

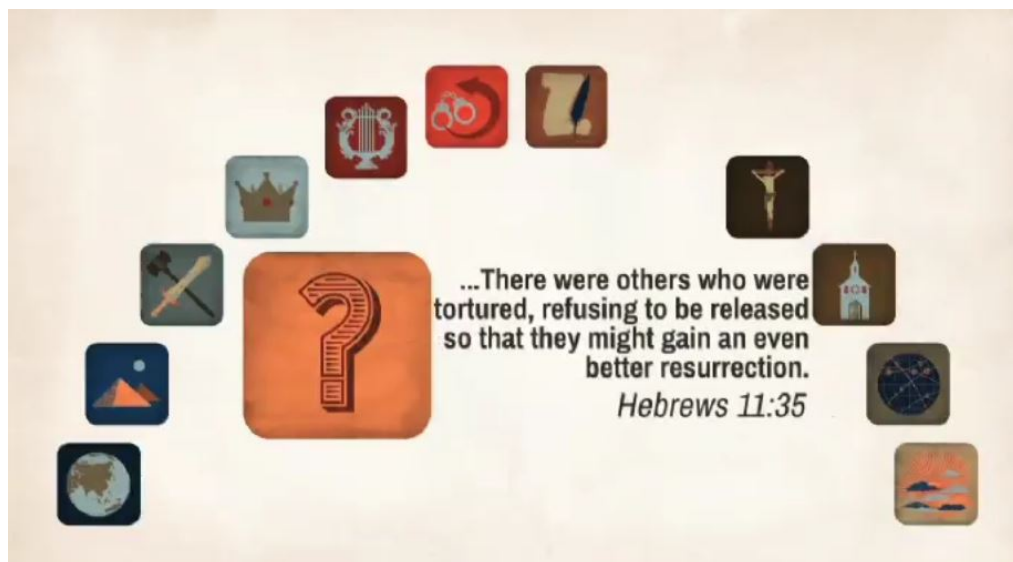


HILL COUNTRY
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THE BIG PICTURE



CURRENT SERIES



Silence

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June 2, 2013

Well good morning. Ever have anybody give you the silent treatment before? Now I know some of you who are introverts say, "Bring it on. I love it when people do that to me." And mothers of small children, oh yeah, love the silent treatment, but generally speaking the silent treatment feels really bad because it kind of makes you wonder, like "Am I recognized as a human. If people are unwilling to talk to me do I even have a personhood." And the nation of Israel must have felt that way to some degree because there was a period of time between the time that Malachi, the last prophet, laid down his pen and the time that Jesus Christ came on the scene with John the Baptist as the forerunner, that we call the 400 silent years. There was no clear, prophetic message being delivered to the people. Let me show you what that looks like.

If you'll grab your Bible and turn to the last of the prophets, Malachi, chapter 4, the last two verses of that section. This is the very end of the Old Testament, last prophet speaking. And in Malachi 4:5-6, Malachi says:

"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

In other words, I'm going to send a prophet of the stature of Elijah before the end, before the catastrophic end of time. And if you study the book of Revelation you see this fulfilled in full, but between here and this promise of a prophet coming until the New Testament, we don't have a prophet. And you'll see the first prophet that comes on the scene is actually John the Baptist. In fact, if you'll turn over just a couple of pages to Matthew chapter 3 into the New Testament. In Matthew chapter 3 after Jesus' birth and Jesus' initial early childhood we see the real first public thing that's taking place. And in verse 1 of chapter 3 in Matthew it says:

"In those days, John the Baptist came, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.' This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: 'A voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' John's clothes

were made of camel's hair and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River."

And later on Jesus identifies John the Baptist as the fulfillment or partial fulfillment of the prophecy of Malachi. And so what happened during those 400 years?

Well during those 400 years typically described in the Bible as the period of silence, the period of silence, the silent time. And we're going to spend our time together walking through that to help you understand the significance of that time. If you understand those 400 years it helps you understand when you begin to read in the gospels, which we'll talk about next week. You'll begin to understand what Jesus actually came into, what the attitude of the people was, and what was taking place at that time. So with that in mind, this 400 year period, what we call the 400 silent years, we want to walk through it and we want to give kind of a high level overview of the reason why the people were so confused.



Now the basic storyline is this: The storyline is **Pharisees and others entombed the Israelites in legalism for the next 400 years.** That's kind of the big storyline of this, that Pharisees and other groups were legalistic, they caught the people in that trap and so the people, their reception to Jesus was an interesting reception. He was so different than what they were told, but there were three really big factors that lead up to this. And the first one is that

during the 400 silent years Israel was politically dominated and humiliated during this period. Israel was dominated and humiliated during this period. Now if you'll recall, it was the Babylonian empire that carried Israel into captivity and then the Persians came and they conquered the Babylonians. It was actually the Persian kings that sent the Israelites back to their land to rebuild the temple, to rebuild the wall. So it was their deal that sent them back. So the Persian Empire, a vast empire taking the place of the Babylonian Empire. Now if you want to study the history of this section there are two ways to study it. Either you can read history books, which would give you the history after it occurred, or you could study the book of Daniel in the Old Testament where Daniel tells us everything that's going to happen during this period of time,



only he tells it several hundred years in advance before it happens. Now some of you guys who've kind of seen prophetic stuff here and there, maybe read Nostradamus or something like that go, "Oh yeah, you're talking about some veiled, strange, little weird words and you've got to add a bunch of numbers together and multiply them by some factor and then something emerges. You know, Jimmy Carter comes out of the page or something like that." That's not what we're talking about here. What we're talking about is a very detailed step-by-step, the kings that were in power, the tax collectors, the princes that married the princesses, the divisions of the empire, detailed. Detailed. And we don't have time to do all of that today, so I would just say that I preached through this back in 2009. You can go on our website under "Sermon Resources" and you can see it all laid out. I put a bunch of resources in there,

timetables. For example, in Daniel chapter 9, Daniel predicts when the Messiah will be cut off, in other words the crucifixion. He predicts when it will happen and measures it out from the time the decree was given to rebuild the temple until the time the Messiah is cut off, 483 years. Guess how many years it was? It was 483 years to the week. Exactly what he said. That's all in that study. I encourage you to go get it.

What I want to do is show you a little bit of that, so if you flip to Daniel, chapter 11. I just want to give you some insight into kind of how this works. So the Persian Empire was very strong for a number of years until they picked on the Greeks. And some of you guys saw the movie "The 300", which is a dramatization of the beginning of that. Xerxes actually picked a fight with the Greeks and over the next, about 100 years or so, what we see is the Greek city-states emerging, coalescing together and then Alexander the Great comes to the throne. And Alexander the Great basically conquers the then known world. And that's all predicted here in Daniel chapter 11, it's laid out in Daniel chapter 11. And what you'll notice is the reason why Jerusalem and Israel are so important in world politics is because one of the desirable areas of the world to control is Egypt. And the only way to get to Egypt is to go through Jerusalem,



go through the land of Palestine. The area below it that's kind of that brown that isn't conquered, that isn't part of the empire -- the reason why that's not part of empire is because nobody lives there. That's the desert and nobody

wants that, nobody cares about that. And so if you want to move an army from one place to another and you want water and you want a road, Israel sits right in the middle of all this activity, and so they're constantly fighting through there and they're constantly fighting for them.

And so as the Persians are conquered by Alexander the Great, the text tells us that Alexander's descendants will not take over the empire after his death. It was actually divided between his four generals, which is seen here in the text. And so the four generals take over and we have the people from the north from



Syria, the Seleucids, and the people from the south Egypt, the Ptolemies, are constantly fighting with each other. And watch what the text tells us in verse 29.

"At the appointed time he,"

We'll run the chronology - he is Antiochus Epiphanies, the ruler of the Northern Kingdom, the Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanies. We're talking about BC168, okay? It says:

"he will invade the South again, but this time the outcome will be different from what it was before."

Look at verse 30, this is fascinating:

“Ships of the western coastland will oppose him, and he will lose heart.”

What actually happened, what Daniel prophesied several hundred years before, these ships from the western coastline, that's the Romans. Antiochus was marching south to invade Egypt, and as he's marching south all the sudden on the western coast of the Mediterranean Sea, the ships that pull up there and begin to unload – these ships from the west begin to unload their troops, that's the Roman Army. And then the Roman Emissary walks up to Antiochus and draws a circle around him and says, “We will have your answer that you will retreat before you step out of that circle.” And Antiochus lost heart. He didn't go forward with the battle. Here's what he did. It says:

“Then he will turn back and vent his fury against the holy covenant.”

Speaking of the nation of Israel.

“He will return and show favor to those who forsake the holy covenant.”

In other words, if you give up your faith you're on his side.

“His armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and will abolish the daily sacrifice. They will set up the abomination that causes desolation”

In December of 167BC, he invaded the city during the Sabbath, killed between 20 and 40,000 Jews there and set up a temple. In the temple a statue, an altar to Zeus and sacrificed a pig on the altar. The abomination of desolation. He did the worst possible sacrilege you could ever do. That's what Antiochus Epiphanies did, and Daniel is writing about this several hundred years before.

“With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him.”

In response to that, a family, Mathias and Judas Maccabeus, rise up and lead a revolt, which over a 3-year period as they're fighting Antiochus Epiphanies, they finally gain their independence. And on December 25th, 164BC they rededicate the altar and that's where your Jewish friends who celebrate Hanukkah every year, that is a celebration of this particular event. In other words, what Daniel prophesied would happen, what actually happened, and what people are still celebrating today comes from this period of time.

For 100 years, 164BC to 63BC, Israel has their independence. There is a huge political unrest, Rome is rising to power but in 63BC, Pompey comes in and captures Jerusalem and establishes Jerusalem as a Roman state. Jerusalem did not exist as an independent state from that point forward until 1948 when the United Nations established the nation of Israel as an independent state. Now this was a period of political domination and humiliation, so think about the psyche of the people. They're in their land, but they're not hearing from God. They're in their land, but they are pawns in a big macro-political chess game as

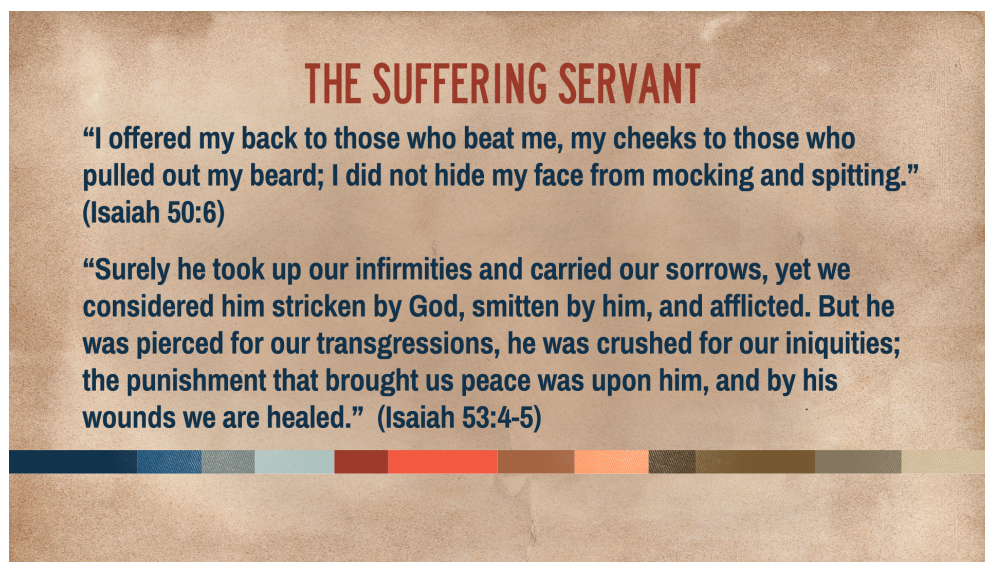


different families and powers and generals come up and use them as a staging ground for major battles. They felt independence for 100 years, so there is hope that a little dinky nation could fight against all these great ones and have a feeling that they might be able to survive. And so during this time we have the Zealots, the early gorilla warfare terrorists who would kill Roman soldiers when they could get a chance or try to assassinate his people trying to somehow resurrect the Jewish state. In fact, one of Jesus' disciples was called Simon the Zealot. He was one of these revolutionary guys, but when he met Jesus he laid that down for a greater kingdom.

The Zealot movement really ended in 70AD, when the Romans came in and destroyed the city and crucified Jewish men up and down the road until they cut down every tree in the area. They didn't have anyplace to hang them. And the last of the Zealots made their way up to the fortress of Masada, and there over 900 took their lives rather than be conquered by the Romans. Masada, the

ruins there, is a site where currently Jewish soldiers are taken for their swearing in ceremony, that they will give up their lives to protect the homeland. Events that happened during this period of time still have ramifications for today. You can imagine what it was like to live in these days and be so confused and susceptible and humiliated as a nation.

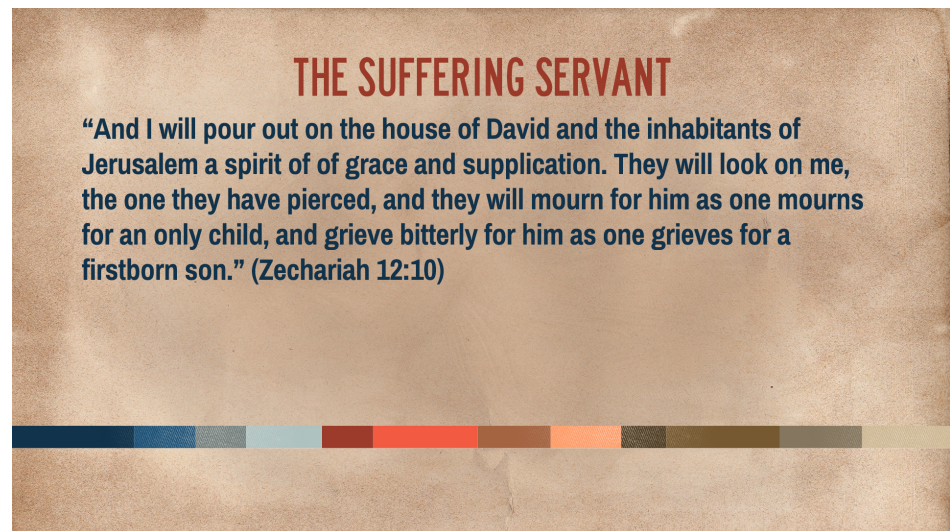
That was just part of the confusion. Also during the 400 silent years there's theological confusion. The theological confusion stems from a misunderstanding or a lack of clarity on who the Messiah is and what he's going to do. There were two schools of thought that are clearly portrayed in the prophets. One is that the Messiah is going to be a suffering servant that will come and suffer on behalf of the people and actually suffer at the hands of his own people. The other view was the Messiah was going to come as a reigning king to establish a kingdom and to rule. And both of these concepts are clearly presented in the prophets. Let me give you some examples of these



so you can actually see the words themselves in the prophets. I'll put them up here for you. For example, when it comes to the suffering servant, the Messiah who is one who is suffering. The suffering servant, Isaiah 56 says, "I offered my back," this is the Messiah speaking. "I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting." You guys know exactly this is a prophecy of what they did to Jesus when the Romans had him right before they crucified him. Down to the details related to his beard and how they mocked him and how they spit on him. It's clear, 600 years before it happened this is given to us. Let's look at the one in Isaiah 53:4-5. It says "Surely he," Messiah, "took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by

his wounds we are healed.” The Messiah pierced? Crushed? Suffering for our sins? What’s that all about?

I’ll give you one more. In Zechariah 12:10, “I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”



This is a prophecy of the nation of Israel looking back on a time where they actually pierced their Messiah and began to grieve in sorrow that they did that. On the day of Pentecost as Peter’s up preaching and says “This Jesus whom God sent and whom God raised from the dead, you guys killed.” And 3,000 people said, “What do we do?” Peter said, “Repent, be baptized.” They formed the first church right there. They saw that, they grieved, they mourned for what they had done. There’s a prophecy about a suffering Messiah. Now I’m just giving you a sample. We could go into many, many more of these.



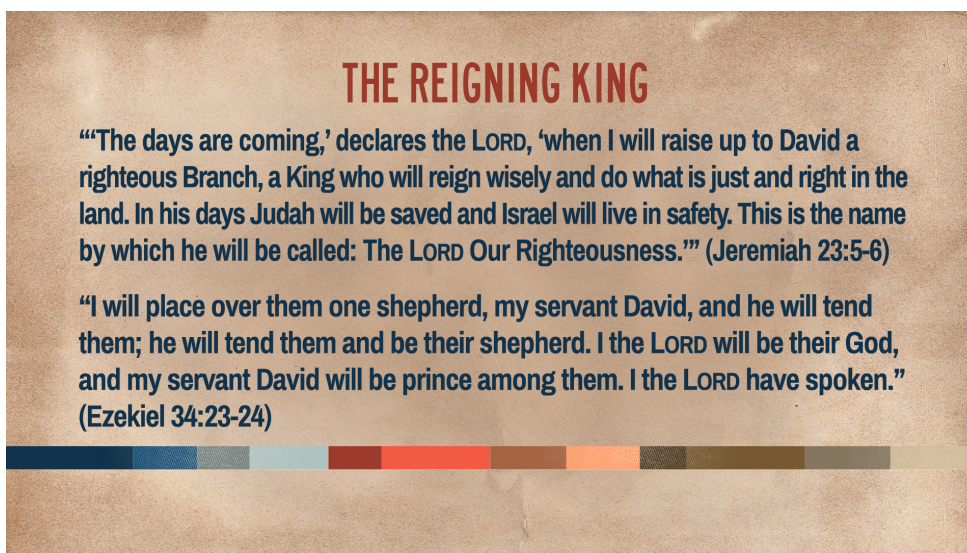
Now let’s look at the other side; the number of verses that talk about Jesus coming as the king to rule over a kingdom. And so the reigning king in Micah 5:2: “But you, Bethlehem

Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times.” Now, a couple of things from here; Bethlehem is going to be the place where someone comes from – we know that’s the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. And it says that the one who comes will have origins of old of ancient times. In other words he existed before he was born. That’s a clear statement of his deity, so this is the Messiah we’re talking about, and it says that he will rule over Israel. So expecting the Messiah to be born to come to be a ruler. That’s why when Herod saw these verses he wanted Jesus dead. He wanted to kill the babies because he viewed him as a ruling threat to the throne.

Zechariah 9:9:
“Rejoice greatly,
O Daughter of
Zion! Shout,
Daughter of
Jerusalem! See,
your king comes
to you,
righteous and
having salvation,
gentle and
riding on a
donkey, on a
colt, the foal of
a donkey.”



Those who know the New Testament you know that this is a reference, this was fulfilled when Jesus rode in on Palm Sunday, that triumphal entrance, they thought he was coming as a king to come and rule.



Let me give you one more – two more: “The days are coming’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days

Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.” In other words, this one called the Lord, that’s God, our Righteousness is going to come and save us and make the place safe. Well how are we going to do that? We have to get rid of the Romans for that to be the case – to save us and make us safe.

And then Ezekiel 34:23 and 24: “I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.” So

you can see we’ve got prophecies that refer to the coming Messiah as the savior who’s coming to reign and rule and establish a kingdom. We’ve got prophecies about the Messiah coming and suffering and dying on behalf of the people at the hands of the people. And so in the midst of this we see people confused as to what it is that we’re looking for in the Messiah.

The third confusion besides the political and theological is the spiritual fracturing that was taking place at the time. Various groups of religious leaders were springing up creating this fracturing that created all kinds of issues, and Jesus comes into that setting. Let’s talk about these two groups. The first one is the Sadducees. If you read the New Testament you see this group named the Sadducees. Well who were the Sadducees? The Sadducees were a group of people who decided that the best way to survive was to go along with the powers that be. They were the compromisers. They were the ones who worked with whoever was in power. So if it was the Seleucid leaders or the Ptolemies or if it was Rome, “We need to find a way for the sake of safety for us and our families, we need to find a way to work with these folks.” They were pragmatic all the way along the line, and in the midst of that they were usually mostly wealthy people because they were the ones who had the most to lose financially if the Romans came down on them or persecution came down or something went wrong. So they found themselves compromising to get along. They went along that you go along to get along.



Now for them the Old Testament law had some value. In other words they esteemed it and they thought it was important. It gave them moral code by which to live. So if you want to be a good person you follow the law. It also created order for society, so you follow it to have a good ordered society, and it had the nostalgic traditions of "Since we're good Jews we keep the law." But they did not believe in a resurrection. In other words, they didn't believe that keeping or not keeping the law would have anything to do with their final destiny. They believed when you're dead you're dead. And so therefore they weren't keeping the law for moral reasons - I mean for spiritual reasons. They were just keeping it for moral reasons, and so that's how they focused.

For them, life is to be had in the here and now. So how do I protect my assets, fit into society, keep a low profile, get along with everybody and make the best out of this one life that I have to live. And they were in power when Jesus Christ came along. From the synagogue standpoint the chief priest was a Sadducee during the time that Jesus was there.

So in contrast to the Sadducees we have the Pharisees. The word Pharisee itself means to separate. Their point of view was, "What's going on in the world around us doesn't matter. All that really matters is the Kingdom of God and to stand before him someday and to be righteous." That's why Jesus kept getting questions like, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What must I do to get into the Kingdom?" From their standpoint their deal was "Not only do we revere the Old Testament law, but we want to make sure that we interpret it correctly and we do everything possible to keep it." And so they honored both the law and the traditions of the elders. So it was the law plus a whole bunch of other things that you add on to it. They believed in the resurrection. They believed someday that they would stand before God and give an account for their lives, so they cared very little about what was happening in the here and now. And everything was focused on "How can I make sure that I know and do all the right things."

Now here's the interesting part. The Sadducees would have been considered the secularist, not having a whole lot of interest in God. The Pharisees were considered the religious fundamentalist. They were so committed to religion and the things of God that if you had a Pharisee and a Sadducee walk into a church everybody would assume that the Sadducee was a Pagan who cared very little about God or spiritual things, and the Pharisees would be a Mother Theresa, a Billy Graham, a spiritual hero. And yet Jesus has the harshest words directed to the most zealous for God in the Bible. Why is that? I want to show you a couple of verses in the New Testament about the Pharisees that will help us understand these people. If you'll turn to John chapter 5, Jesus is talking to

them and what I want you to see is both how noble these people were and how misguided. Not let me just tee it up right now by saying there are lots and lots of people in the Church of Jesus Christ in the United States and around the world today, and lots and lots of people at Hill Country Bible Church that would fall into this category. So be careful not to take the possibility that you might have a Pharissaeical attitude off the table as we actually go to the Word of God to read what that's like. So here's what he says, Jesus talking, verse 39 of John 5:

"You diligently study the scriptures,"

Isn't that awesome. These people had their daily quiet time. They went to two or three Bible studies a week, they listened to all of the podcast preachers, they went to every Passion Conference that you could possibly go to. They had their own personal copy of John Calvin's Institutes. These people were people of the Word, diligently means that they spent hours a day pouring over the Word of God. So let me just make sure that you get this. You may be a person that spends hours a day pouring over the Word of God, and you think of yourself, "I must be on track with God because why would I be doing this if I wasn't doing it for the right motives." Look what he says, he says:

"You diligently study the scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life."

In other words, this is a self-oriented pursuit. You're studying the scriptures because you want to make sure you get the gospel right. You don't want to have the wrong gospel. You want to make sure you understand all of that, that you're doing it right because you want to make sure that you have eternal life. It's all about YOU! And here's what he says:

"These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

It's not your doctrinal purity that gives you life. It is not. It is not your commitment to reading the Bible that gives you life. Now I'm saying that as one who studies the Bible all the time, so I commend you to study the Word. But are you studying the Word to look to find out whether you're right, whether you have it together, and whether you're studying the right doctrine. Do you find yourself critiquing everybody else or are you looking for Jesus and what he tells you to do? You're missing Jesus by looking into his Word. It's possible.

Let's look at two more. Jump back to Matthew chapter 23. Matthew 23, let me give you two more examples. Starting in verse 4, he says:

"They,"

Speaking of the Pharisees, Jesus is talking.

"They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders."

In other words, they take all of these rules that you have to do to make sure that you're going to be saved, and they make this big bundle of rules and they place it on the backs of people. And he goes on to say:

"But they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."

Jesus was constantly running into, "I know you healed this guy on the Sabbath, but you broke the rules. It's the Sabbath." "Oh so you want him to live with the burden of his illness for another day or another week or another year because you don't want to violate your rules." Folks, I got to tell you - I grew up in this, I grew up in this in the 60's and 70's in this real extreme kind of fundamentalism of everybody's wrong and we're right. And we have all these rules about what "real" Christianity looks like and what it really means to embrace the gospel and - I grew up in this and I prayed that that would leave - that that scourge would leave the Church of Jesus Christ. It would leave the Church of Jesus Christ and never return in my lifetime, and it is back with a vengeance today. The number of books, the number of preachers, the number of conferences that are adding all of these things to the gospel, either theological adds to the gospel or practical adds. In other words, if you don't live a life of poverty, if you don't know 20 unreached people groups. Like if you don't know that stuff, obviously you can't love Jesus. I mean even adoption has become something that if you don't do that you have to question whether you're really loving Jesus and following Jesus. I mean all of these things that are good things - they're good things, but is that what the gospel is? Is that what the gospel is? And so we're adding all these things and the pastor podcaster shows up and preaches the message and tells you "You guys got to do all of these crazy, crazy things, and if you don't do these things then you have to question your salvation," and then walks out of the room and you're left to try to figure out how in the world do I do that. How in the world do I do that?

Let me give you one more. Over in Matthew 23:15:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law, Pharisees, hypocrites. You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are."

These people were into evangelism, into discipleship. They would travel the world to find somebody that would buy into their point of view. Paul is an example of that. A Jew from Tarsus who studied at the feet of Gamaliel so he could become a Pharisee, and the first thing he does after Jesus' resurrection is he goes out and tries to kill people who are following Jesus. How is that love your neighbor as yourself? Well you see when you get your theology right, you get your practice right, then you have the freedom to judge other people that aren't doing it your way – even kill them if necessary. And here's a guy who was zealous for God, but missed Jesus.

Let's apply this. I don't think Pharisees and Sadducees are opposites. I think they're the same. And I don't think that all of us are either Pharisees or Sadducees. I think sometimes we're a little bit of both. I think sometimes we're a little bit of both. And here's how this works, okay, because with the Sadducees they wanted to make sure that in the here and now, today, they got what they needed. Self-oriented. And so "If this is common business practices I have to go with this. I don't care if this is wrong, I've got to go with this because that's how you get along in this world." "If you want to have friends, if you want to have guys ask you out you've got to look like this, you've got to do these things. This is what it's like to live in America today, this is the culture. I've got to go along to get along and I don't want my life to not be good. So I want something for myself." That's the Sadducee attitude.

The Pharisee attitude is, "I don't care about anybody else, I just care to make sure that when I stand before God I can say I got it all right. I did all the things I needed to do." And in the midst of all that that's also a very self-centered way of looking at things, very self-centered. And so when you look at these two impulses you have to ask yourself the question: Am I really focusing on Jesus? And so to the Sadducee tendency I would say to us, we need to focus on following Jesus, not the cultural trends. What is Jesus telling us to do. And then we need to recognize that there is a coming kingdom and that there are things that we need to be doing today that support that kingdom, live for that kingdom. To the Pharisee tendency, what I would say is that we need to recognize that we need to follow Jesus, and of all the things Jesus did is he loved sinners. He engaged with people that were different than him. He didn't separate, he didn't look down on people. He sure could have, but he didn't look down on people because they weren't saying it the way he says it or doing it the way he did it. In other words, we need to follow Jesus and love people. If we start loving people and listening to them we'll find balance, and we'll be doing what Jesus said.

I read a really good book recently, Larry Osborn wrote a book called, "The Accidental Pharisee." He says "Nobody sets out to be a Pharisee, just like

nobody sets out to go to Denny's." (congregation laughs) I mean nobody gets up and goes "We're going to go to Denny's today." But sooner or later we all end up there, right? I mean sooner or later everybody ends up at Denny's. It just kind of happens that way, and the same thing is true of Pharisees. Nobody ever sets out to be a Pharisee, but oftentimes we just end up there. We just want to do it right, and we end up there. When Jesus walked in people struggled because they were either focused on themselves and what they could get out of this life, or they were focused on themselves and wanting to prove their righteousness to God. And Jesus walks into the midst of that and says "Take your eyes off yourself and look at me." If Jesus Christ walked in today, right in this room, would you struggle with him? "Jesus, Jesus, I know, I know, but you've got to understand I've got things to do. I'm living my life, this is the way life works." Or "Jesus, I know I know, but you don't seem to understand. This grace thing, I love that idea, but I need to do some stuff. I need to be right, I need to be righteous because I can't live with myself unless I've got it figured out." What would he say? Where would you be?

Let's bow our heads for prayer. Father in heaven, as rough a time period as this was for the nation of Israel, it seems like we've got it easy and yet, at the same time oftentimes in the midst of prosperity and confusion we can run into the same issues. It's my prayer today Father, it's my prayer today that we would put our focus on your Son, Jesus Christ. Listen to him, understand the whole Bible, study it all, learn what Jesus says, and that we would follow you. Get our eyes off ourselves and follow you fully. Father may we as a people, may we as a people be receptive to our Savior. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.