best care of this culture that we have that we might one day continue to pray and one day realize the coming Christ who will set up a kingdom that will never be overthrown. So, God, we look forward to that day. And until then, let us occupy well here for us in Southern California until you come.

In Jesus name, Amen.