



The Fear of God – Part 3 And Our Government

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Well, I may not know much about soccer, but I know the objective is painfully simple. Right? Kick this ball into that net. It couldn't be simpler than that. And the target, by the way, I mean, it's massively big. It's 24 feet long, 8 feet tall. Grandma could do it. Just kick the ball in the net. Simple. Right? Nothing to it.

You know the objective of the Christian life is painfully simple. Jesus left his Church and he said "Go and make disciples." Really simple. And the goal is huge. Right? Here's the target for us "of all nations." Of all nations, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the ends of the earth. We've been studying the book of Acts and I mean, the target is gigantic. But of course, like soccer, there is an adversary who stands between us and the goal. And he's got advantages that we don't have. Then there's a whole other team, this is the reason Grandma doesn't play much soccer because there's a strong team of opponents who want to do whatever they can with their limited power to make sure that you don't do that. The target may be big, but with the opponents and adversaries, there's a lot of challenge in the work.

Our goal is unchanging, to make disciples, and we are focused on that here at Compass Bible Church, but we recognize that there is an adversary and there are opponents. And like a coach who sits the team down and says, "We've got to take a look at the video of our opponents and make sure we know what's going on, how they go about their work." That's critical. According to Second Corinthians Chapter 2, that's making sure that we are not ignorant of the schemes of our enemy. And he enslaves people, the Bible says, to do his will in this world and even in the Church. So we have to be mindful of the opposition. We have to be wise about his strategies and we need to be prepared.

We've been studying through the book of Acts. We've seen a lot of success. The gospel goes out, it's clearly, boldly, courageously taught and preached and shared. The Church is growing. We've got all kinds of people, thousands of people at the Church of Jerusalem, the first megachurch, there it is, I mean, parking problems in Jerusalem, to make sure that they can get everyone in there on the Temple Mount, in the courts of the temple, hearing the word of God preached and dispersing every afternoon to go and make disciples.

Two times ago, we looked at Chapter 5 when Ananias and Sapphira, these hypocrites within the Church, tried to act like they fit in and God says, no, we got to discipline this situation. You have to know that the Church has to have a high standard of holiness. So God himself steps in and miraculously takes out Ananias and Sapphira. And in a sense, as chilling as that was in our series on the fear of God, we thought, wow, we ought to fear God. God is a God who cares about his Church. He's going to enforce his rules of holiness and we ought to, like a Christian who is going to respond rightly to his heavenly Father, realize that he is a disciplinarian and we ought to live our lives, as Peter later put it, in his epistle with fear during our time of stay here upon the earth.



Then we looked at the last time we were together, we looked at the leadership, following on the heels of that in Chapter 5, the leadership they're doing their work. God, of course, in that special category of laying a foundation for the Church through the apostles and prophets, they are authenticated in a very unique and miraculous way. And yet we saw in focusing on leadership how good it was that the church was healthy, it was functioning, it was purified, it was led well and you'd think we might get into the next chapter of all kinds of growth.

And yet we have in verse 17, as we reach our study today, we're going to get a big chunk of Scripture. I want you to turn to it and get your eyeballs on this passage, Acts Chapter 5, beginning in verse 17. We're going to go all the way through verse 32. It's a big section, a big narrative section. But I want to understand this whole section in light of the opposition that the Church is facing. Even the verb that is used to describe how we've got an opponent that steps up and he's an empowered opponent and he's got a lot of people with him, the forward progress of the Church is inhibited, this time not by the hypocrisy within, but by the external defense on the outside in the culture in which the Church was called to thrive.

So the first period of this evangelistic soccer match showed this group of Sadducees within the Sanhedrin, this ruling court and class, the Senate, as it's called here of the Jews, opposes the message. We're going to find in our day, the same kind of opposition. Matter of fact, I'm going to try to here just by way of giving a good overview, I trust, of the kinds of opposition the Bible presents us with. Break this down into five kinds or four rather, four kinds of opposition and say, look at how this happened in the first period of the match and now how it's still happening in the 21st period of this match. I want us to be leaving equipped and resolved and bolstered in our strength, clarity. The dumb little illustration of the soccer match, which I hope to show germane points throughout this message, I think that simple dumb illustration can really transform your perspective on what we're doing and how simple it is that we can begin to interpret everything that's happening in our world and around the world today, far beyond the current COVID health crisis that we're in.

So look at verse 17, we'll see the opponents arise, and it's a dramatic verb here. It's translated "rose up," "But the high priest..." and even the word "high" reminds us we've got a big official here. This is an authoritative figure. "He rose up, and all who were with him." So he's got an opponent here, earthly opponent, of course, and there's an adversary behind it, but they rise up. The clarification here, which helps us even make some parallels to our day, it's says he's of the "party of the Sadducees." Remember the Pharisees, they believed in a lot of the things that we might affirm about the Old Testament regarding God's supernatural intervention into time and space, at particular points on the timeline of the Old Testament and certainly believing in a judgment that is coming afterlife.

Well, the Sadducees did not believe any of that. They did not believe in angels. They did not believe in the supernatural. They did not believe in life after death. So we get a little clarification of the power that's going to step up here within this court, the Sadducees, who are leading here in the Senate, as it's about to be called, they're filled with jealousy. You might understand that. They kind of have the status quo of the leadership in Jerusalem and here comes this band of Galileans with their accent from up north and we've got thousands of



people, people added to their number day by day, and they're talking about God and the Messiah and quoting the Old Testament and the Sadducees get jealous.

So here's what they did. "They arrested the apostles," which is a great word to help us remember, not just what it means in our minds to throw someone in prison, but they're trying to slow this down. They're trying to stop it, trying to restrict it, and they arrest them physically, literally the apostles. This is not just Peter and John that we saw in Chapter 4 being called into the principal's office. This is the whole band of the twelve, we assume, that are thrown into prison. And Luke adds this little phrase, "the public prison," which reminds us they're not just set aside in a little waiting room. They're thrown into the common prison where all the common criminals go.

But God steps in. "During the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison." Now, there are a lot of ways to get them out of jail. You can have a lot of creative, intuitive, I don't know, smart, strategic disciples go break them out of prison. But I think God, in his sense of humor, he takes the people who don't believe in angels and sends an angel, not just a human messenger, but an angelic being and breaks into time and space and gets these twelve apostles out secretly. No one knows about it as we're about to learn. I mean, it's all guarded and sealed, just like the tomb of Christ. It's this miraculous jailbreak.

So "During the night an angel of the Lord," verse 19, "opened the doors, the prison doors and brought them out, and said," verse 20, "go and stand in the temple and speak to the people," I love this now, "all the words of this Life." Which, by the way, one of the reasons you may not get much opposition in the Christian life as you're trying to move the ball down the field is because what you're doing is not what the Bible tells you to do, and that is to give the whole message. I like the way it's put here, a very unique and only once-used phrase regarding the gospel, "all the words of this Life," capital "L." I like the way that's translated to remind us that this is a message and you've got to have all of it. You can't just have "Jesus loves you." You can't just have, you know, "God wants to give you purpose" or, you know, it'll be great if you got Jesus on this walk along the beach because if you fall down he'll carry you. I mean, there's more to the message. Right? You have got to understand the problem of sin, of God's holiness, of his justice, of really what's at stake. As the Spirit goes out into the world, Jesus promised in the Upper Room Discourse that he would convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. And if you want to give all the words of this life, you know you're going to have some opposition. They didn't take well to that message, as we'll see later in their response to the apostles.

Verse 21. "And when they heard this," that is the apostles, they said, man, we got in a lot of trouble for that, we just got put in jail for that. We're not going to do that. Verse 21. No, they said, "OK." "They entered the temple," and I love this, even "at daybreak," they couldn't wait to get back out there and do what God asked them to do. Now he asked them to do that in Matthew 28, in Luke 24, in Acts Chapter 1. I mean this is the whole point. Right? Make disciples, go be my witnesses. And here's this angelic being saying get out there and do it and by sunrise they're out there doing it.

Middle of verse 21. "Now when the high priest came, and those who are with him, called together the council," this is the Sanhedrin, "all the Senate of the people of Israel," the power. "They sent to the prison to have them brought." OK, we're ready. We're assembling now. Everyone's got their coffee. Bring in the prisoners. Verse 22. "But when the officers came, they did not find them in the prison, so they returned and reported," verse 23, "We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the door." And the council said, "OK, you need it open now? All right, we got the papers, let them out." "But when we opened these doors, we found no one inside.

Now, when the captain of the temple and the chief priest heard these words, they were greatly perplexed." That's an understatement. Right? Where did they go? We've arrested Houdini. He's gone. They're gone. "They were greatly perplexed about them, wondering," now, this is a phrase that starts to give us a little insight into their feelings, "wondering what this would come to." We can't even put these guys in prison and keep them there about a leader who was put in a grave who we couldn't keep there. So "what is this all going to come to?" Verse 25. "And someone came and told them," I'll tell you where these guys are. They're not in prison. "Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people," the very thing you told them not to do.

"Then the captain with the officers went and brought them," now, this is a phrase that again helps us give a little insight into how they're feeling, "but not by force." No, why not? I mean, that'd be a time to flex your muscles, go take the security guards of the Temple Mount. I mean, you are the Sanhedrin after all, the high priest. I mean, you can go and with a show of force, you can just go in all your riot gear and grab these pastors and bring them back. But they didn't do that. Why? "They were afraid of being stoned by the people." And that's not like they were going to pass some legislation to turn them over for execution. That means they're afraid, there are a lot of stones out there on the Temple Mount, a lot of building construction still going on in Herod's reconstruction of the temple, the refurbishment, they're afraid they're going to pick up stones and throw them at them. This peaceful assembly on the Temple Mount, "You're not going to take our pastors away." They're listening. They're interested. They want to hear the word taught. They're afraid.

Verse 27. "And when they brought them," here come the apostles now, "they set them before the council." OK, they sit in a semicircle there and they're listening, 70 of these officials and plenty of other people there. "And the high priest questioned them, saying, 'We strictly charged you not to teach in this name.'" They don't even mention the name Jesus. Maybe they were even scared of uttering that name at this point. "Yet here you fill Jerusalem with your teaching, and you," here's the problem with the whole message of life, "you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." You keep talking about how our sins put him there and that we're culpable in some way for this. I can't believe that you'd impugn us in all this like we're sinners and need redemption. I mean, stop with all that sin and judgment talk.

Verse 29. "But Peter and the apostles answered, 'We must obey God rather than men.'" Then he starts to preach, a little summary of his little mini-sermon here. Verse 30. "The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed." You could have left that out if you wanted to make



friends and influence people. But there he goes. You killed him. This senate killed him. This Sanhedrin killed him, "hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand." You tried to kill him. God raised him. He's the source of our salvation. "He's at the right hand as...", and here's a great Greek word, the word that we get, like the chief person, the one in charge, sometimes translated "the prince." It says here in the English Standard Version "the leader." You could have used the word "Kyrgios," the Greek word for Lord, but instead we used the word that comes from "Archehos" like the archetypal person, the one we listen to.

We may be standing before a great authority here, but we got a greater authority and our authority is the "Leader," the King, the Prince. And he's not only the Prince and he's gracious, he's the "Savior, to give repentance to Israel." He wants us to come to repentance. That's what we've been preaching since Chapter 2 to Israel. And that's not so that he can conscript you to some kind of enslavement. No, he wants to forgive you. What a good thing that would be when you die and you face your maker to be forgiven of your sins. Hey, "We're witnesses to these things," we've seen the resurrected Christ and we're here testifying to it, that's what it means to witness to it, "and so is the Holy Spirit," sent out into the world, convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. The spirit is trying to make the same point in the world. "whom God has given to those who obey him." And if you're on our team, the Spirit's on our team and the Spirit's trying to get that ball into the net. It's a great picture. There's much more to it. "When they heard this," verse 33, we'll get into this next time, Lord willing, "they were enraged." That sermon didn't go over very well. "and they want to kill them." But for now, let's just look at their encounter with the leadership.

I entitled this series as we work through Chapters 5 and 6 of Acts, "The Fear of God." We've dealt with that in terms of the fear of God in discipline, fear of God as it relates to some kind of connection to our leaders. Now, I want to talk about our government. In this particular passage the government is scared. They show that, they actually... Luke says that, they're afraid. The Church is unafraid, they're courageous and they're bold. When they face the leaders, they say, "Listen, we've got a higher authority. The prince, the leader, the king is the King of kings. He's the Lord, the Leader of leaders. He's the Governor of all the governors. He's the President of all the presidents. He's the one in charge. And so ultimately, we know where our allegiance lies. And you may tell us to stop doing something, but we have to continue. You want to arrest us and you want to arrest the message. We're not going to let that happen because that is in contradistinction of what our leader has told us."

The opposition that we see in the book of Acts is only going to ramp up. There are four types and I'm just saying this as I sit down and try and give you a way to think through the categories of opposition. Number one, I'd like you to put this down on your notes this morning. You need to "Expect the Church to be Opposed," and you can yawn your way through that point because if you've read the Bible at all or sat through any teaching here, you know, that should be our expectation. But let me go a little bit further and talk about the kinds of opposition that we see in Scripture, going from the least consequential in terms of your daily life to the most consequential. Let me give you four categories here. Are you ready? There's first "Rejection," the rejection of our message, trying to kick the ball into the net and it gets kicked away. "Don't want to hear it. Don't want that. Not interested in it. Don't want to become



a Christian, it may be good for you, it's not good for me. I don't want it." That's rejection. The rejection of our message.

Then there's "Ridicule." Right? There's the trash talk on the field. Right? "You, we don't like because you are trying to give us this message that we don't like and you're trying to impugn us and call us sinners and we need a savior. We don't want any of that and we think you're foolish and ridiculous." Like the Sadducees thought of the disciples who believed in a resurrected Christ. They don't believe in the resurrection. And they're saying, you're dumb, you're stupid. Ridicule. Then there's what's going on in this passage. It started in Chapter 4 when they said, "You need to stop, you need to not do this." They are trying to restrict them. So we've got "Rejection of the Message." We've got the "Ridicule of the Messengers." Now, we've got the "Restriction" of the whole movement. "We want to restrict it. We want to stop it, we want to arrest it."

And then there is "Retaliation." That's something we would generally call, at least they did in former generations, they'd say that's persecution. We call all of it persecution today because we're pretty thin-skinned, but that they used to call real persecution of the Church. That's when they start hurting you. That's when they start arresting you and going beyond just arresting you and giving you a slap on the wrist, which they're going to get here in this chapter. I mean, they're going to get a beating in the process. But what we're going to run into when Steven, we get to meet one of the leaders in the Church, a servant-leader in the Church, and he ends up getting killed, stoned to death. The blood starts to flow in the streets of Jerusalem. Which is happening all around the world today and has for the last 21 periods of this match in fighting the good fight of faith. Lots of people have been retaliated against simply because they are Christians.

I want to put a couple of verses to those just to remind you that Jesus warned us that all of these are coming. How about this? Luke Chapter 10 verse 16. Luke Chapter 10 verse 16. The rejection, he puts it this way, "When someone hears you, then they're hearing me. And when they reject you," in other words, they reject what you say, they disagree with that, "they're disagreeing and rejecting me, and if they reject me, they're rejecting the one who sent me." Luke Chapter 10 reminds us to be encouraged to keep going, even though they reject our message, because it's not our message, it's not our gospel, we're not calling you sinners, God is. So we keep going, try and kick the ball into the net, even though they're going to reject the message. Jesus said, you know, that's going to happen. Some are going to hear you and receive it. Some are not going to hear you, they're going to reject it.

They're going to ridicule you. Listen to these words from Luke Chapter 6 verse 22. Luke 6:22. Here are the words, four words used. "They're going to HATE you, they're going to EXCLUDE you, they're going to SPURN your name as evil and they're going to REVILE you." Those words: hate, exclude, revile and spurn. That's what happens to followers and messengers of Christ who go now and try to advance the ball down the field. It's the trash talk, if you will, in our silly illustration. It's something that you ought to anticipate and Jesus tries to encourage, even in Chapter 6 of Luke by saying this, "Well, if you're feeling that, don't feel so bad because every godly person in the Old Testament who spoke for God, they experienced the



same thing. "So they spoke of the prophets," who went before you. So you're blessed. He says you should "rejoice in that day," that you're part of that group of messengers. You're on the right team. You're wearing the right uniform. That's a good thing.

Restriction, of course, that's what we're dealing with today, more on that in the rest of the message. We're going to see the restriction of the message. "Stop, slow down. We don't want you to speak this way." Acts 4, Acts 5. How about retaliation? Just to give us a sense of what's coming in the book of Acts. Jot this down, John Chapter 16 verse 2. John 16:2 says not only will "they put you out of the synagogues, but there's an hour coming," he says, "when those who kill you will think he is offering service to God." When they cry out in Arabic their words of praise to God, they believe that killing Christians, which, by the way, is an increasing reality in the world. Matter of fact, this generation has experienced more martyrs for the sake of Christ and many of them are killed as Christians because they think, those who kill them, they're doing service to God. They think it's a good thing.

Matter of fact, all you have to do is look up anti-blasphemy laws, anti-conversion laws, the kinds of anti-proselytizing laws that are multiplying around the world today, not just in the Middle East. It's catching on in various places. We're seeing what happened in the first period with Stephen ramping up and more blood being spilled of the martyrs today than ever before. And by the way, Peter later looks back on all of this and says, "You know what? When all of this happens," now this is the same Peter who got thrown in the public jail, he looks back and he says this, "When it happens, don't think that some strange thing is happening to you." Don't think that way. You ought to expect it.

All right, we've got these four categories. I don't have to talk to you about rejection and ridicule, all of you who have been Christians more than 10 minutes, you've shared the message with anyone, you've experienced that. The restriction, though, by the way, I just want to talk just a little bit about because we are in a new level of restriction regarding the gospel, particularly in our culture and preaching in America and Southern California in the midst of a day where, of course, we have a secular society, but now for you to speak up about Christ is getting increasingly more restricted.

I can tell you stories and I have from this platform about people putting up Bible verses in their cubicle, getting in trouble for it, being reprimanded or censured or even losing jobs over sharing the gospel. There was a time, by the way, you should know, in 1964 for instance, the EEOC, in giving us a freedom in terms of being a religious person in the workplace, Title VII of that equal employment opportunity document, it said that we have the right as religious people to even proselytize in the workplace. Not that anyone's looking at that 56-year-old document and trying to apply it in many situations today, because the prevailing mindset of our day is to try to restrict you as a Christian giving your Christian message.

There are a million examples of this even today. I was reading this week about a grade school kid in Mississippi who got in trouble for wearing a mask, of course, during the COVID thing, they're all wearing masks. And a lot of people put, you know, they bedazzled them and put signs on them and all kinds of messages on them. There are plenty of messages that are fine



in the elementary school in this Mississippi school district, but one kid came and the mask simply read, "Jesus loves me." I don't know. Doesn't sound as controversial as a lot of slogans I've seen on people's masks. Ejected, can't wear that. There was a time when that would just be an unthinkable restriction upon people saying "Jesus loves me" and to wear that on your face or your T-shirt.

There are tons of examples of that, and certainly this COVID thing has brought a lot of that into sharp focus. And you've noticed in preaching, I have not been on the cutting edge of trying to be spilling a lot of ink on this or spending a lot of our preaching time on this or, you know, employing, you know, church funds to go to the courts over this. I'm not interested in trying to make a name for our church or ourselves or trying to be on the front edge of any kind of fight. I'm not interested in that. Our goal is to kick the ball into the net. That's what we're trying to do.

But what's happened in the middle of all this certainly is highlighted the kind of restriction placed upon the Church that is not placed upon other organizations in our society. And you know that, right? I mean, some are simple. We've known this from day one. If I want to go to Home Depot and buy a garden hose, I can spend three hours inside a Home Depot buying a garden hose and a ton of other things. Throw it in my basket. I can go to Costco, buy my artificial tree. I can buy stuff I don't need all day long. Stuff I need there, of course. But there's stuff I don't need.

Then it gets more and more ridiculous and some of these have made it all the way to the Supreme Court that I can go to casinos and card clubs and I can be inside of those things and I can do it at great numbers across this country. But of course, the concern was restricting this, because this thing that we're doing, well, that's not essential. Right? See, so we've seen that call come into sharp focus.

I got so curious about this, I've read it in the headlines for months, but I thought, I'm going to call the casino. So yesterday in my study, I called because just to make sure this isn't just some right-wing conspiracy or something to find out. Can I really come right now and take my paycheck and put it on the blackjack table or, you know, spin your whatever they call them, those things, slot machines? Can I do that? You can tell I haven't spent any time in a casino. Of course, they spend time telling me how everything is a lot more sanitized now, but, "Sure, come on down. Come on down."

And it got worse with the kinds of things I was reading about in the headlines and I was careful not to call them. But the strip clubs across the country that are now open because as one San Diego judge put it just this week, it is an essential expression, a free, protected expression, of their First Amendment right to dance on your lap. See? And then even the details of what I was reading, I was careful in these searches, by the way, I'll just let you know, that I can have up to four people in my booth. Right? And engage in this adult entertainment. And I can even have the judicial system in our country going, "oh, yeah, that's good. It's a good thing." And I'm assuming these four people aren't from the same family, am I right? I don't know. It's not a family thing to do, I would assume. I mean, I've never been, but



I'm just thinking, "Hey kids..." [audience laughing] So I can meet in groups in booths and engage in things like that, but things like what we're doing right now, "Hmmm, don't do that. Unnecessary."

By the way, the mortality rate is holding steady, it's 100%. Did you know that? 100%. The mortality rate, the statistics on death, very impressive. 100%. "Yeah, but you are increasing the risk of mortality before the time." You're right. It is safer for you to not be here. 100% right. I mean, I'm a logical guy. I know that's right. You'd be safer not to be here. Right? You'd also be safer not to drive to Costco, not just to be at Costco, but to drive to Costco. Did you know you have 1/30th of a chance of dying in the traffic in an automobile accident by taking the bus? Did you know that? 1/30th of a chance. You can go and take a bus and be a lot safer. But I'll bet everyone I go talk to at Costco with the exception of one or two people, and they're not doing because they're trying to be safe, are driving their cars to Costco.

Of course, I'm not here to preach about all of those things, but I am here at least to think, now wait a minute, when the government says we need to restrict what you guys are doing in church, I'm just saying you've lost your credibility when you're playing the game that you played and call these things essential and important and worth the risk and what we're doing here not essential and important and worth the risk. I think we should at least say as Christians, "Now, wait a minute." That's a kind of restriction that at least is bringing the bias into clear focus. Right? Because if you walk to Costco, it would be safer. If you wore a helmet while you walked. If you wore a flak jacket and a helmet while you walked, you would be safer. I get that.

I had one lady tell me as we sat there and talked about it, "Well, if we save one life..." I said, you know, there are a million ways to save one life. Get rid of electricity, get rid of natural gas. I mean, there's a lot we can do. That is not how you live your life. And to say that we're here assembling to equip Christians to go out into the world to kick the ball into the net, that's our goal, to make disciples, and to know that there is a risk involved in that. Now, when they told us the risk is half of us would be dead, of course, like everyone else, we shut down.

But we realize this, that what has happened in the middle of all this has really distinguished the values of our culture. We recognize at some point we have to say, we're not here to cause problems, we're not here to be on the news, I don't want to be on in any talk shows. I'm just here to say, let's just do our work. We're not here to shame anyone who has got a greater anxiety than the next person as it relates to things like their health. We get it, we understand it. But we know this, that the restriction of the gospel should not be the default when you compare it to all the other things that we deem important and necessary in our society.

We accept the risks because of our calling to assemble. We accept the risks because there's great joy in assembling and I just don't see where that sometimes is gone, as Psalms 84:10 says. "One day in your courts..." I'm not even talking about being a high priest in the holy of holies. We're talking about just being with the people of God. "One day in your courts is better than a million elsewhere." And for some of us, we say that's just where life is really lived. The



words of life talked about in the context of life and the community of life, I'd rather be involved in that and have the risk and actually the reality of what you might see as a premature death.

I'm not trying to be controversial. I did not plan to preach this message this morning. I planned this series, you do remember, nine months ago and we're finally getting around to doing it. I'm just not that smart to have planned all this.

That's the restriction. We see plenty of it. And then there's retaliation and all I would do, seriously, put in your browser this afternoon, apostasy, blasphemy and anti-conversion laws. Read the latest report that I just read from November 2020 on all the countries around the world that have blasphemy laws, anti-conversion laws and apostasy laws. Of course, most of them are in Muslim dominated countries. Start to learn a little bit about what's going on to our brothers and sisters around the world, which is what Peter does say at the end of his book, first epistle. You got to think about the suffering that's going on around the world and it may help us see that, you know what? There's going to be opposition and we have gone maybe from the rejection of our message and the ridicule for being a messenger to the restrictions that we're starting to feel greater in our culture. And it may be that next, we'll see the martyrs of the book of Acts and our brothers and sisters around the world. Who knows where it will be 30 years from now if we're all still here. But we are going to courageously fight on because we remember who's on our team.

Finally, back to our passage. All that was based on the assumption and the basis of what was happening, throwing apostles in jail because the high priest and his team are rising up against them. But look at verse 21, middle of the verse, we see in this passage in Acts Chapter 5 that they are starting to get scared. Just glance through those verses here, you see where we've been. The officers come, they say, "Hey, the guys are gone, they're not in prison." They're kind of freaking out, verse 24, "wondering what would come of this," the last phrase of verse 24. Then they come and say, well, we got to arrest these guys and call them on the carpet again and they're afraid, it says in verse 26 because the people aren't going to have it.

I'm saying that fear, that uncertainty that "what's going to become of this" finally gets verbalized by Gamaliel as he sits there in the Sanhedrin in the next passage we'll study where he talks to his colleagues and he says, "We've got to think about what we're doing here. Do we really want to focus on opposing these people, because what if these people really are on God's team? We might find ourselves opposing God." As a matter of fact, look at it for yourself, verse 39, if you can drop down further in this passage. We don't want to do that. "But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them." That's true, right? Jesus said, "My Church, going to build it, the gates of hell won't prevail against it." "You might even be found to be opposing God." So I'm not sure we want to come down too hard on these guys.

Now, we'll get into all of that and what Gamaliel was thinking. But for today, let's just see, there's some fear in the government officials and I'm saying it's exactly how it ought to be. That's exactly how it ought to be. Number two on your outline if you're taking notes, "Realize the Government Should Fear," the government should fear, they should fear God. That's the whole point. You should have a fear for God. You should say, I do not want to curtail the



Church because if the Church is true and if the message of the gospel is true, we're going to let them do their thing. Now, they're going to have opponents that are going to reject their message. And in the free exchange of ideas in the marketplace of ideas, we'll let them do their evangelism. That's real pluralism there.

In other words, we're going to say go out there and fight it out, have the argumentation that the Bible says all Christians will have, tearing down these arguments that raise themselves up against the knowledge of God, go there and debate these issues and win people to Christ. Now, I know it's more than just a logical debate. I get that. But that's the picture in Scripture. Go do it. Go reason with them from the Scriptures. That's what the Church should do. At times there have been governments that have said, like Gamaliel was suggesting, because they fear that they might be opposing God. They fear what might happen if they oppose the Church. They fear what might happen if they restrict the evangelism of the people of God or the assembly of the people of God. And they stand back and go, "Whoa, I don't want to be against God."

You know our country used to be in that mindset. If you studied colonial America, you know, I mean, we don't have a lot of hope about a lot of the theology that was coming out of some of those people. Of course, we had some clearly, obviously affirming evangelical gospel truths, but we had others in our government in particular who were influenced by a lot of political philosophy and really would be considered more deist than they would be Christians, born again Christians. And you often when you look back at that, go, well, they weren't really Christians, a lot of them, particularly the influential intellectual elites of the day. So you say, well, you know, they're not in our camp. Well, you do know this, that even the deists of the day, even those who were very skeptical of the truthfulness of all of the Bible, they stood back and said this, "We don't want to be found opposing God."

All you have to do is go and take another trip to D.C. Matter of fact, you can look all these guides up online and just go around to all the monuments and look at the things that were inscribed on the marble walls of these places. You start to realize there were in the founding fathers of our country, people who said, "Wait a minute, we're not going to curtail the church." As a matter of fact, you'll start to see that was the cornerstone of the philosophical political movement of America to say we're not going to inhibit the Church, the free exercise of their religion, let them do their thing. We're not going to arrest it. We are not going to restrict it. We're going to let them do their thing. And you know what God did in that? Honored that country.

Go to the Library of Congress. Lots of things on the wall there. You'll find Scripture. You find Micah 6. Right? "What does God require of you," the end line of that phrase etched on the wall, "To walk humbly with your God/" Do you think our leaders in our day have that as their motto? "Declare the glory of God." They have that Psalm 19 text over the science section in the Library of Congress. Go to the Jefferson Memorial. Have you been there? If you read the walls there, I mean, just even this quote, "God who gave us liberty." What was the liberty? What were they concern about? The liberty primarily to express our devotion to our God through keeping the great commission. I mean, that in essence this was a practice of our



calling to make disciples. "This God who gave us liberty. Can liberties of a nation be secure when we've removed a conviction that those liberties are a gift from God?" Our liberty from tyranny, from the King of England and all the things that were going on, the state church, all of that they said you've got to recognize, here's a Micah 6 reverberation, the humility of saying, "Whoa, it's a gift from God."

And then they had to send the fact-checkers out when our president at one point said at a prayer breakfast that at the top of the Washington Monument are the words praise to God, "Praise be to God." It's in Latin. It's a Latin phrase. And they went out there, "Well, he's making up stuff." Well, look it up. At the top of the Washington Monument on the Mall there, here it is at the top. Think about this. Over 120 years ago this thing was built and here it is at the top, at the top of the beacon of "government taxpayer dollars" being used, here is this statement at the tallest monument, "Praise be to God."

What are they all evangelical Christians? I'm not saying their names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, but I am saying they had a little bit of what Nebuchadnezzar had back in Daniel Chapter 3. He saw the work of God. He saw the blessing that came to the people of God. And he stood back in Chapter 4 and he said, "Wow, God is great. Got to give him props for that. God is the king." And just like Jeremiah says, people start to recognize in certain situations, God is the king of the nations. I simply serve with derivative authority to make sure I don't get in his way and I don't want to be found opposing God.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego or more accurately Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah in Chapter 3 were delivered from that fiery furnace and Nebuchadnezzar is greatly impressed. So in his kingdom, he thinks biblically, although not converted, I'm not going to argue he's converted, but thinks biblically enough to say, "You better let those guys have what they need. They need to express their Jewish religion, let them do it." And he says some great things in the first four verses.

But then, much like in America, he kind of gets lulled into that prosperity thing, which happens all the time. God's blessing on a nation, on a culture, then all of a sudden we start to think, just like God warned Israel in Deuteronomy, don't think that you did this. Well, by the end of Chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian autocrat of the world, starts to stand back and say, "Look at the beautiful place that I've built with my authority for my regal glory. I have built a great place." "Everyone's got an iPhone and an iPad. We got Twitter, we got it going on in this nation. Look at our wealth. Look at our military, look at our economy. Look how strong we are." And you know what happens at the end of Chapter 4 of Daniel, right? He gets struck down. God makes him go crazy for seven periods of time. He goes nuts.

And at the end of all that, it says, "My reason returned to me." Let's look at that together. That's worth it, because I think there are so many parallels to the need of what we need in our country, and that is to come to our senses. I'm not here trying to preach to you like you're a senator or a governor, but I am here to say that we ought to think about what's demanded of government, and that is to make sure you do not restrict the Church in the free exercise of what it's called to do.



Go to Daniel Chapter 4. Can you find that real quick? Drop down to the bottom couple paragraphs here. You can see the drama I just spelled out in verses 28 through 33. Then it says in verse 34, "At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven." Underscore this. "My reason returned to me." Oh that the reason of our nation would return to it. "And I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored him who lives forever. His dominion is an everlasting dominion. His kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand," no one can hold his hand back, "or say to him, "What have you done?"" Because God is in charge and his authority lies beyond us.

Dropped down of verse 37, "I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven." That's a humble perspective that our nation used to have and its leadership used to have, at least in theory. "For all his works are right in his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble." "No one can say his hand."

At least there's one little tiny thing that you might see as a silver lining in all the controversy and all the hostility and all the anger that has gone on in this COVID thing, is that my neighbor, as he circles his front room in fear that he might die of this invisible virus, and then I compare my heart saying, "Man, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Bring it on. If you hear I have COVID and I'm breathing my last on a ventilator, you should say, "How fortunate my pastor is." Because there's nothing better than for us to have our faith be sight and to see him as he is. For when we see him as he is, First John 3, we're going to be like him. That's our reward. That's what we can't wait for. That's when I can say I fought the good fight. I kept the faith. I'm ready to see this God that I've been serving. That's the best thing we can have, while our non-Christian counterparts are pacing and fearful and anxious.

"You got a death wish, Pastor Mike." Listen, I'm not going to toss myself from the pinnacle of the temple. I don't go and lick handrails at Costco. Right? I understand that. That's not my goal. And I even put the dumb, you know, requirements in place when I go places. I don't want to offend these people. I get that. And I'm not saying I'm impervious to it. I may be next. Maybe by Tuesday I've gone. But I am saying this. The silver lining might be that some people start to recognize their mortality in a way they haven't before. Maybe they realize there's got to be more to this than this life because the mortality rate is 100% and we are holding out the words of life. And I hope you hold out all the words of life and you say to your neighbors and your coworkers and your non-Christian family members, "Listen, you have put your trust in Christ because this life ain't what it's about." As Paul said, if this is what Christianity is all about, this life, then you ought to pity us more than all men.

We sacrifice for a king. We try to kick the ball in the opposite direction of the rest of the world because we know that it's not about this world. It's about when the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he reigns forever and ever. That's the goal of the Christian life. And when the government starts to recognize maybe we're



restricting that church thing too much, those are little religious people down there, that's a good place, that's where it ought to be.

As a matter of fact, occasionally you want to write a letter to your senators, maybe you ought to write it like Justin Martyr did in the second century as he wrote the Senate. And in his, I think it was his 68th apology, they call it, which isn't an apology like you think it's like, he's making a defense for the Christian life. Here he warns the pagan authorities and he says, "We forewarn you, that you shall not escape the coming judgment of God, if you continue in your injustice." The next time you're upset about this, that or the other, and I'm not just talking about our church services, I'm talking about whether it's the crass immorality of our culture or the killing of our unborn children, whatever it might be, maybe that would be a good way to start your letter to your official, if you want to write one. "For we forewarn you that you shall not escape the coming judgment of God, if you continue in your injustice." You go, "Well, they're going to go wow, another crazy kook now." You understand that's all true, right? That's part of the ridicule that you and I have signed up for to follow Christ. Here's the last line of Justin Martyr's letter. He said, "We ourselves invite you to do what is pleasing to God." We'd like you to do what's pleasing to God and it starts with letting the Church understand its mission and get active and doing what it's called to do.

The Church should have a red carpet in any society to do its work, and when that happens, that righteousness exalts a nation. But sin is a disgrace to any people. You know, I'm not big on preaching political sermons. You know that, right? Matter of fact, some of you are going, "Is this our pastor? What's he doing?" I'm dealing with a passage that deals with the Church, encountering their authorities and how they sit back and say, as you look at it one last time in the last section here, verses 27 through 32, we end up saying, listen, when it comes down to it, we know who our leader and our savior is. We obey God rather than men. It doesn't mean they're always in conflict with one another. But when they come in conflict with one another, or when you say I can sit at a blackjack table or have a lap dance, you understand that when it comes down to what I'm called to do and be and the mission that we have, it really supersedes the authorities of this earth. At some point we say your restrictions have lost credibility. We understand our calling before God.

Acts 5 verse 27. "They brought them in before the council and the high priest questioned them, saying, 'We strictly charge you not to teach in this name.'" And you say, "Well, that's not what's happening today." I get that. I'm not saying this is an exact parallel to what we're going through, but there are principles here, right? "Yet here you fill Jerusalem with your teaching." That's our job, to fill Aliso Viejo and Orange County and the Hill Country and Treasure Valley and Huntington Beach and everywhere else that we're trying to go and make a difference for Christ, fill that place with the teaching of Christ, and to call people to account for the blood of Christ. "You intend to bring this man's blood upon us?" Absolutely. And that's the only portal we have to forgiveness is to see our sin. "But Peter and the apostles, they answered, 'We must obey God rather than the men. The God of our fathers raised Christ whom you killed by hanging on a tree, God exalted him, he's at the right hand as Leader,' as Prince, 'and Savior,'" as commander, as master, as chief, as boss and Savior. And that's for good. Look how good it is for you. It gives you repentance. If you'd listen, you'd get "repentance and forgiveness.



We're witnesses." You'll align yourself with the right team. You'll align yourself with the Holy Spirit. And "God will give that Holy Spirit to you, just obey him." And it starts with you obeying and then repentance and faith.

I want to be obedient to Christ. Our church wants to be obedient to Christ. Number three, jot it down this way if you're taking notes. "Know Obedience to Christ is Good for All." It's good for everyone. It's good for our government, good for our governor, good for our senators, good for the Congress, good for the world. If the Church will be the Church and be faithful and zealously focused on kicking the ball into the net.

Now, if someone wants to block it and say, "I reject that, I don't want to do it, I don't feel..." Well, great. This is not a militant religion that tries to get people to convert at the end of a bayonet, I understand that. But we are engaging in the marketplace, the free exchange of ideas, to plead with them that there is a creator, he has revealed himself, and that revelation is about Christ and Christ has died in your place. Our sin put him there and your repentance will bring his forgiveness into your life. That's our message. We've got to get serious about being obedient to that and not letting anyone stop us from doing that. And when you do that, it's good. It's good for them. It's good for us. It's good for our community. Righteousness exalts a nation, it exalts the community, it restrains evil. I can quote passages like Second Thessalonians Chapter 2, the restraint of evil in a community because a church is doing what it's called to do, it's the best thing that can happen to a community.

They don't know, they don't know what they have when a city has healthy churches, the best thing they can have. Not to mention we'll get godly enough to start doing what First Timothy Chapter 2 says, we'll start interceding for our leaders and those in authority. I hope you're praying for your leaders. It's easy to hate them. I get that. It's easy to be frustrated with them, it's easy to see their hypocrisy. I know that. But can you pray for them? I'm not saying pray that they'll have a great day, their teeth will be nice and white and their hair won't fall out. I hope they drive a really nice car and I hope that their stocks increase. No, we're praying for them to repent. We're praying for them to come to repentance and to have forgiveness and to be the kinds of people that we want to be, followers of Jesus Christ.

Tertullian, known in the 3rd century for writing to his officials, and here's what he says to the emperor. This is the good side of it all. Not only do we call out their sin, we tell them that we're praying for them, he says, without ceasing. This is Tertullian of Carthage. He died in 230. He said, "Without ceasing, for all of our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for prolong life. We pray for security for the empire. We pray for protection of the imperial house. We pray for brave armies. We pray for a faithful Senate. We pray for a virtuous people. We pray for the world to be at rest, at peace, whatever, as man or Caesar, or an emperor would wish." That's what we want. We want good. Don't restrict the Church. Don't persecute the Church, don't ridicule the Church. We only want what's good, what's good for them, what's good for our society, as long as we give them the whole Council of God.

We've got a task, the target's big. We've got an adversary and we've got an opposing team. There's another category of people out on that soccer field, at least in modern soccer. You've



got the referees out there. They're doing their best to try and keep things the way they ought to be, trying to enforce some kind of justice on the field. And that's hard to do because, I mean, it's not professional wrestling or anything but I've seen a lot of dramatics there on the soccer field. Those guys, for being such strong, healthy athletes they're flopping around on the ground a lot, trying to get a call. Right?

Well, they've started, as you soccer fans know, to have, like they have in most professional sports, video review. So if there's some kind of disputed call, they can go up and see the video to see if it happened or not, especially when you see something egregious and the refs don't catch it, you get so frustrated. It's good, though, as Christians to know that the referee of our game, this match, this contested fight that we're engaged in, in the 21st period of it today, is refereed by a God, that though he does not bring the consequences immediately after seeing the infractions, that he misses nothing. Proverbs 15 says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place," in every place, "keeping watch on the evil and the good."

And I know that in our day we see a lot of injustice. Some of you news junkies and you talk show people you're listening until just your head's spinning around. Maybe you could cut back on that a little bit and read more about evangelism and apologetics and engage in evangelistic conversations. That would be my first bit of advice for you. Not to bury your head in the sand, but maybe a little less for some of you. I can see it in your eyes when I walk out on the patio. A little bit more evangelism, a little less talk shows. But I would say this: in your frustration, which we're all going to have, the Bible says he's going to mark the godly, that Old Testament view of the declining nation of Israel, Judah in particular, he says, "I see the people that groan and those are my people." If you don't groan, something's wrong with your Christianity.

But know this, that the injustices will always be dealt with. Why? Because the one who we serve is the King of kings. The King of the nations is, as Jeremiah 2 says. The idea of us trusting in him is to know that one day those government officials, which we hope are friendly to our Christianity, which they used to be, and God blessed them for it, you ought to recognize that that king will one day become the ruling king of this world. Here's how it was put, speaking of a Christmas verse, as we get near Christmas, Isaiah 9. Right? "A child's going to be born to you, wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace," and here it is, "and the government will rest on his shoulders and the extent of his kingdom, there'll be no end." That day is coming and there will be retribution and vindication. Retribution to the opposing team that does not repent and vindication for the embattled team that we're a part of.

But know you're on the right side of this. Expect the opposition. Realize it's the government that should be afraid, not us. We fear God as we should as faithful children, but we realize that the concern of the battle is one that they should fear, not us, when they oppose the Church. Know that obedience to Christ, as the Church is obedient, it's good for everyone. So fight the good fight this week. Do it with gentleness and respect, but be undaunted, be fearless, be courageous and do it because it's a good thing that we do to make disciples of Christ in our world.



Let's pray. God, we need you to encourage us. We need you to give us perspective. We need things like this simple illustration to help clarify what seems so complicated as we listen to it and hear people talk about it. But it's really not all that complicated. We've got a task to do. Make disciples. Be witnesses in Aliso Viejo, Orange County, Southern California, the United States and this world. That's our task, to be your representatives, ambassadors of your message. And all this opposition is all part of what you planned. We're not supposed to when the fiery ordeal comes upon us to act as some strange thing were happening. It's not strange at all. It's what every generation in every period of this great contest has gone through. And so we, I pray, will faithfully step up and accept that and continue to rely on you and trust in you. Empower us in this even this week.

In Jesus name. Amen.