

# A Radical but Biblical View of Authority

*Our Identity in Christ*

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We come to this passage in 1 Peter, and remember the focus in this section of Peter is on how we live as Christians. Peter has divided his letter in a way similar to how we see other New Testament epistles. The first section is more doctrinal, the second section more practical, that is, the first section more theological in character, the second section more ethical. First section more has been we've seen on who we are in Christ, our identity, what Jesus has done for us. The second section is on how should we now live based on who we are. And the key word I mentioned last time, and I want to remind you of it, is the word behavior. The section, first section 1:1 to 2:10, if you divide up 1 Peter this way, 1:1 to 2:10, and then the second section 2:11, chapter 2, verse 11, through chapter 5, verse 14, the end of the book. And so the first section is identity in Christ, what Jesus has done for us, who we are in Christ, the doctrine, theology of that. The second section is more on how we should live in light of that, what difference this should make in our life and a key word that transitions or helps us see the importance of that is the word in verse 12, keep your behavior excellent. Chapter 2, verse 12, he says, keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles. That's a key word throughout the book of 1 Peter, but especially becomes focal in the second half. The idea is behavior is another way of saying your way of life. It's a word Peter uses six times in his epistle. He wants our faith to be exhibited in our life. It's not just salvation, it's not just something that has happened to you that changes your eternal destiny, certainly it is that but it's also much more than that. Salvation is something that is happening now as we grow in our love for Christ, we grow in grace, and it changes us from the inside out and our lives need to be different.

So who you are, how you are to live, that's the focus, and as he turned the corner, he said, this second half, I want to really focus on your behavior, your way of life. As he does that, what has been striking to me is the emphasis that he puts immediately on our relationship to authority. As I've been wrestling with this, it just is more and more profound to me and striking. We've seen it in previous messages. 2:13, he said, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him". Submit yourselves, and that's the key verb, submit yourselves. Be in subjection to the governing authorities, even the emperor, even the governor, even those who are ungodly, be in subjection to them.

Then in 2:18, he says, "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds

favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God." So he says, now servants, be submissive. Slaves, be submissive. Be in subjection to your earthly masters, not only those who are good, but also those who are unreasonable.

And then in chapter 3, after a focus on Christ in the middle of this, he turns in chapter 3, verse 1, and says, "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives," that is, the way of life of their wives, "as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior." Again, same word, your way of life. But the emphasis there, submission, submission, submission, he even emphasizes that again in chapter 3 verse 5 when he reminds us that, "For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands." Fourth time he's used the verb, *hupotasso*, in this section.

So he's turned a corner into how does the gospel make a difference in your life and he hammers, submit, submit, submit, submit. In fact, later, he's going to say in chapter 5, verse 5, that same verb's gonna come up after he talks about elders in the church in verses 1 to 4 of chapter 5. He says, "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders." Chapter 5, verse 5. So the fifth time he uses the verb, fourth different group he tells to be in subjection. He says, be in subjection all of you to the governing authorities. He says, then those of you who are employed, be in subjection to your economic authorities. Then he says, wives, be in subjection to your familial authority, the authority of the husband. Then he says, all of you be in subjection. He speaks of younger men, but he's speaking of the families. When you look at it in context, he's talking about be in subjection, not just to older people, and that's not the idea, be in subjection to the office, those who hold the office of elder.

And as I thought about that, I just find that emphasis stunning. It cuts against the grain of certainly American culture to be told to submit, submit, submit. It cuts against the grain of American evangelicalism; even in the church, it's not something that is emphasized or talked about. In fact, we're a lot more like the world in so many ways and the question is, why this massive emphasis on submission? I wanted to consider this because I think it's so important that we, and what I want to do today is I want to look at this subject, this emphasis of the Apostle Peter. He wants his people to bear up under suffering that is coming. Persecution is coming. We've talked about that. The purpose of his letter, he writes less than or about a year before a major persecution breaks out against the church. And he, of course, doesn't know that in his own mind, but God certainly does and God inspires this letter to be written at this moment in history. And he wants them to know how to bear up, and he says, basically, "I want you to know who you are, you must know who you are, and you must know how you're to live." And when he gets to how you're to live, he says one of the very fundamental things of how you are to live is you must have a different attitude toward all authority. In fact, the title of the message is, "A Radical New Attitude Toward Authority." A Radical New Attitude Toward Authority, and what I want

to do, because the emphasis as I said and demonstrated there just in that walking through the passages here, it's such a strong emphasis of Peter that we really need to hear the message and one of the things that is so important for us to do when we interpret Scripture is to interpret accurately and we need to see a particular passage in the light of the whole of Scripture. And so what I want to do this morning is try to set this attitude, this new attitude of the believer in context of the whole of the teaching of Scripture. So that's what we intend to do this morning, a radical new attitude toward authority.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we come to You this morning as the one true God, the Most High God who reigns and rules over all that is. You've created us for Yourself. We belong to You. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. And yet we come into this world determined to go our own way, to live on our own agenda, to only think about You when it's expedient for us. We come into this world as rebels by nature and how grateful we are that You're a God of mercy and grace who saves those who are in rebellion against You by the blood of Your Son, as we've sung about this morning. You redeemed us back. You bought us back from the slavery to sin, dominion of the kingdom of darkness, and You've made us Your own precious children. But that also entails that we come to the Lordship of Christ. Lord, open our eyes to see the beauty of our salvation and the glory of what You've done for us and the difference it should make in our lives. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

A radical new attitude toward authority. I want us to think about this. I've got three points this morning, and the first point I want us to think about is that salvation, true salvation, is a radical change in the way you see God, in particular, God's authority in your life, and so the first point is a new way of responding to God's authority. A new way of stepping back and looking at the whole of Scripture and its teaching about this issue of authority. Now, I want to remind you, too, that I've spoken about in previous messages that there are exceptions. We don't always submit completely without question to every human authority. We submit to the point that human authority does not call us to violate God's authority. Anytime we're called to violate God's authority, we must submit to God, not to man. We say with Peter, that's what Peter said in Acts 4. We should obey God rather than man. And I've preached on that in previous messages if you'd like to... if you haven't heard the message, I think it was the first message on Christian citizenship, faithful Christian citizenship about five or six weeks ago. But I want us... this idea is just... the drumbeat of authority is so strong here that I think we need to have a biblical understanding of the big concept.

So salvation, though, is a new way of responding to God's authority. You know, Ephesians 2 and verse 2 describes what we were before we were saved. If you know Jesus Christ, this was true of you, and if you don't know Jesus Christ, this is true of you now, that he says, we'll read it in verse 1, Ephesians 2, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins." You were dead in your trespasses and sins. Before you were saved, you were dead spiritually to God in your trespasses and sins, "in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the

air." So you're walking according to the course of this world. You're walking in obedience to the prince of the power of the air, the kingdom of darkness, "of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." We came into this world as sons of disobedience. We were birthed in disobedience. Do you see our relationship to authority when we came into this world? We are against authority from the very beginning. It's in the wiring of sinful humanity. It wasn't in the original wiring, but it became a part of our wiring through the rebellion of Adam and Eve, and so that every child comes into this world ready to disobey. You don't have to teach a child to disobey. It's not like if you have, it's the third child, the first and second have to say, "Let's go ahead and give him some schooling on how to disobey." No, the baby knows how to disobey on his own. He can learn some skills about how to do it effectively from observation, but he has the heart to do it from the beginning. Someone has said that, you know, little babies are vipers in diapers. They're beautiful to them. It's one side of the truth. I mean, they're beautiful in the image of God. What an incredible thing. A beauty, a child. There's so many new babies in our church. How wonderful. What a treasure. And yet, the reality is, it's treasure that is stained by sin and that mark is there and it must be dealt with by the blood of Christ. We all need Jesus.

So he says, you were sons of disobedience. "Among them," verse 3 of Ephesians 2, "we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ." That's the glory of the gospel. God saves sinners like you and me. He takes rebels and he makes them his own dear children.

I want you to think about this, the creation. In fact, turn back to Genesis 1 and just see the story of the Bible. We were made originally to live in complete subjection to God. Genesis 1:26 and 27, the story of the creation of man. Verse 26 of chapter 1, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" God made man to rule. He made man to be a noble, representative of his own glory. He made us in his image that is to reflect and replicate something of who God is and to be representing him in the world. We somehow are like God, truly in our essence. Understanding what all that means, some of it we won't know till we get to heaven, but we have many attributes that God has instilled into humanity. We think, we have a heart, we will, we have affections. And he made us to rule. He gave us a great noble position. Man is over all of the rest of creation, according to God's design. But we are to rule in submission to God. We're like vice regents who rule under the rule of the king.

In fact, right away, after he speaks to, after he creates man, the first thing he does is speaks to him. Verse 28, "God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply.'" God creates man and the first thing he does with man is he speaks to him. That's so profoundly important. That tells you and me that before sin entered the world, that what man needed more than anything else was God to define who man was, why he

was here, what he was to do. Man without sin could not figure it out on his own so God speaks to him and tells him, "This is why you're here. This is what you're to do."

In fact, it's emphasized even more when you read on into chapter 2; chapter 2 is basically a slow-motion account, relatively speaking, of the sixth day of creation, that's how it fits together with chapter 1. He goes back and focuses in on the creation of man and zooms in, as it were, and he tells man in chapter 2, verse 16, "The LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.'" God speaks to man and he gives man a command. Man is the ruler over creation under submission to God, his King. This is the way we were made to live. We were made to reach our ultimate dignity and nobility and beauty and glory in submission to God. Every human being was made to live a life of submission to God and obedience to God and you find your ultimate fulfillment, your ultimate dignity, your ultimate, you know, expression of all that God made you to be as you submit to God.

The problem, of course, was that man rebels. Chapter 3, verse 6, "the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate." They did what God said don't do and this was cosmic treason, this was rebellion on a grand universal scale, and this wrecked everything. Most of all, it wrecked man. In this they listened to the lie, remember the serpent had said just a few verses before, verse 5, "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." He said, "If you eat from the fruit of this tree, you're not gonna die. In fact, you will be like God."

And so the essence of sin is to want to be like God, to want to be our own God, to want to throw off the reign and rule of God and be the master of your fate, the captain of your soul. That's the essence of sin. That's the wiring, the hard wiring that every baby comes into this world with, except one, Jesus, who was born of a virgin for that reason. Every other child, the sin nature passed down. We want to live our own way, we want to go our own way, we would like all the blessings of God, but we do not want to submit to God but God was determined to save sinners, rebels, traitors like you and me and he sent Jesus into the world to bring about that salvation.

Now, when Jesus comes, it's instructive. You know, we miss these kinds of things a lot because there's so much to our salvation. Scripture has so much to say about it. But do you remember what his message was? What was the message of John the Baptist? What was the message of Jesus? The first preaching of John the Baptist is summarized in a very short sentence, one imperative and then a statement that follows it, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." You see that in John's preaching? I'm looking now at Matthew 3:2. You make a note of that? Matthew 3:2. John came "preaching in the wilderness of Judea saying..." He certainly preached longer than this. He didn't just say this one sentence. He had long sermons. But the sermon could be summarized in that sentence, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." God's kingdom is here. God's reign and rule has come back.

And then Jesus... turn over to Matthew 4 if you're in Matthew 4:12, "Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee," this is right after his temptation. He heard that John had been taken into custody, he withdrew into Galilee, "and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali." Skip on down to verse 17, "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" The essence of his sermon, the essence of his preaching is repent, that is, turn away from the way you're going, turn back from sin to God because God's kingdom is here. God's reign and rule have come very close to you. That's the essence. You see, even the gospel is presented in the terms of authority.

The Christian life then begins when someone submits to King Jesus. That is salvation. You hear the good news of the gospel, that is that Jesus has come into the world to save sinners, his message is, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," the kingdom of heaven is coming, and how does he bring the kingdom of heaven? He lives a perfect sinless life. He offers himself as an atoning sacrifice. His blood redeems, buys back out of darkness everyone who trusts in him. He's resurrected to prove that he is God's King. And his Spirit is given to everyone who believes in him. He regenerates the heart. You must be born again. You have to have a new birth. You've got to go out of being dead to sin. You've got to become alive to God and you need to come to see that you need God's King.

In fact, the whole Old Testament. I want to do this sometime because it's so beautiful to walk through the books of the Old Testament and see the big picture of what God is doing in Genesis and Exodus and Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy but it would take an hour or so to do it well and I'm just going to summarize it quickly. Essentially what you're seeing is that the way God deals with the nation of Israel is he's teaching us how to come back to him. He's teaching us how to quit being rebels and come back into submission to his loving kingship, to come again to what it means to be human. When people throw off God's reign and run away from his reign, they become less and less human and the Old Testament is basically teaching us, even in the history, in the way God has ordained, all of the historical events that happen throughout history are teaching us. Why did God allow his people to be taken as slaves into Egypt? "Abraham, I'll make you a great nation. Isaac, you're in covenant with me. Jacob, you're in covenant with me. I'm giving you 12 sons." Why did God let him go into Egypt and be slaves? Think about that. They didn't do anything wrong. They really didn't. God told him to go to Egypt. In fact, he sent Joseph ahead to prepare the way. Why did God let him be slaves? So that he could deliver them through the blood of the Passover lamb and teach us that to be saved, you have to be delivered out of the bondage of darkness. You see, it's a picture. 1 Corinthians 10 says this, that these things happen as examples to us. Hebrews 3, 4, 11 show you the typology idea that salvation is typologically pictured in the Old Testament with the salvation of Israel being taken out of Egypt and being planted in Canaan, which is a type of heaven. They're taken out of the reign and rule of darkness, and they're planted in Canaan by God. They can't do it. How do they get into the Promised Land? Remember, he tells them to go in. What are they supposed to do? How are they supposed

to get into the Promised Land? I love this. In Numbers 14, what does God do? Before that in Numbers 13, before they go in, do you remember they sent spies in? Do you remember whose idea it was to send spies in? You think about it as kind of a tactical error in a way. You're reading the text and you're, "Oh no, they're sending spies in," because you know what's going to happen. But God told them to send spies into the land. Why? Because he wanted them to see, even though they overestimated how difficult it was, when you read what they said about it, even though they overestimated, he wanted them to see that it was impossible for them, people who had been delivered out of Egypt, never had any training in warfare, to go into this land and take these walled cities and to defeat these large people. He wanted them to see that they could only do it by the power of God, and they must take the land by trusting his promise. How do you enter into Canaan? How do you enter into salvation? You look not at what you can do, you trust in what only God can do. And so he's teaching us even through that. Now what happened? They didn't believe. They wouldn't trust him and so they turned back and they wandered in the wilderness and never entered the Promised Land. The author of Hebrews says in chapter 3 and in chapter 4 of his book, he says, "Listen, today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness where your fathers tried Me by testing Me and saw My works for 40 years, and I swore in My wrath they shall not enter My rest."

So this is being taught. What we need, how do you get into Canaan? Well, you've got to be delivered from darkness. But then, how do you get into Canaan? You get into Canaan by faith. And once you're in Canaan, how do you take the land? Well, Joshua, and Judges, and Judges particularly, how do you live in God's presence? The refrain of the book of Judges, especially from chapter 17 to 21, but it's the message of the whole book, but especially 17 to 21. Chapter 17 verse 1 says this, or 17 verse 6, I think it is actually, says, "In those days there was no king. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." Chapter 18, verse 1, it says it again. I think chapter 19, verse 1. Chapter 21, verse 25, same thing, "In those days there was no king. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." And when you read those chapters, especially those chapters, it is a picture of debauchery. It is a horrible just description of what happens when people do what is right in their own eyes. And this is God's people. It reads, I mean, there's one place in there that reads just like the story of Sodom and that's the point. That's the tribe of Benjamin. Jews are acting like the Sodomites. Why? Why? Because there is no king. God is teaching them, "If you're going to live in My land, in My presence, you must submit to My king." You cannot be your own authority and dwell in the presence of God. You must submit to his king. Psalm 2, "I've installed My king upon Zion. Kiss the Son lest He become angry." The whole point of David and Saul. The people wanted a king for the wrong reasons. They wanted a king like the nations and so God gave them a king after their own desires in Saul and that failure. But then God gave them a king after his own heart and the message is, "If you're going to dwell in My land, you need a king like David." And then David's going to build the temple. He's going to establish the presence of God permanently in the land, but he's not able to. No, a son of David must come and build the temple. Of course, that's Solomon, but it's not really Solomon.

All of this, a kingdom, a king like David, but greater than David, a king like Solomon, but greater than Solomon. You need to submit to King Jesus. That's the message. That's salvation. And so salvation always entails a trusting of faith that puts all of your hope in God and what he can do, not what you can do. Nothing in your hands you bring, only to the cross you cling. You trust in him by faith, but there is an element in that trust of surrender and if there's no surrender, there's no salvation. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." To come to Jesus is to come to him as King. That's why Romans 10:9 and 10 says that unless you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, I mean if you do that you will be saved, if you confess Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. It's not just believing, it's confessing and confessing doesn't mean you just say it, it means from your heart, you're saying, "Jesus is my Lord, my Master, my God, and my King."

Now think about that. So the Christian life begins with a radical new way of responding to God's authority. Everything changes. There's been a new birth that happens when someone repents and believes. It's evidence of God's saving work in their life. Like Peter said in 1 Peter 1, you've been born again to a living hope. Now the Christian life then continues as a continued submission to his kingship, to bring more and more of every area of life into submission to King Jesus. How do you do that? Through his word. The same way that he gave his word to Adam and Eve in the garden, he was telling us, "This is the pattern. I rule you through My word." The voice of God in the Scriptures.

We read the word and so we've seen that. In fact, turn back to 1 Peter. The Christian life, he told us in chapter 2, verse 1, or verse 2, he said, "like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." We talked about that phrase "pure milk of the word," and it's *logikos* is the adjective to describe milk, and he's getting at something *logikos*. It's the word for "word," but it also is a word which means "logical; of the mind." He's saying that what we are to do is the Christian life is a call to continually change our thinking and to bring it into conformity to our King's thinking. That's how we submit to his kingship. We change the way we think to be what he thinks. We sang about that in that last song. We're looking for the mind of Christ. That's the Christian life.

Romans 12:2 says, "Don't be conformed to this world, be transformed." How? "By the renewing of your mind." And the Christian life, part of what that is, you're changing your thinking, but you're not merely changing your thinking just in your head, you're changing it in your life. So this is why the call to faith is a call to follow Jesus. It's a call to become like Jesus. This slave becomes like his Master. The disciple becomes like his teacher. Jesus says, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself." Self is not to rule, Jesus is to rule. "Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me daily. Take up your cross daily and follow Me."

So it's a new way of responding to God's authority. It's a radically, different way of looking at God. Now what that does, this moves to the second point, it's a new way of seeing earthly authority. A new way of responding to God's authority, point 1, leads to a new way of seeing all earthly authority. That's what we're seeing in 1 Peter. We have a



new way of seeing what we saw before. Everything has changed. Now, that happened at new birth, but the Scripture keeps doing it and what happens is, we've been conditioned by the world to think a certain way, and to act a certain way, and to have certain attitudes, and God's word is supposed to be transforming us, and that's what it means to submit to the King, to be continually transformed in the way we think.

And so, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority." Submit to the emperor. That's a new way of thinking. I mean, it's counterintuitive at first. I mean, we've come out of darkness, why would we want to be in submission to that wicked guy Nero? But God says, "Wait, you've got to see. You need to see what things as they truly are, not how they appear to be." So that's why I said a new way of seeing authority with our spiritual vision now. That's why he commands again and again, "Servants, be submissive. Wives, be submissive. Young men, be submissive."

Look with me at Romans 13, a verse we looked at a few weeks ago, but this is really stunning in its effect and power. Romans 13:1 says, Paul says much the same thing that Peter said, but he says it with even more clarity, "Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities." And this is what Paul helps us to see, "For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." Every authority in your life, in my life, is there because God put it there. We see that and the world doesn't see that. We're supposed to see that. We forget that. It's hard to remember that when you look at the craziness that happens so often in a fallen world.

But look at verse 2, "Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God." To resist authority is to oppose God. Again, I mentioned earlier there are some exceptions. When God's authority is attempted to be breached or broached by worldly authorities, we obey God rather than man. But he's saying this in the context in which he says this is just as challenging as it is for us as Americans in our day. Think about it. We grew up, those of us, those of you who've been here long, you know, the Western mindset of individualism in America kind of had a spirit of, you know, pioneer, rugged individualism. You know, each man makes his way, each person makes their way. And the way we see government, just keep it off, don't tread on me. But that's not exactly what God says is true. We're to see things differently than that. I'm not saying, I'm not trying to argue for a kingship or anything like that. I'm just saying that we're to see authority the way God says we're to see it and he says it's instituted by God. In fact, in that same passage in Romans 13, he twice speaks of those who are in authority as ministers of God in verse 4, twice. He is the minister of God. In verse 6, they are the servants of God. Could not be clearer. "Even godless people, is that true?" Well, Paul writes and Peter writes during the reign of Nero. Nero was an incredibly wicked man. For them to submit to him and to have an attitude of respect and honor toward him was every bit as hard as anything that we can claim today with all the authorities in our lives. But they were able to do it because they saw God's hand.

I want to show you this in the Old Testament. Turn with me to Daniel. This is actually one of the most helpful books that's showing how Christians are to live amidst the

darkness of this world. Daniel was taken captive in Nebuchadnezzar's first incursion into Judea and Jerusalem in 605 BC, probably a teenage boy, maybe 14, 15 years old, maybe 13, we don't know. But he lives the 70 years of the Babylonian captivity in captivity in Babylon. He probably, because he was made a part of the Babylonian court, he probably was emasculated to make him a eunuch because that was the common practice in royal courts. He went through some incredibly traumatic treatment. He was enrolled in the school of the Babylonian wise men. He had to study their stuff. He was supposed to eat their food, chapter 1, he finds a creative way around that. Chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream, his A-list wise men, he didn't call Daniel and his friends in, but his A-list wise men, the guys that have already graduated from school, can't interpret the dream. Nebuchadnezzar's so enraged and he's such, this is the kind of man Nebuchadnezzar was, he decides he's going to kill all of his wise men, every one of them. Now he asked them to not only interpret the dream, but to tell him the dream. He's a smart guy, even though he was a mean guy. He's like, "I know they'll just come up with something creative. I want to know for sure they're hearing something from the gods." And so he tells him that and he's going to kill not only the A-list guys that he talked to, but the B team as well. Daniel and his friends are set up for execution. Daniel pleads for time and says, "Ask the king to give me some time." He and his friends pray. The Lord gives him the dream and the vision. He goes in Nebuchadnezzar and tells him the dream he had, and the dream was about four different kingdoms that would come. It's a statue, gold, silver, bronze, iron. Four kingdoms. He speaks respectfully to the king. "You, O King, are the head of gold. The God of heaven has given you this dream to show you what will happen." Nebuchadnezzar's moved. He's like, "Nobody speak a word against Daniel's God." It seems like maybe he's been saved, possibly. But you find out quickly, no, that's not the case; chapter 3 makes that emphatically clear. He wasn't saved then. He wants everybody to worship his image now.

Anyway, chapter 4, let's go to chapter 4, and God gives Nebuchadnezzar another dream. This time, he's already grown fond of Daniel. He knows Daniel can interpret when nobody else can. So he calls Daniel to him. Daniel's name, Babylonian name is Belteshazzar. He calls him to him, tells him the dream, and then in the dream, and now what you have here is chapter 4 of Daniel is actually a letter, think about this, chapter 4 of Daniel is a letter written by King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, to all of his subjects. It's included in Scripture. These are Nebuchadnezzar's words. He tells you what happened. He had this dream and God was telling him in the dream as Daniel tells him that, "Listen, God is upset with you because of your pride. You think that you've done all this by your own power and majesty but God is going to let you know that if you don't repent that He has put you in this place. He is the one who placed you in authority. God himself placed you there, Nebuchadnezzar."

So he urges him to repent, "Stop, turn back to the Lord, because this is going to come upon you." What happens is, it does come upon him. For seven years, the king becomes like an animal. He has some kind of psychological breakdown. He runs out of the palace and he lives out in the wilderness, kind of like a wolfman looking thing. I mean, not a wolfman, but his hair, he doesn't comb his hair. Now, I think the way this happened is Babylonians had a view like the Persians that the king is divine. Nebuchadnezzar had

been so powerful and successful that nobody was gonna go mess with Nebuchadnezzar, even though he's acting crazy. Seven years he spends time like that, the Scripture says his fingers become like claws, his hair's all matted, looks like feathers. Can you imagine how nasty that guy looked? And then he reports, that God opens his heart and he looks up to heaven and acknowledge that it is heaven that rules and his sanity returns to him, his splendor and majesty. As soon as his sanity comes, he goes in, I'm sure the first thing he probably did was take a bath, and he gets cleaned up and they put him back on the throne and he's back and has more splendor than he ever had before and he writes this letter to say, "God is able to humble people even like me."

And there's a refrain three times in the passage. It says, in order, this is verse 17 of chapter 4, in order, "This sentence is by the decree of the angelic watchers And the decision is a command of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes And sets over it the lowliest of men." That phrase, "That the Most High," that is God, the God of Israel, the most high, El Elyon, "is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whom He wishes." Why is Nebuchadnezzar king? Because God bestows it on whom he wishes. It's repeated in verse 25, "until you recognize that the Most High," the end of verse 25, the very last part, "until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes." And then again, in verse 32, "seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes." Three times you hear that refrain, "The Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes." Therefore, you and I see things differently than we did before. The president, the governor, the king is there because God placed him there. It's not accidental. Whatever the means, humanly speaking, God placed him there. Doesn't mean there may not be injustice in certain things, of course there is, but God placed him there.

And of course he does that as an act of judgment. In fact, it's interesting, Isaiah 3, if you just turn from Daniel past Ezekiel and Jeremiah to Isaiah 3, the Lord is doing what he's doing with purpose and intentionality at all times. And we know that as Christians, we should know that. He's speaking about what he's going to do to Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, before the Babylonian captivity. This is well before. Isaiah writes around 700 BC. The captivity happens a hundred years after that. He says, "I will make," this is Isaiah 3:4, this is God speaking, "I will make mere lads their princes, And capricious children will rule over them, And the people will be oppressed, Each one by another, and each one by his neighbor; The youth will storm against the elder." When that happens, God's saying, "When this happens, know that I have done it." It's an act of judgment, God's judgment.

So the Christian, when we see crazy things happening, we have a lens into what's going on behind the scenes and if you believe that God is doing it, it will radically affect the attitude with which you respond. We will say like the psalmist said in Psalm 118:23, after he says in verse 22, he speaks about the nation, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone." The psalmist is prophesying that the builders, that is the leaders of the temple and the teachers of the law will reject the stone, Jesus. "The

stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone." That is, God has ordained that the builders will reject the stone, Jesus. And the psalmist says, "This is the LORD'S doing; It is marvelous in our eyes." God is doing it. So when it happens, we know God has done it. This is behind the theology of Acts 4 when they say, listen, they quote Psalm 2, why do the people rage and all of that, and they say that Pontius Pilate and Herod and the chief priests and rulers "conspired together against Your Son and against Your anointed one to do exactly what Your hand had predetermined." God is sovereign.

Now knowing that changes everything. It means that we have a new way, thirdly, a new way of relating to authority. If we see authority now, so that means the government, that means your boss, that means your husband, that means your church leaders, you're where you are because God has placed you under them because God has placed them in the place he placed them. Now, knowing that, the new way of seeing authority, point 2, should lead, number 3, to a new way of relating to our authorities. A new way of relating to our authorities.

You know, when you look at Daniel, and I encourage you to read Daniel 4. You read the whole book. I mean, it's just incredible. It's amazing, the book of Daniel. And I think chapter 4 is really the center of the book. Even though there's 12 chapters, I can explain that to you offline another time if you want to ask me about that. Or go back and listen to sermons I preached about 15 years ago. But Daniel is in this incredibly difficult position and yet he speaks in honor and love and compassion to Nebuchadnezzar when he speaks to him and to Darius as well. And even when he has a harsh word for Belshazzar, he doesn't do it disrespectfully of his position. He speaks truth but you find him saying things like in Daniel 4, when he interprets that dream, when the king tells him the dream, Daniel's response is, "O King, were that this were true of your enemies and not you." That's not the attitude of a Christian who resents his king. That's the attitude of a follower of God who knows that God has placed this man in this position, and he's placed me here to show him honor and because I fear God, I honor the king.

And so Daniel speaks that way about him in chapter 4, earnestly, and he pleads with him, "You need to repent, King. Please repent. Maybe God will show mercy to you." And then in chapter 6, the story of the lion's den. Daniel's now an old man, probably in his 80s. Darius is tricked into making an order that nobody should pray except through Darius to their God. And Daniel keeps right on praying like he always did, opening his window, praying toward Jerusalem, because the presence of God is in Jerusalem. At that point in history, that's the way God has revealed himself. He prays that way. And so he's turned in, and the king had signed a decree that whoever did that would be thrown into the lion's den, these malicious, conniving guys that were in the advisor group, jealous of Daniel. But Daniel keeps right on trusting God. He disobeys the king to obey God. The king is grieved that he has to put him in a lion's den. Daniel's character in response to the king, this new king now that's moved in, was so great that the king was hating the fact that he had to do what he decreed. In fact, he spent all night trying to figure out a way to get around it. But his advisors say, "No, you've got to do it." Once a Persian king has made a decree, it cannot be altered because, after all, they're supposed to be God.

So the king says to him, "Daniel, may the God whom you serve continually protect you from the lions." He puts him in there. The king stays up all night, rushes out in the morning, and he calls out before he even gets to where he can see down into the hole where Daniel is, "Daniel, has your God delivered you?" And do you know what Daniel says? "O King, live forever. You just did this to me because you were foolish in your arrogance, you did this, but you are the King God has placed in authority. O King live forever." Now I think he's also, that's a gospel message in that, isn't it? "King live forever by submitting to my God." But do you see the attitude? That should be yours and my attitude towards Joe Biden. That should be our attitude toward any governor, any police officer we encounter. That should be our attitude.

Now, what do you think about people like that? What do you say about people in authority? What comes out of your mouth? What do you feel about them? You and I feel far short of that, and we say things we ought not say because we are not dwelling in the word of God and thinking like God's called us to think. Yes, we can call evil evil, absolutely. We should, and we must. But we should have a heart of compassion and respect, and we should acknowledge that the Lord has done what he's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes. He's giving man what he deserves. He's giving America what it's asked for. Isn't it something to see God's faithfulness? His wrath being revealed is glorious and wonderful. But the message is everybody turn back to the Lord. What you do when God's coming after you in his wrath is you don't run away from him. You turn and run to him with everything that you can and ask him for grace to repent.

This is to be our attitude toward our boss? Is that the way you think about your boss? Is that the way you speak about your boss? Is that how you feel or do you allow your mind to think untoward thoughts and to fantasize about just telling him what for? Christian wives, do you think about this about your husband? Your husband who may or may not believe, as he says in 1 Peter 3:1, even to those who are disobedient, those who are unbelieving and disobedient, do you seek to honor them? Do you seek to have them succeed and be blessed? And the same thing with church authority. Do you quickly condemn your church authorities? Do you look down upon them? Do you second guess them? How do you speak about them? How do you feel about them? It doesn't mean that you don't speak the truth in love. Of course you do. But it's from an attitude of respect. And if you and I can cultivate a heart and think about this, God has made this so clear throughout his word, we must be different. We're called to a radical new attitude to authority and if we live like that, man, it will stand out. We will be shining like lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation like Paul says in Philippians 2:13. He says, "Listen, stop your grumbling and complaining. Do all things without grumbling and complaining so that you may be blameless and pure, children who stand out like lights in the midst of a dark universe, crooked and perverse generation." How quick are we to grumble and complain about the authorities in our lives? We should be trusting God continually and trusting ourselves to God. "Lord, You are in control." Pray for those in authority over you. Bless them. Yes, speak the truth in love. This is the Lord's calling on our lives. The gospel is supposed to make a difference and supposed to transform us and this is one of the ways we need to be transformed.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how we marvel at Your word, the beauty and sufficiency, perfection of Your word. We ask You, Lord, we come knowing that we as we come to Your word, we find that it cuts like a two-edged sword. It digs into our hearts and it finds those things which are not right and lays them open. We want to repent, Lord, of our sinful attitudes of disrespect and dishonor, grumbling and complaining, even hatred. Lord, You said we're to be children of our Father who's in heaven, that means we're to love our enemies and to pray for those who spitefully use us because You show Your love to all men by causing it to rain on the just and the unjust. Make us like You. Lord, You made us to be Your image bearer. Make us like You in the way we relate to even those who act as our enemies. Make us humble and meek and make us shine with the glory of Jesus. We pray in His name. Amen.*