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November 19, 2023

The Harvest

Revelation 15 and 16

Prayer: *Father, I just again, I thank you for who you are, I thank you for the gifts that you give us constantly among which is the freedom that we have to gather this morning. And I just continue to pray as we open up your book to this very difficult section, this very difficult book, I pray that you would give us a clarity and the ability to take in what your spirit is presenting. I pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit and that this would be of permanent value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are doing the book of Revelation and we are on our fifteenth message and our test this morning is all about harvests. Let me just read to you, this is Revelation 14:14-20. It says: *Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe." So he who sat on the cloud swung his*

sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped. Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia.

Well, we spent a lot of time looking at chapter 13 and again that chapter's all about looking at one side of the battle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. It's all about the dark kingdom, about the forces that are arrayed against Christ and kingdom with the dragon and the two beasts. The dragon, as you recall, was this monster that stood before the woman so that he could devour her child as it was being born. We learned that the dragon actually was Satan, that the woman was the church, and that the child is the Lord Jesus Christ. And symbolically this was a picture that describes the rage of Satan against Christ and his church because he knows that his time is running out.

And chapter 13 also includes a description of two other monsters, one that rose from the sea, one that rose from the land and together they form this unholy trinity. And the dragon represents a demonic version of God the Father; the beast from the sea, that's the antichrist. He's a fellow human, he lives to promote the dragon, he presents a twisted version of the Son; and finally the beast that arises from the earth represents the unholy spirit whose passion is to promote the dragon and the antichrist. That's -- that was chapter 13.

Chapter 14 actually flips the script as it were, gives us a panoramic vision of the other side of this battle, the side of light and life and truth and beauty. These redeemed, these folks are from the very same place that the unredeemed are, they are called out from planet earth. Those who reject Christ are referred to as "the dwellers of this earth," that's a technical term, that refers to those who buy fully into this earth's system as opposed to the kingdom's.

Right now today there's even a mixture of saved and unsaved, redeemed and unredeemed on the planet as there's always been since the dawn of creation. And redeemed are those who have been purchased by the blood of Christ himself. And God goes on through chapter 14 to describe his own in six different ways. He says

first, obviously these folks are redeemed; secondly, they're the only ones who can sing the song of the redeemed; third, they're undefiled; fourth, they follow the lamb; fifth, there's no lies found in their mouths; and sixth, they are blameless.

So what we have with chapter 13 and 14: 13 describes the children of wrath, the dwellers of the earth, 14 describes God's redeemed. He's basically setting us up to see that both parties are about to experience the unfolding of the wrath of God. It's been kept in check for millennia but now it's about to be released.

And it starts with a series of announcements by angels, and the first one proclaims the gospel to the entire world. This is *Revelation 14:6*. John says: *Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people.* Then comes a second angel proclaiming the fall of Babylon, announcing the fall of all of the earthly systems that stand in rebellion to God. And that angel is followed by a third angel who proclaims in verse 9: *"If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And*

the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

Well that angel is followed by a voice and that voice encourages the saints who remain to face even death itself knowing that the reward, their reward is waiting. Verse 13 says: *And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"*

And so what we're going to be seeing this morning, basically what follows next is this harvest. I should say it's not just a harvest, it's a series of harvests that have biblical scholars completely divided. Because we're going to see there's two different harvests: There's a harvest of wheat and there's a harvest of grapes. And what scholars disagree on is what those harvests actually mean.

There are those who see both of those harvests of wheat and grapes as God's final reaction to the wicked, then there are those who see the harvest as split between the wicked and the righteous; the wheat being the righteous harvested first by Christ, and the grapes

being the wicked harvested next by angels.

And then there are those who see both harvests as that of the righteous, Christ gathering in his own. Three different ways of looking at this. The problem is each of these views have scripture to back it up. One thing that each commentator agrees on though is that this first reaping, this first harvest is undertaken by Christ himself.

We pick up at verse 14. It says: *Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, of the earth is fully ripe." So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.*

Well the other harvest that we're going to see, they're taken up by angels, but this one is taken up specifically by the Lord and we know that because this particular harvester is referred to as "the Son of Man." And that instantly takes us back to Daniel who thousands of years previously described this very day, saying in *Daniel 7: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds*

of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

So what we're looking at here is basically what Daniel is telling us is Jesus the lamb is now returning as Jesus the lion, and he's now here to exact vengeance on behalf of the saints who have been tortured and tormented over these thousands of years and to serve a common cause of justice which says in *Galatians 6: Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.*

And so what we're seeing here is the reaping has now begun in earnest. What's not obvious, as I said, is the makeup of these harvests. And as I said, scholars are divided. This is John MacArthur, this is what he says. He says: "The Son can now exercise the right to judge that the Father has delegated to Him (John 5:22, 27; Acts 10:42; 17:31) because the earth is ripe for judgment. In fact, the verb translated 'is ripe' actually means 'dried up,' 'withered,' 'overripe,' or 'rotten.' The grain (the earth) pictured here has passed the point of any usefulness and is

fit only to be 'gathered up and burned with fire' (Matt. 13:40)."

MacArthur, John. Revelation 12-22 MacArthur New Testament Commentary (MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series) (pp. 113-114). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

That's one position. The exact opposite position is taken up by Darrell Johnson who says: "Never in the Bible is the image of 'reaping' used for judgment. It is always used for gathering in what one wants to keep (see Mark 4:29; John 4:35-38). Jesus, the Son of Man, swings his sickle to gather in those who have responded positively to the gospel." (Johnson, Darrell W.. Discipleship On The Edge: An Expository Journey Through the Book of Revelation (p. 263). Canadian Church Leaders Network. Kindle Edition.)

And Johnson backs up his claim by quoting Jesus' famous statement about fields being ready to reap. He says: *"Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest."*

Well still others hold actually the position that I hold and that this harvest we're talking about, it's split and it's split amongst the redeemed and the unredeemable. And that first harvest, it's the wheat harvest, it's undertaken by Jesus Christ, I believe

that's the harvest of the saints. This second one, the harvest of grapes, that's the harvest of ultimate judgment.

We pick up at verse 17. It says: *Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia.*

Well, that last sentence tells you a great deal about the wrath that is coming. It's coming outside the city, that's where Christ suffered the just punishment for all of his redeemed. God says the blood flow from the winepress of his wrath is going to be four feet high and hundreds of miles long. I mean, a distance said to be the length of Palestine is clearly, it's designed to hyperbolically indicate that this finally unleashed wrath of God will be beyond anybody's ability to imagine. It's almost impossible to see this as anything other than the grapes of wrath, I mean, all of the time spent through all of the centuries patiently waiting for justice to

prevail, it's finally coming to an end and it's all unfolding with clockwork precision.

I mean think about centuries ago the prophet Joel predicted this very event. This is what he said centuries ago. He said: *Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.* And what he's saying here, it's taken thousands and thousands of years to arrive, but God's patience is finally spent; the time of God's judgment is finally here.

See, there's something, there's something very unique and very different about the way human beings and God both refer to the passage of time. You see for us, it's linear; I mean, moment comes after moment and they build up and they create the hours, the days, the weeks, the months and the years. But God doesn't see time like we see time. Instead of lining it up moment by moment, he sees right through time. And thus God can say that a thousand years is as a single day and a single day is as a thousand years. And there's something else about time and the way we look at it that differs greatly between God and man and it involves this whole idea of sowing and reaping.

One of the interesting new applications of DNA research is the ability to open previously closed cases with new and much more sophisticated ways for looking at crime scenes that might have occurred over a half century ago. We're seeing more and more people getting arrested for crimes that they thought had long ago been forgotten because when it comes to murder, there's no such thing as a statute of limitations. And we've seen just in the last two or three months more than one person in their late 70's or 80's been arrested, imprisoned for something that they did decades previously.

You know, God also has a database and it records back to the dawn of time; and it's not DNA that God collects, it's every single sin that you and I have ever committed. You see, God is sovereign. God is omniscient. That means there is nothing that escapes him. *Hebrews 4:13* says: *And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.* And that account is going to include every one of the sins we have completely forgotten. There will be the eyes of God himself that scans every single moment of our lives, from birth to death, not only looking at our actions but at our motives and our desires as well. And what we have so quickly forgotten God remembers in details beyond any computer's memory. And it's not because he's petty or picayune, it's because the past and the

future are always in the present to him.

Like I said, we view time in a linear fashion; God views time entirely differently. That doughnut that you stole from your little sister, the one that you successfully accused her of taking when you were eight and she was six and it happened fifty years ago, that happened seconds ago to God. And *Psalm 90* says: *For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.*

And the thousands of other sins that we commit in the course of our lifetime, they go in either of two directions: They are either fully paid for at the cross with the blood of Jesus Christ or they literally go into storage. I mean, we practically think and act like they disappear simply through the passage of time but they don't. They await a time of judgment when each and every sin will be brought forth for payment.

This is what God says in *Romans 2:5*. He says: *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works.* We have Jesus who said in *Matthew 16*: *"For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the Glory of his Father"* -- which is what we're

talking about -- *"and then he will repay each person according to what he has done."* And for many that reckoning's going to be in the form of a harvest. And these next two chapters in Revelation, 15 and 16, they lay out in graphic detail exactly what that harvest is going to look like for those who reject Christ's payment for their sin.

And after thousands of years of patient waiting we find judgment has finally arrived, and we pick it up in chapter 15. It says: *Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished. And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire -- and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."* After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. And one of the four living creatures

gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

Folks, we're looking at the harvest for all those who are on earth who have rejected the gospel. Each soul's going to be judged individually but this is a collective judgment that's part of the harvest of wickedness for the souls who are living during the tribulation. It's part of the judgment that each soul will receive but it's only a part.

And we see there's two radically different harvests here, there's one for those who've had every single one of their sins paid for by Christ at the cross and then there's one for those who will be forced to face the consequences of every last sin. And one of those consequences that those who are now on earth will have to face is what's called the bowl judgments. Now they're similar to the trumpet judgments that we learned about in chapter 8 except that now they're even more personal, they're even more intense.

Starting with chapter 16:1-2. He says: *Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the*

earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God." So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

If you remember back to the trumpet judgments we find the earth is attacked, it talks about a third of the earth being burned up; well, in the bowl judgments the angel's said to pour his bowl on or into the whole earth so that its produce makes people sick. Once again it's not Christians who suffer this, it's those who have the mark of the beast who find themselves personally attacked with painful sores and boils. Verse 3 says: *The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.*

Well in the trumpet judgments of chapter 8, again we find a third of the seas are destroyed, now it's every living thing; and again, the angel is said to pour the bowl into the sea making it not just like blood but like the blood of a corpse. All seafood is now contaminated.

In verse 4 it says: *The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood.* And again in the trumpet judgments it was a third, now all rivers and springs

become blood as a reminder of what this world has done to the saints of God. And whether figuratively or literally God says, let the punishment fit the crime. Verse 5 says: *And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!"*

What's astounding at this point is God is unmistakably actively exacting judgment on the entire earth and its inhabitants and it has zero effect on those who remain. In spite of the overwhelming evidence of the superior power of God, these folks still choose to shake their fists and curse God rather than repent. And God's now exacting his vengeance for his saints. Verse 7 says: *And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and just are your judgments!"* Again if you remember back to chapter 6, the saints in chapter 6 are crying out, they're crying out from under the altar and they're asking God, they say in 6:10: *They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"* Well now that just punishment's been unleashed. The saints acknowledge it in verse 8. It says: *The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed*

the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

I mean it just goes from bad to worse. It's just awful. I mean, as the bowl judgments continue, so does the anguish, so does the cursing. It says: *The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.*

And if you notice this particular bowl, it's poured out not just on the earth but at the throne of the beast. And the darkness it speaks of, it's physical and it's spiritual, it's a form of mental madness overtaking people who were in such physical anguish from the boils and the sores and darkness, they realize they have no spiritual resources whatsoever. But these are ones who are under judgment, they will not and cannot repent. They can do nothing but curse the God of heaven.

And those first judgments, they were against the earth and the people who dwell on the earth; this one is against Satan and his followers. Verse 12 says: *The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east.* All of this as we're going to

see, this is in preparation for the great battle of Armageddon. Verse 13 says: *And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs.*

And you might notice that also in addition to the intensity of these plagues, many of them bear a resemblance to those plagues that were in Egypt when Israel was enslaved. I mean, there's boils, there's water turning into blood, there's darkness, there's frog-like creatures, all of it's reminiscent of Egypt. Verse 14 says: *For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty.* Well these are the three frog-like spirits that go forward from the unholy trinity of the dragon, the antichrist and the beast from the sea, and they move the kings of the whole world to assemble for this battle of Armageddon. God is just moving people like puppets.

And prior to that there's a brief interlude with a warning from the Lord himself, who says: *("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!")* And he's not speaking of physical clothing, he's speaking about clothing yourself in this time with the word of God. And what he's saying

is be prepared, be prepared for his coming regardless. It says:
*And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called
Armageddon.*

And everybody's heard that word. We all know of the word, we don't quite know what it means. But it drying up the Euphrates it's in preparation for this final battle, the battle of Armageddon. It's going to take place on the hill of Megiddo which is sixty miles north of Jerusalem. You see "har" actually means "hill" or "mound" and Megiddo has become Har Megiddo or Armageddon. It's the place where the final battle's going to take place.

There's very little actually in the book of Revelation about Armageddon. Most of our knowledge of what's going to happen there is found in prophecies, prophecies of Joel, Daniel, Zechariah, Isaiah, along with some New Testament prophecies given by Jesus in the Olivet discourse, some by Paul in 2 Thessalonians. I won't be spending a lot of time on that because Revelation talks very little about it.

Instead we're following the angel as he pours this final bowl. Verse 17 says: *The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!"* See the first angel, he pours his bowl into the sea;

the second angel pours his bowl into the rivers; now we have an angel pouring his bowl literally, he says, into the air. Well that's a direct attack on the throne of Satan himself.

If you remember Paul's words back in *Ephesians 2*, he's describing where each of us are before we come to know Christ. He says this: *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.*

So this angel's attack into the air is directly against the prince of the power of the air. And it goes on to say in verse 18 -- and then we're almost done -- *And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.*

Well, you know, all of this apocalyptic language is to describe the complete and utter destruction of the cities and the powers of the kingdom of the enemy at Armageddon. And this earthquake that follows, it's unique, it's the worst earthquake in the history of humankind -- quote -- *"such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake."*

You see, God's wrath is falling full effect right now on the earth. And he says following this earthquake is a hailstorm so great to wipe out anyone who still survives. He says it's got hailstones that weigh as much as a hundred pounds. And once again in spite of overwhelming evidence, there's no turning to repentance because repentance is gone; it's been removed. So they do what the only thing they can do, they curse God for the plague of hail. But praise God, God's wrath has finally been fully spent.

We're talking about a time in the near or distant future -- nobody knows -- when the separation between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the prince of the power of the air will be complete. Those in the enemy's kingdom are going to be fully committed to that kingdom, while those in the kingdom of light will be fully committed to God's kingdom. And they'll be that way because they have been snatched from the enemy's kingdom by Jesus himself. And we know that those whom the Father has given him, of those Jesus

will lose not one. And this is awful news, I've said nothing but awful stuff since I've started this morning. But there's a challenge in this, and the challenge for us here becomes very personal.

You see, most of the snatching of folks from the enemy's kingdom is going to be accomplished not by Jesus himself but by those whom Jesus has empowered to act on his behalf. You see, when it comes to snatching enemies out of that kingdom, we are the snatchers. And those that we're going after are folks that we largely regard today as our enemies. I mean it's simply a fact that every single person who's a member of the kingdom of light was at one time a member of the enemy's kingdom. I mean, that's just a fact. It's also backed up by lots of scripture. *Colossians 1:21: And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.* *Romans 5:10 says: For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.*

And so that raises for us a very important question and the question is: How do you view the other side? Are they implacable enemies that we need to protect ourselves from or are they

potentially new members of the kingdom of God? Do we look at our friends, our neighbors, our relatives and colleagues, particularly those with very different social and political views, do we look at them as enemies to be defeated or victims to be entreated?

Once when Jesus had cast out a demon he was accused by the Pharisees of doing so because he had the power of the devil himself, and he responded by saying in *Mark 3:24*: *"If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house."*

You know, Janice and I, we've been walking the very same street, Old Mountain Road, we've been walking it for, oh, 30 years now. And she'll testify that oftentimes as we walk that I pray that God would bind the strong man so that we may plunder his house. And what I mean by that is acknowledging first and foremost that the battles that we engage in are spiritual. Almost all the time they're not intellectual, they're not philosophical, they are primarily spiritual. And that is to say that if God doesn't grant us victory spiritually by binding up Satan, we'll have no chance

whatsoever of making the gospel sound anything other than ridiculous. And when we ask God if he would bind the strong man so that we can plunder his house, we're literally asking God to supernaturally block the enemy's efforts at frustrating our attempts to snatch people out of his dark kingdom and into the kingdom of light.

So why do that? Well, I do it because it's much easier to see these folks and to care about these folks when you see your political and social enemies as victims, as folks who were under the brutal thumb of an enemy that hates them and wants only their destruction rather than as enemies who are seeking to do me harm. It's very hard to care for folks when you see them on the other side as those who are strictly the enemy.

So how do you develop a heart? How do you develop a heart that sees people incidentally that we are taught and trained by public media to hate, not because our media is committed to our side but because they're committed to eyeballs and clicks, because that's where the money is. And by stroking and stoking our differences, they guarantee that money's going to keep on rolling in. I'm sorry to be so cynical but I trust no public media whatsoever. I don't care if it's CNN or FOX, I don't trust any of them. Both sides have accomplished getting us as close to civil war as we've ever

gotten in this last century.

An article in NPR just last week said this: "A large Pew survey out this week shows just how bad it's gotten. (Pew interviewed 6,174 Americans. For context: most good national polls only interview about 1,000 people or so.) The survey's biggest finding? Democrats and Republicans agree: they really don't like Republicans and Democrats. Since 2016, growing numbers of people in each party simply don't like people in the other party. They increasingly see people with differing political views as closed-minded, dishonest, unintelligent and even immoral. Among Democrats, 63% see Republicans as immoral, up from just 35% who said so in 2016. For Republicans' part, 72% see Democrats as immoral, up from 47% seven years ago. Majorities of Democrats, Republicans and independents who lean toward either party say they do so because of the harm the other side could do to the country."

Well, I am unabashedly pro-life, unabashedly pro-biblical marriage and unabashedly pro-Israel, and that puts me on one side of the political spectrum. And if I can't help but see all those who don't agree with me socially or politically as enemies to be defeated rather than enemies to be entreated, if I don't see that, I have slim to no chance of plundering the enemy's house. And the reason why, it's quite simple, and we have to go after those we

disagree with in the exact same way that Jesus went after us.

Paul says it best in his letter to Timothy. This is what he said. Listen carefully to this because it seems to be an incredibly good description of us. *For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

I spoke at the beginning of this message about God's understanding of time and how that affects his understanding of sin. When I think about my own life I think about all of the sins that I've committed, many of which I've completely forgotten or ignored, I also have to realize the same sovereign Lord who identifies each and every one of those sins also went to the cross to pay for every one of them as well so that we could be justified by grace.

We can't even begin to quantify the enormity of the sin debt that

was placed on his head, placed on the head of the only one who ever lived who was absolutely sinless. We can't even pick a number. Each of us has uncountable numbers of sins, and you compound that with the hundreds of millions of souls that Jesus willingly paid for and you picture Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane anticipating this load of selfishness, wickedness, misery, bitterness, hatred and lust and it's all just waiting to be poured into his very being so that he might pay the price that his own justice demanded for people who were his avowed enemies. And having willingly paid that price, not only did he defeat death itself on our behalf but while we were still wretched sinners he reached out to us. And he did so so that we could become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. And so we have to ask ourselves, is that the same grace that we are extending to those who think exactly the opposite than we?

Add to that thousands of years of active warfare by the prince of this world who's divided this world into the relatively few who see and know what Jesus went through for us and the vast majority of those who not only don't see it but who also see the pursuit of it as worthy of mocking, scorn or absolute indifference. I mean, I know it's incredibly easy to see these folks as the enemy and to see them as hopelessly unredeemably lost. But then I think if that's the way that folks who shared the gospel with me ever thought, they never would have shared with me; I never would have

had a chance. And speaking of chances, every single day that goes by is one less day that folks who are in the enemy's camp have for the chance to be reconciled to Christ.

I mean, we spent most of this message just looking to how awful things are going to get. It's going to be terrible for those the scripture looks and calls "the dwellers of this earth," for those who are locked into the kingdom of the prince of the power of the air, many of whom it's easy to take an intense dislike to. They're the enemy. I mean they hate what we love; they love what we hate. They call good evil; they call evil good. But guess what? Before Jesus snatched us away in some fashion or other, you and I did that as well.

1 Corinthians 6-11 says: Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

So just imagine if Jesus viewed you the way we view our social and

political enemies. You know for now while there's still time, we have our marching orders and they come from scripture. 2

Corinthians 5:16, this is what it says: *From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

You see, every one of us in this room, we have a friend, a relative, a neighbor, a colleague that thinks exactly the opposite that we do. If we're red; they're blue. If we're democrats; they're republicans. If we're republicans; they're democrats. They just don't think or act like we do. I would like us to take a moment to just envision that person, that family, that individual, and I would like to pray and I would like to pray thus: *Father, I just want to lift up each and every one of these people that are being thought of and being pictured, being remembered. I just want to pray for the individual person. I pray, Lord, that you would again give opportunity to us. We long to have the strong man bound up so that we could plunder his house, that we could come into the*

homes intellectually, spiritually of those who are lost and show them the way and show them the truth and show them the life. And finally, Lord, I want to pray that you would give us the courage to do that. We may have the person, we may have the opportunity but then lack the courage. And Lord, we don't need to be Ph.D.'s in theology, we just need to be able to say, "In Christ is life and I found it" and share that. And so I pray that you would give us the person, the opportunity and the courage to do just that. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.