



Israel's Greatest Hits Vol. II-Part 3

When the Lord Seems Far Off

Pastor Mike Fabarez

You know when my kids were little we used to watch as a family together America's Funniest Videos. I thought they liked it. I mean they laughed at all the right times. They seemed to like it. But recently my kids, of course, growing up and we'll have a family dinner, my oldest brings his wife, my middle will bring his fiancé, my youngest will drive in from who knows where she's been, and I'll turn it on because they're all there and they've all confessed to me they hate the show. They can't stand it. They don't like it. But I don't care. I left it on anyway and then I caught myself this week watching it when no one was there so I guess that's me that likes the show, but I saw the show this week and I saw a clip of an ostrich and I guess as a city boy it just struck me as I looked at this video how bizarre this animal is. It was one of those drive-through zoo things, which make no sense to me to start with, and this gigantic, I mean these birds are huge, they tower over the cars and then their long-necked comes in and their head. It's just like it's a horror movie. It's grabbing things, sunglasses and cell phones and just all kinds of weird things happen. It must be the camera angle but I just sat there and pondered from it what a strange, bizarre animal this is. Now, I don't know much about the ostrich other than the old adage that's become a part of our vocabulary about people sticking their head in the sand, that's what they're known for. I actually went online and looked at some pictures of the ostrich sticking his head in the sand. Now, it may not be, as I read some articles, for the reasons that we might think, but it's an apt picture, a real telling dramatic picture of someone trying to hide themselves from reality, shielding themselves from reality, which is all comical and ridiculous because of course this giant body is there exposed on the landscape. But you have the head under the sand as though this is some kind of, you know, hiding from reality when in fact it's not.

Now, I understand that adage and I recognize the parallel to how I often feel and I assume you do too when you've just had enough of this world. You've had enough of the things in this world, the crime, the violence, the dishonesty, the oppression, the injustice of the things that we see around us all the time, and we want to shield ourselves from all that, because the world just gets to be too much. The mess of this world, it's infuriating, it's overwhelming, it's maddening, it makes us angry and sometimes we just want to shut it off. Now, I'm not against you turning off your news feed from time to time but I want to tell you this morning as a pastor and a preacher of God's Word that you cannot stick your head in the sand, as some preachers might even advocate. And I've heard them advocate it, "You just need to stop all the negative influences, just get all that out of your lives, shouldn't be reading the news, shouldn't be reading about crime."

Listen, if you're going to minister in the real world, if you're going to love people and care for people who live in this world. Right? This is going to intersect at some point with people who you care about and love, not to mention your own life. Which by the way, I'd like you to not mention your own life this morning when it comes to this issue because the passage I want you to look at, which is helpful for us in understanding how we deal with this crime-infested, violent, terrible world that we live in. It's really filled with a lot of stuff that is disheartening and sometimes so overwhelming and angering we don't know what to do with it but to shut it out. I want to take this passage that is there for us in a way that presents to us a real solution to knowing what it is to get frustrated with the world we live in and yet not lose our hope, not

lose the ability to rejoice always, as Paul said in Philippians 4, "And again I say rejoice." How do we maintain hope and joy in a world that's so messed up if I'm not supposed to just stick my head in the sand and block it all out? Well, Psalm 10 has the answer and it's a very important answer and we all need it. I want you, as I just said, to see it not for yourself. Matter of fact, that's the key as I'm about to read these 18 verses for you. The key is not seeing this as when injustice strikes your life.

This is not a passage that's going to help you understand what it's like to respond when YOU feel like things have not been equitable in your life, or you've been the victim of some kind of oppression or injustice. That's not what I want you to think. There are other verses for that. There are other psalms for that. We're going to have other psalms in our series that are going to be about that, but this one is really, I'd like to now call it the "news feed" psalm. Because when you see our world and you get frustrated and you feel like it's just overwhelming and I just can't stand this world anymore, this is the psalm for you. Thirteen verses explain the problem in the generation of the psalmist that looks a lot like, in exposing the relevancy of the Word of God, it looks a lot like the world we woke up to this morning. If you don't stick your head in the sand, you really look at the things that we deal with, the people who you know, the people who you love, the people who live in our neighborhoods, in our county, in our state, in our country, the things that we go through in this world, if you know what's happening all around us, you got to feel like this sometimes.

Let me read it for you. I'll read all 18 verses from the English Standard Version. Let me start in verse 1 when it says, "Why, O Lord," why Yahweh, "do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" And who hasn't had that thought before? Right? God, it's terrible here. Where are you? Why? Well, because, "in arrogance the wicked hotly pursue the poor." They're taking advantage of people who have no defenses. Now here's the prayer of a man who's frustrated at his culture. "Let them be caught in the schemes that they have devised." Now again, he's not adding himself in the poor there. He's an observer of his culture and his generation and he says, "I want this to stop. Let the bad guys lose and let the good guys get out of trouble. That's what I want to see." But it's not that way in this world, verse 3, "For the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul, and the greedy one for gain he curses and renounces the Lord." Now you add that theological level to it and it's going to get your blood pressure up. I hope it does at least. You're going to say people who are out there really, I mean, just defying God. They think there's no accountability. They think that God doesn't even care. As a matter of fact, they say, "In the pride of his face the wicked do not seek him: all his thoughts are, 'There is no God.'" I mean they're not just atheists, as we talked about last week, their anti-theists and they continue sometimes to say we don't care about, not just morality and ethics, we don't really care about getting ahead on the backs and heads of other people. Now I know sometimes this is relegated to the crime blotters of our newspapers and our news feeds but we've got to realize that this is a world of people who are boasting in their evil. So often we're struck with the same kind of attitude that the psalmist had and that is, "God where are you?"

Because in verse 5 it gets even worse. They prosper, it seems, all the time. "His ways prosper all the time; and your judgments," oh, they're way out there somewhere up in heaven. "They're out of sight; as for the foes," of this person, this wicked person, "he puffs at them." There's just a prideful kind of people, it doesn't matter. I'm dominant, I'm going to oppress, I'm going to do what I want, "He says in his heart," hey, I'm the winner, "I shall not be moved; throughout all generations. I shall not meet adversity." I'm going to survive. I'm going to



prevail, I'm going to do what I want. "His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; and under his tongue are mischief and iniquity."

Now this is about criminals here, look at verses 8 and 9. "He sits in ambush in the villages; in hiding places he murders the innocent." See, this is the news feed psalm. Right? It's about homicide, it's about people attacking people. "His eyes stealthy watch for the helpless." Right? They're stalking their victims. "He lurks in ambush like a lion in his thicket; he lurks that he may seize the poor; he seizes the poor when he draws them into his net." Verse 10, "The helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might. He says in his heart, 'God has forgotten, he's hidden his face, he will never see it.'" Well it's interesting in verse 4 he's a very brazened kind of bloviating atheist, but now you recognize, as we said last time, people suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Even if he can't convince himself there is no God, at least he thinks, well God is not going to hold me to account. God's not going to see it. God's not going in any way hold me accountable.

But the psalmist says in verse 12, "Arise," Yahweh, "arise O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted. Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, 'You will not call to account?'" Why do they think there's no accountability? Well, because they're getting away with it, because they're prospering, because they're winning, because the bad guys are winning and the good guys are losing. But here's the corrective in verse 14. Here's the attitude that's starting to shift in the mind of the psalmist, "But you do see," you do see it, "for you note mischief and vexation," from the petty crimes to the homicidal maniacs. Why do you see that? "That you may take it into your hands." You see it, you take note because you're going to hold them accountable. "To the helpless," he says to you, "the helpless commits himself." I mean, they're trusting in you, sometimes they reach out, certainly the victims, and say God, God. "You have been the helper of the fatherless," those who can't defend themselves, you've been their helper.

Now here's a very vivid prayer. "Break the arm of the wicked and the evildoer." I want them to stop. "Call his wickedness to account till you find none." We don't want any more of this wickedness, we don't want any more of the evil doers. "Yahweh is king forever and ever." He's sovereign, he's in charge and the nations, these nations, if they're going to rebel, if they're going to be filled with anarchy, if they're going to be filled with crime and violence, "they're going to perish from the land." Now that's the hope and the promise of God. And then he ends with this, verses 17 and 18, "O Yahweh, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their hearts; you will incline your ear to do justice to the fatherless and to the oppressed, so that the man of the earth," this guy who thinks he's so big, but he's just a mortal man, "may strike terror no more."

Well, we live in a day where a lot of folks are striking terror in people's hearts and you may be safely ensconced behind some gated community in a nicely secured and alarmed house. But you recognize, don't you, if you just open up your news feed, you see we live in a world that's filled with crime and violence and you cannot stick your head in the sand. We live in that kind of world. But I don't want that kind of frustration to in any way block out the ability that we should have as Christians walking with Christ to rejoice, to be hopeful and to be glad. Well, how do we do that? You're telling us to get our head out of the sand and see the problems in this world.

Well, that's the whole point of this psalm. That's really what we ought to do. We ought to do both. And I want to start with something that's quite negative, it seems, and you may have come to church to feel better about things and you might be saying, "Well, this sermon isn't helping." Well, don't walk out quite yet. OK? Even though the first point may seem to you not what you signed up for when you came to church today, I want to tell you just glancing through those first 13 verses again, here is a guy taking note of his culture, his generation that's filled with crime and murderers and thugs and people who are out there to do criminal activity and violence and aggravated assault in the world they live in. We got the same thing. And he's frustrated about it. He is, here's a biblical word for it, he is indignant. And I think if you want to be godly you ought to do the same thing. Really? I think you ought to do the same thing.

Number one in your outline, you ought to, number one, "Be Indignant About Injustice." Jot that down. Be indignant about injustice. Injustice. We have a God who declares that he himself is perfect. All his ways are just. He's a God of faithfulness, without iniquity, just and upright is he. That God, guess what, when he sees iniquity and oppression you may think that he doesn't care because he doesn't do anything about it immediately and you're crying out to God, "where are you, why do you stand far off?" But the God of the Bible, trust me, he does not feel good about it. As a matter of fact, here's a good word for you. He feels indignant about it. That's a great word. There's a righteous, just anger over the injustice, the crime, the violence and the oppression in our world. God feels that way. Matter of fact, if you want to be godly, you ought to feel that way.

Matter of fact one, of my favorite verses in this regard to remember and is a great mnemonic as it relates to this verse because I think about it when I pass a 7-Eleven where, by the way, there's a lot of crime. Matter of fact, I thought to get in the mindset of what I need to have in my heart when I stepped up to preach this week I was watching, I know this is strange message prep, but videotapes of violent crimes in our community. And as I looked at these, man, it seems like half of them took place at the 7-Eleven. But so I thought to myself, here's a good mnemonic for you, memorize Psalm 7:11, because in Psalm 7:11, when you think about it, next time you getting your Slurpee walking pass that thing that measures the height of the criminals as they leave the place. Right? I'm reminded here's what God thinks about the crime that takes place, not only at 7-Eleven, but everywhere else it seems in our culture. There's a lot of violence, a lot of crime, a lot of thieves, a lot of thugs. Here's what the Bible says. It says, "The Lord is a righteous judge, a God who feels indignation every day." God is a righteous judge, a God who feels indignation every day. You come to church, I hope, and say I'd like to leave church, get in my car, leave the parking lot more godly than when I came to church. That would be great. Sitting under the preaching of God's Word. If you want to be more godly, if you haven't felt indignation every day, perhaps you're not as godly as you need to be. Maybe I can help you in that regard. You came to feel better and I'm saying, hey, you should be angry a little bit more often. What?

Here's an interesting study. Study the theme of anger in the Bible. You say, anger I want to get rid of that. No, you're right. There's a lot of expressions of anger you should completely get rid of in your life. The trick is to be angry, as the Bible says in Ephesians, and yet not sin. That's the trick. Angry and not sin. Because the Bible, here's the study, every time you see anger in the Bible, half the times the topic shows up it's ascribed to God. And you think, "Wow, really?" Yeah, it's ascribed to God. God is a God who describes himself as angry, indignant, justifiably

angry at sin. And that is something, if I want to be more godly, maybe I ought to feel what he feels. Particularly if I recognize and understand that the perfect model of humanity, Jesus Christ, did the same thing. As I often say, some people think the God of the Old Testament is angry, he took a nap in the intertestamental period, he's a lot more cheery in the New Testament. That's not true. Read the book of Revelation, by the way, if you want to put that myth to rest. Right? The whole book is about an angry God. Can't get past Chapter 5 without them saying, "the wrath of God and of the lamb have come." Right? God is a God who certainly is angry at sin. He's angry at injustice. You need to recognize that in the Bible, in the New Testament, Jesus, the perfect picture of humanity, gets indignant as well.

Let me quote a passage for you. It's found in Mark Chapter 10. Now I know as I give you the context you're going to not picture it the way that it actually happened, because you're going to picture it the way they put on lithographs and paintings in the Christian bookstores in the gilded frames. You're going to see this is a meme on somebody's Twitter account that has butterflies and kittens on their site, on their banner. But listen, I'll prove it to you. I'll give you the key most memorable line from Mark 10. Here it is, are you ready? (Said sweetly) "Let the little children come to me; do not hinder them, for such belongs the kingdom of God." Did I say that about as disgustingly feminine as I could possibly say that? "Let the little children come to me (mockingly)." That is not how Jesus said that. Let me read the line just before it. "And Jesus was indignant and said, 'Let the little children come to me (mockingly).' That's not how Jesus said that. Jesus was angry. And this was a small injustice. I mean really, a relatively small injustice. He saw people coming with their children and the Apostles going, "No, no, no, no. Don't disturb the rabbi. And Jesus is saying, "Let those kids come. Let them come to me. I'm illustrating the whole concept of the kingdom by the fact that children are children who are dependent and have faith. Bring those kids."

Now I don't know if it was, "(Angrily) LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME!" (Smile). But he wasn't happy when he said it. Jesus was indignant. What does that mean? Well, he saw things happening that shouldn't happen. In this case it was Peter and Thomas and the rest going, "na, na, na, na, na, na." And he gets mad. Just study that, Jesus getting angry, God getting angry. They get indignant at the right things. The problem with our anger is we're often getting indignant about the wrong things. The thing I'm being very clear, giving you license to be indignant at, is the injustice in our world. I don't even want you to think about the inequities and injustice that are foisted upon you. I want you to think just about the injustice and inequities that we see all around us. Read your news feed and be ready to get indignant. And you ought to be, because you're sharing in the character of God at that point. I know some people say, "I don't want to feel that way." So you don't even try to connect with anything that's happening in our culture. You don't like to listen to talk radio, they're all angry, you don't like watch the news, it's all about violence, it's all bad news. I just want good news and butterflies and kittens. Well, Jesus doesn't think that way. God, the omniscient God, doesn't think that way. Here it is: Psalm 7:11. "Our God is a righteous judge, a God who feels indignation every day."

I don't want you to be someone who's getting angry and doing sinful things, but I want you to connect with the heart of God, a God who says injustice makes me justifiably mad. The combination here, the descriptive in Psalm 119:53, is always helpful for me. It's not just indignation like some kind of scholarly bent brow. Here it is for you: Psalm 119:53, "Hot indignation seizes me because of the wicked, those who forsake your law." There's a good

description of someone who looks at their news feed and says, "This makes me really mad, hot indignation." I'm not just saying it's a kind of anger that just wants to take my shoe off and throw it at the TV when I see the news, although I feel that way. It's seeing these things and having compassion for those who are oppressed.

Matter of fact, one of the things I did first thing when I studied this passage this week is I broke it into a chart, and I put on the chart a list of all the bad guys and how they were described, and the good guys and how they were described. And the good guys in this passage are always the victims. Right? And in the right-hand column I had the poor, the innocent, the helpless, the Hebrew word is the people who are being sad because they are being victimized. The poor, again it's repeated, and then a different Hebrew word that's translated, "helpless" in our passage in verse 10, the cast down, their heads are down. Then it ends with a description of the good guys, if you will, the victims, being afflicted. Now the bad guys, they're arrogant, they're boasting, they're greedy, they're cursing, they're renouncing, they're prospering, they're puffing at their foes. They're saying I'm never going to be moved, they're cursing, deceitful, oppression, mischief, iniquity, ambushing, murderers, stealthily watching, lurking, crushing, sinking, falling, making the victims fall, saying God's not going to see, they renounce God. I mean, the good guys and the bad guys. The good guys aren't sitting there fighting with armor on horseback, they're being victimized and that is a heart that just doesn't get angry, it has compassion for the victim.

Matter of fact, the first time you see God show a real kind of expressive emotion in the Bible, to show that side of us that we're made in the image of him, we have that capacity to feel, would be in Genesis Chapter 6 when he's about to flood the world. Now that's an angry act, you would agree. Right? To destroy the world? That's an act of God's justifiable, articulated, clearly measured anger at the world. But it starts with this in Genesis Chapter 6 when it says about God, "He saw the wickedness of mankind, it was so great in the earth, their intention of their heart was evil only continually." And it says, "The Lord was grieved to his heart."

I want my anger, my indignation, to be tempered by the fact that I feel bad for the victims. You can't watch YouTube and watch crime videos about people being mugged at the 7-Eleven or being murdered in a back alley or, you know, having their purses snatched or being beat up by somebody at some event and not say I feel bad for those people. I mean, I feel really, really bad. I grieve over that.

Matter of fact, here's a sign of your godliness. Jot it down. You can look it up later, Ezekiel Chapter 9. In Ezekiel Chapter 9 the society in Jerusalem in the 6th century B.C. was so bad, there was crime, there was violence, there were all kinds of rapes taking place, aggravated assaults, larceny, burglary, all that was going on. And here's what God says. I want to not destroy everyone in Jerusalem. I'm going to save those who are righteous and I don't want them to fall under the same kind of condemnation as those who are guilty. But he doesn't say in this scene, "Hey, angels go out and mark for me," because that's the image that's used, "go out and mark for me the people that do good things. Go out and mark for me the people who are righteous and stand up for what's right.

The people who are distinguished as designated for being saved from Nebuchadnezzar's army are designated this way: "Go out," he says, this is Ezekiel 9:4, he says, "And put a mark on those who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in this city." Sigh

and groan. You stick your head in the sand you're never going to qualify for that. I don't want you to be characterized by sighing and groaning. I just want it to punctuate your daily experience because it punctuates God's daily experience because I would like to have the same response to injustice that God has. Let's stop trying to insulate ourselves from all of that and recognize when you see things going on to which other people become victims and oppressed, when you see those who are taken advantage of, you need to feel that. You need to feel that as a groaning and a sighing and then it should make you indignant. So that you can go out and take vengeance into your own hand? No. Be a vigilante? I'm not saying that. I'm saying it just starts with identifying with a God who really, really is indignant over injustice.

Then I need you to do what the passage teaches us to do in verses 14 through 16. Look at it with me, Psalm 10 verses 14 through 16. "But you do see." I know they sit there in verse 13 and think, "No one is going to call me to account." No. God, you do see, "for you note mischief and vexation," no matter how easy, how small, how big it is, "that you may take it into your hands." I love the verb "to note." It's a great verb because I always picture it literally as someone standing there with a yellow tablet and a pen in his hand taking note of everything that happens. I know it seems like he's passive. I know that's how the psalm starts. God where are you? You're standing far off like you're watching football or something. That's not what's happening. God is taking note on everything that takes place. Here's a great psalm or a great proverb for you, Proverbs 15:3. I hope you quote this often, you think this often. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place keeping watch on the evil and the good." The eyes of the Lord are in every place keeping watch on the evil and the good. You need to know this: that he does that so that he can take note, verse 14, so that "he can take the matter into his hands."

He's going to take matters into his hands. Now the "helpless are committing themselves to the Lord," many of them are. And he becomes the "helper of the fatherless," not as soon as they may want. Here's the prayer, "Break the arm of the wicked." I want that to stop, which may be a very literal phrase for you to think through, but the arm is always a picture in Scripture of strength, not that someone couldn't use a good arm breaking in the middle of their mugging. Right? But I'm just saying this: the idea is I don't want them to be powerful to do this. I want them to have their power and their authority and their dominance to be broken. "Call his wickedness into account till you find none. The Lord, Yahweh, is king forever and ever; the nations perish from his land." God will call them to account.

Number two on your outline, let's put it down this way. "Be Certain About God's Judgment." You can start with the fact that God sees everything and God takes note of everything and God will one day settle the score. "Every valley filled in, every mountain made low, every crooked path straight, every rough place plain." That's how Isaiah gave us the prophecy and the Bible says he's not slow in keeping his promise. He's going to straighten this all out. If he seems passive, he's not passive. He's taking notes, he's preparing. He prepares, first of all, by watching.

Did you get your Ring doorbell yet? Some of you got that already? When Amazon took over the Ring doorbell brand, they put out some report, there was a report up here in L.A. where they took one neighborhood and installed that in every home and they found out that it reduced crime, at least that's how it was reported, by 55% in that neighborhood just because people recognized there's crime going on here. I mean, and I'm going to be caught on the videotape.

All this statement of crime and in Psalm 10 may be theoretical until it's someone you love. I remember that happened, one of my colleagues got ripped off, one of our pastors here on staff had their home invaded and all their stuff ransacked and all their drawers emptied out, all their valuables taken, stolen and he just lives up the street. And so I got the call that his house had been ripped off and so, of course, I go over there and just that sense of violation and my indignation about all that. Well, the first thing this pastor did, as you might imagine, he went out and got cameras installed the next day all around his house, for which I thought I'm glad I have cameras around my house. And so I happened to go back the days that this all happened and the days preceding and went through my cameras to look at what was on the tape of the cameras and sure enough, guess what I caught just the day before his house gets ripped off, people coming to my house, lurking around my house, going through the gates along the side of my house, looking in my windows. I thought, there you go until of course the criminal, I'm assuming, it's just not a nosy retailer of some kind, some vendor, he looks up and sees one of my cameras perched up and ducks his head down with his clipboard and leaves.

And I think to myself, that concept of God watching is helpful, not just for me where I can say, as I did and sent that over to the sheriff's department as they investigated what went on at the pastor's house up the street, but I thought it's not just looking at a grainy picture on an iPhone or an iPad, it's really having God having everything in high-def, not just the visual of people's crimes, but every intention, every motive of their heart, God takes note of it all. He sees it all. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place keeping watch on the evil and the good." You feel a lot better if you do come home and you've been ripped off thinking, "Hey, I got the videotape."

Now it may take weeks, it could take months before you have that video there exposed, that's been captured, until you have justice done in a courtroom. And even when that happens, it's not always perfect as you know. You recognize this, there's always a delay too in God's justice. His judgment is coming but it takes so long and that's what gets us frustrated, that's what makes us pray, "Why do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" But you need to realize it is coming and God is a God who has promised that it is coming and it will come. And you need to recognize that that promises as sure as any other promise that God has ever made.

Now when you think about that I need you to think of Second Peter Chapter 2. Would you turn in your Bibles to Second Peter Chapter 2? If you know your Bibles well and you've heard me preach on this topic before or anybody else who knows the Bible well, they're going to say turn to Second Peter Chapter 3, and I just turned you to the Second Peter Chapter 2. Well, that was intentional. Even though Second Peter Chapter 3 would be a great and very appropriate passage for me to quote at this time, which reminds us that if God delays in his judgment it's not because he's slow in keeping his promises. Do you remember that passage? It's because "he's patient toward you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance."

So I know this: that God is a God who in many ways and for many of his motivations it comes down to the fact that we want the Saul of Tarsus, who's persecuting and having people killed, become the Apostle Paul, who ends up becoming an advocate for the truth. We want people to come to repentance. Our jail ministry, the stuff we do in prisons with Partners, and the stuff that's going on through a radio ministry reaching people who are there incarcerated in prison, that's one of the main things that we take joy in is seeing people who are caught in their

transgressions come to faith in Christ and be forgiven. Jesus started the jail ministry on the cross, you remember. Right? Looked at a not only an incarcerated but a prisoner being executed and shares the truth with him. Clearly, that was happening by example to where it works effectually in the heart of that criminal saying, "Hey, I trust you." That was there implicit in the passage because he turns to him and Jesus says, "Today you'll be with me in paradise." We know this: that patience of God not bringing immediate justice is a sign of his grace. As Peter said, "consider this patience of God to be salvation." Now that's great.

I could turn you to that and I've already underscored it by repeating it. But I want you to start in Second Peter 2. Because in a Second Peter Chapter 2 it gets down to where we're at, and that is "are you even coming?" Right? As Christians, "I know you're delayed but are you sure?" And he gives great examples in this passage. It's a big if-then passage. Let's start in verse 3, Second Peter Chapter 2 verse 3. "In their greed..." Now, I know the context is the false teachers. Right? And I get that. But just like the greedy person with a letter trying to campaign for your money and ripping off the woman who's on a fixed income and he does it for his own private jet or whatever it might be, we see the con man in the pulpit, we see the con man in the marketplace, we see the criminal invading someone's house and committing larceny or Grand Theft Auto. I recognize that principle you need to see in light of Psalm 10, we can certainly have in view in this passage. "In their greed they will exploit you with false words," or with a gun or with their fists or with their assault, whatever it might be.

No matter what the sin is, I know this for sure: "Their condemnation from long ago is not idle." That's a great way to put it, it's not idle. When you sit there in your car with your car idling, it's not in gear, it's not moving. Right? God's judgment is coming. Like we always try to underscore from Romans Chapter 1, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness," present tense, it's coming. The train has left the station and it's on its way. Right? It's like here we are in the Ark trying to get people in the Ark. The rain is already starting to fall. It's coming. I mean the flood and the deluge is just around the corner. It's not like his judgment is idle sitting there and not on the way. It's on the way. God has taken note and his judgment is coming. Their destruction, it's not asleep, God is taking note of everything.

Then it's a bunch of if-then statements. Right? It's with the big series of "if, if, if, if" and then a final "then." Look at all the ifs, verses 4 through 8. "If God did not spare angels when they sin..." You want some examples of God being really tough on crime? Here it is, these angels sin, "he cast them into hell, committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment." Apparently, that's a segment of the angelic class who's not out free to roam around and do their work. He's already consigned some of them to incarceration and they're kept there until the final judgment.

And here's another if: "If he didn't spare the ancient world," speaking of Genesis 6, here they were sinning and he said I'm going to destroy you. But then he took the one who has really had to be tormented building this Ark and having that one righteous man and his family receive all of the bad from that society, all the mockery, but he spared him, preserved him, "a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly." Well, he did destroy the world there. So we have the angelic condemnation, we have the judgment upon the world in the flood, verse 6.

And here's another one, "If by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah," where they are raping people and assaulting people, it was a terrible society, "if he reduced them to ashes and condemns them to extinction, making them an example of what is GOING to happen to the ungodly, and if he rescued Lot," just like he rescued Noah before the flood in Genesis 6 through 9, "if he rescued Lot, greatly distressed," here's our sermon, at least point one, "by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over there lawless deeds that he saw and heard)" which is going to be the punctuated normalcy of the Christian life right now.

Well, of all those things, "if, if, if, if, if... God has been so faithful in bringing judgment, well, then you know this: "The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials," whether it's the oppressed or the fatherless or the afflicted, "and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment." Now Chapter 3 is going to say that day of judgment sure is taking a long time and we've quoted that often, but right here I want to say: it's coming. You need to be certain about the judgment of God. If God has made a promise, he's going to keep it as sure as the seat you're sitting on is holding up your body right now, the judgment upon the ungodly is coming. Our hope is to convert a few of those as messengers of the Gospel to see them join us in the body of the redeemed. That is our goal. But if they don't, if they're impenitent, if they're stubborn, their judgment is certain, it's not idle. It's on its way. That in a weird strange way should bring us comfort that God may be seemingly passive in not stepping in to fix the problem right now, but he's certainly keeping track and judgment will come.

Well, if this sounds like the worst, most depressing sermon you've heard all year, maybe we can end on a good note here, verses 17 and 18. "O Lord, you hear the desire of the afflicted." There are a lot of people hurting, but you know what, you're listening to their prayers. "You will strengthen their heart," even in the process that they are praying you strengthen them. "You will incline your ear." Eventually, you will, you will do it, "to do justice to the fatherless and to the oppressed." Oh, they may have scars, they may have lots of stories to tell about injustice, but you're going to do justice, "so that the man of the earth may strike terror no more." These mere mortal men will one day be held to account.

But in the process, in the meantime, you're going to strengthen the heart of those who are in the midst of all of that. Why? Because they're expressing their heart. They are giving their desires to you. That's called prayer, which by the way, I want to look at this whole chapter and recognize it's all prayer, is it not? The direct address of verse 1, "Why, O Lord, do you stand far away?" And we started with a look at all the trouble in the first 13 verses. But judgment is coming, the next three verses, and then you know what? I know that you'll strengthen them as they pray, because guess what's happened as an example in Chapter 10, God has strengthened the psalmist's heart as he prayed. You know what? God will strengthen your heart as you pray.

Number three, jot it down that way, "Be Strengthened Through Prayer." You must be a man or a woman of prayer. You want to get through the stuff in this world? It's not about isolating yourself or some self-imposed ignorance about the problems in the world. It's about seeing the news reports, hearing the crime statistics and even having people in your neighborhood be victimized, and you say this: "I know judgment is coming and I'm going to put myself on my knees and begin to pray." You strengthen us in our prayer life. You give us perspective in our prayer life. You turn us from hopelessness and "where's God in all this" to I know God is on the throne, he's the Lord of all, he's the king forever and ever and he's going to bring justice to



all this. And I can get up from that vexation that I may feel, that indignation that will grip my heart, that hot indignation, and start to rejoice again and have peace and be the kind of person who has that biblical optimism I talk about, that God is still on the throne and it's going to be OK. Be strengthened by prayer.

Here's a tweetable verse for you to sum of everything you've heard this morning. Romans Chapter 12 verse 12. One of the greatest triads of statements that would ever apply to this sermon if there was a passage to apply to this sermon in the New Testament. Here it is in a few simple words. Are you ready? "Rejoice in hope." And that's where I want to stand. Rejoice in hope. Now how do I do that Paul? Because the Roman Empire was really coming down with its iron fist on the young church in Rome. Well listen, I know you're going to have to, here's the next phrase, "be patient in tribulation." So "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation." Well, how do I get there? Last phrase: "Be constant in prayer." Is that a great verse to memorize today? It's great. "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." Those three things are what this is all about. The key practice, the assignment is pray, pray, pray. Commit yourself to prayer.

What happens? Well, that allows me to do what the Bible says I can do and that is be a realist about the problems in the world, see depravity in our culture for what it is, really get angry at the violence and oppression and injustice that I see, and yet still get up from my prayer times rejoicing in the Lord always, and as the Apostle says it again to rejoice, I'm going to say I can. And how come? Because I going to take all the anxiety, all the frustration I feel and instead of being anxious, I'm going to pray about everything, "with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving," I'm going to "let my request be made known to God." And when I do, do you know the next verse? "And the peace of God, which surpasses" all comprehension, "all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Prayer is the most underutilized weapon in our arsenal. That is the thing that's going to help us to truly empathize with a hurting world and to recognize, even in our neighborhoods, when the car goes by with the lights and sirens on, and I hope you stop to pray for what's going on in the situation, you realize this: it seems like the world is chaotic, like people are victims of crimes, like bad things are happening all around us. But God is on the throne, God is going to make everything right, and what I need to do is pray. God can allow me in the midst of all that to have my heart strengthened to know that the affliction of the oppressed will one day be relieved and I will be the person who stands on the other side of that saying, "God calmed my heart in the midst of all of that frustration."

There's a statement thereafter that verse, we quote it all the time, Philippians 4, about being anxious for nothing and praying about everything. But it ends with this in verse 9, the paragraph says, "What you've learned," he tells the Philippians, "and received and heard and seen in me," he said, "practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." That really is the inclusio, that's the end of this concept, this teaching and that is you got to practice what you've seen in Paul. And you know what you've seen in Paul? You've seen someone who doesn't just pray about people he can't help, but he prays about people he can help and then he gets off of his knees and he starts to help. And he does that all the time.

Matter of fact, in the words of James, the inspired words of James, let me give it to you this way. "This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of God, our Father." OK? Listen to this

now. Talk about the afflicted of Psalm 10, "This is pure and undefiled religion before God, our Father is this: to visit the orphans and the widows in their affliction," to care for people who are hurting, to care for those who are defenseless, to be the defense for the defenseless, to be the help for those who have been victimized, to stand up and say I'm going to be a part of the solution. Now clearly in Psalm 10 the problem was so systemic there was a lot that the psalmist could not do but sit here and say, "God I can't do anything. You've got to do something and you don't seem to be doing anything." But I'll bet the psalmist after praying this through, if he saw injustice, if he saw victimization, if he saw oppression, do you think he's going to stand idly by?

I hope you're not going to drive home today from a sermon like this, if you saw some kind of oppression, some kind of injustice going on, you're not going to stop and pull your car over and help? Of course you would. That's the point. Christians need to get the perspective that God is on the throne and he will judge. But in the meantime, we are advocates, we are those who bring comfort to the afflicted. The Apostle Paul, I quote it all the time in Second Corinthians 7, it says "The God, who comforts" the afflicted or "the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus." God uses human people, people with skin on, to go and help other people who need that help.

I can't end this sermon about praying, although it's not explicitly in the passage, certainly I don't think I can pray through this and feel what the psalmist is feeling without saying, when I see the problem I'm going to help, I'm going to get involved. You and I should be indignant more often because there's a lot of injustice to be indignant about. You should be certain that all the injustice will one day be judged. In the meantime, I'm hoping to see a few more thugs and criminals become Christians. That's the goal of our minister, we're evangelistic. But in the meantime, I'm going to be strengthened by prayer. I'm going to spend more time on my knees praying about the things in our world, in our culture, even in our church, because there is not a single crime statistic that doesn't affect our church. And if we start loving people in the real world, we're going to be indignant, we're going to say God, you're going to have to deal with this. We'll use our court systems, we'll use the attorneys as best we can. But all of that is going to be imperfect. But in the meantime we'll be strengthened as we pour out our request before God.

We've been reading in our Daily Bible Reading about courage, which, by the way, I think sometimes you miss the historical background. The people who initially read the book of Joshua, they knew how bad it was. You talk about oppression, aggravated assault, you talk about even to the worst of it, sacrificing your children to Molech, throwing your babies into the fire. I mean this was a horrific society. And God uses Israel to come in and to change it all. Now that was a very specific national request about warfare and, I get it, it's not about what we can do this afternoon on the way home from church, but you do realize that God is using it as an instrument of justice, it was going to be a generational, a multigenerational period of time before they even started to see the Promised Land completely settled.

There were a lot of strongholds, including Jerusalem, but in the passage we read yesterday that was recounted in today's Daily Bible Reading in Joshua, was about the kings, the five kings, do remember that? The five kings who were now before Joshua and one of them was the King of Jerusalem, the Jebusite stronghold. And he brings them out there and they about to execute these criminals, these horrific thugs. I mean these warlords, if you will, of the ancient

Canaanite world. When he does he says this, something that God had said to him repeatedly. God had said to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be dismayed. Do not fear." He turns to those who are watching, a seemingly impossible task of seeing justice really established in the land. And he's got his foot, his sandal, on the head of these five kings who are now about to receive there just execution. He turns to them and he says in Joshua 10:25, "Hey you guys, don't be afraid, don't be dismayed, be strong and courageous. For thus the Lord will do to all your enemies."

That's the picture that we ought to have. The enemies of righteousness, the enemies of good, the enemies of what is lawful and what is good, all of that is going to be made right. The kingdoms of the world, the violent, corrupted, criminal world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. We want to get as many people as we can to join us as repentant and people who now live for the Lord Jesus Christ. But those who stubbornly refused not to, we need to realize one day it will all be fixed. Fearlessness. We've really touched on that in our psalm series. There's no place for fear in the Christian life except to fear the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. But we've made peace with him and he now is our advocate and he doesn't stand idly by. He's taking notes. He's going to bring us to a place of complete vindication. In our societies there will be peace. There will no longer be weapons of warfare, there'll be crafted, it says, into implements of farming.

Proverbs makes clear that fear of man is a snare but whoever trusts in the Lord, that's the ticket. That's the one who in his heart clearly will be safe. Verse 26 of Proverbs 29 says, "Many seek the face of a ruler, but it's from the Lord that a man gets justice." You ought to go to the courts clearly to make yourself whole as best you can, but know that ultimately it's from the Lord that we get ultimate justice and one day he will bring it in. We trust him and we become men and women of prayer in the meantime. The Lord may seem far off in our culture, but he's not and one day he'll make that crystal clear. Let's leave today, I hope, with a new perspective. And if you haven't gotten there yet, review this passage over and over until you start to see things the way God would have us all see it. And that is that God is in charge, God will make all the wrongs right.

Let's pray. God, what a great song we sing there at Christmas reflecting those prophetic words of Isaiah that "Every valley will be lifted up, every hill made low, every crooked way will be made straight, all the rough places plain." We know that one day you'll fix the world but you are patient toward this world wanting more Sauls of Tarsus becoming the Apostle Pauls, becoming the advocates of truth.

So let us be evangelistic, particularly at this time of year, to go out there sharing the good news of the Gospel with more and more people. Getting them under the teaching of the Word of God. May we be the kinds of people who never are dismayed. We may be indignant as Psalm 7:11 says, we may have an indignation like you do every single day. But we're not the judge, we're not the jury, we're not the executioner, but all we can do is entrust ourselves, just like Jesus did, and it says that in First Peter, that Jesus, the ultimate injustice in the universe, when Christ the innocent one, the Holy One, was crucified. He kept entrusting himself to a righteous judge, his own Father. God, I pray we would do the same today. Not saying that we're going to be passive. You want to utilize us for comfort, for protection, for advocacy, God we want to do all that. But in the meantime we want to be on our knees more often, pouring our heart out to you knowing that even those who are afflicted find great strength and



comfort in that. Knowing that one day you will keep every single last promise that you've made to us including those to vindicate the oppressed and to bring ultimate, exacting vengeance on the oppressor. So God, remind us of those basic fundamental biblical truths this morning. Let it encourage our hearts that we might be able to rejoice and hope.

In Jesus name, Amen.