

Desperate Times Require Desperate Measures

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3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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This morning, I come with words of refreshing. Turn in your Bibles to the book of 1 John 1. Now for those of you that are guests and visitors, you may wonder why was there this collective sigh of relief in the room. It's because over the last three years we've been walking through a Bible reading plan chapter by chapter, day by day, and over the course of the last two months, we've been navigating through the book of Ezekiel and it's been a tad bit tedious, has it not? But it has been timely, in fact, one of the comments that I've gotten over and over again over the last two months is how timely the message of Ezekiel was, the idea that you and I are walking through our own Babylonian captivity, that what we know as faith in Jesus Christ and allegiance to the word of God is no longer at the center of our communities, it's no longer the focal point of our culture, in fact, it has been relegated not only to the outskirts but there is a process with the desire of eliminating it completely. As we walked through that study of Ezekiel, one of the things that we came back to time and time again is though it's easy to speak in the corporate or the collective, but at the end of the day, it's about each and every one of us responding to the Lord appropriately and properly.

You and I today are living in desperate times. I don't just mean the idea of a global pandemic that has now worn over a year, I don't mean all the social unrest that seems to come across our news feed each and every day, the fact that we live in a day where every decision we make, every turn we take seems to breed an air of desperation. It has been said years ago that desperate times require desperate measures, and so today as we go to 1 John 1 and 2, I want to look at the measures that have already taken place on behalf of the times that you and I are living in today. In fact, in just a moment as we begin to walk through these very strategic verses, we're actually going to walk through the passage somewhat backwards. I want to look at the "what" and the "who" has already taken place, and then I want to take those facts and I want to apply them to our own life and discover why is this so important for us, why is it that that which has already taken place needed to happen, why is it that we need to respond in a certain way.

The book of 1 John 1:8, it says,

8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,

and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Now as we look at that verse or that passage somewhat backwards, I want you to notice what is being declared, or more particularly who is being spoken of. The person of Jesus Christ is described there in chapter 2 of 1 John as an advocate. Think in our terminology today, think of a defense attorney. Think of it in these terms, you find yourself in a predicament, you find yourself in a desperate situation, what will somebody say to you? "You might want to lawyer up." In other words, you might want to get somebody who has the expertise, the wherewithal and the ability to defend you because you've been accused of something, or there has been evidence that has been brought forth that is very detrimental to you and it's not looking good. Do you find it interesting that when describing our relationship to the Lord, he says we need an advocate, we need a defense attorney?

You know, it's interesting that this idea of an advocate, you don't need an advocate unless you have an accuser. You don't need somebody to defend you unless somebody's made an accusation about you. And yet most of us may not be aware, you know the term Satan, the pronoun, you know, we call him Satan, our enemy, the devil, Satan? Do you know what the term Satan means? Accuser. That's what it means. His name means one who brings forth accusation. Why do we need an advocate so bad? It's because we've got an accuser who's pointing his finger at our lives and saying, "Hey, God, look at them. Are you going to allow them to continue the way they are?"

Now there are some famous scenes in the Bible where the accuser, Satan, shows up and God is an advocate. Probably the most well-known is an individual by the name of Job found in the middle of your Bible. He's a man of great prestige. He's a man with a large family, incredible finances. His future looked the best of anybody on planet earth. Do you remember what the accuser said to the Lord? He said, "You know, the only reason that Job worships you, the only reason he honors you, the only reason he gives to you is because you've taken such good care of him. If you were to remove all that stuff from his life, he would curse you. Allow me to do so." Do you know what the Lord says? "You've misdiagnosed my servant, Job. You take all that away from him, he'll still remain faithful, he will still be true." What happens in the story? His children find death, his finances are evaporated, everything is gone. Remember what happens when he's questioned? He says, "Should I curse God instead of bless him? I came into this world with nothing, I'll leave with nothing. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

So what does the accuser do? Job 2.0. He comes back, now this is going to get real relevant real quick. He says, "All right, God, he's still praising, he's still singing, he's still honoring but it's because you haven't let me touch his body." Chapter 2, verse 4 of the

book of Job it says, "A man will give his entire life for his own health. Let me touch his body." God says, "Okay, you can do so but you can't take his life from him." The next scene he is covered in sores and boils from head to toe and even his wife says, "Curse God and die." He says, "I cannot do that."

Later on in the Old Testament, we have a man by the name of Joshua. The book of Zechariah 3, he's called the high priest. Why is that significant? Because it doesn't get any closer to the Lord than this guy. I mean, this is the one who will go into the Holy of Holies, this is the one who will take the Passover lamb and take the blood and put it on the mercy seat, this is the man who has the closest walk with the Lord of anybody on planet earth. There in Zechariah 3, the Bible says that he stands before the angel of the Lord, that's another message for another day. But guess who shows up? The accuser. The accuser shows up and the Bible says he resists him, he accuses him, he begins to point fingers at him. And then throughout the rest of the story, we discover the Lord's, shall we say, pleasure with how he's been behaving.

Why do I bring these stories up? Job was called greatest in the east, Joshua was the high priest over the Day of Atonement. If Satan pointed his finger at them, don't you think he's going to point one at you? Because I've got news for you, I'm no Job, I'm no Joshua. And here it says we need an advocate and the reason we need an advocate is because if our enemy is going to accuse the Job's and the Joshua's of the world of their misfortunes, then what's his list on us? It says we need an advocate because when you look at our lives, it's not just one or two, it is a laundry list of misfortunes.

But then he goes on to talk about the price that the advocate is willing to pay there in verse 2. This is one of my favorite words in all the Bible. He says that he, Jesus Christ, is the propitiation for our sins, he's the atonement for our sins. That word is one of those big fancy Bible words but here's what it means in simplicity: one who is willing to pay the price for. You know, it's interesting that rarely, if ever, are you willing to pay somebody else's fine, ticket, or endure their punishment. In fact, oftentimes even within our own circle of family or friends, rarely the same. You know, you may not know this but occasionally I get called into court and the reason I usually get called into court is I'm used as a character reference. They want to make sure that you really go to church. They want to make sure that you're really active. They want to know, they've said that they are and oftentimes it's in a variety of cases.

I'll never forget a couple of years ago I was there for a character reference and they were arraigning a group of gentlemen before our case came through and they were coming in and they were in their jumpsuits just one after the other. And I'll never forget, this one guy came in, the judge said, "How do you plead?" He said, "I plead not guilty." He said, "Sir, you do realize we have video footage of the crime. We have multiple personal testimonies of the crime. Why are you pleading not guilty?" And I'll never forget, do you know what he said? "It wasn't me. It was my twin brother." How do you think Thanksgiving went on that year? We're not even willing to pay the price for our identical twins.

You see, when it comes to the price that is paid, it says here that Jesus Christ was willing to pay the price of our sin on his cross because somebody's got to pay the price. The wages of sin is death therefore somebody must be willing to exchange themselves in our place. Our family is not willing to do it. Our friends aren't willing to do it. And surely our enemies aren't willing to do it. Somebody's got to pay the price. Who paid the price? It said Jesus Christ is the propitiation, he is the payment for our sins.

Now if you'll allow me for just a few moments, can I just nerd out with you for a second? There's a lot of these Bible words that I love, most of them end with the sound shun, tion. For example, can I walk you through a few of those? Illumination is the biblical idea that the Holy Spirit of God shows us our sin condition, shows us what Jesus Christ did on our behalf so that we realize who we are in light of who he is. That's illumination. It is illumination that hopefully leads us to regeneration. Regeneration is where we become born again, we become a new creature, we become a new creation, we are no longer headed to hell now we're headed to heaven. Regeneration then leads to sanctification. Sanctification is the process by which the Lord chips away that old man and we become more holy and more like him. Once we go through sanctification, one day we're going to breathe our last breath, we're going to stand before God and the Bible says there we experience justification, that we're declared blameless before him. When we finally end up on the streets of gold all forever, we experience glorification. Can I walk through those words? Illumination leads to regeneration, then there's sanctification, justification, and finally glorification. But there's none of that without propitiation. You see, if the price isn't paid, if that which is deemed necessary in exchange for that which was done doesn't occur, we've got a problem, and the reason I want to start today on the backside of the passage is because it says that Jesus Christ is our defense attorney, Jesus Christ has paid the price. That's the desperate measures that have taken place, the problem is that most of us don't realize the desperate situation that we're in.

Go back to verse 8 of chapter 1, interesting what the Bible says, "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, his word is not in us." Let's talk about the "why" for just a moment. Let's talk about the reality of sin. And I know, I know you expect to hear that term and that phrase in an environment such as this. We talk about it all the time, that you and I have a sin condition that only Jesus can fix, but let's talk about the reality of it. Why do we fall into the trap of verse 8? Read it again, "If we say we have no sin." Can you imagine having that perspective? Can you imagine thinking that your life is actually headed in the right direction and everything's okay? It says we deceive ourselves, the truth is not in us. Why do we get into such a position in life where we think that we're okay, we don't need an advocate, much less one to make propitiation or amends, everything's headed the right direction.

You know, I think the number one cause is we tend to compare ourselves to others, do we not? We have this horrible tendency to look at our lives compared to somebody else's life. Do you know what we always do? We gravitate to the lowest rung of the ladder, do we not? We find ourselves accused, we find ourselves confronted with truth and we say,

"Well, my life may look like that but have you seen So-and-so? I know what you heard me say but have you heard what they've said?" Boy, we have a tendency to do that, do we not?

It reminds me of one of my favorite preacher stories. I don't know if you know what a preacher story is but they're oftentimes more legend than truth but they're just too good, you have to tell them. The story is about a young pastor rolls into a new community, he's young, he's wet behind the ears, he doesn't know a whole lot about everybody and where they've come from and their stories and such. He's been there for about six, maybe eight weeks and all of a sudden the wealthiest, most conniving, most manipulative, most tyrannical man in the community passes away. No one is willing to do the service. No one is willing to host the funeral. He has a twin brother who's beside himself, just as tyrannical, just as wealthy, just as conniving decides, "You know what? I'm gonna talk to the new young guy in town. I bet I can get him to have it." So he has an appointment with him, he meets with this young man, tells him his desire. He says, "Son, if you will host my brother's service and tell the whole world that he was a saint, I'll give you \$10,000." He says, "Deal."

The whole community is beside themselves. The deacons have a special meeting, they've got to get rid of this guy. There is no way. But the time comes, standing room only not to remember this man but to see what this young preacher is going to say. He gets up and he begins to list the list of all of his infractions, I mean, he tells it all, everything that that one in the casket was charged of, everything he was guilty of, I mean, it is a horrific scene but then there's this dramatic pause, he says, "But compared to his twin brother, he's a saint." Don't you just hope it's true? Probably not. But you get the idea. And that's the reality of our sin, is that we so often, if not all the time, compare ourselves to those of greater misfortune or whatever it may be, that we start to think highly of our own selves.

It says there in verse 8, "If we say we don't have sin, we deceive ourselves." So what's the result of sin? We know what the Bible says, we've already quoted Romans 6:23, it says "the wages of sin is death," and that kind of just comes off our tongue so easily because we know it so well, and we've heard it so often, but I want to call your attention to verse 10. This is one of those verses that just resonates with me and hopefully it will with you. It says, "If we say that we have not sinned," let me push pause, if you say that everything's okay, don't need an advocate, you don't need somebody to pay the price, everything's good, "we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." Now I want you to think about that phrase. When we claim that we don't have a sin problem, when we claim we don't need an advocate, when we claim we've got it all together, we're saying that God is a liar. Now I don't know about you and I may be the only person in the room, if so, that's fine because it may just be my issue, but I'm one of those folks, you can say anything you want to to me, you can run me over with the proverbial Mack truck, as people say, you can mistreat me, miscommunicate, I'm just one of those guys, I can take the proverbial beating, but there's one thing I can't handle, I cannot handle when somebody either, A. lies to me, or B. claims I've lied to them. I just can't do it. My family will tell you, I go sideways. My head twists on my shoulders. I cannot handle it. You

want to get me upset? I'm going to give you the trigger point, are you ready? Just claim I did something I didn't do, or didn't do something I did.

Oh, my family will testify this happened in the last 24 hours. Oh, I can't handle it. Why? You don't like being represented either. How do you like it when somebody says you said something you didn't say? How do you like it when somebody stirs it all up, blames it on you and you say, "I didn't do anything"? How do you like it when you do what you're supposed to do and then somebody lies about it and takes the credit themselves? Oh, I got you all hot and bothered too, didn't I? What do you do? You get angry. You get wrathful. Let's be biblical, righteous indignation. Oh, that's right, you get all hot under the collar.

Now if you and I get so upset when somebody lies to us or about us, how do you think God feels when we lie to his face? What does it say here? We make him a liar. Let me reenact this for you. Genesis 3, garden of Eden. The Lord's provided everything they need, everything's laid out perfectly. The serpent and Eve have a little conversation about that "forbidden fruit." Can I share with you what Adam and Eve are doing behind the scenes? This is what they're saying but they're not saying, "God, there's another tree over here that looks better than your tree. You lied to us. God, you lied to us. You didn't tell us that it could be better than what you gave us. You didn't tell us that our eyes could be opened. You didn't tell us we could be like the gods. You didn't tell us that we could enjoy all that we see before us. It's going to look good, it's going to taste good, God, you lied to us." How does that make you feel if somebody says that to you? Well, how do you think that makes God feel? I'll tell you what it makes him feel like, it's called wrath, anger, judgment. Have we not just read the book of Ezekiel? I mean, the Lord says, "Hey, if you claim I've lied to you, if you claim I'm a liar, look out, here it comes."

Back to chapter 2, that propitiation, somebody has got to pay the price. I think one of the things we forget is somebody has got to satisfy the anger and wrath that God possesses over us calling him a liar. Who is going to satisfy that? Who can exchange themselves for that? Well, what does it say there in chapter 2? Only one person, Jesus Christ. He's the only one qualified not just to speak up on our behalf but he's the only one qualified to actually say, "I will pay the price. I will exchange myself in their stead."

Why are there desperate measures by Jesus Christ? Because we're in a desperate situation. We have a sin problem that rarely do we acknowledge and if we do, we blame everybody else and, in particular, we claim that God lied to us, he withheld from us, he twisted things so as to be contrary to us. But then I want you to look at verse 9. It says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and he is just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Let me kind of put a bow on it here. What the Bible is saying is that Jesus Christ went to desperate measures, he defends us even though he knows we're guilty, he shed his blood for us even though we have claimed him to be a liar. What have we done? We've claimed that we've done no wrong, we compare ourselves to other people and then we call him a liar, and he says, "I'll tell you what, though, if you will confess your sins, I am faithful and just to forgive you."

You see, the big question is when, when can you and I take this desperate situation and these desperate measures and how can we have it applied to our own lives? I want you to see that it's conditional. Notice that word in verse 9, "If. If you confess your sins. If you come clean. If you're willing to admit the condition you find yourself in." Now I know that a large portion of us, not all of us, have at some point had children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, students, whatever, that we had some type of, shall we say, responsibility for, and anytime we're responsible or anytime we're raising children, there comes a point and a time where you know and everybody knows that they are guilty as charged but they've got to come clean about it, do they not? I think we underestimate the stubbornness of humanity. You know, James Dobson put it mildly, he talked about the strong-willed child. It's called the stubborn child, is what it is.

We had a situation some years ago, I mean, they were just little guys, and if you look at the big picture, it wasn't that big a deal but there was an infraction that had occurred. There was a violation of the rules of the house. And you know, when you've got multiple siblings, there's two fingers always pointing at one other person, right? I won't reveal the identities, I'll just let y'all pick who, what, when and where. But nonetheless, all fingers pointed to this one soul. My wife Trace and I confronted him about his indiscretion. He denied it. I mean, flat out said, "Didn't do it." We said, "Did brother A do it?" Nope. "Did brother B?" Nope. "Did you mom do it?" Nope. "Did I do it?" Nope. "Did the dog do it?" Nope. There's nobody left, guys, that's it. "Did you do it?" No. We commenced to a very strategic punishment. Came back later, "Did you do it?" Nope. "Brother A?" Nope. "Brother B?" Nope. "Dog?" Nope. "Mom?" Nope. "Dad?" Nope. Y'all want to know how long that went? You know, I know boxers get a lot of credit for being in the ring, I mean, they go 12 rounds, right? Oh, no, no, Tracy and I went 52 rounds that night all until the sun was coming up. Oh, but we weren't going to let go.

You say, "Why is that important?" What does it say? "If we confess our sins." Do you know how hard it is to admit our wrongdoing? Do you know how hard it is to say, "It's my fault"? Do you know how hard it is to say, "Lay the blame at my feet"? Why? Because that's who we are. We claim we have no sin. We deceive ourselves. We're calling him a liar. But I want you to see the confirmation and notice what it says, that he, if we confess, if we finally say, "Okay, God, I'm the problem," he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Why do we not come clean before God? Because we don't want our character compromised, correct? Let me ask you whose character is at stake here? It's his. He is faithful. He is just to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Why do we not come clean? Because there's some of you today who say, "If I come clean before God, he won't forgive me. If I really lay it out, God will not do what he said he's done because he's never had one like me." So you're calling him a liar? He says, "I'm faithful. I'm just. I will cleanse you from all unrighteousness." Do you know what that word "all" means? It means all.

Years ago, one of the great contemporary thinkers of the faith, a man by the name of C. S. Lewis put it so succinctly. He said when it comes to the person of Jesus Christ there's really only three options: he's either a liar, he's a lunatic, or he's the Lord. Now I want you to think about your life for just a moment. The Lord says here in verse 9, "If you

confess your sins, if you come clean, he's faithful and he's just to forgive you." You willing to say he's a liar this morning? Are you willing to say he can't forgive what you've done? Are you willing to say he doesn't understand what you're walking through? Secondly, are you willing to claim he's crazy? The one who was willing to go to Calvary, the one who was willing to shed his blood, the one who said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they're doing," you want to call him crazy? I'll tell you who the crazy one is, us, the ones looking around, pointing the finger at everybody else and the accuser is pointing the finger at us saying, "See, I told you. They're more messed up than you even thought." But he's Lord. You say, "How do we know he is Lord?" Because he defends us. He advocates for us and he was willing to give himself for us. Only he who established us, only he who created us, only he who loves us unconditionally and only he who holds everything in his hands can pull that off.

You see, today we live in desperate times that require desperate measures. We live in a culture and a society where we're even given the right and the encouragement to point the fingers at everybody else and anything else when what does 1 John say? We need to point the finger at ourselves and say, "Where have I gone sideways? Where have I sinned?" And then we need to believe, we need to believe that he is faithful, he is just to forgive us if we come clean.