

Pastor Tom Mortenson

Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

February 12, 2023

Revelation Part 3 - Living Not By Lies

Revelation 2:8-11

Prayer: *Father, I just want to thank you for your grace, for your goodness, for your mercy. I thank you for all the gifts that you have given to us, not the least of which is your Son. Father, I also want to thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit. As again we open up your book, Lord, there's some difficult stuff in that book and we just need the presence of your Holy Spirit not just to grasp it and to understand it but to make it a permanent part of our lives. And so we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are in the book of Revelation and we are at lesson 3 and so far we follow John's encounter with the risen Christ while he's on the island of Patmos. And it's the Lord's day and he's been worshipping and suddenly he hears a sound from behind him. He turns around and he sees the risen Christ, and rightfully so he's terrified. This is not the Jesus that he has spent three years with some fifty or sixty years previously, this is the risen Christ. This is the Christ arrayed in splendor and frankly terrifying in appearance. John says: *Among the lampstands was*

someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last."

Well John encounters Jesus and he's standing among seven lampstands which we learned represent seven different churches that Jesus is communicating with. And each of these seven churches with all two exceptions he gives commendations and he gives critiques along with warnings to the churches if they refuse to heed his critiques. And I mentioned there's two exceptions. The church that we're going to be looking at next is just one of those exceptions.

This is what Jesus says in *Revelation 2:8*. He says: *"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty -- yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but*

are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death."

Well first of all, Jesus refers to himself as the one who died and came to life again. Jesus is speaking to a city that's actually famous for dying and coming back to life. In 580 BC the city was destroyed, in 290 BC it was rebuilt, literally coming back to life. It was something the city was quite proud of. And Jesus is constantly making these references connecting himself to a city in the way that lets you know is that he knows precisely what is going on contemporaneously in this place.

I mean if you remember the last time, Jesus was speaking about Ephesus and he was described by John as saying in his right hand he held seven stars. Well again that was a reference to the emperor having issued a coin showing his son holding seven stars in his arms. His son at age 10 had died and Domitian the emperor decided that he had become a god and he was holding the seven planets in his arms because at that point they only knew about seven planets

or only seven had been discovered. Domitian is asserting that his son hold the power -- held all the power of the planets in his arms. Well Jesus goes one farther. He points out that he's holding those planets not in his arms but in his hands. I mean not only is he claiming his vast superiority but he's also claiming an ongoing knowledge of exactly what is going on in this time in Ephesus. And here Jesus is pointing out he knows exactly what Smyrna is all about reputation wise because as he says in the vision that he gives John, he's walking among these lampstands. In other words he's right there in the midst of his churches. And the comments that he had for them are both encouraging and challenging at the same time.

Smyrna is one of the only churches that Jesus had nothing bad to say about. Jesus starts out by telling them: *"I know your afflictions and your poverty -- yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."* Now the word translated "afflictions" here is actually it's a unique word in the Greek, it's the word "Thlipsis." Darrell Johnson says: "The word Jesus uses, the word thlipsis, is a technical word in the New Testament. It is never used of the normal frustrations of life, of the normal trouble we all experience in a broken world. It is always used in connection with the coming of the kingdom of God. Thlipsis is the pressure

experienced as the kingdom of God comes up against the kingdom of human beings in rebellion against God. Thlipsis is the pressure experienced along the line where kingdoms clash; along the line where the kingdom of light clashes with the kingdom of darkness; along the line where the reign of justice clashes with the reign of injustice; along the line where the rule of life clashes with the rule of death." (Johnson, Darrell W.. *Discipleship On The Edge: An Expository Journey Through the Book of Revelation* (p. 67). Canadian Church Leaders Network. Kindle Edition.)

So Jesus tells the church of Smyrna, I know your thlipsis; I know you're getting squeezed from all sides, and in particular from your fellow Jews. *"I know your afflictions and your poverty -- yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."* So Jesus identifies affliction and poverty and slander as good things? As things that make you rich? Well how so, I mean, Jesus here is looking at two different kingdoms. He's addressing the church in Smyrna and he's telling that in spite of their overwhelming poverty that they're rich. Well this is something Jesus did all the time because no one saw better the two kingdoms than the one who rules both of them simultaneously, who temporarily left one for the other. And when you view life itself from both kingdoms, you can see certain advantages in what the world sees only as a disadvantage. Remember

what Jesus said in *Matthew 5*. He said: *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* So Jesus is actually stating that poverty, persecution and slander are good things, not in and of themselves, but they're opportunities to plant a stake for the kingdom and in so doing grow your ability to not just survive but to prosper in the kingdom that really matters.

You know, just last week when we spoke about having two kingdoms in mind simultaneously: There's the kingdom of earth and there's the kingdom of heaven. It's a breeze to keep the kingdom of earth in mind because it presents itself to us virtually every single day, everything we can see, touch, hear, taste and feel. And that Greek word "thlipsis" translated "afflictions," it describes the friction that occurs when one kingdom rubs up against the other kingdom. Again he says: *"I know your afflictions and your poverty -- yet you are rich!"*

Well, the key to being able to trust God in all things and to live a life of faith, according to Paul, lies in that ability to perceive the other invisible kingdom when the earthly kingdom goes on the attack. Success lies in being able to see both kingdoms

simultaneously particularly when the kingdom of earth starts looking more and more unattractive, starts looking more and more threatening. This is what Paul said in *2 Corinthians 4*. He said: *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

You see, the key to being able to handle persecution and slander and poverty lies in understanding what's temporary and what's eternal. The kingdom of earth, this kingdom that all of us see and interact, it's temporary, I mean, it's fleeting. We all know that; we all sense that. But for most of us it's our only frame of reference and that's really where the problem lies. I mean it's only when we make the effort to focus in on the temporary nature of this earth that we're able to begin to see the beauty and the value in what is unseen, in what's eternal. Because Paul had perfected the art of seeing two kingdoms, he could be sitting in a rotting dungeon and write: *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.*

Now here in Smyrna Jesus is addressing the particular persecution and slander that believers were getting at the hands of their fellow Jews. His reference to the Jews in the synagogue of Satan, it had to do with a unique role that the Jewish community played in the city of Smyrna. Smyrna was a gorgeous city. I mean its coins were said to be inscribed with the words "First of Asia in Beauty and Size." It had temples there to Apollos, to Aphrodite, to Zeus and it boasted of its relationship to Rome. It had competed for and won the honor of building a temple specifically to honor Tiberius Caesar, the very emperor who was ruling when Christ was crucified.

And the wealthy Jews who lived there, they enjoyed a unique relationship with this particular government. You see, the Roman government in Smyrna was profoundly tolerant of things Jewish. Jews who lived in Smyrna, they have didn't have to serve in the military, they also did not have to state their loyalty to the emperor by offering him worship like every other Roman citizen had to. The Jews of carved out a unique relationship with Rome and it gave them the freedom to worship as they saw fit while enjoying the protections of living in a Roman culture. And again, you have to remember Christians at this time, they were not viewed as something separate as a separate entity, they were viewed as an abhorrent wing of Judaism. And thus the Jews in Smyrna saw Christians as a

unique threat to their well-being, something that threatened their relationship with Rome in Smyrna. And so it was the Jews who attacked and slandered the believers causing Jesus to identify them with their true God, the God of this earth, Satan himself.

And it's not the first time that Jesus had done so, I mean some sixty years earlier when Jesus was ministering on earth he had open confrontations with the Jews of his day whom he labeled as belonging not to God but to Satan himself. Jesus told these Jews in *John 8:44*: *"You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires."* And Jesus knew who belonged to him and who didn't. He knew who were the real Jews and who were not. He knew that real Jews were Jews not externally but internally. As Paul puts it in *Romans 2:28*: *For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.*

Jesus also knew who were the real Christians and who were not. You know we spoke with the parable of the wheat and the tares because a tare was a weed that looked just like wheat from the outside. And in the story an enemy sows tares among the wheat in order to ruin the crop. Jesus he tells the laborers to let the wheat and the

tares grow together until harvest time lest in pulling up the tares they pull up the wheat. And so doing he tells us that every single church is going to have a combination of real and phony believers within its members and that both would grow together until harvest time. And whether it was phony Jews or phony Christians, the operant condition here is the word "phony." The phony believers will be the ones who are outward and physical just like the phony Jews were, and the real ones would be the ones whose hearts had been circumcised, the folks who have brand new hearts that are tuned into and attentive to the Spirit of God as opposed to the flesh. What Jesus was warning the church in Smyrna is that persecution most likely was not going to come from strangers, it was going to come from someone familiar, maybe someone you even know and love. And so Jesus offers some truly chilling words. He says: *"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer."*

You know for years now we've actively been praying for those who are suffering persecution all around the world. A few months back we had IDOP Sunday which is praying for persecuted believers in areas that haven't had the full gospel presented, in places like China, Africa, India, many other places known as the 10/40 window because persecution by and large happens on the other side of the world. The idea of praying for persecuted believers now cropping up in so called Christian countries like Canada, like England, like

Finland, that would have seemed out of the question only a few years ago but it's now clearly on the horizon.

There's a pastor in Canada by the name of Artur Pawlowski. He's going to find out in March if he's going to trial to face ten years in prison for preaching at a truckers' rally during the strike over COVID restrictions in Canada. This is what *Fox News* said. It said: "Crackdowns on the clergy in the generally conservative province of Alberta have made international headlines. Police barricaded churches and jailed multiple pastors, including Pastor Tim Stephens, who was arrested after a police helicopter reportedly found his Calgary congregation gathering outside. Stephens' multiple arrests in front of his young children prompted Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., to urge the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to consider adding Canada to its watch list. The Ohio State Legislature passed a resolution echoing Hawley's sentiment."

Meanwhile *National Review* reported: "In Finland a former government minister facing jail after tweeting a Bible verse said that her trial next week will be a test of religious freedom. Päivi Räsänen, a physician and mother of five, explained that she had a 'calm mind' ahead of the criminal trial beginning on Jan. 24."

Catholic News Service reported: "Authorities in the U.K. have dropped charges against a woman arrested for silent prayer in a 'buffer zone' that bans pro-life advocacy outside an English abortion clinic." Now understand, this was not someone lying down in the street blocking traffic which has happened many, many times; this was someone who was standing well off the street, yards away from the clinic simply offering up prayer -- not spoken; silent, inside her head. We pick up on the statement. It says: "However, Isabel Vaughan-Spruce says the charges still could be revived, leaving her in an ambitious legal situation. 'It can't be right that I was arrested and made a criminal, only for praying in my head on a public street,' Vaughan-Spruce said in a Feb. 3 statement."

Well anyone who follows the news, you know for certain these are not outliers, these are much more of a trend that we see happening more and more every day. I'll be the first one to say here in the United States we have far more harassment than persecution.

Although if you're a person making artistic cakes in Colorado or a wedding photographer in Connecticut or any one of a dozen crisis pregnancy centers that have been vandalized and even fire-bombed with minimum effort made on behalf of the FBI to do anything about it, you probably see this more than simple harassment.

I repeat the analogy I've given a number of times about I think the state that we find ourselves in right now. See if the gospel is the light, just picture that light as a bright burning flame, and you don't realize its power until that flame starts to diminish and just like a campfire that's blazing brightly, you don't realize what's out there that's being kept at bay by that light until that light starts to diminish. And then slowly but surely you begin to see these red glaring eyes start to pop up and they grow bolder and more numerous as the light continues to dim. I think that's precisely what we're experiencing today. You see, the wolves see the dimming of the light of the gospel and they're growing more numerous and bolder by the minute.

You know, the Grammy awards used to be a family friendly show. The show just last Sunday was so profoundly grotesque that even secular pagan outlets said that's -- that's too much. I mean the *Daily Beast* -- I don't know if any of you have ever heard of, it's not exactly a Christian publication, but they had this to say about the Grammy awards. They said: "Want to know why so many people are giving up on 'mainstream' pop culture? Take a look at Sam Smith and Kim Petras' performance of their hit song 'Unholy' at the Grammy Awards on Sunday night. In case you missed it, *Variety* described the performance as including Petra's dancing in a cage, flanked by some dominatrices wearing satanic headgear.

Smith also donned a satanic top hat, as huge flames heated up the stage.' You know, wholesome family entertainment. Cardi B, hold their beer."

When a publication like the *Daily Beast* is offended, you know you've really accomplished something. If you are offended don't expect an apology because after all the whole point of the exercise was to offend in the first place.

So we say so how have we gotten here? And what would Jesus do? What would Jesus say? You say, well, this is unrighteous, this is unfair, we know this is not good and because it's not good and because I love you, I'll protect you, I'll keep you. Well actually the answer to that question is yes and no. And all that has to do with this concept known as "thlipsis" or "affliction," the conflict that comes when both kingdoms rub up against each other.

Jesus will indeed protect and keep us but in a way that he might be used to but we are not. Far more and away that he keeps as protects his own in China, Africa and the 10/40 window. This is what Jesus said. He said: *"Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown. Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death."*

Well, my question for us is are we prepared for this?

You know, I remember reading a story I think it was in *Voice of the Martyrs*, it was about an Iranian evangelist, he had been arrested and tried. He was sitting in a jail cell awaiting his execution for spreading the gospel, and he said while he was there one night he had a dream. And he said in that dream Jesus appeared to him and so he turned to Jesus and said, "Jesus, I've been faithful, I proclaimed your gospel, I've been arrested, I've been tried, they're going to take my life!" He said, Jesus looked at him and said, "So?" Again this was a dream. This isn't scripture. And we know that Jesus appears to lots of folks in dreams and places where the scripture is restricted but the point the man was expressing in the dream is very similar to the one that Jesus is making here in Smyrna. In fact it's the same point that he made over and over again during his earthly ministry on earth. He said it plainly and clearly to his disciples in *Matthew 10*. This is what he said. He said: *"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*

Let me be the first one to say I have a hard time with that command. I fear those who kill the body. I also understand that Jesus offered very little assurance to those who believe in the prosperity gospel that were somehow entitled to health, wealth and

prosperity if we only check the right boxes in our Christian faith. Instead he says: *"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown."*

Now before you take issue with Jesus being almost kind of cavalier about something that should be considered awful, just consider where Jesus has been. He knows exactly what it's like to be unjustly persecuted and falsely accused. He knows precisely what it is like to be stripped and beaten and whipped and flogged and crucified. He also knows what it's like to be faithful to the point of death. It was a death he was quite willing to die so that through his resurrection three days later we could by faith claim his righteousness as our own and so stand before a holy God. So Jesus is not asking of his followers anything that he was not absolutely willing to go through at first.

But here's the semi-good news, and I say "semi" advisedly. I don't think we in the West are going to face the same kind of persecution that the church in Smyrna faced because after thousands of years of Gulags and tortures, governments are now finding a far more effective way of coercing their citizens softly. I mean we may at

some point actually face prison like the pastor in Canada or the legislator in Finland or even the prayer warrior in England but there's now a much more effective way to get people to reject the kingdom of God and embrace this kingdom of earth without realizing that they ever have.

I've mentioned before an incredibly important book *Live Not By Lies* by Rod Dreher. I think it's actually critical you get your hands on that book and read it if you want to understand what's going to be happening to this country in the next ten years. *Live Not by Lies* uses the experience of Christians who have suffered greatly as proof of the author's argument that suffering can in fact be a blessing and not a curse, that it can actually be a gift sent by God to those whom he loves, a gift that forces us to focus on the only kingdom that really matters and that's the eternal one, not the temporary one that we get hooked on.

And here's where the book connects directly with us and our culture. See, the author's contention is that we have grown so soft, so completely averse to even the idea of suffering that governments can now force our compliance without even resorting to the old ways of compulsion. Rod Dreher's contention is that there are two types of totalitarian governments: There's the hard type and the soft type. Hard totalitarian governments, they use fear as

their primary weapon to shape their citizens. They've built an entire system on a lie and the lie was that there's no God and the state is all the god that you need. Well, the lie had to be propped up and it had to be propped up by using arrest and torture, imprisonment and execution to cow the population into accepting the lie as the truth. We're all familiar with it; it's how North Korea operates today. If you get caught with a Bible, you face eminent execution or at the very least banishment to a concentration camp that's beyond belief.

But over against hard totalitarian is soft totalitarianism. In the soft version governments no longer have to rely on arrest or torture or imprisonment in order to get their citizens to believe a lie. What soft totalitarians rely on is the citizens' aversion to suffering; an addiction, if you will, one that the church has fostered for years now. "God loves you and has a perfect plan for your life." It's absolutely true on one level. But like Jesus states and countless others have discovered, God's perfect plan just might include imprisonment, torture and execution. *"I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown."* That's something the American church is woefully unprepared for.

This is what Dreher said. He said: "In 2005, the sociologists of religion Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton coined the phrase Moralistic Therapeutic Deism to describe the decadent form that Christianity (and all faiths, in fact) had taken in contemporary America. It consisted of the general belief that God exists, and wants nothing more from us than to be nice and to be happy. In therapeutic culture, which has everywhere triumphed, the great sin is to stand in the way of the freedom of others to find happiness as they wish." (Dreher, Rod. *Live Not by Lies* (pp. 12-13). Penguin Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.)

He pointed out that years ago Aldous Huxley wrote a dystopian novel about the future. It was entitled "*Brave New World*" and in it he referred to what Christianity would become. What was a devastating commentary consisted of just three words. He described the faith that had been "Christianity without tears," Christianity in which suffering was nonexistent.

And you know we have one of the best examples of how this type of system works, how this soft totalitarianism works if we just look at present day China. I mean it uses a very effective system of intense surveillance coupled with a social credit system that shapes and molds behavior exactly as their leaders want. See, the Chinese government monitors every single aspect of its citizens'

lives. They know who is well-behaved and who is not. And the well-behaved are those who refuse to go to any church at all unless of course it's state sanctioned. They support the CCP, that's the Chinese Communist Party when it indoctrinates their children and imprisons Uighurs in concentration camps. These model citizens, they get awarded social credits that then allow them to shop at the best supermarkets, buy the newest car, it gives them credits and points to ensure that they get to purchase the airline ticket they want if they want to travel. Their kids get to go to the right schools; and as long as their social credits are high enough, everything works out fine. Just do what the state tells you to do. No need for fines, no need for imprisonment, no need for torment or torture, you'll do what the state wants you to do because you don't want to suffer the consequences.

Say, well that's China, that's not us. Have you spoken to anybody who goes to a secular university about how they have to shape and mold their papers and test responses to a certain ideology or else they're out or either flunk or forget grad school? How about this one student at a Catholic high school -- this is in Canada. The *Epoch Times* sported this headline just last week. It said:
"Gender Beliefs Get Ontario Catholic Student Shut Out of School for the Year. Josh Alexander, 16, is not allowed to attend school for the rest of the year after saying he would continue to express his

belief that God created only two genders. The school told him his presence would be 'detrimental to the physical and mental well-being' of transgender students, Alexander told The Epoch Times. He told St. Joseph's Catholic High School in Renfrew, Ontario, he would not intentionally engage or start conflicts with transgender students, but he would continue to express his belief. He and his lawyer are bringing this matter to an Ontario human rights tribunal, calling it religious discrimination." You think?

Dreher speaks specifically to these type of things, and this is what he says, again in *Live Not By Lies*. He says: "What is happening here? A progressive—and profoundly anti-Christian militancy—is steadily overtaking society; this spiritual power takes material form in government and private institutions, in corporations, in academia and media, and in the changing practices of everyday American life. It is empowered by unprecedented technological capabilities to surveil private life. There is virtually nowhere left to hide. The old, hard totalitarianism had a vision for the world that required the eradication of Christianity. The new, soft totalitarianism does too, and we are not equipped to resist its sneakier attack."

Well, as Dreher states there are three major lies that our culture today is now insisting all of us have to live under. There's the

lie that says that babies in the womb are no different than a tumor; there's the lie that says that male and female is an artificial construct changeable at will; and there's the lie that says who you choose to love makes no difference whatsoever. But there's a lie in addition to those three lies and it is the most dangerous lie of all: It's the lie that these lies don't really matter.

I've had folks insist that addressing these issues is really majoring in minors. I mean, after all, Christ never said a word about homosexuality, gender or abortion. Well the fact is he had words to say about all three but that's not even the point. You know, folks think we are obsessed when these three minor aspects of the gospel come out, but it's not believers who are obsessed. Think about it. It's the culture that has elevated these three points of disobedience to God as markers of what it means now to be free, to be woke, and to be a functioning member of our culture.

You know, ancient Rome, the issue was accepting Caesar as God. In present day America there's almost no chance that Christians are going to be confronted with that kind of demand, to explicitly reject Christ, that's way too blatant. That's just not going to happen. Instead we're going to be asked to live by lies such as these three that we've already seen. Accept these three, abortion,

gender and homosexuality, I guarantee you there's going to be more to come because our Christianity without tears is a Christianity unprepared to make any sacrifice that causes personal pain.

Understand, if you are not willing to live with those three lies, you are going to suffer. At the very least you're going to be considered a hater. If word gets out that you actually refuse those lies, you may well be canceled when it comes to social media. And we've seen dozens and dozens of conservative Christian sites get canceled, sites like Focus on the Family, Citizen Go, Life Site. We've all seen their sites labeled hate speech and have seen them come to be deplatformed for one reason only: They refuse to live a lie. So you may lose your job, you certainly might lose your friends, you might lose your family, maybe your home, maybe your goods, because our culture has made these three lies part of its religious observance of what it means to be a citizen. And if you choose not to live by those lies, you are going to suffer.

See, part of my role as pastor is to prepare each and every one of us for such a time as this. And what is oftentimes a devastating burden to those who've only known a Christianity without tears is to discover that ours is a Christianity with tears. But Jesus made that clear to Smyrna. *"I know your afflictions and your poverty -- yet you are rich! I tell you, the devil will put some of you in*

prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown."

Jesus says commitment to him can come with prison, persecution and death. You know, thlipsis or the affliction that comes when both kingdoms clash, it's going to be something we experience more and more and more each day. But Jesus says thlipsis can also be a profound blessing, and it all depends on what kingdom you're focused on. And whether you're willing to refuse to play the game of soft authoritarianism of living by lies as it grows more and more persuasive.

Paul said in *Philippians 3*: *I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*

Well here's some questions: Have you been disciplined in a faith

that takes seriously the apostle Paul's words? Are you willing to suffer the loss of all things for the excellence of knowing Christ? Are you willing to count this world's treasures as rubbish in order to gain Christ? Well if you're willing, you'll find just what Jesus meant when he said: *"I know your affliction and your poverty -- yet you are rich!"* Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for what you've written, it's kind of jarring and it's kind of -- in some ways it's frightening. We look around us and we see a country that is going in a direction that we could not have imagined just a few years ago. And I want us to be prepared, Lord, I want us to have an understanding of exactly who we are, where we are, where we're going and why. I pray and I thank you for your word, I thank you for your insight and your grace. And I pray that each of us would have the discernment, the wisdom, the insight, and the courage to recognize the lies and to refuse to live by lies, and to be willing to pay the price. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.