

The Thoughts of Man vs. The Wisdom of God Isaiah 31:1-9

Our sermon text for this morning will be Isaiah chapter 31, verses 1 to 9, which is the whole chapter. Before the reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Father in heaven, Scripture tells us that you have honoured above all things your name and your word. We pray, Father, that you would now speak to us from your word, that you would make your word effective and powerful in our lives. By your Spirit, we ask that you would bless the preaching and that you would bless our hearing. Father, teach us, that we would truly glorify you. These things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Isaiah 31, starting from verse 1:

“¹ Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD! ² And yet he is wise and brings disaster; he does not call back his words, but will arise against the house of the evildoers and against the helpers of those who work iniquity. ³ The Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together.

“⁴ For thus the LORD said to me, ‘As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey, and when a band of shepherds is called out against him he is not terrified by their shouting or daunted at their noise, so the LORD of hosts will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill. ⁵ Like birds hovering, so the LORD of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it; he will spare and rescue it.’

“⁶ Turn to him from whom people have deeply revolted, O children of Israel. ⁷ For in that day everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you.

“⁸ ‘And the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of man; and a sword, not of man, shall devour him; and he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be put to forced labor. ⁹ His rock shall pass away in terror, and his officers desert the standard in panic,’ declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.” Amen. And may God bless His word to us.

Well, it's very easy in this Christian life to allow yourself to think the way the world thinks. It's very easy to, though you may have a true faith, and this can happen to true Christians, people who are truly saved born, yet our minds need a whole lot of training.

You know, I'll use myself as an example. I was converted at 21. I had 21 years of not thinking like a Christian, 21 years of background that was not in any way positive. My mind had to be retrained. My mind had to be brought into line with the thinking of God. I had to learn the Scriptures, and I had to learn to obey the Scriptures.

It's very easy for us as Christians to still think in worldly ways, though we are saved. It's also very easy for people who are members of churches, who might actually think that they're Christians, and yet the truth is, nothing has ever truly happened in their hearts, and their minds are still completely sold out to, and given over to worldly thinking.

The people of Judah were supposedly the people of God. They had the temple, they had the priesthood, they had the prophets, they had a son of David as king. It would appear that about this time in Isaiah's prophecy, we're somewhere in the reign of King Hezekiah.

Now God's word had told the people of God, "You don't rely on anyone else, you rely on me, God alone; you put your trust in me, God alone; if your trust is in me, I will fight for your nation, I will fight for your city. You don't need to fear the enemies around you, because I, the Lord your God, will fight for you and I will protect you." But, you know, the Lord our God, He's the true and living God, and He's invisible. You don't see Him.

Remember the scene in the life of Elisha. The scene was they woke up in the morning, and his servant stepped out, and he saw the armies of the Syrians surrounding the place where they were camped or sleeping. And he ran back into his master and said, "What do we do? What do we do? The armies of our enemies surround us!" And the prophet said to the servant, "Don't worry about it. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them. Don't you understand?" He must have apparently looked pretty blank, because the prophet prayed, "Father, open his eyes." And when his eyes were opened, he saw the chariots and the hosts of the Lord surrounding the prophet, fighting for his faithful people.

The people of Judah, the wise men of Judah, those who would have been considered the king's counselors, couldn't see the power or the glory of the Lord. All they could see was the armies of the Assyrians, who would become the Babylonians. All they could see was these great armies in their hundreds of thousands off to the northeast and the northwest of their nation. And all they could think was, "Our tiny little city on a hill? We're going to be overrun. We're not going to survive. We need something powerful, we need weapons, we need allies. And the Egyptians, they've got cavalry, they've got horses, they've got chariots. The Egyptians have got a big army. Let's form an alliance. You know, we'll still trust in the Lord our God. We'll still say the prayers, and we'll still go to the temple on the right days, and we'll still make the sacrifices. But just in case, just in case—shouldn't we have an insurance policy? Shouldn't we have just a little alliance with the Egyptians? Surely that's not too sinful."

But of course, the Scripture said, "Do not go back to Egypt. Do not go back to Egypt. And do not form alliance with the nations that surround you." But—"An alliance will be wise. And if the Assyrians get too aggressive, well, we'll send a message down to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh will send his armies up, and they'll fight it out, and we'll be fine up here on our hill. We'll have nothing to worry about."

They're thinking like the world. And people who are thinking like the world tend not to actually understand that what they're doing is they're shaking their fist in God's face. They imagine that they are faithful. "We still go to the worship service. We still go to Synagogue. We still hear the Scriptures read. We still sacrifice our lambs. Surely, we're faithful believers. But we're

practical and we're pragmatic people, and we understand that in this big, wide world, you can't really be an idealist." You know, idealists—they paint themselves into a corner, and then they can't get out of it. Who wants to be an idealist?

And God says "Woe." Isaiah chapter 31, verse 1: "Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help." Woe to them. What does that mean? It means God is against them. When a prophet pronounces a woe, he's saying, "Woe to you, for God is against you because you are against God." And you don't go against God without having God respond in some way.

You know, we look out at the world and we see people, and we see them living in hatred and rebellion to God, and we see them living in sin, and all the madness out there, and we think, "Why doesn't God do something about that?" Well, the promise of Scripture is that eventually, He will. But now is the time of grace, and He's using the gospel to call sinners to salvation.

But here within the church, here within the people who are under the word of God, rebellion is a different thing. Disobedience is a different thing. Scripture tells us that judgment begins in the house of God. And there are those who rebel knowingly, those who sin with a high hand.

In the book of Numbers, there are a whole lot of laws concerning sin, and it's making a difference between a man who sins accidentally and a man who sins deliberately. And it's saying, the sins of a man accidentally can be forgiven. Now what would an accidental sin be? Well, for example, if you went to the temple but you had passed near to a dead body, you were ceremonially unclean; but you didn't know that you'd passed near to a dead body. That could be qualified, or classified as an accidental sin. And it's saying there's specific sacrifices for accidental sins. But the one who sins with a high hand, the one who sins with a high hand, God says that he shall be driven from among the people.

Judgment begins in the house of God. And to these pragmatists who were advising the king to form an alliance with the Egyptians God is saying through the prophet Isaiah, "Woe upon you. Woe to you"—look at the end of verse 1, the last stanza in my Bible—“(who) do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD!” They trust in chariots. They trust in horsemen because they are very strong. But they do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord. A similar thing is said back at the start of chapter 30. They “make an alliance, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin.”

What does it continue to say? Verse 2: “And yet he is wise.” Now who is Isaiah speaking of? He's speaking of God. He's saying to these counselors, these supposed wise men, “You think you're wise? No, God is wise. He is wise, and He will bring disaster upon you.” He does not call back His words, but will arise against the house of the evildoers and against the helpers of those who work iniquity. Isaiah's speaking to the covenant people. He's speaking to the nation where is found the church of that day. And you hear what He's saying—“God is against those who are in my church, who are in my nation, who are making alliances with the world and who are leading my people astray. He brings disaster, and will not call back His words.”

Turn to the book of Isaiah chapter 45. I want to look at verses 5 to 7. Isaiah 45, verse 5: “I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not

know me, ⁶ that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. ⁷ I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these things.” What’s God saying to His people? He’s saying, “You worship me. Understand something. All of providence is in my hand. Everything that comes your way, everything that happens to you is in my hand. I create, or form light. I create darkness. I make well being and create calamity.” The Lord our God rules over all things.

Back at Isaiah chapter 31, verse 2. God tells us He “is wise and brings disaster.” He brings disaster. He’s saying that you cannot avoid the calamity that God has in store for you. You have been unfaithful; you have sinned against the Lord your God; you have gone your own way; you’ve relied upon your own wisdom; you’ve sent people back to Egypt. You can’t stop the consequences of this. You don’t get to shake your fist in the face of the living God and then continue on as though nothing has happened.

Looking now Isaiah chapter 31, verse 3: “The Egyptians are man, and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together.” Okay, so what’s being said to us? Well first of all, they are man, not God; they are flesh, and not spirit.

Now that should be familiar to us as Christians. As we read our New Testament, those kinds of references should immediately make our minds go to things like the gospel of John, and chapter 1, where those who are worshipers of God are born not of the will of the man, not by the will of the flesh. They are born from above. They are born by the will of God. Or Jesus speaking in John chapter 6, where He says, “The flesh is no help at all.” Or the Apostle Paul in many places—the book of Romans and in the book of the Galatians. “The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to one another, so that you cannot do the things that you wish.”

Here we are back in Isaiah. As far as I’m aware, it’s the first place in the Bible—if you’re reading from front to back—where you get this contrast of flesh and spirit. And the Lord is saying that you’re trusting in things that have no real power. You know, we’re created physical beings, and in our minds, the physical is the real. The floor we stand on, the earth we walk upon, the cars we drive—in our mind, these things are real, these things are reality. And the world wants you to think that way, my friends. It wants you to think that way, that the stuff around you, that’s reality. It’s called “materialism.” Material is all there is. If it can’t be touched, felt, measured, it’s not real. That’s what the world tells you. And of course, God doesn’t submit to our touching, feeling, and measuring. Therefore, they say, God is not real.

But the truth is that this whole physical creation, as we know it, was created by God, who is Spirit—God who is a Spirit. And it’s upheld by the will of God, who is a spiritual God. It’s actually the spiritual that has power over the physical. We don’t actually rule over this world, spiritual powers rule over this world, God rules over this world. God designates, or hands out authority to lesser beings. It is God who rules this world.

We as Christians rejoice. Why do we rejoice? Because the one who is truly God and truly man, the Lord Jesus Christ, He now rules from the Father's right hand. He intercedes for us. He is our intermediary. No matter what happens, though He does indeed run the world, though He does indeed visit calamity when and where He sees fit, we know that everything He does is for the good of His people. Romans chapter 8, verse 28: "For we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, for those who are called according to His purpose."

And so even the things that seem to us to be painful, the things to us that seem to be hard times, the things to us that seem to be bad times—in the end, one way or another, all of those things are being used by God to do what? Well, Romans chapter 8 tells us: To shape and conform us into the likeness and into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father loves the Son, and the Father loves everyone who is of the Son, who is like the Son.

So everything that happens is being negotiated, if you want to think of it that way, or mediated, for our good by Jesus Christ at the right hand of God. God rules over His creation. The truth is that the spiritual is more real than the physical. This is the way Scripture tells us that we as Christians should think. The spiritual is more real than the physical. The Apostle Paul spoke in Second Corinthians chapter 10 of the fact that our war is not in the flesh. Our weapons are not in the flesh. Our war is in the spiritual realm, and the weapons that we use are mighty, to cast down strongholds.

Notice there also in Isaiah 31, verse 3, there's that one line there: "When the LORD stretches out his hand." When the Lord stretches out His hand. What's that about? Well, that's a reference, as Isaiah has made so references, back to the law, back to the books of Moses, back to the Exodus. The Lord stretching out His hand in the book of Deuteronomy, for example, at Deuteronomy 4:34, and Deuteronomy 7:19, is a phrase used to describe the power that God used to save His people, and at the same time, to destroy the Egyptians. "He stretched out His hand," is actually a fearsome phrase. It's a phrase saying that God is saving and judging. He's protecting and destroying. Think of the crossing of the Red Sea. God saved His people; God destroyed the enemies of His people. He stretched out His hand.

Now look at what it says there in verse 3. "The Lord stretches out his hand, the helper will stumble, and he who is helped will fall, and they will all perish together." Who's that referring to? Well, go back to the top of our passage. It's referring to those who have gone seeking help in Egypt. The helper will stumble, Egypt will stumble, and those who have sought the help of the helper will fall. God's saying that He's stretched out His hand against those who have gone after the wisdom of the world.

Verses 4 to 7 give us a slightly different picture. They speak to us of God's protection of His people and God's willingness to receive anyone who will repent of their sins. Let's just read it:

"⁴For thus the LORD said to me, 'As a lion or a young lion growls over his prey, and when a band of shepherds is called out against him he is not terrified by their shouting or daunted at their noise, so the LORD of hosts will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill. ⁵Like birds hovering, so the LORD of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it; he will spare and rescue it.' ⁶Turn to him from whom people have deeply revolted, O children of Israel. ⁷For

in that day everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which your hands have sinfully made for you.” And here we have to sort of get a little bit deeper into the book of Isaiah and understand the things that Isaiah is telling us.

I want to ask you two questions, and then I want to answer those two questions. The first question comes from verses 4 and 5. It says that the Lord is fighting. The question I ask you is, But whom is He fighting? The second question I want to ask you is, The Lord will protect His people, but whom is He protecting? That comes from verses 6 and 7.

Why do I ask those questions? Remember, for example, back in Isaiah chapter 22 that we’ve already been told that the Lord is judging Jerusalem, and Jerusalem will be destroyed. So when it says, for example at the end of verse 4, “the LORD of hosts will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its hill. ⁵ Like birds hovering, so the LORD of hosts will protect Jerusalem,” we’ve got to take into account all that Isaiah has told us.

Now Isaiah has constantly throughout this book spoken of God’s faithful remnant, God’s true believers, those who are truly the faithful members of God’s eternal church. They are the Jerusalem that God protects, and they are the Zion that God fights for. You see, if you take it to say, straight-up literally, “Well, God’s going to fight for Jerusalem and Mount Zion,” you’re setting one portion of Isaiah against the other. So we’ve got to nut this out, or think this through and work out what Isaiah’s trying to tell us.

There are people whom God will save, and there are people whom God will not save. Always remember, in the New Testament it helps us to understand all these things, because in the New Testament we’re told that there is a new Jerusalem, that new Jerusalem being the church, the people of the church, gathered into the presence of God. There is a new Mount Zion, so to speak—that place where the new Jerusalem is to be found. So God is judging Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be destroyed.

But the eternal Jerusalem that we’re taught about in the book of Revelation, we’re yet to enter it. We’re yet to enter into that place where we live in the very presence of the Lamb. But it’s coming, my friends. And He is protecting His church. We can never lose our citizenship in His holy city. We can never lose our citizenship, our right to gather in His presence. And so, though all the cities of the earth, Isaiah tells us, are marked down for destruction, even so, God protects and fights for Mount Zion. He fights for His faithful ones.

Turn for example back in the book of Isaiah to near the start of the book. Go back to Isaiah chapter 1, and there we’ll read verses 21 to 27. This is speaking of Jerusalem, my friends. Hear what God has to say:

“²¹ How the faithful city has become a whore, she who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. ²² Your silver has become dross, your best wine mixed with water. ²³ Your princes are rebels and companions of thieves. Everyone loves a bribe and runs after gifts. They do not bring justice to the fatherless, and the widow’s cause does not come to them.

“²⁴ Therefore the Lord declares, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel: ‘Ah, I will get relief from my enemies and avenge myself on my foes. ²⁵ I will turn my hand against you and will smelt away your dross as with lye and remove all your alloy. ²⁶ And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city.’ ²⁷ Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness.” Zion redeemed by justice, those in her who repent, redeemed by righteousness.

Way back in Isaiah chapter 1, Isaiah told us God was against the city of Jerusalem, in the state in which He found it. The city of Jerusalem had become a whore. It was under His judgment. It was to be destroyed. And yet, at the same time, He speaks of a Zion to be redeemed by justice, those in her who repent to be redeemed by righteousness.

Just turn your page over to Isaiah chapter 2, and we read about the latter days. Isaiah chapter 2, start reading at verse 2: “² It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, ³ and many peoples shall come, and say: ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. ⁵ O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.”

So even though in Isaiah chapter 1, Isaiah tells us that Jerusalem is the enemy of God, Isaiah chapter 2 tells us there is a day coming when there will be a Jerusalem to which all the nations are gathered, all the people are culled. And there will be peace upon the earth.

Now I ask you, has that happened yet? Has there yet been a moment upon the earth where there has truly been peace; where there’s no need for swords; you’d rather have a plow than a weapon; you’d rather have a pruning hook than a spear; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore? It’s certainly not our age, is it? And it hasn’t been any, yet. He’s speaking of a latter day, a day to come, the final consummation of the Lord’s kingdom, through the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, when God’s people will be gathered into His presence.

Back into Isaiah chapter 31, and we look now at the last couple of verses. “⁸ ‘And the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of man; and a sword, not of man, shall devour him; and he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be put to forced labor. ⁹ His rock shall pass away in terror, and his officers desert the standard in panic,’ declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion, and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.”

Just notice a few things here. Isaiah mentions the Assyrians, but I believe that when Isaiah speaks of God protecting Zion, fighting on Zion and protecting Jerusalem, God is speaking of His people in a representative way. The phrases Zion and Jerusalem are referring to God’s truly faithful people. I think here in verse 8, where God speaks of the Assyrians, the Assyrians are

being spoken of as representatives of all those who rebel against the will of God, all those whom God hates.

Now we should note something in the book of Isaiah. Just turn quickly forward to Isaiah chapter 37, verse 36. There was an event in the reign of King Hezekiah which does indeed come to us and show us that it is a fulfillment—I say *a* fulfillment—of what is spoken of here. Now the situation here is that Hezekiah was a faithful king and he put his trust in the Lord, and the armies of Assyria yelled their defiance at God and said, “What god can stop us from doing what we want?” In verse 36 we read “the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.” So there’s a fulfillment. It’s an example to us of the fulfillment of God’s word. God said “the Assyrian shall fall by a sword, not of man; and a sword, not of man, shall devour him.”

But I don’t think it’s the final fulfillment, just as I don’t think that that particular issue of God protecting Jerusalem at that time is the final eschatological fulfillment that Isaiah is pointing to. Many prophecies have more than one fulfillment and are filled in more than one way throughout redemptive history. And many of those smaller fulfillments point us to the future. So we can see what God has done in the past, we read what it tells us God is yet to do in the future, and we understand—it’s being done, and it will be done.

I think though in terms of eschatological thought, in terms of thinking through to the end of time as we know it, the Assyrian is standing for those who were in rebellion against God. And they shall all “fall by a sword, but not of man; and a sword, not of man, shall devour him; and he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be put to forced labor.”

For example, turn quickly to the book of Second Thessalonians chapter 2, and have a look at verse 8. Now this is Paul speaking of things in the future, the revealing of the lawless one, often called the Antichrist. Verse 8: “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.”

How does it say he’ll be killed? With the breath of the Lord. It’s as though all Jesus will have to do is—“whoof”—and he’s gone. That great Antichrist figure who seemed to rule the world, who seemed to have all the power of the world in his hand—is destroyed, but not with the sword of a man. He’s destroyed through the breath of the mouth of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Bye. You’re finished.”

Move on to the book of Revelation chapter 19. Once again, we get this picture. I want to look at verse 15, but we’ll start reading at verse 11—the rider on the white horse, the Lord Jesus Himself marching out to war. Starting at verse 11:

“¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.

¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he

will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.” From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.

Now I don’t think that Jesus is literally going to return to the earth with a great big broad sword coming out of His mouth. But in other places of Scripture we’re told that this “sharp sword” is what? It’s the word of God, the sharp two-edged sword, able to divide spirit and soul. He comes with His word. Think about this. If all things were created through the word of God, and if all things are upheld by the word of God, when God chooses to destroy something, how will He destroy it? He has said, “Let something be,” and He is saying, “And let that something be maintained.” What about the day when He says, “And now let that something be destroyed”? His word. He speaks forth His word. His enemies are destroyed, but not with a sword of a man, not with the hand or human power. They’re destroyed by the divine almighty power of the word of God, spoken by none other than the Lord Jesus Himself—the power of His word.

So having come more or less to the end of our passage, I don’t want to go into fine detail. There are so many cross references into so many other parts of Scripture in our passage. If you’ve got a cross-reference Bible, you’ve probably got at least twenty cross references in this chapter alone. Let’s just draw some application.

Question 1—they’re both questions. Do we think spiritually, or do we think after the flesh? Have we set our minds upon the flesh? We’ve always got to be thinking this way, Christians. We’ve always got to be trying to bring our minds under the authority of the word of God. We’ve always got to be facing up to the fact that we need to be taught to think as Christians, in a Christians way, in all circumstances.

The world is pouring information at us. You know, it’s just bombarding us. It comes through the newspapers, through the TVs. It comes through our Internet connections. It comes through our Smart phones and our devices. The world is constantly speaking to us, saying, “No, no, no. No, no, no. You’re blinding your eyes with faith. You’re being a fool. You’re thinking like a zealot. You’re an idealist. You’re nuts! You need to have a bit of pragmatic and practical wisdom. You need to do it our way.”

You know, there a lot of very good Christians counselors around, and a lot of very good Christian counseling courses around. But there are some that are poison. There are some that take modern psychological theory and try to combine it with some kind of Christian approach. And I’ve seen it do some pretty bad stuff to some people. Why? Because modern psychological theory does not come under the authority of the word of God. And so the truth is, they’ve got nothing to offer except the same misery that they themselves live in. Do we think spiritually? Or do we think of the flesh?

Turn to a couple of references. Let’s have a look at Romans chapter 8, verses 6 to 8. “⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Notice it doesn't say they could if they wanted to. It doesn't say they're trying to please God, but just falling short. It says they're totally unable to. Those whose minds are set upon the flesh are totally unable to please God. Those who are in the flesh *cannot* please God. They do not submit to God's law, they cannot, they can't. The law is an accuser against them.

And even those who think they're righteous, they have their righteousness—their righteousness is as filthy rags. It's not saying that everybody in the world is as evil as a Stalin or a Hitler or a Pol Pot. What it's saying is that everybody in the world whose sins are not forgiven cannot do the things that please God. They cannot exercise true faith in Christ. They cannot be truly obedient to His word. They can't live a life of love which fulfills the law of God. We as Christians don't keep the law because it's legislation. We as Christians fulfill the law in living in Christ-likeness.

I often want to say to people who say they just want to be like Jesus, and they imagine that just being like Jesus is being sort of this happy pacifist peace-hippy, Understand something: Jesus kept the law of God perfectly. That's why He is our perfect sacrifice. That's why God was happy with His sacrifice.

So my friends, when we say we want to be like Jesus, we're actually saying we want to live a life that is fulfilling of God's law; that the way we live is the way God wants us to live. In Galatians chapter 5, we're given a list of the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control. And what does Paul say just after that list? He says, "Against such things, there is no law." In other words, in doing those things, you are fulfilling the purpose of God's law.

You know, when you look at the law legalistically, you see a whole lot of "don'ts". For example, "Do not murder." When you look at the law through Christian eyes, you see that "Do not murder" becomes, therefore, "Give the gift of life." It's not only restraining yourself from evil, but it's, Do positive good. Give the blessing of life. "Do not commit adultery." It's not only, Do not be sexually impure, but it's, Honour and uphold the whole concept of marriage. It's, Love one another as a husband and wife, in a way that gives glory and honour to God. You don't only restrain yourself from the evil, but you fulfill the righteousness that the law demands. That's the way Christians live. That's God's commandment for Christians. And by the power of His Holy Spirit, we can live that way, we can fulfill His law. We also sin. I'll never tell you that you're going to achieve perfection in this life. We always must be coming back to God, confessing our sins and receiving the forgiveness that we need, and growing in Christ-likeness. But we can by the power of His Spirit live in fulfillment of His law.

Turn forward in your Bibles to Second Corinthians. We'll just have a quick look at the passage I mentioned earlier, Second Corinthians chapter 10, and reading from verse 3. Paul speaking: "³ For though we walk in the flesh,"—now in this instance, he's speaking of the fact that we are physical beings—"we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. ⁵ We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ."

What have we got to do? “Destroy strongholds, . . . destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.” My first bit of advice to you Christians is, do this in your own mind before you start worrying about anyone else’s. You know, don’t worry about the speck in someone else’s eye while the log is still in your own. Cast down, destroy your lofty opinions. Destroy arguments that have been raised against the knowledge of God.

My friends, can I tell you something? You’ve never had a problem, a doubt, or a question about the word of God that someone hasn’t had before you. You’re not that original. I’m not that original. We’re all created beings. You know, no one has ever had a problem or a doubt about the word of God that someone hasn’t had before you, and that someone else hasn’t answered for them.

You know, the more I’ve studied these things, the more I’ve realized that I’ve never had a problem that someone before me didn’t have. I’ve never had an issue to deal with that other people haven’t had to deal with. The teaching of this foolish world that gets implanted in your mind—I’ve never thought a thought that hadn’t been thought before by someone, whether it’s a good thought or an evil thought. My friends, answers are there to all of your problems. If you’re willing to seek them, you will find them. They’re there. They can be found.

The next question I want to ask then, in terms of application, is simply, Are we aware of the depths of our sin? Are we aware of the depths of our sin? Let’s not be hypocrites that fool ourselves and imagine that we’re small-time sinners. “You know, I’m a small-time sinner. Jesus only had to shed a drop of blood for me, but for some people, it had to be poured on by the bucket-load.” Don’t imagine it’s that way.

My friends, we’re born rebellious. We’re born sinners. Turn to Romans chapter 3. Now by the way, if you’re wondering where I get this idea of the depth of our sin, it’s the phrase in Isaiah chapter 31, verse 6, where Isaiah says to the people, “Turn to him from whom people *deeply* revolted.” Deeply revolted. He’s not saying they’ve just done a little bit wrong, he’s saying they’re *deeply* sinful. They’ve revolted *deeply*. They’ve really turned their hearts against God.

So in Romans chapter 3, I want us to read from verse 9. This is Paul’s summary of the state of humanity, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. And what he’s done is he’s drawn together a conglomeration of Bible references, mostly from the Psalms, concerning the state of humanity. We’ll start at verse 9:

“⁹ What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’ ¹³ ‘Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.’ ‘The venom of asps is under their lips.’ ¹⁴ ‘Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.’ ¹⁵ ‘Their feet are swift to shed blood; ¹⁶ in their paths are ruin and misery, ¹⁷ and the way of peace they have not known.’ ¹⁸ ‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’”

Paul uses those phrases, drawing together phrases from the Psalms, not to describe some people. When Paul says Jew and Greek, “both Jews and Greeks are under sin,” in his lingo of the day, there were Jews, and everybody else in the world was called a Greek. So what’s he saying? Everybody—every single soul ever born—“none is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God,” etc. We have revolted *deeply* against the rule of our God and King. We have revolted *deeply* against His law. None of us can claim to be little, small-time sinners, as much as we would like to. The fact of the matter is that all of us are worthy of the death penalty in hell, full stop. There’s no escaping that. That’s the judgment of God.

My friends, if you want to say you’re saved, and I hope you do, well then you must accept the fact that you’ve been saved from something. And when you ask the question, “Well, what have I been saved from?”, the first thing I want you to do is to look at the means by which you were saved. One perfectly righteous, sinless Man sacrificed His own life on a cross. He allowed the Romans and the Jews, He allowed the kings of this world, to gather against Him and to attempt to destroy Him. And that’s the price that was paid. One perfectly righteous, holy, sinless Man died for sins.

Now ask yourself the question: Why? Why? Why did it take such an incredibly valuable payment to redeem us from the power of sin? To redeem us from the power of death? Money wasn’t enough. The sacrifice of all the animals upon the earth was not enough. All the trees of Lebanon, as it says in Isaiah chapter 40, weren’t enough for the burnt offering. Everything that this world could offer was not enough. Why? Because God already owns it.

You know, in the Psalms where God says, “The cattle on a thousand hills are mine,” He’s not counting a thousand hills and saying if there’s a thousand and one hills, the cattle on number thousand and one, they’re not mine. He’s saying every place all over the earth, “It all belongs to me. Everything is mine. It’s all mine, and I don’t need you to give me what’s already mine. I need you to give me what you don’t have, and what you don’t have is righteousness. What you don’t have is holiness.”

And so He sent His Son into the world to pay the price of our sins, that we could, through faith, be justified; that we could, through faith, be counted as clean in His sight; that we could, through faith, be counted among His people. If the price paid was so high, my friends, you’ve got to understand, there’s no such thing as a small sin.

I’m not saying some sins aren’t worse than others. We all, I imagine, lose our patience on the highway—or am I the only sinner in the room? Someone does something stupid in front of you, and you shake the fist, and you say ungracious words. Now that’s a sin, and sin draws down the penalty of death. But it would be a much worse sin if in that moment of anger, I drew a gun out of the glove box and shot the fool that just cut me off in the traffic. You understand, there is sin and there is sin that is much worse. But yet, all sin in the sight of God is evil and wicked, and draws down the death penalty.

And so, look upon Christ. Look upon the things that He has done. Look upon the payment that God made for our redemption, and understand something. We who are Christians should be the most humble people on the face of the earth. No pride. There should be no pride in a Christian.

We should be willing at all times to confess that we are saved purely by the grace of our God. No works. We've done nothing to earn His favour. He poured it out upon us freely, for He loved us. He gave it to us as a gift, for He wanted us. We've done nothing to earn the blessings that are poured out upon our head, as the church of the living God. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, once again we come before you and give you thanks that you have revealed such glorious and wonderful things to us from your word. We thank you that you indeed are our God, and that through Christ Jesus and by the power of your Holy Spirit, you have made us your own. We pray, Father, that you would help us to live in obedience to your will in all things. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.