

The Christian's Warfare Part 9: A Biblical Perspective on Justice Part 2

The Christian's Warfare

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 10. We are continuing our message, our series of messages on dealing with contemporary issues and concerns and how to think biblically and we've called this series of messages modern Christian warfare or "The Christian's Warfare." We're talking about spiritual warfare as it's defined in Scripture and this passage in particular, 2 Corinthians 10:1-6 has been a starting point for us each week where we remind ourselves that spiritual warfare is essentially fought in the mind, is in the thinking, is to think God's thoughts after him and to replace unbiblical and ungodly thought processes with biblical thought processes, that when we replace unbiblical assumptions, unbiblical conclusions, unbiblical beliefs about life, we find ourselves liberated to be all that God has called us to be. The imagery is vivid in the passage. It's a military imagery that Paul is using here. It's warfare, spiritual warfare and it's the tearing down of things exalted against the knowledge of God.

So the title of our messages has been "The Christian's Warfare," and this morning we're continuing last week's subtopic, "A Biblical Perspective on Justice." A biblical perspective on justice. Let's read this passage together, 2 Corinthians 10:1-6.

1 Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ-- I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold toward you when absent! 2 I ask that when I am present I need not be bold with the confidence with which I propose to be courageous against some, who regard us as if we walked according to the flesh. 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 6 and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we come now as always before Your word, aware of our great need of grace. We know that, Lord, these things are spiritually discerned, they must be taught by the Holy Spirit to us through the precious word of God and so we pray that You would open the eyes of our hearts that we could understand, that we could obey, that we might love Christ more, and that we might be like Him, for His glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So a biblical perspective on justice. We began looking at this last time and we saw that we see that this is a very big issue in our culture. Justice issues really dominate the dialog in our culture, fill much of what we see in the news, concerns for social justice, and so what we want to do is learn to think God's thoughts after him, to think biblically. And so we began looking at this and we saw that when you look at Scripture, the Bible has a lot to say about justice. We noted that the word "justice" or related words in Hebrew and Greek, you have justice, judgment, righteousness, justify, all of these words, righteous, righteousness, just, all of these words dominate the Scriptures. In fact, 1,500 times you'll find one of those words in the Bible as you read through the pages of Scripture. So justice is a big concern to God, righteousness, and that essentially these words are very similar: justice, righteousness, judgment, essentially God's intrinsic character is that he is just, he is righteous, he himself is the standard of what justice and righteousness are. He does not conform to a standard outside of himself. He is himself the standard.

So we saw last week, the three points we went over just to remind you just a way of reviewing quickly, that to understand justice biblically, to let God's thoughts direct the way we look at our world and consider very real significant issues that are concerns that are worthy of, you know, exploration, seeking change, certainly there are a number of areas where we should be doing that always but we want to think God's thoughts and have his mind as we as Christians, we who follow Jesus Christ, seek to live in the world. And so we saw last week the three points where God alone defines justice, that it is intrinsic to him and so he defines it, and God himself embodies justice, that was the second point last week, God himself embodies justice, and then, thirdly, God calls you and all people to image justice, that he calls all human beings to image justice. We looked at Genesis 1:26-27, created in the image of God, in his likeness. We were made to be like God and so that's where we ended last week. We want to pick up from there this morning as we continue to try to understand a biblical perspective on justice and I want us to gather our thoughts really around God's call. We want to really unpack that third point last week which was God calls you to image justice. God calls me to image justice. That is, he calls us to exhibit his justice, to be like him, to exhibit his character. We were made to be replicas of God. That's what an image is, remember? An image is a replica. We were made to be a replica of God, something that reflects his glory the same way a statue represents the one that it's made in his image, it reminds you of the hero or whatever, right?

So in the same way, we are images of God. We are made to be like him. We're made to resemble him accurately and to do that, part of that means we are to exhibit his justice. We are to image his righteousness. The Lord is righteous in all his ways, Psalm 145. In fact, let's turn there for a moment just to be reminded of God's righteousness and

holiness. Psalm 145. You see how the Psalmist focuses on who God is. Verse 5 of Psalm 145, "On the glorious splendor of Your majesty And on Your wonderful works, I will meditate. Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts, And I will tell of Your greatness. They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness And will shout joyfully of Your righteousness." When people really reflect on God's works, when they see them accurately, the heart is led to worship and to glorify him for everything he does is good and righteous. In fact, righteousness is a subset, I mentioned last time, of his goodness. Everything God does brings blessing and kindness to what he's made. Genesis 1 when he creates the world, we see that it is good. Seven times in Genesis 1 God looks at what he made and said it was good, and the seventh time he actually says it was very good. It's God's nature to be good and righteousness is a subset of that, that is, God's goodness reflected in moral actions. All of his ways are right.

Verse 9, "The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works." Skipping down to verse 17 of Psalm 145, "The LORD is righteous in all His ways And kind in all His deeds. The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth." This is the God that has created us and he created every single human being to be like him.

So this first point we want to think about this morning as we try to unpack what it means to be called to image justice, is things we need to see, three things we need to see so that we can respond to God's call to image his justice. And the first thing is our individual responsibility. Individual responsibility. Justice according to God is primarily individualistic. It is individual responsibility. This is important because justice today being talked about in the culture is talked about in terms of groups, group disparities, and that's a completely unbiblical way of thinking about justice. The way God thinks about justice is he created every single human being to be like him, to image him. This is in the wiring of every single soul that he has created, that there is in our wiring the need to be like God in righteousness and in his character.

So the problem, of course, is we don't meet that but we need to see our individual responsibility. You see this in a number of ways. Essentially the idea that I want us to see though is that God has called each person individually to be just. He's evaluating each one of us. That's what we saw last time, we talked about the judgment of God is upon us individually. God creates us with a call to be like him, to be righteous in all of our ways, and he's going to judge each one of us. It's individual judgment. It's not group judgment before the throne of God. Jeremiah 17:10 says, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds." You see, God judges each man, each person. Jeremiah 32:19, God gives "to everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds." Ezekiel 33:20, the Lord says, "O house of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his ways." He speaks to the nation and he says to the nation of Israel, to the people, "I will judge each one of you according to his ways."

So we're all called to be just. God looks at individual people, individual hearts, individual lives, and individual actions. That's how he judges and that's how we should judge. We

are each responsible before God to be just, to pursue righteousness. You know, when you really think about this, God has made us, this is something that is so foreign to us because of how sin has messed us up, but do you understand that the Lord really made you and me, we are made to do righteousness. We're made to be holy. We're made for purity. We're made for meekness and gentleness rather than sinful anger. We were created in the fabric of our souls, this is like when you have a machine that's running as it's supposed to run. You know, you put the gas/oil mix in the weed-eater because it says put a gas/oil mix in the weed-eater. If you don't put a gas/oil mix in the weed-eater, your weed-eater is not going to work very well for very long. If you forget and just put gasoline in it, you'll remember the next time you buy a weed-eater.

You see, God has designed us for righteousness. It doesn't seem like that because sin has so distorted us but we are most human, we are most what God has made us to be when we are imaging him and living from our hearts like him. This is what God made every single person to be. It's so important. It's so important in your own personal life to know this, to believe this, to meditate upon this, to stop listening to the lies, stop listening to your sin nature, to stop listening to the world that tells you that life is found in everything else. No, life is found in righteousness. That is where life is found. This is so important in evangelizing. You're talking to someone who's struggling with all kinds of lies, they're bound up in sin, they need Christ and you feel like and the world tells you that when you speak to them about righteousness, that you're putting something on them, that you're putting a load of guilt upon them, that they really are pursuing what they're made to do. Maybe they think they're, you know, they have same-sex attraction or maybe they have gender confusion or whatever, and so the world says when you talk to them and you say, "Listen, God made you, if He made you biologically a woman, He made you to be a woman and to pursue purity as a woman. He made you that way. I know you feel so different. I'm not minimizing your feelings, I'm not minimizing the struggles. I understand you're struggling. I struggle also to be what God made me to be and that's why you need Christ. Only Jesus can set you free from everything that is actually robbing you of what you were really made to be. You were made to be righteous. Your heart was made to beat with God's heart. Your heart was made to love what He loves and to hate what He hates. That's how he made man."

You see this, turn to Romans 2. We're designed to be like him, to be in relationship to him, to love him and to be like him. That's what we're designed to be and there's nothing more fulfilling and joyful than to obey God. That is life. Now we have some problems, right? We have to be born again but it doesn't change the fact that you and I were designed to be like him and to be holy like him and to be righteous like him. You see this in the sense that God wrote his law on our hearts. Romans 2:14 and 15, there the Apostle Paul says, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them." He's talking about people in whom God's grace is working, Gentiles who don't have the law, and yet through God's common grace and cooperating with what he put in their hearts, he wrote the law in their hearts. He has written, God has written his law in the very fabric of our souls. When we were made, we

were made to be righteous and holy and when God gave the 10 Commandments, he was giving his essential character. It's not an arbitrary list of commandments. This is who God is. This is what God is like. And so he makes man to be like him and so he makes us with a bent and disposition. This is before the fall now, but after the fall there's still remnants of this in the image of God. This is what the image of God means, so that there's this sense in which the law is written on the heart.

You see this in a number of ways. You see that when you go from culture to culture, every culture throughout history there are certain things that are wrong. It's wrong to murder. It's wrong to commit adultery. It's wrong to lie. It's wrong to steal. Go to any culture. C. S. Lewis wrote a book called "The Abolition of Man." He talks about this, how every culture throughout time you have the same basic rules. It doesn't make sense if you really believe in humanistic evolution, it does not make sense. Why would every culture have the same morals essentially when you look at them over time, these things are always wrong? Now sometimes they change that then the culture dies, but basically every culture you find this. He called it the Tao, t-a-o. Lewis in "The Abolition of Man," he says you find this everywhere, certain things are right, certain things are wrong. Why? Because God put it in our hearts. And even sinners who are running away from God as fast as they can, cannot deny what they know within their hearts. Paul in Romans 1 essentially said the same thing. We know there's a God because God made it evident to us in all that is made and he made it evident within us.

So this wiring and so when you're talking to a sinner who's wrapped up in their sin, who thinks they're happy in their sin, you can know, you can know that sin brings misery. That's why they're doing drugs and alcohol and things to numb the misery. Righteousness is life and we can have hearts that break with them over how bound up they are in their sin and we can sympathize with them knowing that there but for the grace of God go we, and we can come alongside them and say, "There is someone who can help you. His name is Jesus. He came to deliver sinners like you and me and He can set you free." He said this, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." So many sinners are just like those Jews in Jesus' day saying, "We've never been a slave to anyone." They don't see they're slaves to sin.

So God made us to be righteous. Now that means every single person is not only made for that, they're going to be judged according to that standard. In fact, this passage makes this really clear. If you go back to verse 1, it again shows us the individual responsibility is clear because of the individual accountability at judgment. Paul says, "Therefore you have no," this is Romans 2:1, "Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things." There again, the fact that we're in the image of God, we judge because we're like God. He made us to be judges. He made us like him. He made us to want to be righteous and to judge righteousness by the standard. Now of course, we're sinners, we're proud, we're disconnected from God, but we can get away from our wiring. This is why people who deny even absolute truth still will find a reason to judge people. By their standard there should be no basis of judgment, yet they judge. You don't believe people judge, just look at Twitter. Any moment of any day, people are

judging one another and Paul says, "Listen, you who pass judgment and condemn, watch out, you practice the same things."

"We know," verse 2, "that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things." And look what he says next, "But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." There is a day coming that will be the day of wrath and the righteous judgment of God where he will judge every single human being individually before his throne based on how they have failed to live up to his requirements for them. Every one of us will stand before God.

He says, "in the day of wrath," verse 5, "and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds." Verse 11, "there is no partiality with God." He will judge everyone righteously according to his standard. This is what you were made to be and those who depart from that standard will experience his righteous wrath because it's actually good and righteous for God to punish evil. It's good and righteous for God to punish those who destroy his good works and that's what evil and sin is. Sin is an attack on God's good works and, of course, we're all sinners. That's our problem, but we all will stand before the Lord.

So to understand justice and to pursue justice, to heed God's call to image justice, we need to understand our individual responsibility. We're all called to be like him. We're all called to love righteousness and to hate wickedness. We're all called to pursue holiness. Every one of us individually. It's not about your spouse's holiness does not blend over to you. Your dad's holiness does not blend over to you, young person. You are called before God to pursue holiness and righteousness and to be like God. Every one of us. So that's the first thing we need to see as we consider how to heed this call to image justice, our individual responsibility.

The second thing we need to see is our personal inability. Our personal inability. In fact, if you're still in Romans 2, just turn a page over to Romans 3 and understand that our personal inability does not in any way lessen our responsibility. We are still individually responsible though we're personally unable. Our personal inability is not an excuse because God made man good and we chose to sin. But personal inability. Here there are two sub points under this second point, our personal inability. Our personal inability, first of all, stated. Stated, that's the first sub point. Personal inability stated. Romans 3 beginning with verse 9. "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin." Jews and Gentiles, all people. Paul is making the point here as he begins to unpack the good news of salvation in Christ, he's making clear that all people, Jew and Gentile, are lost, are under sin, have failed to meet God's standard, that we are all, though we're called to exemplify righteousness, we are all utterly unable.

Look what he says next, verse 10, "as it is written, 'There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.'" God looks out at the world that he's made and the mankind that he's made and he looks upon every single human being and he says, "This is the verdict, there is none righteous. There is none who is what I made them to be." Unrighteousness is to twist and distort. Righteousness is to be straight and consistent with the standard but we have twisted and distorted God's righteousness.

He goes on in verse 13, "Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps is under their lips; Who mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known." Listen, when we look at this sometimes we have trouble seeing ourselves in it. That's because of our own sin even in that, our pride. Now is your mouth full of cursing and bitterness? Poison of asps under your lips? Every time that you have spoken harshly, called someone a fool, yelled in anger, these things are true. And as Jesus says in Matthew 5, we've murdered other people with our tongues. It's not just outward murder that God hates, it's the inward attitude of the heart where we despise another human being because they get in our way, they somehow withhold something that we think we deserve and we lash out and attack them. That's what he's talking about here. Their throat is an open grave, death comes out of their throat. Their tongues are deceitful. The poison of asps, snakes' poison is on their lips. We're murderers with our tongues. Feet are swift to shed blood. How quickly we do it. How quickly you let that word fly that you can't bring back and you see the devastation that it brings.

So he's saying, "Listen, we are completely unable." He ends up verses 19 and 20, "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." As we compare our lives to the standard of God's law, we are all accountable and every mouth is closed before God. We have nothing, we have no defense. That's our personal inability stated. There is none righteous, no, not one. As the prophet Jeremiah says, the leopard cannot change his spots, the Ethiopian cannot change the color of his skin, neither can you, Israel, do righteousness. We just don't have the power anymore. It doesn't change our responsibility because we were created with freedom in Adam and we rebelled against God and we've all individually joined in that rebellion actively, sinning every day of our lives.

So that's the personal inability stated. Now what I want to show you something very important that I think is very helpful biblically is when you really understand what's wrong with man biblically, you understand that what's wrong with man cannot be fixed externally. This is why justice cannot be accomplished externally. Now to be clear, we are supposed to have governments but government is necessary because of sin, because we are so evil that we need government to restrain evil continually, and if we don't have government restraining us, we will just go on doing evil. But government cannot make us

righteous. An external means cannot change us because we need to be changed from the inside out. The disease is too deeply rooted. The malady goes to the very core of our being. You can't treat it with surface remedies. And this is really the picture of Scripture.

So the second point here personal inability illustrated. I want to show you this from the Bible and the whole Bible now. It was stated in Romans 3:9-20, it's illustrated in the flow of Scripture that you cannot produce in man what man was created to be from external pressure, external means. You see this as you read through the Scriptures, the Old Testament in God's dealings with Israel particularly. Now think about what God because God's teaching us in the Old Testament, he's teaching us how deeply sinful we are, how deeply needy we are. He's illustrating it in the way he deals with his people Israel. It's just so clear. I mean, everything about the Old Testament how he deals with Israel, if you stop and you think about it, there's so much that is being communicated and like John Calvin said, he's prattling with us, he's baby-talking, he's using pictures so that we can understand.

One of the moments where I really, this hit me with force was one time it suddenly occurred to me, "Hey, why did God allow the nation of Israel," remember Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Jacob has 12 sons. Joseph goes into Egypt, remember? But why did God let them be slaves for 400 years? There's nothing in the text that says they deserved it. That's a really good question. Why did God do that? Well, I think what we find out as we read the rest of Scripture is that he did it so that he could give us a type of salvation. Now he somehow was accomplishing his purposes in every single human being's life all along those 400 years and he, everything he was doing was righteous and holy and beautiful, but essentially the reason he let them be slaves is so that he could deliver them that they might know, "I am the Lord." They might see his power and the Egyptians might see his power and we might understand that to be, we're so sinful that for us to be made righteous again, what has to happen is we must be delivered from the domain of darkness. We're slaves. They were slaves in Egypt because God was showing us we're slaves in sin and the exodus was this type of the antitype salvation that Jesus Christ accomplished. This is why 1 Corinthians 5:7 says Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed, that the Passover lamb typified Jesus, that his blood being offered delivered us from in the same way bondage under Pharaoh, bondage under Satan's dominion. But then you watch the rest of it unfold.

So God, he's saying, you know, how is it that man, how is it sinners are going to come back to him? How are sinners going to be able to be what he's called them to be? Well, he lets us see through Israel's failure how deep the malady of sin is. After he delivers them from Egypt in Exodus 19:6 he tells them, "You're to be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. I'm bringing you to Myself and I want to show through the world My righteousness in you. I want you to be My people." And essentially this covenant that he makes with them, the Sinaitic covenant, is typified in the phrase, "Be holy for I am holy. Be like Me. Be holy for I am holy. Be righteous." He gives the law. "Here's the 10 Commandments." He gives them the sacrificial system. They're not going to keep it. He gives the sacrificial system, "So here's a way for you to keep coming back to Me." He

puts his presence right there in their midst. God manifested himself in glory and, think about it, he does these incredible miracles.

I mean, imagine if you were there. Have you ever thought that, "I wish that I had been there to see those things"? Because today we don't see miracles like that. I mean, the Lord's doing miracles that are greater than that but we just don't think they are sometimes. Spiritual miracles are far greater than physical miracles but wouldn't it be cool to go back and see some of those physical miracles? I agree it would. I mean, to see the Lord open up the Red Sea to let the nation go through and those Egyptians who were coming with murderous rage, to let them go into the Red Sea. How stupid was that for them to follow into the Red Sea. It just shows the confounding, you know, power of wickedness. Wouldn't you think you would stop, "Hey, something's going on here. I'm not going into that Red Sea." But they all rush in and the Lord judges the Egyptian army.

Wouldn't you have liked to have seen water from a rock? Bread from heaven? The Lord continuing to show his glory moment by moment, day by day, to see a pillar of fire? Where do I go? What do I do? We so often wonder what should we do. Should I take this job in this other city? Should I go to this college or should I not? Don't you just wish you could just have a pillar of fire just lead the way? They had that. The pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud. Pillar of cloud by day, pillar of fire by night led them and whenever it stopped, they stopped and they camped and they waited, and when it got up and moved, they followed. They had in that the Shekinah glory of God, the manifest presence of God, the sacrificial system, the laws, the miracles of God, and yet Moses goes up on the mountain to get the 10 Commandments and what do the people do? They build a golden calf and worship it immediately. Such is the wickedness of our hearts. They continually go astray with every external blessing. Do you see that? Every external blessing applied to them that could be applied is applied and it comes to nothing.

We'll continue following through the Old Testament. The unbelief that doesn't let them go into the land of Canaan. They wander for 40 years. Surely they've learned by now. No, they haven't. They grumble and complain. They see acts of judgment upon those who grumble and complain. Then they have the conquest and that seems pretty good. There are some more amazing miracles, the conquest of Jericho, victory over these nations that were far greater in power than they, and yet it's an incomplete conquest and right after Joshua dies, we find in the book of Judges that the people have already begun to turn away from the Lord. They continually turn away from the Lord. You read the book of Judges it's the cycle of disobedience and God's judgment and discipline. Then the people cry out under his judgment and discipline and he lets a nation afflict them. They cry out, God raises up a judge. The judge preaches the truth to them and delivers them from the bondage that they are under. You would think that would be enough. First time, "We got it, Lord. We got it." No, it's over and over and the spirals get deeper and deeper throughout the book of Judges and it ends, the last five chapters, 17 to 21, Judges 17 to 21, with this refrain, "In those days there was no king. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

And the message of the book of Judges is, "What we need is a king. We need God's king." It's making the argument for David. Once God gives us his king and so God gives them a king after Saul, the one they wanted after their own hearts, God gives them a king after his own heart, David. Surely now they're going to be okay. They have the presence of God, they have the commandments of God, they have the sacrificial system and they now have a godly king. Surely now they're going to be there. Everything external, now they have a godly government. But it is failure. David himself fails. The people fail. Well, so the son of David, and so Solomon is born and so Solomon is going to now be the answer and he builds the temple. Now they have a permanent temple. Now they have a king of incredible wisdom that people from all over the world come to hear his wisdom. Surely now they're going to be okay and, of course, the answer is no. Solomon falls away. They fall away. Their wickedness continues to grow so that God separates the kingdoms and divides them into two. The northern kingdom is perpetually wicked. God raises up prophets to go and times there will be moments of apparent repentance but not real repentance. In the southern kingdom the same patterns until finally he destroys the northern kingdom through the Assyrians and he causes the southern kingdom to go into Babylonian captivity, and there in the exile, the exilic prophets begin to clarify what God has been teaching them all along through his dealings with them. Jeremiah 31:31-34 says, "Listen, what you need is a new covenant. A new covenant. Now I'm going to really write My law on your hearts. The law that's written on your hearts has faded away under sin but I'm going to write it in unadaptable inscription upon your hearts. I'm going to make a new covenant with you. You will know Me." Ezekiel 36, "I'm going to take out the heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh. What you need is new hearts." You see, you can't be changed from the external. What's wrong with man has to be changed from the inside out.

This is what explains too as you read through the rest of the Bible, the rest of the history of Israel, the exile from 606 to 536 BC, that's when the nation of Judah was exiled from Jerusalem. They come back to the land and we've been studying Ezra-Nehemiah, right, those two books. I mean, it's a long time ago. I know it's been a long commercial interruption from our study of Ezra-Nehemiah but it makes it fresh again. I think when you go back you'll be excited hopefully to be back. At least I will be and just pretend you are if you're not and pray also that you will be because God's word is precious. But Ezra-Nehemiah, one of the things to understand as the flow of Scripture, again how God's illustrating to us our personal inability. The flow of Scripture, when they come back from exile, remember there's three returns chronicled in that. Remember, Ezra-Nehemiah is basically one book in two parts. Ezra-Nehemiah, one book. First return under Zerubbabel where they arrive in the land in 536 BC. They come back to the land. The second return about 80 years later, 458 under Ezra, a second group of exiles returns to reestablish the law. Then 13 years later, 445 BC, Nehemiah goes back with another group of exiles to rebuild the walls, to rebuild the city. Now when they were dealing with that, when they were experiencing that, when they looked and they read their Bibles and they read Ezekiel 34 and Ezekiel 37 and all the prophecies in Isaiah and Jeremiah that talked about the exile that was coming, it also talked about the return to the land, and you can see this especially in Ezekiel 34 and 37, that God tells them, "When you come back to the land, I'm going to gather you. I'm sending you out. I'm casting you out of My land like I told

you I was going to do because you've not been righteous. I'm casting you out but I'm going to gather you," Ezekiel 34, "like sheep and I'll bring you back to Myself and you're going to be My flock again, and I'm going to set David as a shepherd over you. You're going to be in the land and you're going to have all kinds of blessing, and you're going to be under the kingship of David." And the same thing in Ezekiel 37, and this is repeated over and over again in all the prophets.

Imagine you were in Ezra or Nehemiah's day. You're back in the land but there is no king. There's no Davidic king. Where's the Davidic king? You're under, when you first go back, you're under the Babylonian hegemony, the reign and dominion of Babylon. Daniel 2 and chapter 7, I preached a series of messages on this about 11-12 years ago. I think they're on the website. But Daniel 2 and 7, Daniel was given revelation. He was an exilic prophet, he was in the exile from 606 to 536. He was an old man. He writes the book of Daniel, records for us his revelations, the visions he had, and in chapters 2 and 7, he basically gets revelation from the Lord that there are going to be four kingdoms that are going to dominate the world. It's a statue, a multi-metalled statue in Daniel 2. A gold head, silver chest, bronze thighs, iron legs and feet, and toes of clay and iron, and he's told that this represents four kingdoms and he tells Nebuchadnezzar, "You, O Nebuchadnezzar, are the head of gold, but after you will come another kingdom, the silver kingdom, and after that kingdom, the bronze kingdom, and after that kingdom, the iron kingdom." Four kingdoms and when that fourth kingdom has come, then God's going to take a little rock out of a mountain, a small stone cut out without hands, and he's going to take this small stone and he's going to throw it at the statue and this massive statue is going to be hit at his feet by this little rock and the whole statue is going to be shattered, and that little rock is going to grow to fill the whole earth.

And the same thing is told in Daniel 7 and this time it's not a statue, it's four beasts. The first beast is a lion with wings. The second beast is a bear raised up on one side more than the other. The third beast is a leopard with four wings and four heads, and that's terrifying. Can you imagine a multi-headed leopard? One head is more than you need to take care of any of us, right? Claws. I was watching that video, have you guys seen the video of the guy backing away from the mountain lion, the cougar? That was really, I thought about, you know, as you're watching that, what do you do when it comes at you? Well, imagine he has four heads, you might as well just go ahead and lie down and just let him kill you. So this leopard is four-headed and then after that, though, there's a dreadful terrifying beast with claws of iron and it's much worse than the previous beast, in fact, it destroys all the previous beasts and Daniel so so upset by it that when you read the whole of chapter 7, he keeps asking the angel sent to him, "Tell me more about that fourth beast." He's just so unnerved by it. Well, he's told they're four kingdoms and that during the time of that fourth kingdom, the Lord will appear and he will set up his kingdom.

And what you're being told, what Daniel was being told, put yourself in his place in the exile, and put yourself in the place of the descendants or the people of Ezra-Nehemiah's day reading Daniel, asking the questions, "Where is the blessing? Where is David to reign over us? Where is all the blessing of the land?" What God is telling them is the

Lord is building a spiritual kingdom, that what has to happen to man is not something that can be done externally. The nation of Israel was a visible type of spiritual inner reality. This is the flow of the Bible. You're moving from outward and external to inward and spiritual. That's why circumcision was given. I mean, think about it, what an odd thing, circumcision, a mark of inclusion in the nation of Israel. But circumcision was a type of a new birth. Colossians 2:11-12, "If you've been born again, you were circumcised with the circumcision made without hands in the death of Christ." You see, all of these things were pointing to the spiritual reality. There's some movement from the outward and visible to the inward and invisible, from the physical to the spiritual.

So as you look at the flow of Scripture, that's why Jesus when he comes, he is the fulfillment of all those prophecies. He's come as the King, David's son. He's the son that David was told about, "Your son will build a house for Me. Solomon, yes. Jesus, yes. That's the One." He comes to build the house and he says, what? "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world," he says this to Pilate, "My people would be fighting for Me, but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm. I'm doing something different. I'm changing people from the inside out. I'm delivering them from the domain of darkness, not from the domain of Persia or Babylon or Rome. No, because," in fact, if you look at it, Israel was under Babylonian hegemony for 70 years, Persian hegemony for over 200 years, Greek hegemony for 170 years, Roman hegemony for about 470 years, and they still weren't a nation until 1948 and that's not really even the point. I mean, I don't think it's totally irrelevant, I think God's still doing something with the Jewish people but you can't escape Romans 11, that's definitely he's doing something. But the bigger picture of Scripture is what he's telling us through the Old Testament is, "Listen, these things happened," as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, "as examples for you. These were examples to show you that what we need is we need a Savior who will change us from the inside out."

And the message of the Old Testament is you and I are completely unable, we cannot with all the external blessings that you could possibly supply, it will not be efficacious to make you and I able to do one righteous thing. Not one. The very best that we do from common grace is still tainted with sin and unfit for God and so we need a Savior, and so Jesus comes and he comes and he lives out, he is able. We're unable. He's able. He comes and he keeps the law perfectly. He keeps every single commandment of God. Every commandment that says, "Thou shalt not," he obeys by not. Every commandment that says, "Thou shalt," he obeys by doing it. He loves God with all of his heart, with all of his soul, with all of his mind, with all of his strength every moment of every day for 33 years, and then he offers himself as a sacrifice for sin. He fulfills the law actively in his obedience to God, and he fulfills the law passively in his obedience to God on the cross where he then experiences God's holy and righteous wrath against every sin that every believer would ever commit. Past, present, future, Jesus was punished for it at Calvary and he took the full weight of God's wrath and because of that, he then can declare, he then can share his righteousness with those who place their faith in him. Those who repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are saved, they are delivered forever from the domain of darkness. They are taken away from Satan never, the wicked one can touch you not. He has nothing on you.

I love that, Jesus said that about Satan when he's getting ready to go to Gethsemane, "The ruler of this world is coming but he has nothing on Me. It's going to look like he does but he has nothing on Me. And how do you know he has nothing on Me?" Because on Sunday he got up out of that grave and he walked out. It was impossible for him to be held in the power of death because he was righteous, perfectly righteous, no sin. And he gives to those who believe in him, those who repent, he gives a perfect righteousness from the inside out. First of all, a forensic declaration of righteousness so that you can have no condemnation for any sin you ever commit ever again. You are beyond the realm of condemnation because Jesus has already paid for it. That's why there is therefore now no condemnation for them who are in Christ Jesus.

But what he's doing then is he's going to make a people who are righteous from the inside out and this is the whole point, for instance, of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7. In fact, turn over there for a moment, Matthew 5-7. A key phrase in Matthew is "kingdom of heaven." He's basically saying and remember the beginning of the preaching in Matthew 4, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." What did John the Baptist come saying? "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The king is coming. The king is coming. Jesus says the king is here. The Son of David is here. The kingdom is here so repent.

And in chapter 5-7, this is kind of, it's been called by some commentators the kingdom manifesto. "This is what My kingdom is like." Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world," to Pilate before he was crucified, but here he's saying, "This is what My kingdom is." He tells us the character of the people in his kingdom and you have in the Beatitudes verses 3 to 12 a picture, a character sketch of the person who belongs to the kingdom of heaven. This is the person who Jesus saves. This is the way he saves. "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Oh, how happy," that's what "blessed" means. Oh, how happy. Righteousness makes you happy and to be blessed is to be exceedingly happy. "Oh, how happy are the poor in spirit." To be impoverished spiritually, to realize that you have nothing, that you have absolutely no resources in your spirit, that you are helpless and hopeless, to understand that, "Oh, how happy are you for yours is the kingdom of heaven." That's the beginning of experiencing the kingdom of heaven in your life, is to come to understand your personal inability.

We move into point 3: internal reality. Individual responsibility, personal inability and, thirdly, to understand and to respond to God's call to justice, we need to understand that justice is an internal reality. We saw the Old Testament make the case for that because we're unable. It has to be an internal reality. There's no other way, and the wonder is God has made a way. He's made a way to make people righteous. He's made a way to make us able to do righteousness. You really can do it. Now it's never perfect but there's real righteousness in you as you walk by faith, resting in who Jesus is and what he's done by the power of the Spirit. Walking in accordance with his word, you and I are becoming more righteous. That's what should be happening in our lives.

You see, government could only restrain evil, it can't produce righteousness. That's why Jesus came to produce righteousness and the way that he changes society is he changes people from the inside out, and over time people changed from the inside out have an amazingly salty and lightful impact on their culture, also here in Matthew 5:13-16. You're the salt of the earth. You're the light of the world. When you are like this, when you not only mourn over your sin, I mean, when you see you're poor in spirit and, "Blessed are those," verse 4, "who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." I have no rights. I have no claim on anything. I surrender myself to God. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. I want to be what You called me to be, God. I'm so far from that. I need You to give me righteousness." Then Jesus gives righteousness. In fact, we were reading Romans 3 earlier, 9-20, to see how we're so unable. Paul turns the corner in Romans 3:21 and he says, "But now apart from the law, a righteousness from God has been revealed." There is a way to righteousness. It's apart from the law. You don't go through the law to get to this way of righteousness. No, you go by faith in the God-man Jesus. You place your faith in his finished work and you are credited with righteousness, and then he begins to do a work in you where you actually now having come to be righteous in his sight forever because of what Jesus has done, he will make you more and more like him.

But he says if you have these Beatitudes, if these Beatitudes are true of you, if you're poor in spirit, you mourn over your sin, you're meek, you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you'll become merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, and then often persecuted, but if that's the case, then verses 13 through 16, you're the salt of the earth. Verse 14, you're the light of the world. He says, "This is the people I'm coming to make into My kingdom's citizens." But verses 17 to 20, he says, "Listen, don't, I want you to be clear." He's explaining that there's a way to righteousness that's apart from the works of law. He's saying essentially the same thing Paul's saying in Romans 3 and this is why he says what he says in verse 17 of Matthew 5. Look what he says next. After he said you're the light of the world, he says, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." I didn't come to do away with the law and the prophets. Now the law is not the means to righteousness for sinners. Sinners cannot be made righteous through the law. Impossible. "So I did away with it as a means to righteousness but I did not do away with it because it is good and righteous and holy. I came to fulfill it."

"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." He's saying, "Listen, for believers out there that tend toward antinomianism, if they're truly believers, if they're teaching other believers to disobey My law, that's not good and they're going to be least in the kingdom of heaven." Because God loves his law, because his law is who he is. His law is a reflection of his holy character.

This is why the Psalmist, this is what Psalm 119 is basically saying. You read Psalm 119 and how can you be an antinomian? An antinomian means somebody who's against the law, who believes, this is a heretical teaching that comes up throughout history over and

over and over again, that says basically Christians, once you're saved by grace you can live however you want to. It doesn't matter. But that's inconsistent with the word of God. It's inconsistent with the Gospel. Read Romans 6:1, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Since we're now saved by grace, should we just continue in sin?" God says, Paul says, "God forbid! How shall I who died to sin live any longer therein? I've been transformed from the inside out. Why would I want to go on living in sin?" Remember how I said righteousness is life? The person who's been born again, who's been given a new heart now knows that righteousness is life. Why would I want to live in death when I can be alive? That's the argument.

Now listen, it's more complicated and messy for us, isn't it, in our reality because fighting against sin is hard and the old man is there, the body of death that Paul talks about in Romans 7, and so we're confused and the world is continually lying to you and Satan is continually deceiving you, and so sometimes you feel like death is life, you feel like sin is life, but it is not. It is death. It's a lie. Righteousness is life. Now righteousness can only be accomplished when you go to faith in Jesus Christ first and then the way that you're going to grow in holiness is by trusting in Jesus, and as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord, so also walk ye in him, you're to walk by faith. You're to realize that who you are in Jesus, his death, his resurrection, gives you the power now to walk in holiness. He takes us, though, and he makes us righteous from the inside out.

He goes on in verse 20, listen, this is an amazing statement, Matthew 5:20, "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." I think there's a double meaning of this. I think he's saying that you've got to be righteous in his righteousness but I think he's also saying that everyone who truly comes to faith in Jesus Christ will over time become more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees, and if they don't, they should question their salvation because the scribes and Pharisees were thought to be very righteous but we find out, no, they were really people that were all about the external. Remember Jesus called them whited sepulchres? "You're like painted sepulchres, painted graves that have been painted but inside you're full of dead men's bones. Your hearts are far from God but you act like you love God." You see, you've got an external, you've tried to change things from the outside. You've tried to be righteous, to be just. You tried to pursue those things from the outside. You cannot do it. You must be changed from the inside out.

But the reality is you have to be righteous. You and I are called to a life of righteousness. It's not through human effort. No, it's through the grace of Christ but it is through pursuing, it's through abiding in Jesus. It's through expending our energy to cling to Christ, to read his word, to pray, to seek his face, to be in the means of grace, but always trusting in his power. And what you see through the rest of Matthew 5, I encourage you to read it this week, he basically says, "Look, here's the external view of the law but what I have come to do is to change people in the heart. You've heard it said, 'You shall not murder,' I'm telling you, I'm creating a people who will not be angry and speak sinfully in anger out of their hearts. I'm changing people from the inside out because that's what matters." He does it again, six times he says, "You've heard it said but I say to you."

He ends up this passage by saying, verse 43, "You've heard it said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." Do you see what he's saying? Be like your Father. Be like God. He ends up saying, "be perfect for your heavenly Father is perfect."

He calls us back to what we were created to be. We were created to image righteousness, to image justice, to image holiness, and it only happens as we see that we're individually accountable, responsible, that we are also personally unable, and that the only way it can happen is we need the internal reality of the new birth, the work of Christ in our hearts, but once that happens, we're called now, then we become God's holy people. He says, "You," he's talking to Gentiles mostly when he says in 1 Peter 2:9, "For you are a chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people for God's own possession." You're a chosen race.

You know, I think one of the things we have to remember today is that you and I are not, I mean, race really is a social construct, we're all basically children of Adam, there's not really differences based on the color of our skin, or the shape of our eyes or our faces or anything. That's not it. We're all sons and daughters of Adam, one race, but in reality if you're a Christian, it doesn't matter whether you're white or black, if you are a Christian you are of the race of Jesus Christ. That's your race because you're a chosen race. God has set you apart and there is a chasm separating you and me and every other person who's not a part of this race. They're on the way to hell and they need to be brought into the path and into the presence of God's salvation, and all that matters is you and me. And this is why God is not preoccupied with the external systems, that's why he allowed the Babylonian hegemony and the Persian hegemony and the Greek hegemony and the Roman hegemony, and he allows injustice today. And I'm not saying we shouldn't be about as we can doing what we can through voting and other means, but I'm telling you it's a small thing compared to what God has called you to be as a Christian. It's a small thing. It's not unimportant but relatively speaking it's so small that when Jesus came to this earth, he did not free the slaves. When Paul preached, he did not free the slaves. It was going to happen over time as he changed people from the inside out, it led to the conclusion slavery is wicked because God never intended one man to be owned by another man because we're all image-bearers, equal before God. We are equal in value. We're made to be righteous like him. What incredible value every single human life has because we can be like him.

That's our worth but God understands that what's most important is most important and I've used the image of triage, medical triage. He does not deal with superficial issues until he's first dealt with the primary issue and the primary issue is every single person stands before God, under his justice because we are not righteous in ourselves and we will stand before him and if we're not in Christ, we will experience eternal judgment. And that's what matters and that's why Jesus came to deliver us from sin. He didn't come to deliver the Jews from the Roman rule, even as unjust as it was. Over time it would happen but, you see, it's not about this present world. This present world is of such quality now, listen, it was beautiful when God made it but it is of such quality now in God's eyes as he

looks at it, think about this, it is only worthy to be burned up. He's got to burn it up. It's got to be cast into the fire. And so why would you and I set our minds on this present world?

Now we are to be a blessing. That's a challenge, to be salt and light but to be salt and light you, first of all, have to be preoccupied with what God wants us to be preoccupied with and that is the souls of men and the word of God. And if we're preoccupied with that, then everything else in its place, and everything else will then come in its place and over time as people's hearts change, society changes because you've got more salt and you've got more light, and when you have more salt, you have less decay, when you have more light, you have less darkness. But it's counterintuitive but in reality it's only logical. Our ways are insane. We think we could fix this thing ourselves and God says, "No way. You can't fix this thing yourself." You and I can't fix ourselves but Jesus can and he's going to. He will fix you today if you repent and believe in him and he's going to fix everything.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the Gospel, how grateful we are for the fact that You did not leave us in our sins. Lord, we deserve only wrath, we deserve justice. When we call for justice, Lord, we deserve Your justice and that would be separation from You immediately forever but we thank You that You're not only a God of righteousness and holiness and justice, You're also a God of mercy and compassion and love, and You have held back the meting out of justice until that day and You're inviting sinners to come to You, to come to peace with You, and to not only be no longer at war with You and under Your wrath but to be Your precious and beloved children, and You are willing to transform us and make us more and more like Jesus and so that You then are going to make us as we become like Him, You're going to make us people who do the things that He did, who look more and more like Him. So God, have Your way in our hearts. We pray for those that need today to truly surrender their hearts to Jesus. Lord, help them do that right now. We pray that all of us, Lord, who belong to You would heed Your call to "Be holy for I am holy," to pursue righteousness, to hunger and thirst for it more. We thank You for Your promise. Oh, how happy, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.