Living In A Hostile World

Well, amen. It's so good to come together, so good, again, to glorify our Lord Jesus Christ and look at his word once again. And last time we were together, we looked at that riot that ensued in Ephesus, and we realized it revolved around many that happened to be of the population coming to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we see, again, that their salvation, again, brought fruit that happened to begin in their life, that their whole lives, the way they talked, the way they acted, where they went, their desires, all changed. And it changed, again, so much that it really changed the fabric of that whole society that happened to begin around them. And that's something, again, to really behold because we realize Christianity really does change people, doesn't it?

You know, I can remember reading, this was probably 20, 25 years ago, an incident in the life of Harry Ironside, a famous evangelical of the past, and an atheist came up to him and started saying, Christianity really has no value. It really doesn't change people. We would be better off if Christianity did not exist. And Ironside challenged him to take 10 to 100 various different people who believed in his philosophy of atheists and show how they had changed from the better. And he said, I'll bring 1,000 tomorrow, who used to be drunks, who used to be fornicators, who used to be thieves, who used to sap others and take from others, but now that they give. And his whole point was this.

Again, Christianity really makes us better people. It really makes us more godly individuals. It conforms us after the image of the Lord Jesus Christ and makes us, again, better even in the society that we happen to live in. And we can all realize that.

I often wonder, I don't know if you often wonder, where my life would be without Jesus Christ, without him coming in my life, without the wonderful salvation, without the wonderful direction that he's given me and the excitement. I really enjoy being a believer with all the difficulties, with all the problems. I really enjoy being a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. recognizing that we have this God and recognizing we have this salvation. Now, here's the thing.

We realize that this right is really not about the change in the people. But as Demetrius gets all the silversmiths together, it's really about this. It's really about their pocketbooks. It's really about the bottom line. It's really about that it affected their livelihood and the money coming into their coffers. We realized that they sold these silver statues and when a certain percentage of it were no longer bought because our believers came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, they were no longer buying these. So they got all these silversmiths together, Demetrius, and he begins to talk.

And their passions are raging at this time. They're on fire. And they start this riot. They start marching through the streets. Others are joining. No doubt they're telling them what this is against, Christianity and the blight it happens to have on their city or whatever it happens to be. But more and more are gaining.

They see Aristarchus and also Gaius, and they apprehend them to bring them into this 25,000-seat amphitheater, this theater that happened to begin right there. And they chant for two hours about Artemis, the goddess. I got it right here. Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

And please realize that this was shrieking cries. This was very chaotic. This was not, again, orderly. This was really, if anything, out of order. And Paul really wants to go in. He really wants to speak to this whole assembly that happens to be gathered together. But many of the disciples realized he'd probably be torn apart. And therefore, again, grab him and do not let him go in.

There's even a word sent from the Asiarchs. And the Asiarchs were basically the rulers. They were the ones who were in charge of the city. And it seems like many of them had come to a saving knowledge of Lord Jesus. And they sent word for Paul not to go in.

Suddenly, in the midst of all this chaos, there happens to be a man who comes forward who happens to be Alexander of the Jews. He's probably not thinking to speak on behalf of Christianity, but being a Jew, maybe he has fidelity with the Christian message. He's not allowed to speak. And again, he's heckled. The screams, again, about Artemis could come up.

And that's where we ended off last day. This morning, we're going to look at the town clerk. The town clerk is unnamed. And the town clerk was one of the most recognized people in all of the city. He was in charge of the infrastructure. He was in charge of any major projects that happened to be done in the city. It would run through him. He was usually chosen among the ACARCs.

You know, and therefore, he probably had some fidelity, some loyalty to them, and we realize a certain sector of them came to Christ. But this town clerk is not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, he comes together, he speaks to them, he quells all of their passion, and then they disperse. You know, and I think this section of scripture is really important for us for a couple of reasons.

Because here's an indifferent person outside of Jesus Christ looking in. You know, his life is not affected, but he's looking at Christianity. And he really gives a view, again, of what he sees in Christianity, which I think is really healthy for us. How do other people many times view us in a non-combatant way?

The other reason why I think this is so important is because again, we need a testimony of Jesus Christ in a hostile world. As we look at our lives, as we look again at all the difficulties, we realize all of us suffer. This doesn't just take in suffering from politicals or from society that happen to begin around us, but all suffering.

You know, think of it this way. This week, you suffered in some way. You know, the world, other people, it might have been suffering at home, it might have been suffering in your workplace, it might have been suffering in society. But you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, you suffered in some way. You know, and that's a reality, isn't it? We realize that we have people come at us. We realize so often our suffering is caused by other people.

The only question is, again, how did we respond? You know, did we respond in a Christ-like manner? Did we respond because we were so overwhelmed with who Jesus Christ is that we represented him? You know, I believe, again, much of our problems, much of our difficulties that happen to begin in life is that we are not representing him as believers in Jesus Christ.

So what I want us to do is I want us to run through this passage of scripture. I want us to really gain an understanding of it and then bring some conclusions, bring some things that we can heat out as far as living in a hostile world. living in a world of suffering, living in a world where people will sin against us, people will mock us, people will scorn us, and some people, even close to us, many times will do this. So let's run through this passage and see if we can gain some sort of understanding of this passage. And let's just read by way of introduction, verses 35 and 36.

It says, and when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of Ephesus, of the Ephesians, is the temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky?

Seeing that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing. Rash, that's good wisdom from a very ungodly man. It's amazing, again, how that comes. And let me just say this.

I think much of the opposition that we face in the world that happens to begin at large, much of the opposition that we face when some people come and they malign us, they ridicule us, many times they want nothing to do with us. You know, and I think a lot of times we have the potential of taking that personally, don't we? You know, look at that person, look at what they're saying about me, look at how they've cut me out of their lives. But many times, the reason why they're doing that is just because of our association with Jesus Christ. In fact, if we took ourselves away from the Lord Jesus and we no longer profess Jesus, we no longer preach Jesus, we no longer preach that message of the gospel, they would be fine with us. And many times as we look at the rejection of the world, we look at the rejection of individuals that happen to begin around us, we look at the mockery and scorn that many times come upon us.

It's not personal. It really isn't. It's because of our faith and our trust in Jesus Christ. Now, saying all of that, I think one of the reasons why we suffer many times, and why we suffer our suffering many times, is because we respond in a non-Christian manner. In other words, we do not have the character of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We realize people will attack us, people will malign us, they'll say all sorts of nasty things. And think of how we respond. Because the normal way to respond when we are sinned against, when we are maligned, When people come at us, again, very vociferously, it's responding like kindnessness.

You see that in the world that happens to be getting around us. Our world, again, really lacks hope, doesn't it? Our world, again, is really volatile. You think of the politics that happen to begin of the day and the things that are spoken. I mean, even three or four, even if you go back five years, the things that are spoken in politics would make us blush. And yet they're said.

And then we read them, we hear them, and we don't even bat an eye. In fact, a lot of times, if it happens to be our party, if it happens to be, again, our candidate, if it happens to be the one that we want to get in power, many times we endorse those things.

And folks,
many times we suffer, not because we have the character of Christ, not because we have the love of Christ, not because we have the compassion of Christ, not because we have the patience of Christ, not because we have the kindness of Christ, but because of the exact opposite. And as you look at your testimony, as you look at where you suffer, as you look at how you live in an ungodly society, does it say anything about the Lord Jesus Christ? Does it say anything about, again, His grace that happens to be in our life? Because the Christians in Ephesus were lovers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it changed how they lived, how they functioned, how they talked in that society that happened to begin around them. And here we see. You know, all of a sudden this man stands up, he quiets again all the chanting that has been going on for two hours, and he gives this remarkable speech, and it really is a remarkable speech, because he's talking about their own philosophies and how they interact with Christianity. And he starts off again talking about, again, what they know, what they believe, and we can see that again in verse number 35. He says, and when the town clerk, excuse me for a second, And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, men of Ephesus, who's there? who does not know the city of the Ephesians is a temple keeper of the great Artemis and a sacred stone that fell from the sky.

Now, we ask this in a question, and it's a rhetorical question because they know this. In that open air theater, they could look over and they could see this wondrous temple, again, that was in the sky. They could see that they were keepers of it. And here's the thing. Through all of this rioting, through all this commotion, nothing, again, as far as that temple, was in jeopardy. There was no one there pillaging it. There was no one there throwing rocks or stones that happened to be in it. It was not in jeopardy.

And they realized that. And also, again, they realized that this meteor, or whatever it is, this rock that happened to be in the sky, fell down. And somehow, they've taken that rock, and they've actually worshipped that rock as coming from Artemis, or again, her personification. But the whole goal in speaking about this is to somehow refute what Paul, again, allegedly said, that gods made with hands are no gods at all.

You know, here it is. It fell from the sky. No, it's still part of creation. He's wrong on this. And so he states what they already know. Here's the temple. It's not in jeopardy. Here again is his presence of Artemis. And on the basis of what they profess about Artemis, he goes on and he begins to look at them. Look at what he says next.

He says, seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. And he speaks about how they lived in society, how they functioned with those that happened to get around them. And he gives them a warning, don't do anything rash. And this is not a mild suggestion. This is a warning of repercussions if they act rash. But he says these people are not guilty of sacrilegion.

And sacrilegious behavior was basically going into any temple, any religious place, and pillaging it. Destroying the artifacts that happen to be, again, there, or taking, again, valuables that happen to be right there. And it was one of the worst crimes. It was one of the worst, again, aspects of lawbreaking. And it was punished severely.

And he said again, as you look at these believers, as you look at the temple that happened to begin over there, they're not going in the temple. They're not pillaging it. They're not taking the value of the bulls that happen to be right there. They're not even stealing from the silversmiths. Their style of living went down because there was no statuettes being bought, or very little. But they weren't stealing from these individuals that happen to be getting right there. That's a fact, isn't it? There were no laws being broken. And not only that, they did not blaspheme the name of Artemis.

Now think about that, because this is the thing you have to realize about Paul. Paul preached that there was one way of salvation, and it was through the Lord Jesus Christ and him alone, right? We realize that truth. All other gods, again, are false. There's only one true God that happened to begin of creation. And this is what you have to understand.

Paul, in the true sense of the word, and let me explain this, Paul, in the true sense of the word, was what we would call a very tolerant individual. In other words, again, he dabbled in, or he was characterized by toleration. Now, a lot of times we hear that word. We think, again, of the modern day definition of toleration. Toleration, again, basically is this.

You tolerate every single view that happened to begin out there. And what they mean by that is you accept every single view. You have this view, you have this view, you have this view, you have this view, you have this view, you have this view. And

people many times pride themselves, I'm so tolerant.

You know, if that's what makes you happy, if that's what makes you happy, if that's the way you want to live, that's fine, great, great, toleration. You know, Paul was a tolerant individual. But here's his definition of toleration. And this is the true definition of toleration. When you live in a free society, and think of Rome, think of that whole Greek atmosphere that happened to begin right there.

They bantered around various different philosophies. They argued about which one was right. They debated them. You know, they debated various different religions and which really had power, which really was efficacious. That's what they did. And it was a free society as far as those free thoughts. And they looked at themselves, again, as very tolerant. And here's what toleration is.

I'm going to fight for your right to believe whatever you want to believe, right? We call that many times freedom of expression, freedom of speech, or whatever it happened to be. But I'm going to fight for my right, here it is, in a free society. Here's toleration in a free society to tell you that you are wrong.

And that's exactly what Paul did. He wasn't belligerent. He treated people with respect. He treated people, again, with dignity. An excellent example of that is when he came into Athens. He came into Athens and he saw all these idols that happened to be getting everywhere. And he was angered. There was a righteous indignation that happened to be in him. But guess what he did? He didn't go off on them. He didn't start shouting. He didn't start, again, accusing, again, calling down these cursings or whatever it happened to be. He didn't treat them in a disrespectful way.

But Acts 17, 17 says this. So on the basis of his anger, he says, so he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons and in the marketplace every day with those who happen to be there. So think of what he would do, he would go into the synagogue, he would say, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know that's what you're teaching, but Messiah has come. Look at these scriptures, look at the fulfillment of Jesus. He would go into the marketplace and here's these pagan, here's all these idolaters, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know you say this, but they're only creations.

Look, you've carved this, you've built this, it has no power, it cannot do anything, but look at the great creator God, look at the evidence that happens around you. Look at the evidence. Even in your heart, you know what is right, what is wrong. And you know that you are guilty. You know that you're a sinner. You know that you're in need of a Savior.

And look at what He's done. He sent Christ. And He reasoned with them. He reasoned these truths. And here's the thing you have to realize, Paul, in the true sense of the word, when we look at what toleration is, was the most tolerant man. You know, he recognized the need, again, of trusting the Lord Jesus Christ. He was charitable and respectful. And think of this. Because this is the whole argument that the town clerk is making. You know Christianity. You know the witness. They live among you, these various different believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. You know their demeanor. You know their testimony among you.

So look at what he says next. He says, if therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open and there are pro-councils. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. So basically, again, he recognizes where the true problem is and what the true problem is. The problem isn't with faith in Jesus Christ. The problem, again, is with Demetrius and the silversmiths, their pocketbooks, again, their money that they wanted, their lifestyles that they wanted. And he says, if there's any laws, if these Christians,

if these believers, if these people who happen to be, again, in the way, if there's anything against them, bring them to the law courts.

There's pro-councils. Now, the pro-council was basically a judge, the main judge, who was set up by Rome. And there was usually only one in every city, but they were interchanged so often. That's the plural that happened to begin right there. But there's options. Bring them here.

If you see anything that they have done wrong, if they've been guilty of blasphemy, if they've been guilty of sacrilegious behavior, bring them towards these judges. And he says, if there's anything else, if there is some sort of disturbance not under the law, then bring it before the assembly. And the assembly was basically a city council. And they could again establish various different ordinances in order to keep peace that happened to
begin right there. But do these things. In other words, they had options.

And it is amazing, isn't it? Because when you look at the history of Christianity, Christianity, wherever it was established, and I mentioned this at the beginning, made the individuals better citizens of that society, more law-abiding. Again, they lived out their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But in those societies, again, and we see this all the way through the Book of Acts, those who hate that, those who are in love with their sin many times and want to keep that sin, want to keep that, again, in their hearts, many times act outside of the law. in trying to subjugate, trying to destroy Christianity.

Now, we'll look at a concluding couple of verses that I happen to begin right here. He says, for we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause. I love this, because he's talking about believers. Since there is no cause, no cause that we can give to justify this commotion. And why? Because there's nothing that they've done wrong. And when he said these things, He dismissed the assembly, and the whole, again, short speech that happened to begin right here was to engender a greater fear. You know, the charge could be brought against them, and not against these believers, that they are causing this commotion. they are acting outside of the law. The whole goal was to engender fear.

When you look at the Romans, the Romans prided themselves, one, in their law. They looked at the law as equitable, as fair, as holding up various different citizens, and they prided themselves in that. The other thing that they prided themselves in, because they had this law over all the people, over all the empire, was peace. If there was any disturbance outside of that law, they would come and they would very violently, very swiftly, very again, aggressively put down that uprising.

Because there is nothing being done outside of the law, he says, be careful, be careful, there's greater repercussions that might come if you keep going in this direction. If you do anything against Aristarchus, if you do anything against Gaius, if you apprehend Paul and tear him to pieces, let me tell you, there's going to be repercussions. And with those words, it says at the end, when he said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

Basically, the believers are preaching and believing the same message and living the same way. But this unruly bunch, full of emotion, full of uncontrollable, again, passion, suddenly is dismissed and they disperse. And why? Because there's a greater threat. there's a greater thing that could happen to them if anything were to happen to Gaius and Aristarchus. Now, think about that because that's a run through again of that passage.

In one of the ways that we look at the Word of God is we realize that the Word of God has given us for life and godliness, isn't it? To train us, to edify us. So anytime we go through a paragraph that I'm going to begin right like this, we have

to ask yourself, how can we apply it to our own lives? How is this germane in me living in the 21st century in Windsor, Ontario? I think that's a great question, isn't it? One of the things that we have to realize even before we begin to apply this, is we have to realize that there's always been opposition. There's always been trouble.

There's always been those, again, who hate the message of Christ, who want to stamp out the message of Christ, and you have that right at the beginning. Right in Jerusalem, when you come to Acts chapter 4, after we have that great time again of Pentecost and the establishment again of the church, we see that Peter and John are apprehended and are imprisoned. right at the beginning.

And we shouldn't be surprised that as if something strange, when we see the laws being changed in our land, when we see again that it's a little more difficult to live for Jesus Christ and even vocalize our faith, whether it happens to be online, whether it happens to be in our workplaces, whether it happens to be again in our neighborhoods. Folks, we shouldn't be surprised by this. You know, we're even told in Romans chapter 1 and verse number 32, and I think this is such a great description of those, again, who happen to be again around us.

Because look at what it says, though they know God, and this spoke of us even before we became believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. It says, though they know God's righteous decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die. Isn't that amazing thing? Because he's just told us again, just a few verses previously, that those who know the word of God, and every single person is born with that word, with that law that happens to be in them. They know right and wrong, and what they do is they suppress that knowledge again of God. They know it in the deepest recesses of their heart. The problem is they want these things. So the verse goes on and says this, they not only do them, but give approval to those who practice them.

So think about it again, those who practice them, those who are engaged in them, come on in, we love you, we want you. Again, into our lives, everything's fine. If you agree with me, if you won't call sin, sin, praise God, come in. We see that behavior, but think about it. If you call sin, sin, if you identify sin, As against God, do you think, again, you will have that approval? You know, and think of it, and I want us to be careful right here. We just don't call sin and we just don't condemn sin, but we call out sin, we condemn sin, we show it again what it looks like in the face of our great, holy, benevolent God.

And the reason why we do that is to get to the good news. And the good news is God has come to save sinners like us. God has come again to redeem us in the Lord Jesus Christ, to pay that ultimate price, right? The message isn't just about sin. But this gets the foundation of the greatest news that has ever been. Christ has come.

But here's my whole point. In order to get there, we have to talk about sin. And what if you condemn, even as our brother was pointing out, Islam? What if you condemn the LGBTQ community? I think I got all the letters in there. Well, what if you condemn against secularism and the whole idea of living for this life and living for the things of this life? And life is all about me. Life is all about me. Life is all about my pleasure.

What if he condemned that? What if you say that is sin, that's why Christ had to come? What if he called people to repent and place their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you think you'd be welcomed? Do you think you'll be applauded? Do you think again all of a sudden again people hold you up again on pinnacle? Because think of it, because that's how we apply the text, isn't it?

You look at why these believers were in this place that they were in, and it's

because of this. They took, and I want you to hear this, they took because of their love for Christ, because they were overwhelmed with his forgiveness, with his presence to happen to begin in this life.

They were overwhelmed with the great hope that they have in Jesus Christ that is sure and steadfast. This is what they took seriously. They took obedience seriously. They obeyed God. They reverenced him. They delighted in disobedience. Let me just say that they didn't choose different obediences.

They didn't say, I like that, I don't like that, I like that, I don't like that, and they obeyed in an area where I think it's always been a frustration for believers. But maybe a greater frustration today and that is again they obeyed the forces that be, the governing powers that happen to be. Let me tell you, they were a lot more corrupt. a lot more externally anyways wicked than any of the leaders that we had today.

You know, and Peter, again, states it, again, so clearly. Because listen to what he says. This is in 1 Peter 2, beginning at verse number 13. And think of it. Think of it, because you have a living illustration of this in Ephesus at this time. He says, be subject for the Lord's sake to every institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. So here are these leaders, and they're not godly. The emperor is not godly. The governors, again, are not godly in and of themselves.

But he tells them, again, to obey them as much as they can obey them. And think about that, because that's exactly what the city clerk brought up. You look at these people. Why are you rioting against them? There is no laws that they have broken. They delightfully, they unashamedly obey the laws that happen to be in the land. And what happens to them? You know, as they live out these laws, as they live, again, as respectful and peaceful people in that society, it ends up silencing the ignorance of foolish people.

Now, think of that. Because think of our own lives. You know, how law-abiding, how respectful, Are we of the political forces that happen to begin reigning over us right now, whether they happen to be city councils, whether they happen to be police officers, whether they happen to be provincial authorities, where they happen to be, again, the governing people that happen to be getting over our land. Because I think a lot of times, many times, we look at the laws that happen to be getting established, and we look at the people that happen to be getting right there, that we can speak, we can do as we like. You know, so all of a sudden, we come to a stoplight, and it's red, and we look around, there's no traffic here, there's no traffic there, I'm in a rush, you know, and the light is red.

What do I do? I've got to be at work, I've got to be at this meeting, it's really important. What do I do? No one's around, no one's going to know. But here's the thing, God has put us in that authority. What do we do? It's incredible again how many Christians today cheat on their taxes. They basically funneled the numbers. Why? Because I don't want to give this money up. You know, I don't want to pay my taxes. You know, and Jesus is very clear, isn't it? There's no wiggle room. Give to Caesar the things that are what? Caesar's, and give to God what? The things that are God. I mean, there's no wiggle room that happens to begin right there.

And think of it, their government was a lot more wicked, a lot more evil as far as externally than our government. Oh, no, no, no, no, my taxes, no. Pay your taxes. Pay your taxes. Live a peaceful life that we might preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here's something that many people do. They call it working under the table. You know what working under the table basically is?

I don't want to pay anything out to the government. I don't want to pay CPP. I don't want to pay, again, all these other things. I just don't want to do it. And what happens? We just choose. You know, and we have that kind of scenario there. It's all about me, it's all about me, it's all about me. It's all about what I think is right, rather than trying to be these good citizens in the place that we are living. And folks, this really burdens me. It really burdens me.

There's so many political ads that happen to begin out there, and there's so many derogatory remarks that are made against leaders. And let me just say this, we do have a lot of ungodly leaders out there, and they express their ungodliness. But it's amazing how we never use what I would call benevolent, what I would call truthful, what I would call patient, what I would call, again, very respectful behavior. You know, I can think of one gentleman in the States who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, who writes political commentaries for Christians, and he always does it in a respectful manner.

And what really shames my heart and really wounds my soul is not what he says. It's not like I agree with him in everything that he writes about. But really shames my heart and really wounds me to the core of my being is all the comments. You know how they have a comment box right there?

And the derogatory terms that are used. you know, the vile terms about the judgment of God coming upon, again, these individuals. You know, and when you look at it, again, Christians, we would doubt, even five, six, seven years ago, we would doubt the authenticity of that person's salvation, not because of the point that they're trying to make, not because of what they're trying to defend, but how they're defending it. And I wonder, when we look at our society, when we look at how we are to live a Salton life, and let me, I think we know this, but let me just say this as clear as possible.

Government is not gonna save us. If you read the word, just go to Revelation. Government's not gonna save us. Government's gonna fail in the end. Folks, I'm all for godly laws being passed, but guess what? A whole bunch of people who live moral lives, guess where they're going? Right? It's all about the gospel.

And when you look at Ephesus, where it was changed, it wasn't changed by this political movement. It wasn't changed by this force. It wasn't changed by ignorance. It wasn't changed by, again, heavy handedness. It wasn't changed by all these derogatory comments.

It was changed from the inside out. My heart loves Jesus Christ so much that I want to live for him. I want to praise him. I want to reflect him. And folks, when it comes to the government of the day, How respectful are we? You know, idiot. What an absolute fool.

Let me just say those are mild terms that are used many times. You see this again so often in the world that happen to begin around us, but there's a second way that we can do this. Because we look at society and how we live in society given as a large, we also again have to live in a godly and respectful and a Christ-like way in our personal relationships. I'm going to tell you something that I think you know. You have in your life, what is known as difficult relationships. And you go, boy, that is enlightening. I didn't know that. We've got difficult relationships. We've got people who have hurt us from the core of our being. And I think some of the deepest wounds come from people, don't they?

We used to have that little saying when I used to be a kid, because kids can be mean to one another. And see if you can remember, the sticks and stones may But guess what names will never do? Let me tell you, I can always heal from sticks and

stones. But sometimes some of the people, some of the things that people have said, when I think of them, even years later, decades later, they still wound my soul. And so often we're thinking, we're thinking, we're thinking, we're thinking about what they have done in our lives, the wickedness, the evilness, the hatred, the hurt.

But if we ever asked, what does it look like to live out the message of reconciliation? What does it look like to make much of Christ? What does it look like? Oh, this wonderful forgiveness, this wonderful love, this wonderful patience of Christ. What does it look like?

Because Peter does that in his epistle. He changes the focus. Here's these enemies. We could call them rightly our enemies. And here's these enemies that happen to begin right here. And he changes the focus away from the enemies to how we are responding. to our own testimonies.

Listen to what he writes in 1 Peter 3, he says, but even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, think about it, I'm doing the right things, I'm saying the right things, I'm having the right attitudes. This is what he says, you will be blessed. You know, we have the blessing of Christ that happens to begin in our life. And because God is sovereign, this is what he says, have no fear of them, nor be troubled. But in your hearts, here's where the change is, right? Change from them to Christ. In your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy. Don't sin. Don't go in that direction. Always be prepared to make a defense, right? We dabble, we give truth.

Make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, and here is the toleration again of Paul earlier. Yet do this with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, think of Ephesus, so that when you are slandered, Those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. And then he ends it this way, for it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, right, than doing evil. You know, and ask yourself, is that the way in all my difficult relationships, is that the way I'm responding? When people have hurt me, when people have maligned me, do I recognize that God is over this situation and God has given me an opportunity to make much of Him?

Because I'm afraid, again, so often we start with righteousness, we live that Christ-centered life, we live that life glorifying to Him, then suddenly somebody sins against us, and when they sin against us, our response again is a sinful way. You know, are we truly following Christ? Are we truly making him? And let me just give one last way that I think, again, that we can apply this passage of scripture.

And that is, again, and we all know this because I've been saying this over and over through this passage, but God is sovereign over all of our suffering. Isn't it? We live in this time again of history because God has put us in this time of history. We live with the relationships that God has given in our lives because God is sovereign and put those relationships that happen to begin in our life. We live in this time of great upheaval, great uncertainty, great suffering, great pain, great hurt in our life. Why? Because God has put us in this time. All these circumstances that happen to begin in Ephesus were not by mistake. They're under, again, this headship, this lordship, this sovereign God who happens to be above.

And we realize there's many things in God's sovereignty when we go through hurt, when we go through pain, when we go through trials, when we go through tribulations, that we cannot answer. We cannot tell you why we are going through those things. We don't know what God is doing, but we know that he's in control. And we know that he's all good. But there's so many things, folks. We can know because God has given us light.

You know, one of the things he's doing is he's showing me my heart. He's showing me my lack of love. He's showing me my lack of patience. He's showing me the things that really rule my heart. He's giving me an opportunity to persevere. And through that perseverance, he's changing my character and he's also showing me where my hope is.

My hope is not in peaceful things happening here. My hope is in the greater peace and the greater assurance of being with the Lord Jesus Christ. And one of the main things that he does in this very dark, this very painful, this very hurtful world, whether we look at it on a national level, as we look at it on a personal level, one of the things that he's doing is giving us an opportunity to show where our hope lies.

Isn't it true? Here's Artemis. Here's all this lifestyle with Artemis, and it's threatened. And what do people do? They respond with rage, anger, and even want to murder. Here's all this rage, here's all this animosity brought against the good believers in the Lord Jesus Christ because of their faith. And how do they respond? They respond with goodness, kindness, love, forgiveness, the gospel of Christ.

Once more, listen to 1 Peter chapter four. It says this, beloved, Do not be surprised at the fiery trials when they come upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to
you. It's not something strange. Been planned out by God, it's always been that way. He says again, instead of being surprised, he says, but rejoice. I always love when it says rejoice.

Because how many of us rejoice in suffering? How many of us rejoice when somebody sins against us and hurts us from the deepest realms of our soul? And let me tell you, we would be lovers of the pain if that's what we rejoiced over. But what we rejoice over is what comes next. But rejoice insofar, this is why I'm rejoicing, as you share in Christ's suffering, that you may also rejoice and be glad when glory is revealed. Think about it again. Am I suffering? If this didn't happen, I couldn't share Christ's suffering. And what does it mean to share Christ's suffering? And let me tell you what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that I merit salvation. It doesn't mean that there's something left undone by the Lord Jesus Christ that I have to complete that happens to begin over there. That's not what he means.

But what he means by share is that we are suffering. Why? We're suffering for doing right, just like the Lord Jesus Christ. We're suffering, again, for compassion, for love, for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to those that happen to be around us. And this is what is happening. Think about it.

When we're hurt, when there's animosity, when there's rage that happens to begin in our communities, in our nation against Christianity, in our own individual lives with the personal relationships that happen to begin right here, I become, when I suffer like the Lord Jesus Christ, who didn't threaten, He didn't malign individuals. He didn't again curse them who were doing these things to them, but it was like a lamb led to the slaughter. He spoke truth, he prayed truth, he did all of these things. But when I am maligned, when I am in pain, when others hurt me, God gives me an illustration. This is how we share in the sufferings of Christ. God gives me as an illustration, although faint, of the wonderful gospel, of the wonderful sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. I mean, think of it.

Here is somebody who has been hurt. Here is somebody who has been sinned against, and they forgive. Here is somebody who's being persecuted, and he prays for his persecutors. Here is somebody filled with hate, and here is somebody that loving that other individual. That's not supposed to be that way. That's not what we find in the world, right?

And what does it picture? It pictures a greater forgiveness, the greater love, the greater joy in Jesus Christ. I mean, have you ever looked at somebody like that and seen, you know, that they were going through some tumultuous thing that happened at the beginning of their life? I see illustrations of this all the time with believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

They're going through it. They're going through it. They're going through it. And they're looking to Christ. They're praising Christ. They're adoring Christ. Even through the tears, even through the pain, they are forgiving individuals. They're trying to restore these relationships. They're not giving up on people. They're praying the highest prayers for these individuals.

And what's it show? It shows Jesus Christ. It gives credence, again, to our whole testimony, even when we preach that gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And here's the thing, folks. We all know that we're going to suffer. We all are suffering. We all will be tried, and we all are being tried. And all of this is under the sovereignty of God. And folks, it's not about us. It's about Him. He's giving us a wonderful opportunity to say, look, look at what my Christ has done for me.

The only question in all of our suffering, and it's the same question all the time, is not whether we will suffer, but how we will suffer. Will we be representatives, we see this in Ephesus, will we be representatives of our high God, of our Lord Jesus Christ? Let's bow our hearts in a moment of prayer.

Father, I thank you so much for this passage. I thank you so much for the glory of this passage. Lord, an example. Although imperfect, Lord, the example of the Ephesian believers. And God, what we realize in our suffering, whether it's on national, whether it's personal, whether it's societal, Lord, whether it's others who have done something against us, God, that so often we want to take the emphasis off Jesus Christ and put it on ourselves. But it's amazing to think, Lord, no matter how anybody has sinned against me, Lord, it's nothing compared to the multiple sins I have done against you. And to think that every single one of those sins, Lord, every single one of those past sins, every single one of those present sins, every single one of those future sins have been forgiven in the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, when we look at that and recognize what even one sin deserves, Lord, how can we not be constrained?

How can we not be controlled by the greater love of Christ? that in the midst of pain, Lord, that you've given us, Lord, it is a gift, it is a stewardship to make much of you. We thank you so much, Lord. May we take these opportunities not to make much of self, but to make much of Christ. We thank you so much in his name. Thank you pastor for that ministry this morning. We have this morning been