

The Christian's Warfare Part 3: From an External Preoccupation to Gospel Priorities

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The Christian's Warfare

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 10, the 10th chapter of 2 Corinthians, continuing a series of messages on this really a jumping off point for each week as we're really looking at biblical doctrines rather than just expositing this passage, but it is the basis, forms the basis of what we're trying to do each Sunday.

Before we go further into the message, I just want to mention the blessing of the wedding that happened yesterday. Savanna Fruhwirth became Mrs. Taylor Baldwin at Providence and the church was beautiful, the ceremony was really Christ-exalting and God-glorifying. Her uncle Rob performed the ceremony and he and his wife were in town for the weekend. It was a wonderful time. What a beautiful reality and this came out, the glory of the Gospel was just really clear in the message in how marriage is essentially the purpose of marriage is to be a picture of what God was going to do to save sinners in Christ. That's the purpose of marriage, the ultimate purpose of marriage. You see that when you really read carefully Ephesians 5:22-33, "This mystery is great but I'm telling you I'm speaking with reference to Christ and the church," that marriage is a picture of that. And it was a beautiful opportunity, we praise God for it and be praying for this new couple as they begin their life together. Sadly, they're not going to be worshiping with us. He lives in Augusta and she mistakenly agreed to live with him. Okay, well, anyway, so praise the Lord for that and pray for them as they're looking for a new church home and everything too.

This morning the title of the message that we've been building on each week, the title of this series has been "The Christian's Warfare," and we're looking at this passage which speaks about spiritual warfare and what true spiritual warfare is and that is essentially doctrinal assaults upon our wrong thinking; that we try to repent of things that we have believed, things, opinions that we hold that are wrong, and we try to bring them into conformity to the word of God and this is what this passage is describing. So we've said the Christian's warfare is to try to do that and we brought this subject up after we had spent some time in Nehemiah and then in Ephesians 6, from that talking about spiritual warfare, and then really trying to address some of the contemporary issues that we are facing in America today, that we as Christians, as people who live in this day and age, in this place, are facing.

So the Christian's warfare, that's the title of the message. This morning, we're going to again have a subtitle. The first week, remember we talked about "The Christian's Warfare: From Pride to Humility," and then second week, last week, we talked about "From Prejudice to Sound Judgment," today "From an External Preoccupation to Gospel Priorities." From an external preoccupation to Gospel priorities. These contemporary issues that face us, our challenge is to think biblically, to think God's thoughts after him, and we basically understood and tried to understand each week how our thinking is messed up because we are sinners. All of us are darkened in our understanding because of the fall. We don't think as logically and rightly as we should. Our affections have been distorted, disordered. It's particularly the problem that we're looking at today, an inordinate affection or concern with the systems of this world, and this can happen to all of us. No matter where you are on the political spectrum, as a Christian you are tempted to have an inordinate concern about the physical governmental systems. It's not that they're unimportant. Please understand they are important, they have their place, and they have great impact. They're not just important, they're impactful issues but if you want to think God's thoughts after him, you're gonna be challenged as we look at this today to see that we tend to put way too much stock in the external systems in a fallen world. It's not that God doesn't care about these things, it's that he is concerned about what matters most with the appropriate urgency that that entails.

And I think you can think about this analogy. I think this is something that I think will help us as we think about, as we look at how the Lord thinks about the systems and the government, the structures, and how we should, it's to think about a doctor in an emergency room. Say there's been an accident, you know, some significant accident, a number of people have been injured and so they're rushed into the emergency room and the doctors on call, the first job of the doctors on call is to do kind of a triage and to evaluate the need of each person that comes in, and they're looking for the most critical situations because they need to be dealt with first. And so you may be in great agony because you have a complex fracture which can be so incredibly painful, I haven't had one but you knowing people who have and seeing it happen, it's just agonizing. But a good doctor is not going to deal with a complex fracture before he stops the bleeding, the hemorrhaging of another patient. He's not going to deal with a complex fracture until he deals with the person who's in cardiac arrest. And if a person has a compound fracture but they also are hemorrhaging themselves, he's not going to set the bone, as important as that is, as urgent as that is, as impactful as that will be, until he first deals with the life and death issue at hand. And what I want to suggest to you is that God, when you look carefully at the ministry of Jesus, the priorities of Jesus, and you look carefully at the teaching of the Bible in the Old Testament, what we're going to see is that the Lord is a wise emergency room doctor, in a sense. He's always dealing with the most important things with the greatest sense of urgency. He's going to deal with everything in its time but you and I, because we're fallen, we tend to think that less important things are more important than they are. It's not that they're unimportant but we tend to have inordinate affections, the things that we value, we value the wrong things, we value some things, well, we value all things basically in wrong ways. We love some things we should hate. We hate some things we should love. We love things we should love too much. We value

things more than we should. We value things less than we should. So if we're gonna think biblically, we're gonna be challenged to move from an external preoccupation to Gospel priorities, to think God's thoughts after him.

2 Corinthians 10:1-6 is our passage. Here the Apostle Paul is defending his apostolic ministry to the church at Corinth. He is confronting their need to listen to the truth. They have been misled by false teachers. False teachers have infiltrated the church and they are in danger, they are in spiritual danger in the same way that false teaching infiltrates the church in every generation. It's always a threat and it's a threat today. Worldly thinking is always pressing itself into the church and so the Apostle Paul is dealing with this and how we deal with this when he says in chapter 10, verses 1 to 6,

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

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we are mindful of our great need of grace. Lord, though our warfare is spiritual and divinely powerful weapons that we have, we acknowledge that in ourselves we have nothing, and so we ask that You by Your Spirit would take Your word, open our hearts, apply it to our hearts, give us understanding, convict us, bring about more repentance, bring about truer and deeper faith in Jesus Christ. And Lord, lead us in paths of righteousness for Your name's sake. Amen.

So the Christian's warfare from external, an external preoccupation to Gospel priorities. Paul here is talking in this 10th chapter of 2 Corinthians about the devastating impact of false beliefs and of our tendency to be controlled, to have our lives dominated by lies. He uses vivid military imagery, that we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. Verse 4, the weapons of our warfare divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We're destroying every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. We're taking every thought captive. He piles these military images upon one another to say that this is warfare. This is a spiritual war.

And these mental fortresses, the word picture that he's painting is that the battlefield is the Christian's mind, and in the mind there are mental fortresses that have been erected. These are structures of thought, fundamental beliefs, ideas, even ideals that have been formulated in the mind and these are ungodly thought processes that are like castles on

the open plain. As an advancing army tries to take territory, a fortress is a great barrier to the advance of that army. A castle, you know, filled with soldiers. They're able to at any time send those soldiers out against that army and then retreat back to the safety of the castle so that a castle can control a large area of territory. And Paul as he writes, is writing to the Corinthians who the city of Corinth there in Southern Greece had one of the most famous fortresses in the ancient world, the Acropolis at Corinth. It stood high above the city of Corinth and so it was a lofty thing raised up against invading armies, and so he captures that even because Paul had spent 18 months there himself ministering, probably many times looked up and saw that mountain and that fortress, and he knows that they see that as a daily part of their lives and he says, "This is what we're up against. This is serious warfare but the good news is we have divinely powerful weapons that are able to smash and destroy these fortresses, that are able to tear down and collapse these walls."

And one of the thought structures that I think we need to understand today is that we tend to have a preoccupation with external things. We tend to think the problem is out there in an inordinate way. The problem is out there. Let's be clear. I mean, there is a problem out there. There's lots of problems out there. In fact, every system of man is by definition corrupt because every system of man has been implemented by sinners and is still being run by sinners, and so every system is corrupt. All systems, you can say, are evil. Now all systems are not equally evil, some are much more corrupt than others, but the problem that we have is we tend to want to focus on the problem out there and what we're gonna see as we look at the ministry of Jesus and we look at the history of how God dealt with his people, we're going to see that God's preoccupation is not with the external forms, it's with the internal reality of the human heart.

And it is really striking to look at this, and I say this, it's challenging. This study has challenged me in my own thinking with how I think about these issues because I thought that I understand the issues in here but we are continually pressed by the world, by our own sinful flesh, by the lies of Satan who is basically governing the world system, the thought forms and values of the world, those things are pressing in upon us at all times. That's why Paul says in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The world is exerting an external pressure to bring us into conformity. It is a continual pressure. It's there all the time. And so we must, if we are not being transformed we are by definition being conformed, and so one of the things that we are being conformed with is this idea that the problem is out there. Even those who believe the problem's not mostly out there still believe too much that the problem's out there, or that the solution is out there.

Something we see in a number of ways and these are these speculations we have developed. We're destroying, Paul says we're destroying speculations. I'm reading the New American Standard Bible. We're destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. The word translated "speculation" is the word "logismos." It comes from the verb "logizomai" which means "to reason; to calculate; to count; to infer; to consider and come to a conclusion." And so these are considered, thought out conclusions that are in our minds that are in reality erected against the

knowledge of God and we have these ideas that the problems out there, if we could just fix the things that are going on and we see that in all of our hearts. There we probably see it profoundly in many ways is when you think about the issues particularly, I mean, there's so many ways. We could talk about the coronavirus and if we wanted to get into some really heated discussion, we could start talking about our opinions about whether you should be masking or not, whether you should be social distancing or not, you know, how serious is the threat, how serious is it not. I mean, some of you would say that the problem is that if we would just, everybody would just really do what they're telling us to do, we could get past this pandemic. The pandemic's dangerous. Others of you would say that the greatest danger is government overreach and telling you what to do. Who's right? I don't know for sure, and you don't either. You think you do and you think you do more than in an unreasonable way, just like I do because we're proud. We tend to value our opinion and then, as we said last time, we're prejudiced, we tend to judge before we have all the facts and the fact is, the true fact is none of us has all the facts about the coronavirus and the fact is that none of the people who act so certain about it speaking on tv and whichever experts you're listening to has all the facts either. Only God has all the facts. It doesn't mean that you just are in a hopeless sea of subjectivity but it means that you think carefully about these things.

When it comes to the issue of racial strife, some people are very concerned about the ongoing effects of racism and believe it's a huge problem today, that police brutality is significant, real, imminent threat, and there are others who believe that it's not that big a problem, that we have made more progress. These are emotional issues, these are important issues and, in one sense, both sides actually are tempted to believe the system is more important than it is. For those who are really on one side of that issue, that believe racism is not just a problem in human hearts but it's systemic racism or structural racism or institutional racism, that it's baked into the system in such a way that it, disparate outcomes are impossible to avoid. This would be the view of Derrick Johnson, the Director of NAACP, defines systemic racism as essentially that idea that the differences in the system are so great that there will be an inability for just outcomes when it comes to wealth, employment, housing, education, politics, criminal justice; that these systems are baked into the system and the system needs to be overhauled, that we need to move to a more socialistic system. That's one view that is out there. Others would say, no, the system though the American system has its flaws, it is still the best system that we could have in a fallen world, that socialism is not better than capitalism. And so the issue would be, "Hey, we've got..." And so some would be thinking we need to see structural change. Others would be thinking we've got to keep the system the way it is.

And you can think about how much time you spend thinking about these things no matter where you are. How much time do you spend reflecting and reading on the internet, and I think what we're gonna see is that we are, it is likely that we are spending a disproportionate or inordinate amount of time, spending way too much time thinking, way too much time, way too much energy, expending way too much emotion on something that is important but that is not ultimate, and we're spending more energy and more time and more thought on it than it should be given in a godly mindset. It doesn't mean that it's not important. It doesn't mean that it's not important to vote. It doesn't mean

that these issues aren't important and impactful. They are and it is good to have healthy discussion of these things.

We've been talking about, one of the things that we needed to do last week is that we tend to prejudge so we all tend to think we already have enough facts to know how we feel about something and we don't continue in getting information. I mentioned that confirmation bias that people describe where you ignore data that contradicts your position and you accept data that reaffirms your position. This is part of the bias of fallen man. This is why we need one another as iron sharpens iron to keep talking and understanding one another and leading each other toward the truth. It doesn't mean that we all have equally valid positions. I'm not saying that. No, the issue is what is true? But one thing we know is that we're not able by ourselves to come to truth, but even then what's the bigger problem we're looking at today is not that we just need more facts, we just need, we need a better perspective. We need to have God's perspective. We need to think God's thoughts after him.

So in thinking about how much time we devote to these things, what I want us to do is look at and, again, make it very clear, I've said these things are important, they're not unimportant, there is a place for discussion, there's a place for, you know, interchange of thoughts, there's a place for talking about elections and the consequences of elections, absolutely. And we will talk a little bit more, Lord willing, I plan to talk about the role of government and what God says about that because we want to think biblically about what government is supposed to be and do. That's probably gonna be next Sunday, but today what I want us to look at is God's basic way of thinking about these things so that if we can get this right, it will help us in so many ways to approach everything that we need to look at.

Okay, what I want to do is I'm gonna use four points but the fourth point's gonna be by far the longest point, so I'm just telling you upfront if you're like spacing out on your page, you want to save a lot at the bottom. It's like, it's really like about, well, anyway, just save a lot of space at the back. And we're going to use the same four major points we've used before which are design, condition, environment and resources. So the first point is design, and just we're trying to take all that Scripture says from the beginning, Genesis through Revelation, and see how God would have us think about these things, and so what we've been looking at each week, we've talked about this a number of times, is that God designed us as human beings who place great value on us, Genesis 1 and 2, and our value is that we are to be worshipers of him, though, that our true value comes in being the image-bearers, bearing his image starts with loving and submitting to him and worshiping him, and God gave man this exalted place underneath him as co-regent, a reigning and ruling over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, and all of the things that creep upon the earth in Genesis 1:26-28. We see that and God made man like him, the Scripture says. In his likeness. In his image. He made us to think in a way that no other creature thinks. He made us to feel. He made us to have a mind and affections and a will, if you think of it three ways. He made us to think, to feel, and to choose. Three verbs and then you can put beside that: think, mind, feel affections, choose will.

So he designed us that way and so we are to look at things, and remember we talked about last week, we're to judge. He made us to judge. That's part of what it means. He made us to judge with all the facts, to gain all the information we can, to start with his word. But our condition, the second point, our condition is that we are fallen. Genesis 3 makes this clear, shows what happened when sin entered the world, when man rebelled against God, and we see as we read through the rest of Scripture that the mind of man is darkened, that now we don't think God's thoughts after him. We don't reason the way we ought to reason. We haven't lost all semblance of reason, no, we certainly still bear the image of God and so man can figure out some wonderful things, but man cannot know ultimate truth, spiritual truth apart from the miracle of grace, God opening the heart. We're blind. We're disconnected from God and so spiritually we're blind and that affects our thinking in radical ways. Our affections are disordered. We love what we should hate. We hate what we should love. The things that we should love that we do love, we don't love enough. The things that we should love that we do love, we love too much. Our will is bound.

Now then when you're saved, you get a new heart. Your will is no longer bound, you now have the mind of Christ, you have a new heart and yet it's still inside a body that is plagued with sin, and so that there's this sense of daily warfare happening in the human soul. But we have to recognize continually that our minds apart from the Spirit of God, apart from the word of God working in us actively, the default thinking of our minds is toward darkness and not light. The default setting of our affections is, again, toward that which is evil rather than that which is good so we need to be seeking the Lord and his word and walking in the Spirit and loving Christ and actively helping one another to follow him. So we don't tend to value the things, we don't see things the way they really are. We don't see it the way it is and therefore we don't feel the importance the way it is. We think some things are way more important than they are. We think some things are way less important than they are and we don't really see it until times where the Lord just shakes us up.

I mentioned something last week. I want you to turn to Luke 13. I mentioned this passage and we talked about it but I want you to look at it. We're talking about we're preoccupied with external things, right, and we realize we need to move from that external preoccupation to Gospel priorities. In Luke 13:1, look at how Jesus responds to really an appalling act of social injustice, religious desecration. Look what he does. Luke 13:1, "Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices." Luke sums this up for us. There were some people who came to Jesus and told him that Pilate, that's the governor, the Roman governor who is over the people of Jerusalem, the people of Judea, that Pilate had sent soldiers who were following Galileans, that is, Jews who are from Galilee who were apparently zealots. You see, the zealots were people who were preoccupied with the external conditions. They wanted to throw off the tyranny of Rome. They wanted Israel to go back to its glory days, being like when David was king, when Solomon was king. So the zealots were always plotting and thinking, they would sometimes, you know, ambush Roman soldiers, kill them. They were trying to throw off Rome. Well, some zealots come into town and Pilate gets word about it, his soldiers began chasing them.

They run into the temple so that they can be saved and there at the altar Pilate's soldiers cut them down so that their blood mingles with the blood of the sacrificial animals. Incredible desecration. I talked about it last week.

The point is, they come to Jesus and they report it to him. What are they wanting, why do they report it to Jesus? They want to see how he feels about this. "Jesus, how do You respond? What is Your statement on what has happened? What is Your Twitter response? What is Your comment on Facebook or Instagram?" And Jesus just blows their minds because what happened was indignant, what happened was evil and if you read your Bible carefully, you will know that God did not fail to notice it. Now how do you know that? Well, I know it because I read the rest of the Bible and what I want you to understand is we're gonna see that God tends not to care about the structures but he does deal with evil fully. Let me give you an example. You read through the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, what you find is over and over again you find oracles of judgment pronounced on nations. Oracle against Babylon. The oracle against Nineveh. That's the Babylonians, the Assyrians, God pronounces oracles because he cares and he's going to judge and he's gonna judge what Pilate did, the soldiers that went in and did that. He's going to judge but what we don't understand is, though that is a part of God's heart and he's concerned about it, that's just a broken bone.

There's something more important that needs to be dealt with and the people came to talk to him and Jesus looked into their souls and he dealt with the deadly malady in their souls and he said in verse 2, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate?" "I mean, bad things happen to bad people is what you believe, right," Jesus is saying. "Do you suppose they were worst sinners than other Galileans? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." And then he adds on a second story that had happened some while back. He said, "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

He says that the greatest, most shocking thing is not that Pilate did this. The greatest most shocking thing is the fallen condition of all of the people around him, the fact that you are rebels against God and that God's wrath has not fallen upon you at this moment. That is the most appalling thing and that's true of me and you. Now I say that and I, like you, feel a great distance in my soul from being able to feel that. Do you? I mean, we can say it's in the Bible, it's true, but do you feel the urgency and the need of those people who are perishing who want to comment, who want to hear what you have to say on the Instagram. Do you feel the urgency of that like that? We don't but what's wrong is what's wrong with us. We're supposed to be working toward feeling what God feels, to thinking his thoughts after him. He designed us to think his thoughts after him, to feel what he feels, to love what he loves, to do his will.

So the condition of man, we are all out of sync. The fact that you run into things in the Scripture that shake you up like they do is just a reminder. When I come across things like that, it's just a reminder and I go to the Lord and say, "Lord, how sinful my heart is

because I just don't see this. I find myself wondering why You did what You did." The problem is with me. The problem is with you. The problem is not with God. So our condition, you can see that our darkened mind, our alienated affections are evident. The environment, the world, the devil, the flesh, everywhere surrounding us, that's the third point, everywhere surrounding us, lying to us. Satan, the father of lies, continually sowing discord and division by lying. He is the one who comes to steal, kill and destroy and that's what he's doing at every moment of every day. Then surrounded in this condition, in this environment, how great is the challenge spiritually for us and that's why we need the resources.

The fourth point and here we come to where we're gonna spend most of our time. The resources, the word of God and the people of God, we said before, and what we're going to look at today basically two sub points. I want us to look at the priorities of Jesus, basically the example of Jesus and the example of the Father. So it's the priorities of Jesus, the priorities of the Father.

Now I just was in a passage here that we're gonna talk about for a moment here, the priorities of Jesus. His priorities were not his indignation over the ungodly and what they do, his priorities were to deal with his people and their spiritual needs. He's essentially saying the problem's not out there. We have, as R. C. Sproul said, a misplaced locus of indignation. It's one of those sayings that just once you learn it, well, maybe you won't be like me but I've had to keep that in my mind since I heard it, even though I never use the word "locus" on my own. It sounds like locusts without a "t." Locust, you know the grasshopper, right? No, it's locus of indignation, that is the point of indignation. The thing that we're indignant about, R. C. Sproul when he preached on Luke 13 said, "The thing that we're indignant about is the wrong thing." We're indignant like those Jews who came to him and said, "Look what the Galileans did. Look what people are doing to hurt other people. Look what's happening whether it be in the systems or in the actions of people. Look what's happening." And it's not that those things aren't worthy of a measure of indignation, they are, but there's something far more worthy of indignation than that and that is our great spiritual need. The problem's not in the systems.

You know, you see this, there's an interesting thing I want you, turn with me to Matthew 9, looking at the example of Jesus, we're continuing to look or the priorities of Jesus and how he was redirecting the focus of his people from systems to their own hearts and to the hearts of others. In Matthew 9:30 we encounter something that theologians have called the Messianic Secret. The Messianic Secret. It's basically a term that describes something we see in the Gospels. As we read the New Testament, you're gonna see and you have probably noticed this, you'll come to passages like this and see that Jesus seems to be keeping his messiahship secret. Now think about that for a moment. Isn't that 180 degrees out of phase from what you would expect? He has come to be the Savior of the world. He's come to show God to the world. As we read earlier in John 1, the Word has become flesh, his glory is being made known and you would think that to be shouting from the housetops, "The Messiah has come! The Messiah has come!" Isn't that what John the Baptist's ministry was, "The Messiah is coming"? But Jesus is keeping his messiahship a secret.

You see this when you look at verse 27 actually. He "went on from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David!' When He entered the house, the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus said to them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.' Then He touched their eyes, saying, 'It shall be done to you according to your faith.' And their eyes were opened." Two blind men's eyes are opened. Look what it says next, "And Jesus sternly warned them: 'See that no one knows about this!'" That's one of those verses that you should read and you should, "Wow, this is not what I expect. Why would Jesus want this not to be said?" Well, let me just show you a little more before we try to answer that question.

Turn to chapter 12, verse 15. The Pharisees in verse 14 are conspiring against him in a certain area, so Jesus, aware of this," verse 15, Matthew 12:15, "But Jesus aware of this, withdrew from there. Many followed Him, and He healed them all, 16 and warned them not to tell who He was."

Turn with me to chapter 16, verse 20. This is after Jesus asked the apostles, the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter says, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," in verse 16. Jesus tells him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven." And then in verse 20 after he's finished his statement about the wonder of this revelation that's been made known to Peter, he says in verse 20, or this text says, "Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ."

Chapter 17, verse 9. After the transfiguration they come down from having seen his glory manifest in an extraordinary way, the Shekinah glory shining out from Jesus, verse 9, "As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, 'Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.'"

You can see this in Mark's Gospel and Luke's Gospel. Why? Well, I think the answer I think becomes evident. Let's look at John 6:15. After the feeding of the 5,000, after they gather up the 12 baskets with fragments in verse 13 from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. This is John 6:13, "Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, 'This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.' So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone." When they see his glory and the feeding of the 5,000, the people realize, "This is the prophet, this is the Messiah, this is the One who was to come. Let's make Him King." They were going to gather him up, proclaim him king, anoint him and now let's go attack Rome. But Jesus withdraws from them, goes away and continues his ministry.

This is called the Messianic Secret because the reason Jesus had to keep his messiahship a secret is because of the external focus of the people of Israel. They wanted to be delivered from oppressive governments. They wanted to be delivered from the injustice that they had experienced at the hand of the Romans and Jesus is interested in something far more important than the deliverance from Roman bondage. Now he's gonna deal with

the Romans in his time, just like he's gonna deal with the Babylonians and the Persians and the Greeks. In his time. But he doesn't want his people to be preoccupied with minor things. He wants them to be preoccupied with major things and what you see as you turn over from John 6, turn over to chapter 8, verse 31, a familiar verse here but to read it in context is quite illuminating. "So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'" John 8:32, "You will know the truth and the truth will make you free. What a wonderful promise that is. But look how the Jews answered him. "They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, "You will become free"?' This is an astonishing statement. I mean, they are Abraham's descendants and they haven't been enslaved formally but they are under the dominion of the Roman Empire. They are not their own country and in that sense they are, in a manner of speaking, under their thumb, under their authority. And before that they were under the Greeks. And before that they were under the Persians. Before that they were under the Babylonians. It's been a long time since they were their own nation.

And Jesus said to them, ""Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." He says, "Listen, I have come to deliver you from the true slavery that really matters and that is the slavery of the human heart. I am not coming to deal with your broken bones and your lacerations. I'm coming to deal with the thing which will send you to hell for eternity and I'm going to deal with that with clarity and force so that you don't miss the point." That is the point. Here we see Jesus had Gospel priorities. He's not concerned with the external forms. It's not that he's not concerned at all, his concern is appropriate and proportionate. As I said earlier, he's going to deal, every man is going to give an account for every deed done in the body. Every person that's ever lived is going to stand before the judgment seat of God and give an account for every idle word. So imagine what the oppressors that have lived are going to experience as they stand before a holy God who himself is described as a consuming fire. The only hope for us, though, because we are not that much different than they, it's only a matter of degrees. We still stand before a holy God guilty in our sins until we come to Christ, until we repent and place our faith in the one God has made an offering for sin.

God's indignation is with us, with the condition of our hearts, with our great spiritual need, with the reality of our spiritual rebellion, with the fact that we live our lives as our own kings, as our own gods, by just nature, by our fallen nature. We think we are our own gods. We judge other people like we are God and we condemn them like we are God, and if you don't believe that, if you don't see it in yourself right now, just look around you. That's what's happening every moment of every day, people are living as if they were God and God hates that, and God ought to hate that, and we ought to hate that, and the reality is even after we've come to faith, even after God opens our hearts and gives us a new heart to love him, he shows that the only way is to place our faith in Jesus. He took our sins in full on the cross. He took all of these evil attitudes, he died for them. He died for our pride. He died for our prejudice. He died for our hatred. He died for every

sin past, present and future of everyone who would ever believe and if you believe in him, you have now his righteousness. God sees you as if you had never sinned, and not only that, God sees you as if you had always perfectly obeyed. That's how God sees you in Christ. That's his love for you. His love for you is based on, you are accepted in the Beloved. He loves his Son and he loves his people and so but though now we live each day and we are to think like God. We are to love like God. We are to be gentle and meek like Paul talked about in that first passage, the meekness and gentleness of Christ. We're to have that same heart attitude toward people around us, even those who are committing injustice against us. We are to be like Jesus because this life is short, our citizenship is not in this world, we are citizens of heaven. We're strangers passing through.

So those are the priorities of Jesus but I want you to think with me about the priorities of God the Father, point 4B, the priorities of God the Father. I've been reflecting on this and this continues to blow my mind in the way that when you really look at it, I want you to think about this, God seems to consistently throughout the Scriptures show that he is not as concerned about governmental structures and external realities as he is about the hearts of his people. Let me give you an example or I'll just give you several examples.

First of all, Egypt. He allows his people to go into slavery for 400 years in Egypt. He allows them to be oppressed by the Egyptians. He allows his people whom he loves. He called Abraham his friend. Isaac and Jacob walked with him and loved him and his descendants, he promised the land of Canaan but he sends them. Joseph he loved, he sends Joseph, we talked about this already, into slavery, into the dungeon, and he does that to accomplish something great, something miraculous, to accomplish spiritual salvation of his people, and he does the same thing by allowing them to stay for 400 years in slavery. If he were as concerned about external circumstances, he would not have done that. I mean, it's something to wrestle with. I think about, I thought to myself what would it have been like to have been a Jew about 200 years into that process. You would be perplexed. We're Abraham's descendants. The land of Canaan is to be ours. God's gonna make us a great nation that's gonna bless the entire world and here we are in slavery, not free to go.

Now what he's doing in that, I believe, is when you read the rest of the Scriptures carefully, he's showing us what salvation really is by the way he deals with his people and somehow he's even showing them in the moment, everyone who would look to him in faith could be saved by looking ahead to the Messiah, by seeing their difficulty, their circumstances, experiencing the turmoil, the pain, and looking up to God. But he's also using them to show what salvation will be. How will you be able to be saved. He's teaching us and baby-talking with us in the Scriptures in the history of how he's dealing with Israel. 1 Corinthians 10 makes this clear, that God is showing us basically in types he's teaching us about his ways and our need in the way he deals with the Old Testament people of God. This is 1 Corinthians 10, we're in 2 Corinthians 10 I know, but I'm talking about 1 Corinthians 10. Read those first 10 or 11 verses, 13 verses, you'll see this.

But anyway so he's showing us Canaan is going to be a type of heaven as it's made clear in Hebrews 11, that they didn't ever receive the Promised Land but they began to look for

a city whose builder and maker is God, a heavenly inheritance. They saw that when God promised Canaan, it was a type of something greater. To be in his land, to be back with him, that's what Canaan was. How do sinners get to Canaan? How do sinners get to heaven? You must be delivered from slavery in darkness. You are the slaves of sin, like Jesus said, "I am a slave of sin. I need to be delivered by God's mighty hand." God must see our misery and he must act, and so he did that to teach us and every subsequent generation of the faithful what salvation is. You see, God has a higher priority of his Gospel of salvation than he does on our comfort and we should too. We all love comfort. It's just natural, I mean, and we were made for a perfect world. This is the reality, we were made for Eden, and so there's a part of us that does hate injustice and hates even discomfort but in a fallen world we can't have heaven yet and so God's teaching us.

Now you watch the rest of the way he deals with his people. They go into the Promised Land and he deals with them in the time of judges. When they are sinning, what does he do? He allows them to be oppressed over and over again by different nations, the Philistines, the Midianites, the Syrians, A, B, C, whoever it needs to be and then he raises up a judge to deliver them. He's teaching them spiritual reality and he's allowing external oppression to happen. Then he brings in the Assyrians, in a sense. I mean, after they become a nation and then they have a king, David and Solomon, the glory days, what happens immediately after Solomon's death is they begin to experience oppression by the Assyrian nation. The Assyrians were wicked people. I mean, the Assyrians were just nasty people. They had perfected evil. They were masters of psychological warfare. They were great warriors as it was but they even used psychological warfare to help them in their conquest. What they would do is try to be so brutal and make an example of one city so that the 10 cities around it would surrender. One of the ways they would do this is they would impale live people on poles in such a way that they would live for a while. This is the beginning of crucifixion, by the way. The Assyrians invented the seed of crucifixion. It was the impaled people on poles. They would put those poles on main thoroughfares, maybe they're going this way, they put someone here so that the people over there when they come this way, they see him. The Assyrians have been here. You'd better be afraid. You'd better surrender. God worked even through wicked evil people. He hates oppression and yet he works through even that. What they meant for evil, God means for good. He doesn't, he's not the author of evil, he does not tempt anyone to evil, and yet in his sovereignty he allows it only for his purposes, to glorify his name and to bless his people.

So the Assyrians came in and destroyed them. This is why Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh. Would you want to go witness to people like that? Jonah's basically saying, "God, send them to hell." But what is God like? You see, he doesn't share the same sense of external focus that we have. He sends Jonah to Nineveh, has a whale swallow him because Jonah was willing to commit suicide rather than go and do what God called him to do. That's a really good prophet, isn't it? The whale spits him out on the ground back on the way to Nineveh and he goes and he preaches and he's mad that God blessed them. He's angry. "I knew You would do this. I knew that You were a God of mercy and compassion." He doesn't understand, he doesn't think like God thinks. God delights to show his compassion and mercy and the reality is the wickedness of the Assyrians is only

different from you and me in degree. There but for the grace of God go we. God's common grace, the fact that he allowed you to be born where you are, that he put godly people around you, that he put people who think soundly around you. Even as an unbeliever you were protected by that, and so the only difference is in degree.

You can talk about the Babylonians. Read the book of Habakkuk this week. Habakkuk is really concerned as a Jew about all the oppression he sees around him among the Jews and God is concerned about it too. God is concerned about the spiritual need of the people that he has around him because he is God's people. It's Judah and Habakkuk is praying and asking God to deal with the wickedness around him and God says to him, "Habakkuk, I'm about to do something that is so wonderful that if I told you, you wouldn't believe it." How about Habakkuk, his ears were picking up, he's like, "Man, my prayer is being answered." And God says to him, "I'm about to raise up a wicked and ferocious people, the Chaldeans," that's the Babylonians, "and I'm gonna bring them in and they are going to level My people. They're going to wipe them out. They're going to humble them." And Habakkuk's like, "Wait a minute. That's not what I'm asking for. You're gonna bring people that are more evil than us in to chastise us?" And God says, "Yes, I am but don't worry, I will deal with them. After they come in and do My bidding, I will punish them for every evil thing they did while they were here." This is why, this is the kind of understanding that led Paul to say, "O the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways. Who has counseled the Lord? He does what He sees fit and His ways are always right and good and holy."

So after the Babylonians, then they come and wreck Jerusalem, they destroy the temple, they live under Persian rule. We're picking that up in Nehemiah, remember? Ezra-Nehemiah. God's not made them a nation again, he's letting them be under the hegemony of Persia. They're under the rule of Persia. They are not their own nation. They are not free in the sense that they expected they would be; that even, listen, even the promises of the prophets appeared to say they would be delivered because the promises of the prophets that prophesied after the judgment, "God's going to restore you," the promises of the prophets were to be interpreted spiritually because God was moving as you go through the Old Testament from the external, the outward to the inward and internal. Because who is Israel, after all? According to Romans 9, Israel is spiritual Israel, the true people of God.

So in a sense when you look at history and you see how God has acted, God has consistently prioritized the internal Gospel realities over external injustice. We saw this in James 5 when we saw how they were to deal with social injustice. That's first century believers and he basically says in that chapter, they were being oppressed by rich landowners who were oppressing them and he says basically as you read James 5, I think it's the first 8 or 9 verses, he says, "Listen, God will deal with them. You keep entrusting yourself to God, God will deal with them." Now this doesn't mean in certain circumstances you don't do what you can. You vote. You talk. You work on things. You try to make the system better. That's all appropriate and right, but you see, it should be this much of your life and the Gospel should be this much, and if you're thinking and I'm

thinking too much and spending so much time thinking about this that we are not Gospel focused, we are sinning and we are displeasing God. He wants us to love souls the way he loves souls. He wants us to be lovers of even our own soul in a godly way. Now I'm not saying we're supposed to love ourselves understand, but that we value what he values and that's the best thing for us.

This is why he continues to allow suffering in our lives. You're not just oppressed by governmental structures, you can be oppressed by disabilities. You can be oppressed by disease. You can be oppressed by losing a loved one, going through a divorce that you didn't want. All of these things are oppressive circumstances but our God is a God who uses what they mean for evil to the good of everyone who loves him. He will turn it around and make it an avenue of untold, unanticipated blessing to you. He's so good and so he wants us to get our eyes on the new heavens and the new earth. He wants us to understand like Jess was preaching on several weeks in a row, if you haven't listened to those messages, I encourage you from Philippians 3 where it says this, "For our citizenship," verse 20, Philippians 3, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." Our citizenship is in heaven. Love God and long for heaven. Do all the good that you can here, yes, even practical good. Yes, God cares about that. But make the spiritual good the primary focus. The practical good is really only a means to get to the spiritual good because if you help someone, even if you feed them, as good as that is and you don't tell them about Jesus, they still die and go to hell.

So we're to do both but with the weight on the spiritual. This is why Paul and Peter who lived under oppressive regimes, I mean, they lived under one of the craziest, most oppressive Emperors of all time, Nero, and read what Paul writes in Romans 13:1-7 when he says, "Obey every institution, every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." He's talking about under Roman governor Nero. Peter in 1 Peter 2:14 and following he says, "Obey every institution. Obey the governor." He's talking about under Nero. Paul and Peter would both die at the hands of Nero. They're saying, "Listen, Christianity is not about political upheaval. It's not about political maintaining either, the status quo." Christianity transcends that so no matter what happens in the election in November, nothing changes for you and me spiritually. I mean, things will change one way or the other each day as things go on but spiritually everything is riding on Christ and he's done it all. So are you living like that? Is your heart joyful in that? God wants us to be joyful, peaceful, loving people who are different than the world, who even in spite of turmoil around us, there is a solidity and a buoyancy that we're unaffected because our eyes are on where we're going, our eyes are on Christ.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for the glory of the Gospel, that You have done everything necessary to save sinners, that You have given us a message that is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, that can transform a dead person bound up in

darkness and deceit, misery, spiritual pain, and the Gospel can go forth in their life and bring light and life and love and hope. Lord, help us be people of the Gospel. Help us be people who care about real suffering and that we do care about everything, we're not just completely otherworldly like monks. No, let us be in the world but not of the world. Help us to be like Jesus. Help us to walk as He walked. We can only do that as we love Him and rest in Him and trust in Him. Father, we pray for those that are here today who've been harboring anxieties, who've been living in resentments and anger in what they see around them. Father, grant repentance and clarity to see that You're concerned with what's within us and that if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed. Lord, set us free through Your word for the glory of Jesus. We pray in His name. Amen.