

**No Greater Love-Part 6**  
**Second Chances**  
**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Well perhaps you sit here this morning as an optimist. You always think the best of the people around you. I'm not here to knock that, by the way, I prefer you to be an optimist to a pessimist. That's certainly much more pleasant for all those who know you. But being an optimist, if you happen to be one, certainly will set you up for some shocking disappointments in your life, there's no doubt about that. Because there will always be some people who you encounter who you never thought would do some horrible thing, that ends up doing some horrible thing. And you'll think, "I never thought they could do that." Well that horrible shocking news, that jaw dropping news that you hear, is really something that you need to understand from a perhaps a historical perspective.

And by that I mean, as my dad used to say, the police officer home that I grew up in, he would always say when some illicit scandal broke in the news about someone, maybe someone we knew in one of our circles or whatever, he'd say this. He'd say, "You know, that's not their first crime." And I thought well that's kind of an insightful way to look at it. Right? It's not their first crime. I mean, it might be the first crime that we hear of. It must be the big news that broke that got us all to gasp, but really there was a long series of decisions that led to this particular thing. Now I know we're all born sinners, but it takes some practice to be an egregious sinner. Right? I mean, there's a descent that leads into the big sins and that's helpful for us to recognize. Because there are many things you have to do to break through a variety of concentric circles, if you will, of kind of rebellious breaking through those restraints to get to the place where you're going to do something that is going to make everyone go, "Wow, that is a horrible thing that that person did."

Consider for instance the seminary professors of the first century. The seminary professors of the first century who were actually responsible, humanly speaking, for the crucifixion of the Messiah. Now that's a remarkable thing if you think about it objectively. I know you've grown up, perhaps, hearing that and you think, "Oh yeah, I know it was all those religious leaders who crucified Christ." But think about this - the religious leaders. These are the religious leaders of Judaism, the Old Testament, they knew the Bible, they taught the Bible, they memorized the Bible. Those 39 books of the Old Testament, they were well versed in, and if you asked them, "Tell me about what the Bible says regarding the coming of Messiah." They would tell you stories. They would go to prophecies, they look up things in Jeremiah and Isaiah. They would present to you prophecies from Micah and they'd say, "Here, here's what it is."

And they would create disciples and they would start schools and they would teach you how to pray and they would teach you how to share the realities of the one God of Israel. I mean, all these spiritual things and then the Messiah comes and stands before them and they're jealous and they're envious and they hate him and they work to get him executed. I mean that's a jaw dropping thing. That will be just like, "Wow, I can't believe it, it is so out of character," but it wasn't their first crime. Right? There were lots of things they had to do to get to the place where they are in Luke 23 having Jesus crucified. I mean, there are a million second chances, if you will, to turn back from this path that you're on so that you wouldn't become the party responsible for crucifying Christ. We can imagine what a lot of those were. I mean, just going back to some of the rebellious acts in their lives that would lead to that kind of opposition to the very one who they've been teaching and studying about in the Bible.

And there are even some you don't have to imagine because they're spelled out for us in Scripture.

There is really two built into the first five verses of Luke 23 and I want you to look at those this morning. Two things that should have been like this, "Don't go here" sign, "don't go any further. I know you don't like him, I know you're jealous, I know he's got big crowds and all the rest, he's offended you, but don't be against him, at least don't send him to a Roman execution rack." And the first one is, as you read this, is that they even had to go to the Roman authorities.

Now again, historically, let's just remind you. The Jewish people at this time were under the hand of Rome, and Rome was trying to supervise them from many, many miles away by having local governors. First, they started with the Herods and that wasn't working out too well. So in 26 A.D. they put Pilate, Pontius Pilate, this guy who we know since our Sunday school days, he is the Roman prefect or the Roman governor of Judea in the south where Jerusalem is, where Jesus is about to be crucified. That particular Roman authority had to sign off on capital offenses. Yeah, the legislative body of the Sanhedrin, that 70 group of high priests and chief priests and elders and scribes, yeah, they had authority but they only had authority within a certain jurisdiction. And that high priest that made the 71st member of that council, he could decide things and he could pass judgment, but when it came down to it, if you wanted to have someone executed for something you had to go to the Roman authorities.

Now think about that. I mean, this is something you could get your pals to agree to, but now you've got to go to Romans who don't really care much about the details of your Jewish law. Now they don't want to sit here and dispute blasphemy laws. And you going to have to go now and get them to sign off so that you can somehow legally justify his execution. And then, I don't know if you know it or not, but it's not a simple take him to a Pilate and Pilate goes, "OK, you guys want to crucify him. Go ahead, crucify him." If you know the story of Pilate and we get the first encounter with Pilate here in the first five verses, in essence he ends up saying, "Nah, don't do this guys, don't do this." You want another sign that says, "Turn back. Don't be notorious sinners who are going to be responsible for crucifying Christ." You've got two built into this passage.

So let's read it together, let's look in this text, and let's learn from it this morning as we see the Sanhedrin going through continual restraints, moral restraints, if you will, of sin and they break right through them. Number one, verse 1, Luke Chapter 23. "The whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate." Let's get the pronouns right. "Them," are all those folks described in verses 66 and 67 of Luke 22, if you glance up there, the whole assembly of the elder, the chief priests, the scribes, the council. Right? They're going to have that little trial there after they Ananius, the previous high priest, who still had a lot of sway among the Jews, that's why he's even consulted. Then we have Caiaphas in his family, he's the presiding high priest, and then you have the morning arrives, they can actually have a meeting of the Sanhedrin and now they hear the blasphemy and now they say, well, we've got to get Pilate to sign off. So they bring him to Pilate there in Jerusalem, an early morning session. "And they," that is the group who wanted to see Pilate give Jesus a thumbs down so they could go have him crucified, "they began to accuse him," here's our case. We get a summary of what they say, three things they're going to say here.

Number one, "We found this man misleading our nation," which is, on the surface, not all that convincing. OK. You've got issues with your nation, OK. I mean, there's probably a lot to that but that's the summation of the first reason. Second reason, "He's forbidding us to give tribute," or taxes, "to Caesar." Okay, well we think that should get Pilate's attention. He represents the Roman Empire and certainly he wants everyone to pay Roman taxes. "And he's saying that he himself is Christ," this messiah figure, who, by the way in our theology, "is king." He's a king, you know. And there is only one king here in Rome's economy, in Rome's politics and that's the Emperor Tiberius,

so, you know, this should bother you Pilate.

So Pilate has a hearing. This is the first hearing of Jesus before Pilate and he asks him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" And Jesus answered and he said, "You have said so." Now again, this is a seemingly odd way to put it. And though I can tell you, as I said last time as Jesus responded to Caiaphas, there is an idiomatic sense to this in which the idiom is a confession. "Of course, yes, you're right. You've said it. That's what you've said." He's not saying he's not, he's saying he is. And yet there is that weird kind of sense in how he says this that gives us some insight into the fact that what Pilate thinks about what that means and what Jesus thinks about what it means, these are two different things.

Nevertheless, he's saying, "Yes, I am." And Pilate, verse 4, said to the chief priests and the crowds, again probably much more than two simple sentences that you could read in three seconds, Pilate says, "I find no guilt in this man." So whatever exchange they had beyond this, and we see some in Matthew and Mark and John, we recognize his conclusion is, "Hey, hey guys, you want to kill him? Nah... There's no reason to kill him. I'm not going to sign off on it." And they double down, verse 5. "They were urgent." Now they're really at it, now their veins are popping out in their neck and forehead. "Hey, this guy stirs up the people. He's teaching throughout all Judea and Galilee even to this place." So, down south, this whole region, up north in Galilee, and even to this place on the Temple Mount. "He just tipped over some tables this week on the Temple Mount. This guy's trouble, he's causing problems, we don't like him, let us crucified him." And because he mentioned Galilee, Pilate ends up sending him in verse 6, we'll look at this next time we're together, to Herod who happens to be in town.

Verses 1 through 5 I think will be helpful for us to analyze and look at it as a template. As uncomfortable as it is for your pastor to suggest that you identify this morning with the wicked Sanhedrin, I would ask you to identify with the wicked Sanhedrin this morning. Say to yourself is there anything in this example of what they did of kind of bursting through these restraints to move toward their sin and being just bullheaded about it, is there anything I see in my life that kind of parallels that? Now I understand this is an extreme example, it's an extreme example. But I would like you this morning to learn from that because, as First Corinthians 10 says, some of these evil people in the Bible become examples, bad examples for us, so that we will learn not to crave the evil things that they crave.

So we've got to look and kind of analyze what they're doing and kind of say, "Hey, if I parallel any of that, I want to make sure that's not a part of what's going on in my life. And by God's grace, hopefully we can leave this morning much more apt, as Paul put it to the Ephesians, to make sure that we've done everything to stand firm in that evil day, because there are going to be those days of temptation, there are going to be those days when we were tempted to do things that are not right, and we want to do everything we can to stand firm and to hold up underneath that temptation. And so this morning, if we can learn from them, slip yourself into the sandals of the Sanhedrin and let us recognize that we can do the same things that they do, perhaps, we see as Christians on a much lesser scale, but let's make sure we understand the problem.

Well that may sound weird because if you look at your outline the first word in point one that I provided for you is the word "appreciate." What am I supposed to appreciate about this? Well let's appreciate this: that there was a hoop to jump through, there was a barrier, there was a hurdle. There was some kind of restraint upon the fact that they weren't just to wake up one day and say, "Let's kill this guy. Oh, you're want to kill someone? Go kill him." No, you've got lawful authority that

you've got to answer to and that lawful authority is going to be a barrier. You're going to have to work to get your sinful thing accomplished by going through that lawful authority.

So let's just put it this way. That's one of many things that I'm sure was a part of the, kind of, as I put it, the moral baby-proofing of these guys that God put in place so that they would not do this. And I think you can look in your life and my life and say there are many things that God puts in place in my life that makes it harder for me to sin. That if those things weren't there it would be easier for me to sin. But there are things in place that may be irritating to me, but they're there because God has put restraints upon sinful behavior.

So number one, let's put it this way you and I should "Appreciate God's Restraints on Sin." He puts restraints on them. By that I mean there are things that he puts there to make it harder for you to sin. To compare yourself now, something much cuter than the Sanhedrin, compare yourself to the little kid who you had when you brought home from the hospital. All of a sudden now you said, "Well, once this blob starts to crawl, I got to get ready to make sure that his pea-brain in that little skull of his is not directing himself into foolish and harmful things. So I need to baby-proof my house. Right? There are a lot of things that could go wrong here. Right? Because he's just so dumb. Anything he sees that he thinks is shiny or colorful, he's just going to pop that in his mouth, it doesn't matter if it's a, you know, a tide pod in the laundry room, it doesn't matter if it's my medicine that I left out on the counter, it doesn't matter if it's Comet, you know, he wants to eat the Comet under the sink. We got to make sure we baby-proof our house.

So you put up things, starting with putting him in a cage in his room. Right? It's called a crib. I'm not against them, I'm all for them, but you put him in a cage. Right? I don't want him to get out. And then as they start getting good you realize pretty soon it doesn't take long until he starts figuring how to get out of that. And then you put up one of those little, like nursery gates, you know, like you do for your dog. You put one of those up for your kid. You got to keep him in that room and then you put little things on the cupboard so he doesn't get in under the sink and drink your Drano and all that. So it's all these things you do that make life harder for him. Harder for him for what? To not hurt himself. Right? You don't want him sticking his little tiny finger into the socket. So what do you do? You buy these little plastic things and you stick them on the outlet so you can baby-proof that outlet. You want to make it harder. You learn that their little chubby fingers can peel that thing off in time but it makes it harder.

That's the baby-proofing that any loving parent puts out there in some way to make it tougher for a foolish, brainless person who is going to do things to their own hurt. You're trying to keep them from that, make it harder. God's put a lot of things in the order of your life and mine, just like he did with the Sanhedrin. You just can't haul off and execute anybody you want. You got to go to the lawful authorities. Let's just think about this: you've got lawful authorities in your life, don't you, that make it a little bit harder for you to do whatever you're craving, sinful thing is that you want to do? You've got to think twice because there are some people who won't approve of that and there's some rules and regulations and policies.

I mean, it's harder for you, I think, at work to embezzle money from your work because there are policies and procedures and safeguards in place. And all those things are put there, of course, because they're trying to keep people from doing bad things. There are laws on the books, things you are not supposed to do. Things you may feel like doing, but you shouldn't do those. So there are rules to keep you from that, and those rules, they come with consequences and punishments and all of that lawful authority that you're under, that makes us feel like, "I wish we didn't have all these



rules, I wish we did have these authorities, I wish I was in charge, I really wish I were the captain of my own fate and the master of my own soul." No, I live in a world under authority with a lot of things that I can't do the way I want to do them because I'm not a free-range kind of individual autonomous. I have safeguards in place. Now they're not foolproof of course. But they are there and it does make it a little more difficult. And that's a good thing. Lawful authority. The laws themselves.

Have you had non-Christians tell you. "You Christians want to legislate morality. You shouldn't be legislating morality." That's the dumbest statement, one of the dumbest statements that your non-Christian friends tell you. Because law, by definition, you understand, is the division and distinction between what is right and what is wrong. That is by definition what morality is. Right? Justice, the concept of justice in the law code, is all about defining what is good and what is bad, what is harmful and what is appropriate, what should be punished, as Romans 13 puts it, and what should be rewarded or allowed or permitted. That's what the law is.

By the way, and I don't have all the room on the back to always put all the books that are pertinent. I should've put this when I suppose. Frank Turek and Norm Geisler wrote a book in 2009 called "Legislating Morality." That's a provocative title for people who think that's ridiculous. That's a good book to read. It's well written, very good, helpful. That's the whole point of rules, is to legislate morality. That's the point. Even non-Christians have to, at some point, if they logically think about it, have to admit that's what the rules are there for.

That's certainly what is the law in Scripture. Think of the law for instance in Deuteronomy. I think I jotted down the passage of Deuteronomy Chapter 22 verse 8. Don't turn there but Deuteronomy 22:8 talks about a building code requirement which you and I hate. Right? I do hate... I don't know what you hate. Unless you're a building inspector or something, you probably love them but. We hate them. We go through the T.I.'s, the tenant improvements for the construction, and I kind of get frustrated and I'll even say dumb things like, "Well, you know, if the Founding Fathers could see the law codes and the building codes, they'd go crazy." But I realize they're there, much like Deuteronomy 22:8 is there, for good reason.

In that passage it says everyone in the ancient world, they didn't have air conditioning, but they did have a roof and they would go up on the roof in the afternoons, they put shades up there and sails up there, they'd sit under them and cool off in the afternoon. So if you had a roof of a home, everyone would have stairs to get up there and it says this: "When you build your house on that roof, you got to put up, now the English Standard Version translates it "parapet." I guess if you're an architect you know that word, but if not, it's a railing. Put a railing around your roof, "Lest," I'll read it for you. Listen to how firm this is, "Lest you bring guilt of blood upon your house, if anyone should fall from your roof." Right? So here's a building code. And the point is this is something that you are obligated to do that makes it harder of creating something that is a hazard that ends up making you a manslaughter, at least in some secondary sense, because you are really negligent in providing a safe environment for your guests.

I mean stuff like that. I'm just saying there's a lot of stuff we hate with our sinful desire to be completely autonomous without any authority. But those things that feel like strictures upon us, even though we're always saying, "We want to break the bonds and be free," certainly in our society. You need to know that those things, they're not always perfect, they don't always reflect the perfect law of God, I realize Romans 13 isn't perfectly reflected in any society, but I recognize this: they're there so that God is putting upon all of us, as morally dangerous and hazardous individuals,



to try and keep it, at least under control, that we would make it much more difficult for us to engage in some kind of sinful behavior this afternoon.

To appreciate God's restraints on sin you've got to appreciate the fact that sin is corrupting, and just like babies popping anything into their mouths that seems colorful and attractive, so it is that if we sow to the flesh we reap from the flesh corruption. We've got to realize God is trying to, not only honor himself by us being holy because he's holy, but also trying to keep us from the self-harm that often comes by us indulging in our own sins.

So whether it's lawful authority, the laws themselves, or even the law within our conscience that makes us feel guilty... Some of us like to say, "I'd like it if I didn't ever feel guilty." No, you need that. That's another one of God's moral restraints against you doing the wrong thing. Even lawful peer pressure, if you will, within the church, whether it's church discipline or just the disapproval of your small group when you go and confess that you've done some egregious sinful thing this week, that is all there, the shame of that, the guilt of that, is there to keep you from being unfettered in your pursuit of whatever sinful thing that you might do.

So I'm grateful for God's restraints on sin. And in a fallen world it may not be comfortable, but we should be grateful that God's looking out for us, whether it be, in this case, that in the first century the Sanhedrin had to have the Romans sign off. That was just another safeguard against them just doing whatever they wanted.

Verse 2. It says, "They began to accuse him," now that they brought him before the powers that be and said, "We found this man misleading our nation," number one, "we found this man forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar," number two and number three, "he's saying that he himself is Christ, a king," number three. All of those were designed and even stated, and the way they were stated, to make Pilate go, "Oh man, you'd better kill this guy then." That was their point.

But if you look at all three of those and you think back even to Luke Chapter 20, let's start with the middle one, forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar. If you've been around long enough in our study of Luke, you recognize this: didn't Jesus just deal with that? They came to him, tried to trap him, to get him to say that he shouldn't give tribute or taxes to Caesar, and he said, "Give me a coin," and someone handed him a coin that had Tiberias on it, the Emperor. And Jesus said to the crowd, "Okay, here's the coin. You're talking about giving these to the government? Whose inscription and likeness is on it? Oh, it's the Emperor? Well, give to the Emperor, give to Caesar what is Caesar's. But give to God what is God's." Now that was a crafty and careful and shrewd way to respond to the question. But here we are, made in the image of God, we're supposed to give our complete loyalty. His image is stamped upon us. The image of Caesar is stamped upon the coins. Hey, give him the money that he's asking for, and you give your life and your heart to God. It was a great response. So he said exactly the opposite of what they're saying. We call that, when someone says the exact opposite, at least we understand truth and correspondence with reality and foundationism, we say that's a lie. Right? That's a lie.

He did not say you cannot give tribute to Caesar. Matter of fact, he said just the opposite. Not to mention, look at the first line, "We found this man misleading our nation." You might even remember the way they set up the conversation when they came to Jesus asking him about taxes they started with this line: "Teacher, we know that you speak the truth rightly and show no partiality but you teach truly the way of God."

That's how they set it up. Now that may have been facetious. That might have been something they didn't believe, but they said that because they knew that's what the crowd knew about Christ. They knew that is Christ. Christ is teaching the way of God rightly. There was nothing they could say about him that was misleading anyone. They knew that. Matter of fact, at one point, Jesus looked at his critics and he said, "For what good work are you picking up stones to kill me? Why do you want to execute me? What's the bad thing I've done?" He's asking them, what is it that I have done? I mean, there's nothing in him misleading the nation. He was the light that was to dawn on the nation of Israel, leading them in the way of God, the way of the Lord. All of that, without any contradistinction to anything in the record, shows us that he wasn't misleading the nation, he was leading the nation in righteousness. And he was telling them pay taxes to Caesar.

Now what's the last one that ends up being the question that Pilate picks up on? It's at least the one that's recorded for us from Luke. But "Saying that he himself is Christ, a king." Now they said it that way because they knew if they could pin him as an insurrectionist there's one thing about Rome. They don't want anybody being an insurrectionist or trying to have some kind of political coup in some corner of the Roman Empire. So they thought if we can put it that way, we know that Pilate is going to agree with us. But of course, they knew enough about Jesus' teaching that that's not at all what he was trying to be. He wasn't collecting a posse with riches to set up a palace and a rival capitol. He was, I mean, "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man doesn't even have a place to live." This guy was not a political threat and yet that's how they posited this. He's a political threat to you.

So, look at all three of those. I can tell you this. I guarantee you with everything that's in the text, all three of these are lies. Now, is he the Christ? Of course, he's the Christ, but he's not the kind of king they're implying. So all of these are deceptive. Now here's a question for you. Do you think they believed all these things? I'm thinking, I don't know. Knowing the fallenness of my own life when I'm trying to break through the restraints of my own moral barriers and hurdles, when I'm really set on doing whatever my flesh wants to do, I know this: when it comes to me saying those things in my own mind, I start to believe those things. I mean, I'm tempted to believe my own lies just so I can break through another level of moral restraint to kind of have the satisfaction somehow in my life by doing this sinful thing I want to do. That, I think, is the kind of analyzation we need to have in our own lives when we face our own temptations.

Number two, I'll put it this way: you need to "Consider the Lies We Tell Ourselves." Whether or not they saw this as an out and out lie, or whether they started to believe their own pitch to the judge, they were saying things that were not true. I know this, we say things that are not true. Even if we don't believe them, we lie to ourselves so that we can do the sinful thing we're craving. And that's where you've got to start with your own sin.

Now we're going to start to meddle a little bit in this sermon. You need to think about the sinful temptations that you face. And I want you to think about the way that you engage in, here's a word for you, the irrationality of wanting sin that you know, you know, it's not only not good, it's not good for you. You know that. You know how you're going to feel on the other side of that. You so desperately want to share that answer. You're going to guise it under a prayer request, but it's nothing but slander and gossip, but you're going to say it anyway. But you know, as you're gearing up to say it, you know the bad feeling you're going to have on the other side. You've got some lust of the flesh and, you know, if I can just say this about the whole temptation, I can justify why I do this. And you engage in that kind of self-deception. There's a lot of lying that goes on when it comes to our sin. Let's put it this way, as Hebrews 3 puts it, there is, I love the phrase, it's helpful,

"The deceitfulness of sin." Right? We know that every hook, if you will, of transgression that we are going to get snagged on, it's always got bait on it. Does it not? It's got something that baits it. We sit there and say, "I know that's not right, I can see the glimmer of the barb on that hook, but I'm looking at it and here's all the reasons I want to bite down on it anyway." And we lie to ourselves. "The deceitfulness of sin."

If you want to go back to the very first sin, we know this: it didn't happen without some external pressure. And though I can say you and I can fall into sin this afternoon without any external pressure, I do know that a lot of our sin doesn't happen without external pressure. I don't mean external pressure from people who you can see. I'm talking about the things you cannot see. And the Bible is very clear about this. There is a spiritual battle going on in our lives. And Eve did not reach out to pick that fruit off the tree that she knew in her mind, here's the truth, she knew in her mind that God said don't do it. And she knew God was good and she knew God had his best intentions for her and Adam. But she was listening to lies and she started to believe the lies, if not, she at least told herself those lies that justified when she said, "It looks good. I want it. It looks like it's going to be good for food, it's going to taste good, I want it. It's going to make me wise, I want it." And she bought the lies or at least used the lies to step across this threshold of transgression. And she dug into that thing and we do the same thing. No one really, I think, ever gets involved in sin, certainly not to the next level of sin in our descent into some kind of notorious sin, it doesn't happen without us lying to ourselves.

And when Jesus was talking about sin in John Chapter 8, he sat there with these leaders and he said, "Why don't you get what I'm saying to you?" This is John Chapter 8 verse 43. "It's because you cannot bear to hear my words." It's a moral issue for you. You can't handle it. And he said here's the problem, you're believing lies. And it talks now about in the text about Satan being a liar and the father of lies, and whenever he lies he speaks his own native language because no one is really going to step across the threshold of sin with conscience and moral law and godly peer pressure and the clear precepts of God's Word, we're not going to do that without believing some kind of lie.

And all I need to tell you and remind you of is that's always a part of our failure and our falling into sin. Please recognize the deceitfulness of sin and the deceiver that's behind those sins. And get serious about the fact that you and I are doing the same things that the Pharisees did here, the Sanhedrin in verse 2, in trying to justify my sin. "It's no big deal, it won't matter, God will forgive me, I deserve it, I've had a hard day, a hard life, a hard whatever. He's not fair, she was mean to me." Whatever you're saying to try and justify this, analyze those statements and start to apply some truth to that. "How can a young man keep his way pure? Keeping according to your word." "I've hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." The truth is the antidote, the truth. And that has to be in our minds, in our brains. You need to put it on sticky notes and stick it in places that will remind you, in places and context of temptation, and say, "I'm going to remember the truth when I'm tempted because I know the strategies to get me to believe a lie."

Verse 3. Luke Chapter 23 verse 3, "And Pilate asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' And he said, 'You've said so.' Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, 'I find no guilt in this man.'" OK. There's a five second summary of the first round with Pilate and he says, "Ahh... I don't think he's guilty."

I want to step out from the Sanhedrin for a second and just look at God dealing with Pilate, which may not seem all that remarkable to you unless you know the extra-biblical history of Pilate. So much about Pilate in extra-biblical history, let's take two historians, Philo and Josephus, both of

these early historians in the first century. Both of them describe Pontius Pilate, the prefect of Judea, as a cruel, oppressive, unreasonable man who just was ready to drop the hammer on anybody for any reason. That's the kind of guy he was. That's how he's described. He reigns from 26 A.D. to 36 A.D. right in this period of time, obviously, and he's a cruel, mean, kind of despotic governor. If you think that this is a reasonable thing, I'd probably do the same. "I don't know, these guys look jealous and angry. They want me to sign off on the crucifixion. I don't think I'm going to sign off on that." That might be what you would do, but that's not what we would expect from Pilate. If you really know him from a historical perspective, you're going to think I can't believe he didn't say, "Hey, you want to crucify this guy? Great. If you've got a halfway decent excuse for that, I'll sign off on that. He claims to be a king? Great. We don't need any other kings except for the Emperor. Kill him." That's not what he does. Matter of fact, he seems to go to great lengths to try and get out of this. Remember Barabbas? We're going to talk about this in two weeks. Pilate now has to pull out the worst possible criminal he's got to say, "OK, let's follow this pattern of saying let's release someone." He's trying desperately to get them to get off of Jesus' case. And if you know the parallel passage in Matthew, you might remember that even God works, it seems, through Pilate's wife and giving her some tormenting dream that she comes to Pilate's office and says, "Hey, Pilate. Have nothing to do with this guy. This righteous man." I mean, in other words, no thumbs down on him, man. Stay away. Keep your hands clean from this. Pilate is conflicted, Pilate is vacillating, Pilate is trying to skirt responsibility, Pilate seems to be, I mean you almost have great sympathy for Pilate, like he's trying to be a good guy here. But you need to know he wasn't a good guy. He wasn't known as a good guy, he was known as a cruel guy. And you see in this, God, working with a guy, that if he were just to be himself would have been a whole lot worse than we find him to be in this passage.

Now in the end he gives the thumbs down to Christ. He's a bad guy. He's culpable, it's not good. I get it. He's a bad guy. But it sure is interesting that it took a long time for him to get there. Why? Because not only did God have restraints in place for him in his own conscience and even in this dream that his wife had, but you know what, God was being gracious and patient with Pilate. In other words, God could have said, "Yeah, you know what, you're just the right guy to condemn my Son, so I'm going to make sure you do that at the drop of a hat. You're going to incur all the punishment of that kind of hair-trigger against Christ." No, he didn't do that. God works with him. God continues to try and get him to back off.

Number three, I'll put it this way. You and I need to appreciate God's restraint towards sinners. God is seeing sinners. And while every single one of them deserves to pile up as much sin on the heap of their sin and reach the maximum judgment at the end of time, God continues to show patience. He works with sinners. He restrains their sin and in restraining their sin, he's restraining his judgment on them. God is patient, is he not? I know the things about the world we hate is if God is so good why is he allowing all this terrible stuff in the world. You understand that if God didn't allow all this terrible stuff in the world, none of us would be around to contemplate the problem. You get that, right? Why? Because you're less than God in terms of your holiness. All of us fall short of the glory of God.

If God was not patient, see, if he wasn't patient, then, yeah, we could have a fantastic society. The problem is none of us would be a part of it because we're all sinners. There's the problem. And when it comes to God giving grace to people and, by that I mean giving them time, and the Bible tells us why he gives them time. He gives them time, Second Peter Chapter 3, so that they might come to repentance. Why is it that he said, "Hey, this world, every thought and intention of their heart is only continually evil," this is Genesis 6 now, "so I'm going to destroy it. I'm not going to sit

here and continue to put up with this, but I'll give them 120 years." What? Look how incredibly patient God is with sinners.

God is patient with this world, he was patient with the ancient world before the flood. Matter of fact, some of the greatest, strongest statements about God putting up with things comes when he speaks of the pre-Diluvian world, that world before the flood, and it is so corrupt, but he continues and continues to be gracious. Now it's a kind of grace that results in a really wicked, corrupt society and you and I complain about our wicked and corrupt society, but you know why it's wicked and corrupt? Because God keeps waiting, he keeps patiently waiting.

The word that translates patience most of the time in the New Testament, there are two words actually, let me give you the first one which you know, "Hypomone." Right? That is the picture of endurance. Hypomone and we only say that as a Greek word because it has two great components "hypo" is "underneath," "mone" is "to remain" "Mone" is "to remain." That's one word. God's got a lot, if you will, to speak humanly about God, I understand just for the sake of illustration, the weight of bearing a sinful world is a lot, but he bears up under it. He's long-suffering in that regard.

But as long as I'm using that antiquated word, "long-suffering," let me give you the other word that translates patience, it's the word "makrothymia," makro, not micro, makro. "Makro" means a lot. "Thymia" in Greek is the word for "heat" or "fire." Right? That concept of something heated up, which of course analogizes anger, long anger. It doesn't mean he has a long period of anger, it's a long period, it's a long buffer until he gets angry. He's long-suffering. He'll suffer a long time before his anger explodes. God is a patient God and he's a patient God with people that are provoking him to anger and justice, but God holds off. He's very patient.

I tell the illustration often about me as a kid and messing around and my older brother and a lot of bad stuff and my dad would come home from work and after dinner maybe lie on the couch and relax and we would be sitting there goofing around and dad would say, "Stop that. Don't throw the ball. Stop yelling," whatever we were doing. And, of course, as long as dad was laying on the couch you'd kind of press him a little bit. What you'd be doing is you're testing his patience at that point. And there is a point you recognize that what you're doing is nothing other than really stretching this patience of your father, that's makrothymia, the longer he lays on the couch the more patient a father you have even though you're completely disobeying him and rebelling against him. That's a picture of a God right now who continues, if you will, as a human as an illustration this is, laying on the couch saying, "You know what? I know it's bad. I know it's wrong. I've said I'm going to deal with it. But let's just give him more time to get this right."

That's a humanistic way to look at this I realize but that is the picture from Second Peter Chapter 3. And it's a God who is constantly referred to as a God who is putting up with us and, by the way, it's not just non-Christians he puts up with, it's Christians he puts up with. Do you remember that statement in Luke in the passage? If I can remember it, here it is, Luke Chapter 9. It was a long time ago. Luke Chapter 9, when Christ is speaking to his generation and his disciples are included in this example, he says, "How long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? How long am I going to have to put up with you?" He says that to his own children. Just like in the wilderness wanderings when it says that Stephen gives that great sermon in Acts Chapter 13. I just love the way he puts it, here it is: "For forty years God put up with his people in the wilderness," put up with them.

I just want to say that you and I need to recognize that God, if he were to be the God of justice,

immediate justice, we'd have a whole different experience on this planet than we have right now and you ought to be thankful for that. God is patient with sinners, he's patient with our world, he's patient toward you. We read a great passage this morning in our Daily Bible Reading. Hopefully you're keeping up with us, if not jump on today and start in First Timothy 1, because that's our passage for today in the New Testament. And Paul said this, "I received mercy." I received mercy. Who are you? You're the persecutor of the church, you were a terrible opposition, you know, not only researcher but an executer of Christians. And he says, "But God was patient with me and I received mercy, so that as the foremost of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his perfect patience." There's the word, makrothymia, the perfect patience. "As an example," to you and me, "to those who believe on him for eternal life."

The point is this: you and I ought to be grateful for the fact that God is a long-suffering, merciful God who loves us so much, he often times will give us the time to get things right. It may be as I talk about temptation and you identify specific temptations in your life, maybe some barriers of restraint that you're stepping through, and you say this: "Nothing bad has happened yet." Well, it's only because of God's patience.

God is a very patient God. In the words of Psalm 86:15, "You, O Lord, our God are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger." There's kind of the Hebrew expression of the one Greek word makrothymia, you're slow to get angry, "abounding in steadfast love." A whole another sermon there on the fact that if God is that way toward us as sinners we ought to be that way toward other people, but I don't have time for that sermon. But it's a good little point maybe to discuss small groups this week.

God is very patient with Pilate. We'll see the other side of this as Pilate ends up being persuaded to have Jesus crucified. But for now, hey, round one, he says, "No, he's not guilty." But as I said, verse 5, look at it, Chapter 23 verse 5. "But they were urgent..." But they were urgent. But, man, they were urgent. They doubled down, they said, "He stirs up the people." I don't know what all was involved in that argument but, "You know what, it's not good, we don't like him. He's teaching all throughout Judea getting people all upset and in Galilee up north and even here in Jerusalem. He's just a mess. Please have him crucified. Can you sign this execution order please? Please! We don't like him, and we want you to agree with us."

It's one thing when God patiently endures, either non-Christians who think they have all the time in the world, or even us as we continue in sin when we know we shouldn't and we need to repent. But I'll tell you what, that ought to be a very scary thing for us and we ought to think of it this way. Number four. Never presume upon God's patience. I pulled that right out of Romans Chapter 2 verse 4 by the way. "Never Presume Upon the Patience of God." Romans Chapter 2 verse 4 says, "Don't presume upon the riches of his kindness and his forbearance," that's another great biblical word, "or his patience knowing that this kindness," the reason he hasn't gotten off the couch yet is that, "he wants to lead you to repentance," he wants to continue to persuade you, he wants your conscience to work, the authority, the lawful peer pressure, the rules, he wants you to stop. Stop.

Talk about second chances, please, would you not crucify him? I mean humanly speaking that's what should be going on here. You can't get it signed off on. Don't do it. Don't double down on this. Never presume on the patience of God. Let me get very specific with you that if you're not a Christian here this morning, you think, "Well, I don't know. I'm not the kind of Christian you guys are talking about at least, and I kind of want to run my own life and..." Matter of fact, that's the number one thing that people tell me. I'll share the Gospel with them, when it comes down to it, "I

want to be in charge of my own life. Maybe I can find a church where God, you know, is my co-pilot, that would be a good place. But you guys seem to think that God needs to be the pilot. I don't like that stuff." That's because we're teaching the Bible here and when it comes to what God wants to be, it's the only thing he will be, if he's going to enter your life, he's going to be in charge. He's the lord of all.

But some people say, "Well, if that's the way it is, I'll invite him in the cockpit at the end of my life." I hear it all the time. "I just kind of want to be in charge a little bit longer," and some people are bold enough to say, particularly young people like to say, "Well, when I'm just at the end of my life. If you're telling me I can get right with God, he'll forgive all my sins, can I wait till the very end?" And my answer is no. You really can't. Why? Because what you're doing is presuming upon the patience of God. Don't presume on the patience of God.

Let me give you two reasons why. Number one, because there's something in Romans Chapter 1 that says God will turn you over to your sin. At some point you will try his patience long enough where he'll say, "Fine." And he will get off the couch, so to speak, and walk out the door. He'll be done. But he'll be done with a passivity toward you. Now think about that. The only reason you're ever considering becoming a Christian, non-Christians in the room, is because of the pressure of the Spirit of God is putting upon you. That's the pressure you feel. And at some point, when God says all right, it says it three times in Romans 1, "I'll turn them over." "I'll turn them over." "I'll turn them over." You want to continue to break through the moral restraints, he'll say, "Fine. Great. Fine."

It's like someone with a fence and then a barbed wire and then bars on the window and they're trying to keep you from breaking in. But at some point, "Hey, you're going to break in? Fine. Take the bars off the window, just come on in. You want to do it? Do it. I'll turn you over to your sins." But you're going to reap all the stuff that comes with that. And if you think you can become a Christian on your deathbed when you're 80-years-old, sorry. There will be zero pressure from the Holy Spirit at that point. He'll turn you over. That's the thread in Romans Chapter 1, which means, as it says throughout the book of Hebrews, today is the day. If you feel the pressure of the Spirit of God to repent and become a Christian? Today's the day, don't wait. You presume upon God's patience, it could be over. It could be over just in the sense that you'll continue to live, you might have a great life. You'll be the pilot till the end. You may be successful, relatively healthy till you die, you might be economically comfortable. You'll get all the stuff you want except for the fact that you'll be the fool that Jesus taught about, who, after his life is over, you got silos filled with stuff, but you're going nowhere. "What would a man give in exchange for his soul?" That's a ridiculous... Talk about the irrationality of sin. What a fool to gain the whole world but forfeit your soul.

Number two, it may not come with the fact that you just live your life out. You may not live your life out. And not just because you might die of a heart attack, which I guess is still an opportunity. It's a small opportunity, small chance that that will happen, humanly speaking. But I know one thing that's absolutely certain, at some point the Bible says all the opportunities are going to be done because he's going to come back like a thief in the night. While people are saying everything's copacetic, peaceful, secure, "Then sudden destruction will come upon them like labor pains upon a pregnant woman and they will not escape." And that's a good parallel concept of what Jesus taught in Luke 21, which says it's going to be like a trap, that the coming of the Lord, like a trap.

And if you want to tie all this together, think more specifically and detailed than your eschatology, think of it this way, it says this in Thessalonians, those who believe the lie... They don't like the truth, they don't love the truth, they don't obey the truth, when it comes to the fact that, if my

eschatology is right, the Church is taken and the hell breaks loose that's all spoken of in First and Second Thessalonians, people get saved, but it's going to be the people who are not sitting in churches today. It's not going to be the people who have had the call of the Spirit on their lives, because they said no one too many times. And then God's eschatological plan will unfold and there'll be no more opportunities.

Non-Christians, you need to not try or presume upon the patience of God because he may turn you over to your disobedience, or he may close the door of mercy, much like the door shut on the ark. You may have your feet still on the ground, but there's no getting in when God says the door is closing and it's going to start to rain.

And Christians can say, "Oh, yeah, get them Pastor Mike." Your turn. Christians, we do the same thing. Oh, we're not rejecting Christ as our Lord or our savior but, you're toying around with sin and temptation. You know there are things in your life right now that you need to deal with, and you continue to listen to the lies and you're saying, "I don't want to deal with that temptation, I don't want to deal with that sin, I kind of like my sin, it's my secret sin, my private sin. No one sees it, no one knows it. I'm just going to continue, I deserve it, God will forgive me, whatever your excuses are. And I am saying isn't it great God is patient with you and hadn't zapped you, that's great. Let me tell you this. Do not presume upon the patience of God. Don't presume upon the patience of God.

Because here's the thing about dad. Right? The creator might get off the couch and walk out the room to the non-Christians. I get that. But when it comes to you as a child of God, your Father will get off the couch, Hebrews 12 says, and he will incur discipline in your life. He will actively put something in your life that will be painful. Here's how it's put. It's painful, it's not pleasant. All because like a child who is being disciplined or chastised by his father, so the Father chastises every child who he receives. If you're going to be rebellious against God, I guarantee you, the first time you do that, there may be no immediate consequence. But you're not working on the first time are you? That temptation, that falling into sin, you got to say, I got to get serious about that. If my hand causes me to sin, cut it off. "I can't do it." My eyes cause me to sin, gouge it out. Because one too many times dad gets off the couch and his patience is up and he's going to deal with you, not as a judge who cast people into hell, but as a father who's going to discipline and purify his kids.

"OK, well I'm tough, I can take it. I can take the spiritual spanking from God." You're not going to say that because there's another aspect to it. Let me give you this one from Numbers Chapter 14. In Numbers Chapter 14, if you know your Old Testament, I taught you this in the Old Testament Survey, you got to remember Numbers 14. It was when they were tested at Kadesh Barnea, they were at the front of the Promised Land, they should have gone in, they'd left Egypt and God has them send in the 12 spies. They come back, ten of them say, no we can't do it, two of them, Joshua and Caleb, say we can. They said no. Well, they said no to God a lot but that was it, that was it. God got off the couch and said we're done. And the one thing he said is you're not going into the Promised Land, to quote the book of Hebrews, "In my wrath," my anger, "I swore to them, 'You will not enter my rest.'"

Now did he ditched them into the Red Sea? No. That was what he did with the Egyptians. What did he do? He led them through the wilderness, gave them manna to eat, gave them quail to eat, made sure their sandals didn't wear out, pillar of fire by night, cloud of smoke by day, led them, Moses, still their pastor, still their leader. All that worked out great. But what about the Promise Land? That's what they really wanted. Let me say this, even if you think you can tough out the spiritual

discipline that God gives you, you're going to forfeit benefits and blessings in your life. Think about that. Because in Numbers 14, you may not know this, but at the end of that, Numbers 14, we often think about the test at Kadesh Barnea, at the end of that passage, it says a group of them came to Moses and said, "We're sorry, we're sorry. We sinned. We should have believed you, we want to go in now. Let's go, let's take up arms and fight against the Canaanites. Let's take the Promise Land." And Moses goes, "What are you doing? We're done. God said you're not going in." Can you get right with God? Sure. Will he forgive you? Yes. If you confess your sins they will be forgiven? Sure. Yeah, get right with God. "But can we go on into the Promise Land?" Nope, can't go into the Promise Land.

Reminds you of Nathan in front of David. Right? When David finally sees in his sexual sin, "Yes, I was wrong. I want to be forgiven." And God says, "You can be forgiven. But the mess you caused? It's going to stay. As a matter of fact, it's going to start with the grievous pain of you losing this child and that child that you can see will die. And then the sin you're going to see in your kids and your grandkids, sexual sin because of this. Well, put your crash helmet on, here it comes." David says, "What? You don't love me?" "No, I love you, I forgive you, I forgive you." All I'm saying is you can forfeit things in your spiritual life because you test the patience of God. Don't test the patience of God.

Well, that doesn't help if you're looking back in the rearview mirror. This sermon is not about your past, it's about your future. The reason I'm giving you this sermon today? I say this with the authority of Scripture. It's because all we can deal with is what lies ahead. And I'm concerned about what you would do on Thursday without the sermon. I'm concerned what you would do next month without this sermon. I need you to take this sermon and say this is the sermon I want to take to heart so that I don't break through another barrier of moral restraint. I want to see the sin and not get as close to the edge as I can. I want to get as far away from it as I can, and I want to make sure that I don't any longer test God's patience. I want to repent. I want to repent now. Because I know that this sin can lead to the next sin and the next sin and then eventually people are going to drop their jaw and say I can't believe that he or she did that. Repent now. God is a gracious God.

Listen to this: Psalm 78 verses 37 through 39. "Their heart was not steadfast toward him," talking about that generation in the desert under Moses. "They weren't faithful to God's covenant. And yet God, being compassionate, he atoned for their iniquity, didn't destroy them; he restrained his anger often, did not stir up his wrath. He remembered they are just flesh, a wind that passes and doesn't come again."

Let me encourage you in this regard. Whatever your past was, can we forget your past for now, forgetting what lies behind? Can we press on to what lies ahead and what lies ahead right now are decisions about your temptation, to say its time for me to get serious about this. But I know this: that God can look at my past and say what's done is done, but in the future, let's not take another left turn. Can we walk steady and straight? God is a God with all the weaknesses like Psalm 103 says, "Father has compassion on his kids." He knows their frame, he knows we're just dust. But he can take weak people like you and I and provide for us opportunities to stand strong. But you've got to do everything you can do to stand against the evil one on that evil day. So today, as part of that equipment, strap on your sword, put the breast plate on, put the helmet on and say its time for me to fight sin in a way I haven't fought it before.

It's not about pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. I understand. It's about Grace. I get sanctification. I can guarantee I'm orthodox on that. It's just that you and I better do all that we can



do to stand firm. I don't want to be like the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the people who constituted the Sanhedrin. Let's don't presume any longer upon the patience of God.

Pray with me, would you? God, help us as a church to see the seriousness of our sins. I know it was kind of a downer sermon, I get that, but sometimes we just need to wake up to the fact that what we did last week, what we did last month, it cannot be repeated, it cannot continue. We need to say before you, it's done, it's over, I'm not going back. I'm not going to put myself in that situation again. I'm not going to believe those lies anymore. I'm going to have to surround myself with the kind of help that I need, which starts with truth being in my brain. Godly peer pressure. I gotta let some people in on this so that I can do the right thing the next time I'm tempted. I've got to get this all together in my life so that we don't move further down a descent into some kind of sin that brings dishonor upon, not just us, but it brings dishonor upon your name.

God, we thank you that you're a kind and compassionate God, that we sit here today without a lot of the consequences that should be on us right now. You've been withholding and not giving full vent to your righteous parental discipline. And yet, God, we want to make sure that we don't presume any longer upon that. We'd like you to take care of us, God, clearly guiding us in the path of righteousness for your namesake. So provide, God, very clear application for this sermon for us. Bring to mind the very specific temptations that we deal with. Let us have success in our lives, not to take this lightly. God, we commit ourselves afresh to you this morning. We pray this sermon would do us good for weeks and months ahead.

In Jesus name. Amen.