



How Should We Now Live?

Selected Scriptures

July 12, 2015

Pastor Nick Shaffer

Beloved, it is so good to be back with you, worshipping with you this morning. Our vacation was much needed and a great gift from the Lord but it is always a much greater blessing to return home to you, to our people, to this body of believers we love so much.

We are going to get back into the book of Philippians next week, but even before we left to go on vacation, I realized that when we got back, we were going to need to talk about the times and the seasons in which we find ourselves as the people of God. The last couple of months has seen some fundamental sociological shifts in our society and has for some of us been very unsettling. We look at the current condition of our nation and it is nation and a country, a society that we barely recognize, though the shift in this direction has been apparent for some time. We look around our culture and see racial tensions unlike any we have seen in the last 20 or 30 years, violence that is commonplace and to which we have almost become totally desensitized, the celebration and glorification of perversity and depravity on a scale that we have never seen in this country before, apathy and moral indifference to human life and dignity that is the result of godless evolutionary thought, the marginalization on an unprecedented scale in this country of any sort of Christian worldview, the numbing of the masses by entertainment, by virtual realities and social media run amok which desensitizes us to thinking critically and biblically about the greater issues of life, the emergence of unbridled totalitarianism in this formerly democratic republic – Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia calls this Supreme Court on which he presides “a great threat to American democracy,” and rampant ungodliness in every level of authority.

Our current generation, more than any before us, is seeing the bankruptcy and feeling the effects of the failures of such social experiments as the “moral majority” – the misguided attempt to organize people of like mind and like faith and create a voting bloc that would usher in morality in this nation – the failure of politics, of social conservatism, of progressive

social engineering and of education to bring any kind of lasting virtue to this culture. We are awash in the clamoring for rights and for the removal of any sort of moral and theological judgment. With the advent of the SCOTUS ruling on homosexual marriage, we must come to grips, as the people of God, with this reality -- we are right now living in a culturally post-Christian nation. The fundamental societal norms, that as Christians in the Bible belt we have long been able to depend upon, no longer exist. The SCOTUS ruling on homosexual marriage imposed a view shared, not only by the liberal and progressive elites in this country, but also by a majority of Americans, a view which effectively categorizes Bible believers as bigots in the eyes of most people in this country. This is the new normal. This is the culture in which we find ourselves.

We live in the midst of a rapidly growing moral and spiritual darkness so how do we live as children of the light? How do we fulfill the command of Paul in Philippians 2 to ***“be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,”*** (Philippians 2:15, ESV)?

This isn't a new question. It is a question that every serious believer in every era of human existence has inevitably, at some point, had to consider. It is a question that the American church, by virtue of living in this nation, has not had much cause to really consider in depth. We have almost been lulled to sleep. But it is a question that we find ourselves asking after the events of the last several weeks, and in all honesty, it is one that we should have been asking all along. In Peter's first letter to the churches, he was writing to a people who were exiles and strangers to the world, exiles in the nations in which they lived, to its views, its thoughts, its desires, its hopes, its wisdom, and so he called them in their daily walk, their speech, their mind, their spirit, their judgment, and their affections to be faithfully devoted to Christ. He knew that living like that was sure to bring persecution. Exactly what they were facing -- social ostracism, hateful acts against them, pressure from pagan spouses and family members, masters taking it out on Christian slaves, public mockery, workplace discrimination, societal discrimination, government legislation and interference with the practice of their faith -- all of these things were already taking place and full blown physical persecution was on the horizon. And still he called them saying: ***“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”*** (1 Peter 2:11–12, ESV) So, how do we do that? That's what I want us to think about today.

In thinking about how to arrange this message, I am so grateful to God that while we were on vacation we worshipped with a wonderful group of believers at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Wilmington, NC. On July 4th weekend, the pastor there, a faithful brother named Daniel Gillespie, preached a sermon on this very subject and his outline was simple and pithy, one that helped me to think through some things, and one I am going to use in a modified form today. This sermon today will not answer all of the questions and cultural issues that we are going to face in the coming days, but I pray it will give us a biblical foundation from which to grapple with the question of how we should now live in the midst of a culture that is rapidly accelerating toward abject godlessness.

In survival situations, there is something that survival specialists call the “core four” – shelter, water, fire, and food. These are the four things that you must have in order to have the best chance of survival. And I want to share with you what is the spiritual “core four” for living in this age. Four things that we must keep at the forefront of our mind, of our thinking, of our consideration as we live in the midst of this present darkness. The four truths that must form the foundation of our thinking and acting The first thing that we need to realize is this:

#1 -- The Fall Is Real

Everything wrong in the world today, everything wrong in our nation and culture can be traced to Genesis 3 and the subsequent spread of sin throughout the human race. In **Genesis 3:1-7** we see the genesis of the fundamental problem in our world today. ***“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.”*** (Genesis 3:1–7, ESV)

God declares something, some immutable truth and Satan, and after him, satanically inspired and fallen mankind says, “No He didn’t. That’s not true. That’s not what He meant.” It is an attack at the very core of biblical truth and the foundation of God’s authority. It is this that was at the heart of the SCOTUS ruling that vainly attempted to redefine marriage. It is this mindset that is really at the heart of every sin – rebellion against the rightful authority, against the truth and clear revelation of God in nature and in His Word.

Beloved, the Fall is real. This is not a fairytale, not a myth, not a religious attempt to shame people – this is fact and we are dealing with its universal effects. And here is what we need to see and understand –there has never been a golden age of humanity, ok? There has never been a golden age of any culture anywhere – not Israel, not Rome, not Europe, not the American Indians, and not America. Sin has infiltrated every part of the human race. Genesis 6:5 makes this very clear. There we read: **“The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Genesis 6:5, ESV)** Please do not make the mistake of thinking that those words are exclusive to pre-flood humanity. We want to think that, but it just isn’t true. We are profoundly broken people. Jeremiah 17:9 says: **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9, ESV)**

Romans 1 explains our condition very clearly: **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with**

women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”
(Romans 1:18–32, ESV)

We have a theological term that describes this – it's total depravity. I prefer the term “radical depravity” to “total depravity” because to most people, the word “total” gives the idea that all men everywhere are as bad as they can possibly be. Obviously that is not true. That is not the point that Paul is making in this passage. What he is saying is that sin has affected the entire person down to the very root or core of his being and placed us under the just wrath of God. Sin has so fully and deeply affected our lives that, spiritually speaking, we are in a totally hopeless condition, unable to do anything to get ourselves out of this fallen state. Apart from the grace of Christ to change our hearts and save us, we choose to follow the natural inclinations of our depraved hearts because when left to ourselves that is all we want to do.

Man desires wrong; he desires sin. That's the reality of life and laws can't change that. Laws do not change the human heart. Even massive displays of judgment do not change the human heart. They can be a vehicle, perhaps, for the revelation of God's grace, but judgments, in and of themselves, do not change the human heart. Think about the flood. Even a judgment as great as the flood did not curtail sin in the human heart. The ground is barely dry when we immediately read in Genesis 9: **“Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.””** (Genesis 9:20–25, ESV) Now there are a number of interpretations to this text that I cannot go into this morning, some suggest very unseemly behavior, even

homosexual behavior on the part of Ham, but the point that I want for us to see is this – judgment, by itself, does not change the human heart. Sin remains.

We live in a fallen world and one thing is certain throughout the Word of God and throughout the ebb and flow of human culture – human beings are consistent sinners. This age that we live in is not unique, unique perhaps in the vehicles and avenues available to us to express our sin, but not in sin itself. Racism and racial tension, prejudice, violence, sexual immorality, malice and all the rest are simply not new.

For that reason, we should not be surprised at the sin that we see around us. It should grieve us but it should not shock us. We should not be shocked or shaken when we see a world separated from God living out its faith. None of this should surprise us if we are paying attention. The sin that infests our nation’s culture may be more bold, or proud, or flagrant than it has been in times past in our country, but it is not new. The Fall of Man is real. The second principle that we need to remember is this.

#2 – Sin is Always Wrong

We need to be fully resolved on this account. We face the very real pressure of society to redefine what is right or acceptable through appeals to human reason and wisdom, through appeals to people’s struggle for acceptance, through emotionally stirring rationalizations. Not only is there is an attempt to redefine right but the prideful celebration of what is profoundly sinful. And yet the words of Isaiah are clear in this regard: **“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!”** (Isaiah 5:20–21, ESV)

But it is not merely the society. We also face the very real pressure and temptation of cultural Christianity to redefine, rename, accept, tolerate, and celebrate sin in the name of false love and acceptance. But this is foolishness – Romans 6:23 states it clearly: **“For the wages of sin is death...”** (Romans 6:23, ESV) No amount of theological twisting, judicial wrangling or misguided legislation can change that fact.

Let me be clear about this. No matter what the SCOTUS may have ruled, homosexuality and homosexual marriage is wrong. It has always been. Under the Mosaic Law it was punishable by physical death. The NT declares it to be sin and worthy of spiritual death. **“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”** (1 Corinthians 6:9–10, ESV) The Supreme Court of any nation, even the United States, cannot overturn the eternal law of God. To think that 5 American justices – that’s a misnomer if there ever was one – could overturn the Law of God is ludicrous. The Supreme Court is supremely arrogant. And for the church to accept these things requires an entirely different creation account. Do you see that? Woman was taken from the man. Man and woman are made to be together, to bring forth children. God’s plan is exquisitely simple. Not only that, but to accept homosexual marriage as valid requires an entirely different gospel, an utter redefinition of Christianity and the relationship between Christ and His Church. Otherwise Ephesians 5 loses all meaning.

It is beyond all moral question that homosexuality and transgenderism, for instance, are always wrong, but beloved, those are not the only sins mentioned in 1 Cor. 6 or throughout the whole of the Bible are they? Here is the truth that we must reckon with. Sin is wrong in others; it’s wrong in our society; and it is wrong in us. If we are going to speak to and war with sin, we must war with sin in ourselves just as vigorously. We must pursue consistent holiness in our own lives. **“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”** (Colossians 3:5–10, ESV)

Do you see how important this is; how important it has always been but also how much more important this will become in the coming days? We must pursue holiness ourselves before we can expect to be taken seriously. Judgment must begin with the household of God. We are hypocrites and not worthy to be heard if we do not deal seriously with our own sin.

Psalm 51 describes what ought to be our heart and mind toward personal sin. We must be humble and honest about the sin that remains in all of us. ***“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”*** (Psalm 51:1–12, ESV) We want to immediately go to verse 13, right – ***“Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.”*** (Psalm 51:13, ESV) – but we need to walk through verses 1-12 first. Self-righteous indignation is no better than open sin. We must be resolved that sin is wrong in others – yes – but in me first. And that leads to the third principle that needs to guide our thinking in these evil days.

#3 -- The Gospel is Infinitely Powerful And the Only Answer to a Profound Problem

We need to read the rest of the passage in 1 Corinthians 6, don't we? ***“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*** (1 Corinthians 6:9–11, ESV) The gospel is infinitely powerful.

Now to be sure, the world has its own counterfeit of the gospel and it goes by a variety of names: political correctness, tolerance, judgment free zones, offense free zones. All of this amounts to an attempt to create a world in which everything is right and nothing is wrong; where the enlightened social engineers have decided that everyone has the right not to be offended and those social engineers reserve the right to determine what is offensive and what is not. They try to create a world in which people have the right to believe anything they want as long as they do not act on any of their beliefs – which is to say you cannot

actually believe anything at all – except what they say you can believe. They want us to buy into the words of the John Lennon song, “Imagine” –

“Imagine there's no heaven It's easy if you try No hell below us, above us only sky. Imagine all the people living for today. Imagine there's no countries. It isn't hard to do. Nothing to kill or die for. And no religion too. Imagine all the people living life in peace. Imagine no possessions. I wonder if you can. No need for greed or hunger. A brotherhood of man. Imagine all the people sharing all the world. You, you may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one.” A godless, humanly designed utopia is ever there was one.

But we all know what John Lennon means by those words and what he sees as the great problem of man – religion, and specifically Christianity. He was great hater of Christ and unfortunately; he's not the only one. The self-professed “enlightened” create a world in which anyone who disagrees with them or has any sort of eternal moral or ethical code of righteousness is classified as a “hater” and “haters” are to be re-educated, marginalized or eradicated and the free practice of true, biblical Christianity and the gospel are at the top of the offensive list. But the great irony in all of is that the gospel is the only answer to man's greatest need, it is the only source of what they profess to desire – this brotherhood of man and living in harmony. It alone answers the urgent and greatest need of every human being – a new heart. The heart of man is corrupt and wicked and we have the perfect gospel for it. The gospel doesn't simply deal with the expressions of sin from the human heart – it deals with the very root. Man needs a new heart, a new life, new desires, real forgiveness, real transformation, and it is the gospel, alone, that deals with all of these things. It goes to the root.

Listen to these passages describing the power of the gospel. Ezekiel wrote of the new covenant in Christ, describing what God would do through Him saying: ***“I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”*** (Ezekiel 36:25–27, ESV)

““For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, ESV)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us...” (Ephesians 1:3–8a, ESV)

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” (Titus 2:11–14, ESV)

A new heart, a new life, new desires, real forgiveness, real transformation are available for all who will repent of their sins and turn to Christ and trust in His death and resurrection in the sinners’ place. **“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith...” (Romans 3:21–25a, ESV)**

The gospel is infinitely powerful. No sinner is too stained, too corrupt, too far gone. We hear that and we even “amen” that, but it is not always so easy to embrace, is it? We can have the tendency to respond to sinners in pride and self-righteousness. We find ourselves wanting to be judge and jury. We can be angry at sinners for being sinners – rather than praying for them, rather than engaging them with truth. Instead, we curse them inwardly or leave them to their just desserts. Like Jonah, there can be that little place in us, all of us, as it

regards certain sinners where like Jonah we don't want to see God be to them ***“a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.”*** (Jonah 4:2, ESV)

But beloved, we are in a dark world that needs light, a dead world that needs life, a hopeless world that needs hope, a world of deceit and lies that needs the truth and we have it – the gospel, the Word of God. It is worthless to give people a batch of philosophy and psychology and behavior modification. It is empty to ignore or redefine the cardinal doctrines of the Word of God, and preach a religion that is uncertainty and shifting sand, without any definite truths whatever. It is hollow to preach self-love and self-forgiveness or the universal brotherhood of man. It is not preaching Christ or the gospel to do all you can to avoid saying the hard truths, to fail to confront error, or to be fearful of offending sinners. It is not preaching Christ nor is it preaching like Christ.

We have the most powerful, most explosive, life-changing, only soul delivering message in the world – the gospel. It is the only message that deals with things as they really are. It is the only message that calls sin what it is, that saves people for eternity; changes someone into a new creation; gives forgiveness of sin and cleanses us thoroughly from our sin; takes people out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light; that creates true brotherhood, that gives eternal life and overcomes death and sin and brings us into intimacy and peace with God forever and with other sinners saved by grace. The gospel is the only message that brings in a true and perfect kingdom of love and righteousness. The gospel is and always has been man's only hope. We must preach it, live out its calling and commands, be faithful to Christ, and display the unrivaled hope and confidence that we have in Christ because:

#4 – Jesus Reigns Supreme

Look, Jesus reigns supreme, right now. In Ephesians 1, starting in verse 17, Paul was praying for the church in Ephesus, a church enduring persecution, battling false gospels, confronting paganism, idolatry and sexual immorality and he prayed: ***“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to***

the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:17–23, ESV) He prayed that they would have wisdom, a greater knowledge of God, understanding the hope and the power that is theirs in Christ in the cultural climate in which they found themselves and he roots all of it in the truth that Christ reigns supreme, right now, over everything and over the glorious future that is to come. But the point is clear – He reigns right now.

None of this that we are facing in this country, under this government, is beyond Jesus' power or outside of His authority and will. There's only one true "Supreme Court" and it's not in Washington. ***"The Lord reigns; he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed; he has put on strength as his belt. Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved. Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting."*** (Psalm 93:1–2, ESV) There is only one supreme leader and he does not reside at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Jesus is Sovereign Lord– ***"On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."*** (Revelation 19:16, ESV) – and His Word, the Holy Scriptures rightly interpreted, are the absolute and unvarnished truth. Nothing changes that fact. As the Psalmist says: ***"The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever. Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of your words. I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil. I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law."*** (Psalm 119:160–163, ESV)

Jesus reigns right now and here is what that means for us: that we live in this age, in this country, in these times, under the growing threat and experience of persecution for faithfulness to Jesus Christ is no mistake. These are the times that have been appointed to us and how we live now matters for eternity. Paul told the Corinthian church: ***"Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love."*** (1 Corinthians 16:13–14, ESV)

Standing firm in the faith, being watchful, acting like men (having guts and fortitude) and being strong in Christ – it won't be easy. It is going to become increasingly costly and the true church, the true followers of Jesus Christ, will be increasingly revealed in the very near future. On vacation, I read a book about Black Bart – Bartholomew Roberts – the pirate with

a conscience – and the age of piracy. In the book, it quotes one of the few female pirates Mary Read who actually defended the death penalty for pirates on the unconventional grounds that without it, “every cowardly fellow would turn pirate.” She was thankful for the death penalty because it weeded out the “would-be” pirates who were not committed to a life of piracy.

The time in which we live will have the same effects upon the true church. It is going to become increasingly costly to be faithful to Christ in our culture. We see it already. For instance, two Christian bakers who refused to bake a cake for a lesbian wedding have been ordered to pay \$135,000 in damages by July 13 or else the state of Oregon could place a lien on their home. This is by no means the last or the worst fate that awaits faithful Christians in this society who seek to live out their Christian faith openly and authentically. There is no way around it. The storm clouds are gathering and in some places breaking forth. The calm for Christians in this nation may well be over. And that is a good thing because we need to be reminded: America is not our ultimate homeland. **“Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,”** (Philippians 3:20, ESV)

To the disciples who pledged their faithfulness to Christ, living under Roman rule and in an increasingly hostile environment, Jesus said: **“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.”** (Matthew 10:16–25, ESV) That sounds pretty dark, doesn’t it? But then He also said: **“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and**

body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:26–33, ESV)
Jesus reigns and He demands our faithfulness, no matter how difficult.

Peter, who knew something of persecution, told the churches to whom he wrote: **“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” (1 Peter 4:12–19, ESV)**

The Church throughout history has only truly thrived when it’s marginalized, oppressed, mocked, and killed. That’s when the church has historically experienced the most power and that is my hope even now.

I do not know what tomorrow may bring. Perhaps a revival is yet to come to this nation. I pray that is the case. God brought revival to the Ninevites, to a people whom He pitied saying: they **“do not know their right hand from their left...” (Jonah 4:11, ESV)** That is an apt description our own nation. Or, perhaps the future for this country is an even greater spiraling into darkness and unchecked sin. We do not know. We cannot change this fallen world, but we can be God’s instruments in saving people from it. Eternally speaking, there is nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Beloved, I know this sermon cannot answer all of the questions that we are going to face in the coming days, but it does give us a foundation of four core truths from which to think biblically about every decision, every stand, every conviction – individually and corporately – that we must make. These times in which we live require of us some real heart-searching.

We may not have spent a lot of time thinking about what we think about, thinking about what motivates us, thinking about why we do what we do, about living for something more than the moment, but we need to. And in everything, our response needs to be that of Peter and the Apostles when they were threatened for their faithfulness to Christ: **“We must obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29, ESV)** It will not always be easy or popular, but as Charles Spurgeon said: **“That very church which the world likes best is sure to be that church which God abhors.”**

Some of the discussions and decisions, some of the stands and convictions that we need to make are not going to be obvious to everyone and will require real bearing with one another and working through some of these issues. It is going to require patience with the saved and also with the lost we are trying to reach with the gospel. Jude gives us good counsel here: **“But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.” (Jude 20–23, ESV)**

Let’s be guided by these foundational truths, the “core four.” The Fall is real. Sin is always wrong. The gospel is infinitely powerful, and, praise God, Jesus reigns supreme.

© West Salem Baptist Church, 2015

Permissions: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material but you may not alter its contents in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. If you are posting online, a link back to this original document is preferred. Anything beyond these guidelines will require prior approval by West Salem Baptist Church.