

Living in a Perverse World John MacArthur

Well, all good things must end. So we come to the final time tonight, and I feel like I want to see if I can't maybe pull everything together for us as we talk about a Christian worldview. I don't really need to rehearse what's going on in the world; you know that, it's inescapable. You don't need information about the disappointments in our culture, the disappointments in our world. You don't need to know that everything is upside down, as in Isaiah chapter 5. Bitter has been swapped with sweet, and good has been swapped with bad, and we're living in an inverted and upside-down world.

But I want to give you a perspective biblically so that you can understand what's going on, and the first thing I want to say is you have to understand this: What is happening in our country, and largely in our world, is a divine judgment. I just want you to mark that in your mind. It is a divine judgment. Joe Biden is not in charge of this; God is. And our Congress and our Senate and the people who run this nation—whatever's behind the Wizard of Oz, pulling the strings—does not have the final, sovereign say over this nation or over any nation in the world.

So we are experiencing the judgment of God on our nation. It's not as if we're waiting for it; it's not as if it's nearby. We're in the middle of this judgment, and I want to show you that by having you open your Bible to Romans chapter 1. And this is just an introduction for you. "But how do you know when a nation is under judgment? How do you know? Can you be sure? And the answer to that is you can know, and you can be certain, and I'll show you how. Romans chapter 1, verse 18 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." Any nation, any association of human beings that constitute a culture, if they turn away from the truth in unrighteousness, will receive the wrath of God.

Now the wrath of God comes in many forms. There is eternal wrath; that's hell. There's eschatological wrath; that would be all of the expressions of wrath in the book of Revelation, all the judgments that fall on the earth that you know of in time of the Tribulation. That's eschatological wrath; our Lord talked about that in His sermon on the Second Coming in Matthew 24 and 25. So there is eternal wrath, eschatological wrath; there's a kind of a cataclysmic wrath—massive earthquakes, massive floods, the most massive being the Genesis flood, where God literally drowned the entire human race with the exception of one family. There is sowing and reaping wrath: Whatever you sow, you reap. There are consequences to sinful behavior that are built into that sinful behavior. So there are many aspects of the wrath of God, and it works inexorably, it works inevitably, and it works justly.

But there's another kind of wrath, and that's what is being talked about in Romans 1. This is the wrath of abandonment. This is the wrath of abandonment. This is historical. In Acts 14, the Bible says God allowed all the nations to go their own way. The history of the world is the history of nations going their own way and consequently experiencing the wrath of divine abandonment. And that is in view in Romans 1:18: "The wrath of God . . . revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth and unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." This is the perfect place on the planet to connect with that, right? God, by His creation, has put Himself on display to the degree that His eternal power and divine nature are manifest, and anyone who rejects Him is without excuse. And men do, and nations do, and cultures do—and that's the cycle of human history.

"Even though they knew God," verse 21, "they did not honor Him as God or give thanks," because "they became empty in their speculations, their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for

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an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling things.” They’ll substitute anything for the true God, including animals—idols of all kinds. So what you have here is the wrath of God unleashed all the time through human history upon every people that suppressed the truth in unrighteousness, the truth concerning God which may be known by the creation. And chapter 2 of Romans says by “the Law [of God] written in the heart,” so they’re also without excuse. They reject what is revealed. They know there must be a God; they don’t honor Him, they don’t give thanks. They become empty in their understanding, and their foolish heart is darkened. They profess to be wise, but they are actually fools, and they exchange the incorruptible God for some other deity of their own making.

Then verse 24 is the key: “Therefore”—what happens when a nation abandons God? “Therefore, God gave them over.” This spells out what this wrath is: “God gave them over.” Now remember, this is historic. This is not looking at the future; this is looking at history. “God gave them”—past tense—“over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.” When this wrath goes into place, the first thing you will see is a sexual revolution. When God abandons a culture, you will see them sink to a low level of lust and impurity and the dishonoring of their bodies. The first thing that happens when a nation is under judgment is a sexual revolution. Verse 25 says, reminding us why it happened, “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” So look back to 1970, 1980, and remember when the sexual revolution began. That was step one in the abandonment of this society by God Himself.

Step two comes in verse 26: “For this reason”—again, looking back at verse 25; because of their rejection of God, “for this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,” verse 27, “and in the same way also the men abandoned their natural function of the woman, burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own person the due penalty of their error.”

When God abandons a society, the first thing that happens is a sexual revolution, inevitably followed by a homosexual revolution—and you have it described in verses 26 and 27. And interestingly enough, it starts with the female side of that in lesbianism because when God abandons a nation, the instinct—the strongest human instinct there is—the instinct of women mothering their children, is perverted. This is that severe of a blow, this level of judgment on human culture and human society. And then you have the male homosexuals in verse 27, “committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.” There’s an immediate penalty, and you would remember it as the AIDS epidemic. It’s built in. It’s a venereal disease that is built in because that kind of behavior will have built in its own punishment, as well as being evidence of the abandonment of God.

And why does this happen? Because “they didn’t see fit to acknowledge God any longer,” verse 28. They keep going back, these verses, to the reason: They rejected God. They rejected God. They rejected God.

First there’s a sexual revolution, followed by a homosexual revolution, verses 26 and 27. Then look at the middle of verse 28; here’s step three: “God gave them over to a depraved mind.” A depraved mind is a mind that doesn’t function. Sometimes it’s translated “reprobate mind.” The Greek word means “nonfunctioning.” That’s when you’re a man, and you think you’re a woman. It’s a kind of insanity, and it’s an insanity that is such an insanity, it begs the issue of reason; to even think people would do this. The reason people are doing it is because they are under divine judgment. God has let them have a reprobate mind.

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So when you see all of this transgender activity, and when you see them want to make laws to protect transgender identity, and you know it is absolute and total and utter insanity, you know we've reached the reprobate mind. People can't think reasonably, which means there's no way back to sanity; there's no way back. And because it is a divine judgment on them, God doesn't interrupt the course of their thinking down this path of sexual revolution, homosexual revolution, to the kind of insanity that we see with transgenderism. I used to wonder what in the world the reprobate mind could be, but we're living in the middle of it. It is insane, it is irrational, it is ridiculous, and yet it is so strongly in our culture that the society and its leaders are making laws to protect the people who are absolutely insane. That's the reprobate mind. So this is judgment, this is judgment.

And out of that depraved mind what are you going to get? Well you're going to get verse 29, "All [kinds of] unrighteousness, [all kinds of] wickedness, [all kinds of] greed, evil; . . . envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice"—that's a Greek word, *kakia* which means generic, general evil—"gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, [and] unmerciful." So what is that? That's what you see every day on the news. That's just the way people are; that's the way they live.

And verse 32 says, "They know the ordinance of God." Look at our nation. There's not a dearth of reality or truth. This nation was really founded with knowledge of the Word of God, the Bible. It's had it its entire 200-plus years. "They know the ordinance of God"; they also know that in the ordinance of God, "Those who practice such things are worthy of death, [but] they not only do the same, but they give hearty approval of those who practice them."

You have a president who is a Roman Catholic and who is advocating the insanity at the third level of divine judgment as if this is normal. What you see in our country is the unfolding of the judgment of God in Romans 1. So mark it down: There is no group of senators or congressmen or anybody else who is going to reverse this. This is not reversible; this is divine judgment. Now in the middle of that you might be saying to yourself, "I hope the Lord remembers His people in the midst of this. I hope He doesn't get so carried away with judgment that He misses us." And that reminds me of the end of the very last book in the Old Testament, the book of Malachi. This is a word of comfort. God is promising judgment from the prophet Malachi, and in verse 16 of Malachi 3 we read this: "Then those that feared the Lord spoke to one another"—here we are in the middle of this, talking to each other and saying, "What's going to happen? What's going to happen in the future?" And that was exactly what the people of Malachi's time were saying: "What's going to happen?"—"And the Lord gave attention and heard it"—I love this—"a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name. 'They will be Mine,' says the Lord of hosts, 'on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him. So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.'"

God has a book, and in that book are the people who belong to Him, and none of them are going to get washed up in the judgment. This is important because we have to understand, people, that we are living in a Romans 1 world of judgment. This is how it is. But we are His; we are His own possession.

"For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze"—now you're looking at eschatological judgment—"so that it will leave . . . neither root or branch. But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,' says the Lord of hosts." What

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day is that? The day that Christ returns to establish His kingdom. It will be a day of fire and judgment; but the Lord knows those who are His, and we are safe because our names are written in His book.

So with that as an introduction to our thoughts, how are we to live in this world, knowing that we are secure, and knowing at the same time that we're living in a culture under judgment? To answer that question, I want you to look at Philippians chapter 2, Philippians chapter 2; and just a few verses to consider. I don't know how many we'll be able to cover tonight; I can't see a clock, and that's a benediction on my soul. So I just want you to come down to verse 15, and let's begin there.

Philippians chapter 2 says, "So that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse [nation], among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain." This is a very, very important portion of God's Word. We are described as "blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse [nation], among whom [we] appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life."

Now I just want to pose three questions here: Where are we, who are we, and how are we to live? Where are we? Look at verse 15. Where are we? We are "in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation." And this was true actually in the case of the Philippians, when this letter arrived in Philippi.

Philippi was a city in Greece, in northeast Macedonia along the Egnatian Highway, which was a Roman trade road. So it was a town that basically had to absorb people going both directions. It was somewhat cosmopolitan. It was on the Strymon River, which also allowed for some concourse to move on the water. So it was a strategic place. There were goldmines, by the way, in the Philippi region, and those goldmines attracted Philip of Macedon. Philip II of Macedon was the father of Alexander the Great. And he was drawn to this place because it was strategic in terms of trade, and because of the goldmines.

So he annexed the region. In other words, he drew it to himself as part of his Greek empire. And he fortified a small town at the time. The small town was known as Crenides, just a small town. Crenides means "the little fountain"; it had natural springs. And after he took over that town and fortified it, he renamed it Philippi. So it's named after Philip of Macedon, the Greek pagan. When the Romans conquered the Greek Empire, the Romans conquered Philippi in the second century BC, and it became still known as Philippi. Roman conquering turned it into a Roman province.

In 42 BC—and this is kind of an interesting historical footnote—42 BC, one of the greatest battles in Roman history was fought there. It was a battle with some very familiar figures. It was called the Battle of Philippi, and the forces of Antony, Mark Antony and Caesar, 110 thousand men, defeated the forces of Brutus and Cassius, who had 90 thousand men. Forty thousand casualties, and it was a bloodbath. The battle actually marked the end of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the Roman Empire. At that point, Philippi was largely settled by soldiers, who are the roughest and toughest and most sinful and gross of people in a culture, very often. Many soldiers settled there. The citizens were given full Roman status. It became a pagan, idolatrous, crooked, and perverse place.

The Lord led Paul to Philippi to establish the first church in Europe on his second missionary journey, and the story about that is in the sixteenth chapter of Acts. And it starts out with Paul being thrown in jail, right? You know the story of the Philippian jailer. The believers there were desperately poor. They're actually described in 2 Corinthians chapter 8. That's a familiar text,

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but I'll just give you a little bit of insight into the condition of the people in Philippi by reading a few verses out of that eighth chapter.

“Now brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia”—that’s where Philippi was—“that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.” They were profoundly poor, even the believers, but at the same time, they were extremely generous. They were also persecuted. If you go back into chapter 1 of Philippians, you see in verse 27, “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you standing—that you’re standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but salvation for you.” So that introduces us to the fact that they had strong opposition. In fact, chapter 3, verse 2, says they even had Jewish opposition from the dogs, the evil workers, and the false circumcision.

Down in verse 18 it says, “Many walk, of whom I have often told you, and now tell you . . . weeping, they are the enemies of the cross of Christ”—verse 18, then verse 19—“whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.” You know how base a society is when it’s proud of what is the most shameful of its conduct, to boast about your shame. This is Philippi.

There was also a measure of disunity in the church. Chapter 4, Paul says, “My beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord”—“Get those two women to quit fighting,” he says.

Back in Chapter 2 and verse 1, he says, if there’s any consolation or encouragement, “if there’s any fellowship of the Spirit . . . any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. [Doing] nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; don’t look out for your own personal interest, but for the interest of others.”

So there’s a lot going on. There’s paganism, there’s corruption, there’s evil, and there’s persecution; and there’s division in the church. So Paul writes this letter from Rome in the fourth year of his Roman imprisonment, and he’s awaiting Nero’s verdict on his life. In spite of all that I’ve said, Philippians is known as the epistle of—what?—of joy, the epistle of joy. And Paul calls for them to be joyful as they live in this crooked and perverse generation. Now by the way, that could be a description in general of the whole world. In Matthew 17:17, Jesus said about Israel, “You unbelieving and perverted generation.” Even Israel was labeled in the same way: “You perverted generation.”

I guess we could just sum it up by saying that’s how the world is; it is crooked, and it is perverted. “Crooked” is *skolios*, from which we get “*scoliosis*,” the curvature of the spine. It means “to be bent or twisted,” “to be deviating from the standard.”

This is nothing new, this deviation from the divine standard. You remember, I know, Proverbs chapter 2 and verse 11, “[Wisdom and] discretion will guard you, and understanding will watch over you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things; from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness; who delight in doing evil and rejoice in the perversity of evil; whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways.”

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This idea of being crooked and perverse describes that natural human depravity which distorts and twists every sinner. In fact in Proverbs 21:8 it says, “The way of the guilty man is crooked.” Isaiah 59:8 says, “They . . . made their paths crooked.” “Perverse” is *diastrephō*; it means “to distort.” So anywhere you go, any city or any group of people, you have people who are crooked, distorted, bent out of shape. And Paul was really drawing that description of Philippi from the history of the Israel. And Jesus also reiterated it in, as I said, Matthew; and it also is repeated in the ninth chapter of Luke. So we have to understand that in general, man is perverse and distorted.

The term “generation” is the idea of a nation, those who are alike. The similarity of people in a nation is not the color of their skin; it’s not their mutual ethnic history. The similarity of people in any nation is that they are crooked and perverse; they are wicked. And you can go to Romans chapter 3: “There’s none righteous, no not one; there’s none that understands; there’s none that seeks after God,” and so forth. They all have “the poison of asps . . . under their lips.” This is the world we live in.

So the first question is, Where are we? And the answer is, We are exactly where the Lord wants us. We’re exactly where He wants us. We’re in a crooked and perverse nation. And beyond that, we’re in a nation that is, according to Romans 1, under judgment; and it is manifestly obvious, because we’ve progressed from a sexual revolution, to a homosexual revolution, to the insanity of a brain and mind that doesn’t even think straight, so that we protect people who don’t even know what reality is. Did something go wrong? No, everything is exactly the way it’s supposed to be. This is how the world is supposed to be, this is how judgment works, and we’re seeing it as clearly as we ever could have seen it, and we are exactly where God wants us to be.

I know you feel like bailing out. I’ve had people say, “Well, I’m going to move to Canada.” I just talked to a lady when I was getting a bite to eat earlier, and she said, “All the Canadians are coming here.” And I said, “The Canadians are coming here?” “Yes, it’s worse there.” Well where are you going to hide? What’s next, Mexico? You are exactly where God wants you to be. This is where we belong.

So, 1 Corinthians chapter 5. I’m not asking you to avoid the immoral people in the world; we’re not supposed to run from them. Listen to verses 9 and 10 of 1 Corinthians 5: “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; but I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.” No. “Actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he’s an immoral person, or covetous, or idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such one”—no. It’s what we talked about in the Q&A in the last session. But no, you’re not to leave the world; this is exactly where the Lord put you. So remind ourselves, we’re exactly where we should be. Everything is exactly the way the Bible describes it in a nation under judgment. So that’s where we are.

The second question is, Who are we? And that answer is very explicit here as well. We are described in verse 15 as “children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse [nation],” and we also are described as “lights in the world.”

So we are given two designations. First, we are “children of God.” This is a very, very clear separation from the “crooked and perverse [nation].” And to see the real foundation of Paul’s thinking there, you go back to the eighth chapter of John’s gospel, where our Lord makes that familiar distinction. Verse 42 of John 8, “Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father’”—these are the Jewish leaders who are saying God is their Father; He says, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is

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because you cannot hear My word”—why?—“You are of your father”—who?—“the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father.”

What do you expect people to do if they are the children of the devil? To behave in a devilish way. Everything is as you would expect it to be. He was a murderer. You say, “Why are they murdering babies?” Because of the children of the devil who was a murderer from the beginning. “Why don’t they ever tell the truth?” Because they’re children of the devil, and the devil doesn’t stand in the truth because there’s no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature. He’s a liar and the father of lies.

So you expected them to tell you the truth? You expected them to be the people of the truth? You expected them to be protectors of life? No. No, this culture under judgment really doesn’t care if babies are killed, doesn’t care if old people die, it doesn’t care if people are untreated for a virus and die languishing without treatment, because they simply reflect the nature of their father. You’re not going to change that; you’re just not going to change that.

In fact when you do speak the truth—He says, “Because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.” Did you understand that? “Because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.” Here’s the issue: They have no capacity to believe the truth; they have no ability to believe the truth. They’re blind by their own fallenness. They are double-blind by Satan, who has blinded the minds of those who do not believe lest the light of the gospel should shine unto them. There are multiple layers of blindness: They cannot see, they cannot understand—that’s Ephesians 4; they have no understanding—they are cut off from the life of God. They’re defined by ignorance, they’re defined by hard-heartedness, they’re defined by unbelief, and they’re defined by chasing after every imaginable and unimaginable impurity with greed.

Verse 47, he says, “He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you’re not of God.” Do you understand why it’s difficult to speak the truth to this generation? They don’t have the capacity to understand it. Until they are regenerated, until they are brought from the darkness to light, until they are delivered from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, Colossians 1, they have no capacity for the truth, to even understand the truth at all. So this is the condition of the world that we’re in: under judgment, crooked and perverse, and utterly unable to hear and believe the truth—because their nature is the nature of their father, and it is murderous, and it is deceptive. We, on the other hand, are the children of God. “But as many as received Him . . . He gave the right to [be called the] children of God,” John 1:12, right? Romans 8, Galatians 4—Romans 8 says we’ve been adopted as sons; Galatians 4, “No longer a slave, but a son.” And because we are the children of God, we know the truth, we hear the truth, we believe the truth, we love the truth, we live the truth, we fight for the truth, we proclaim the truth.

First John 3:10 says, “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who doesn’t practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who doesn’t love his brother.” Not only is there a difference in the ability to receive the truth—when you’re a child of God you can receive it—but also necessarily and consequentially you live it, you live it. Probably the most common question that I get is, “How do I know I’m a Christian?” And sometimes people are trying to reach back and remember whatever they felt at some moment when they prayed a prayer, walked an aisle, felt an emotional attachment to Jesus. They think their salvation is based on something that happened in the past. No.

How do you know you’re a Christian? You know you’re a Christian when righteousness is the pattern of your life. You used to be a slave of sin; now you’re a servant of righteousness, Romans 6. It’s the transformation that is the evidence. Where there’s no transformation, there’s no salvation. “Faith without works is dead.” That’s why you hear Jesus say: “By their fruits you shall know them. Good trees produce good fruit; bad trees produce bad fruit.”

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First John 3:1 says, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason”—listen—“for this reason the world doesn’t know us, because it [doesn’t] know Him.” So understand this: We are aliens in this world—a world under judgment, a world that cannot know God, has no desire to know God, has no faculty to accept the truth, can’t understand who we are, sees us as an impediment to the freedom of their transgressions, and wants to get us out of the way so that nobody is questioning their sinfulness.

But we know we’re the children of God. Why do we know that? Because Romans 8:16 says, “The Spirit . . . testifies with our spirit that we are the children of God.” How does the Spirit testify to us? Not a whispering in our brain. The Spirit testifies to us that we’re the children of God by producing in us love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control—the fruit of the Spirit. That’s the attitude fruit of the Spirit that results in the action fruit of the Spirit. If you have some kind of religious action without religious attitude, or spiritual action without spiritual attitude, that’s legalism. Genuine spirituality starts with the attitude, the fruit of the Spirit, and shows up in the behavior.

So you know the Spirit is testifying that you belong to the Lord when your life is marked by the fruit of the Spirit and the love of the truth. Love of the Lord, the truth, written in the truth incarnate. So we are children of God, and as such, we are in complete alienation from the world around us. So we are exactly where God wants us to be, and we are exactly who He wants us to be. We’re right in the exact place of His design.

And then he also says, Paul does, that we are lights in the world, *phōstēr*, used of the sun and the moon and the stars. Believers shine as lights in the darkness. And he uses that little phrase, “among whom you appear as lights in the world.” You are literally shining as luminaries, like Daniel 12:3: When you lead other people to righteousness, you shine as the stars in heaven. Isaiah 49:6 says of the Servant of the Lord, “I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.” Jesus said, “I am the Light of the world.” Paul said to the Corinthians that the glory of God shines in Jesus Christ, the glory of the gospel of the nature of God shining through Jesus Christ. And then when Christ is in us, we become lights in the world. And when we come around as lights, the first thing we do is expose—what?—the darkness, the deeds of darkness.

In Matthew 5—and I know I’m throwing a lot of Scripture at you—but Matthew 5, verse 14, “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden . . . [So] let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” What’s your responsibility in the world as a child of God? To be the one who hears the truth, understands the truth, believes the truth, lives the truth, proclaims the truth, defends the truth; and by virtue of that truth, you become a shining light in the darkness. That’s what we do.

In Ephesians 5:8, Paul said, “You were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.” Now what does “light” mean? It means truth and holiness, truth and virtue—the light of truth and the light of holiness. “Walk as children of Light.” First Thessalonians 5:5, “You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the darkness nor of the night.”

What I’m trying to show you with this is we are not part of the world. I said that Wednesday, right, in the morning. We don’t have any connection with the system; we are alien to it. All together, we shine in the midst of the darkness. We are not the darkness, we are the light. In fact, in Proverbs 4:18, I love this verse, “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the [final] day.” It was said of John the Baptist, he was the lamp that was burning and shining.

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So we know where we are; we're in a crooked and perverse nation under divine judgment. We know who we are. We, as Malachi said, are the possession of God: He knows who we are, He's written us in His book, He will protect us, and He will use us as His children to proclaim the truth, and to shine as lights.

So the last question, and really a simple question, What are we to do? Let's get practical. Well, it's revealed in the imperatives of this chapter. But first I want to go back to a foundational text in the eighteenth chapter of John's gospel toward the end of the chapter. Jesus is confronted by Pilate, and Pilate is very sarcastic with Jesus. Pilate, in verse 33 of John 18, says, "Are You the King of the Jews?" That's just pure sarcasm, what a joke. "Are You the King of the Jews?" And Jesus answers him in verse 36, John 18, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." Again, this is what we were talking about on Wednesday. The kingdom of God has nothing has nothing to do with this world. In John 6 they try to make Him a king by force, and He escaped. He didn't want to be a king in this world. It has no connection to this world. Why? Because 1 John 5:19 says the whole world lies in the lap of the evil one. And Jesus is not going to be the vice president to Satan. The kingdom that belongs to Christ, the kingdom that belongs to Christ is a kingdom that is a spiritual kingdom at this particular time.

I think you are familiar with the statement that Jesus makes. Listen to Luke 17:20, "Now having been questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or, "There it is!" For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst.'" The kingdom of God is in you. The kingdom is present, the kingdom is present.

The kingdom that belongs to Christ, though, is not visible to the world. That's what John meant when he said that the sons of God are not yet manifest—that the kingdom transcends the world, but it is present in the world. It doesn't derive its power, it doesn't derive its reality, its origin, its nature, its extent, its duration from any created entity. Christ's royal title, His sovereign authority and power are not derived from or dependent on any created person, institution, force, energy, work, effort, or right. His dominion is eternal, derived solely from His own glorious nature. His rule is neither given nor taken away by any person, any government, any authority. His power and authority cannot be at all diminished, limited, altered, removed, or replaced. His rule is complete, comprehensive, and everlasting, over time and eternity, over every soul that ever lived. And one day He will rule all creation with rod of iron in truth and righteousness. Everything is on schedule.

Psalms 2 gives us a preview of that day. These are familiar words: "Why are the nations in an uproar and the people devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed"—that would be the Father and the Son—"saying, 'Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!'" They're going to attack the kingdom of God.

"He who sits in the heavens"—does what?—"laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'But as for Me, I have installed My King on Zion, My holy mountain.

"I will surely tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, today I've begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will . . . give You the nations as Your inheritance, the very ends of the earth as Your possession.'" Satan thought he could tempt Jesus to take that from him rather than wait for God the Father to give it to Him. And Jesus said, "Get behind Me, Satan!" When that kingdom does come, He will "break [the nations] with a rod of iron," and "shatter them like clay pots.

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“Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the Lord with reverence, rejoice with trembling. Do homage—or kiss—the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!” Again, we’re reminded that when His wrath comes, we’ll be protected. One day He will rule the creation. Revelation 19, He returns; Revelation 20, He sets up the glorious kingdom and reigns for a thousand years.

So our Lord basically gave His kingdom manifesto when He said, “The kingdom is in your midst.” And then He talked about the future earthly kingdom, when He will triumph over the whole earth and heavens, halting all other kingdoms. He will rule alone as King of kings and Lord of lords on the earth, and then follow that by destroying the entire creation. It’ll have an atomic meltdown, described by Peter as “the elements melting with fervent heat”—the elements would be the atoms. There will be an un-creation in which everything goes out of existence, and in its place a new heaven and a new earth, according to Isaiah 65, 66, Revelation 21.

But for now, the kingdom of God is a spiritual reality, separate from, beyond, above, all other earthly power, all other earthly authority, all other earthly rule. Because of that, we draw nothing from earthly forces or powers to advance the kingdom of heaven. His kingdom cannot be harmed, and it cannot be halted, and it cannot be hindered by any earthly power. No laws can be made by any government or any ruler to advance His kingdom, to secure His kingdom. No penal sanctions can stop His kingdom. No temporal force can halt His kingdom. No one can get in His way.

Now there’s more about His kingdom in John 18, verse 37: Pilate says, “Are You a king?” “Jesus answered, ‘You say it correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’” What distinguishes people in the kingdom? They believe what? They believe the truth.

So you have Satan, who is the father of lies. The whole world lies in the lap of the evil one. The whole world is basically built on lies; it’s a house of cards built on lies. Don’t be surprised when you see those lies starting to collapse. They maintain their power by murder and lying. His people are the people of the truth. His people will rise up with David and say, “O how I love Your law.” All who love the truth are in His kingdom.

So we start from the foundation of the truth to be identified as members of His kingdom. We’re not of the world; we’re in the world. Jesus prayed in John 17, “Father, I don’t want You to take them out, I want You to protect them in the world; protect them from the evil one.”

So how are we to live in the world? Well, let’s go back to Philippians. And just to mention some things that you can examine on your own, there are many instructions here that are direct. One appears in verse 5 of chapter 2: “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself.”

We are the children of God. We are lights in the world. How do we live? With an attitude of humility like our Savior. Selfless humility should mark us. James said, “Humble yourself in the presence of God, and He will exalt you.” You don’t want to take the fact that you’re a child of God and a light in the world, and you’re so distinct that you belong to Him eternally, as something to be proud of. You humble yourself. Why? Because then you’re prepared to suffer. If you think too highly of yourself, you’re going to assume that somehow suffering is something you don’t deserve. But we are called to suffer as Jesus suffered. He died as our atonement,

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obviously, but 1 Peter says He died as our example, because when He suffered, when He was reviled, He did not revile again, but committed Himself to a faithful Creator.

So humble yourself, and get ready to suffer. Take suffering the way the Lord took suffering. Think like the apostle Paul, who said, “That I may know Him, the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His” — what? — “of His sufferings.”

There’s another imperative here in this text, and that is in verse 12: “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” What does “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” mean? It means to obey. “Just as you have obeyed, keep obeying. Work out your salvation.” It doesn’t mean you earn your salvation; it means the salvation that you have, needs to show up on the outside. Obedience. Be demonstrably a servant, a slave of righteousness.

There’s so many imperatives here, but I want you to go down to verse 14. “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.” You know what is the best thing we can possibly communicate to the world, as we live in these horrible times? That we don’t complain. Humble yourself, live a holy life, and don’t complain. “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.” “Grumbling” is an onomatopoeic word; that is, its definition is like it sounds. It’s an expression of discontent, an expression of dissatisfaction. It basically means to mutter in a low voice — verbal rebellion, constantly complaining.

Look, you can’t go around saying all that is true about you, and that you’re a part of the eternal, invisible kingdom, and you belong to God as His beloved children forever, and you are headed for heaven — you can’t say that and expect anyone to believe it if you just complain all the time. Because what you’re saying is, “I believe in God, but I don’t believe God’s got control of the mess we’re in.” Who needs a God like that?

Our God has complete control. And I think one of the definitive things you can say to people is, “It is exactly the world the way the Bible describes it under judgment.” Don’t complain over what has happened in the sovereign purpose of God, and don’t complain over your place in it. Paul says, “I’ve learned in whatever state I am to be” — what? — “content.” And don’t dispute, dialogizomai, don’t argue with God over His purposes.

You know, the happiest place to be is to be in the will of God and in the plan of God; and that’s where we live and move and have our being. I was saying recently that my favorite place in the world is to be in the midst of a very difficult dilemma that I can’t control. I feel safest there, I feel most secure there, because in the things that I can control, I may be asserting my own will over the will of God. I’m uncomfortable with that. I would rather be in a situation that has no obvious exit and say, “OK, Lord, I’m going to be joyful. I’m going to let You show me what Your providence is planning.”

You know, people said, “Well, you had courage when you kept your church open.” No. Look, I’m old. I’ve seen the providence of God my whole life. I’ve seen the hand of God. The invisible hand of divine providence is the most amazing thing; I’ll take that every day of my life over an occasional miracle. And it’s one thing for God to stop everything and do something that’s against nature and supernatural; it’s far more complicated for God to allow all the natural events and people and decisions and actions to be woven together to precisely accomplish His perfect will. Every single day of my life, I am surprised at divine providence. I love it when I don’t know the way out and I don’t know the answer. I have no fear because my faith has grown, by the faithfulness of God to extract me from every imaginable dilemma.

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So rather than grumble or dispute, I would take it down to verse 18, for the sake of time: “I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.” Paul says, “Look at me. I’m being poured out as a drink offering. I’m in jail for the sacrifice and service of your faith. I rejoice and share my joy with you all. If I’m in jail, and I’m joyful, and I’m right where God wants me, then wherever you are, you need to have that same joy.” The world needs to see us as joyful. Israel was, according to Deuteronomy 32, Israel was a crooked and perverse nation. Moses knew it. They sinned against God by complaining; and Moses complained, Aaron complained, Miriam complained, the Israelites complained. You get into the book of Numbers, and you think they might have learned something, and they’re complaining through the whole book of Numbers. Stop complaining. Stop disputing with God. He is for us, He is in us, He is with us; and we don’t win here, but we win in the end. Amen? Amen. Amen.

Hear the words of David in Psalm 37. And maybe this is a good parting word—Psalm 37, maybe down at verse—well, verse 1. Let’s start there and take it all, first eleven verses. “Do not fret because of evildoers, do not be envious toward wrongdoers. For they will wither quickly like the grass and fade like the green herb. Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and cultivate faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord; and He’ll give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light and your judgment as the noonday.

“Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who carries out wicked schemes. Cease from anger, forsake wrath; do not fret; it leads only to evildoing. For evildoers will be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord, they will inherit the land. Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place and he will not be there. But the humble will inherit the land and will delight themselves in abundant prosperity.”

Wow. I could sum that up by saying, “Don’t watch FOX News.” When you get to worrying about things, read Psalms 37. Amen? Amen. Let’s pray.

We draw such strength and encouragement, Father, from Your Word. It’s so exhilarating to know the truth, to be the people of the truth, not by any merit of our own or any will of our own. We were born again, not of the will of man but from Your sovereign will. May we live in joy. May we live in contentment. May we live with love. May the church of Jesus Christ be so marked by love and so marked by joy and peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control—all the fruit of the Spirit—that there is no human explanation for us. And may the church in its joy, its tranquility, its love, and its peace and it’s truth, be that shining light on the hill, lifting up Jesus Christ, who will draw all men to Himself. That’s our prayer; for Your glory, we ask it. Amen.