

Christmas-JosephMaryScandal 20-12-27b

As we continue now looking at the circumstances of Jesus' birth, I'm particularly interested in drawing out, better than a Calvinist, the sovereignty of God. They just don't go far enough. They don't appreciate what a great thing God's sovereignty really is if they limit it to God's preordaining of people to salvation.

It just is such a tragic misapprehension and misunderstanding. In fact, I told somebody here in the last day or so, it's a mashup of misunderstandings. It's like misunderstanding's greatest hits.

It's a medley of misunderstandings. And it's really a shame. But in the Christmas story, if anything could straighten you out on how greatly sovereign God is, this is it.

We've seen it in Simeon's presentation. You can see it throughout. But let's continue thinking about the circumstances in which Jesus was born and God's sovereign actions in that regard.

I want to talk about the timing of Jesus' birth and look at some of the events surrounding this. If I was going to sprinkle rose petals in the path of somebody who was going to be the parents of the Messiah, we talked about, I would not do it as a human the way that God chose to do it with Mary and Joseph. We talked about the betrothal.

Think a little bit more about this betrothal. This has just been fascinating me all week long. In my gaps between wrapping paper and meals, I've been thinking about the betrothal.

You remember how this works. A year or so earlier, Joseph and Mary's father had worked out the, or we assume it was his father if Haley or whatever his name was, was still around. No, actually Joseph's father was Jacob, just like in the Old Testament.

It's real interesting. Joseph married to Mary. Her father-in-law is Jacob.

Anyway, so it could have been arranged that way. It could have also been the way that Rebecca was arranged for Isaac where the father is deceased and so the brother, the elder brother who has gone and taken charge of the household. And so you make arrangements with him, with Laban.

But here's the upshot. The betrothal is arranged. Bride price is paid.

And Joseph, what does he do now for the next year? It's much stronger than an engagement. They're married for all purposes except cohabitation and actually consummating their marriage. Cohabitation and consummation, those things wait for what? What are they waiting for? What does the year period provide for? I go to prepare a place for you and if I go, I will come again and receive you to myself that where I am, there you may be also, right? That's what Joseph is doing.

And then this very awkward pregnancy happens. Why is your betrothed pregnant, Joseph? Well, I was hoping you wouldn't ask that question. I was going to try to put her away privately, but it's a God thing and it's going to be really awkward.

So the time comes when she is going to be delivered and they've got to go down to Bethlehem because of the census. And it's a sad thing. You can read in Luke, he talks about Quirinius and the governor of Syria.

And this creates timing issues for the birth of Christ because Quirinius did not become governor of Syria until about AD six or seven, which is far too late to be a circumstance for the birth of Christ. But it's a misreading. It's a misunderstanding of Luke because what Luke, Luke was at pains to try to say, I want you to understand that this is not the census under Quirinius in six to seven AD because that one was very famous.

It had, there was so much resistance to it and disaffection and unhappiness that there were armed conflicts over it. People rebelled at the point of swords over that census. And that's the one everyone remembered.

And so Luke is trying to say, you know, when Quirinius became governor of Syria and there was that census that there was armed resistance to and created all of the news. Not that one. It's before that one.

It's the previous one. It was about 10 years earlier and Quirinius was involved. But at that time he was, he was a different kind of authority.

He was, he was not the governor. And so Luke was, was straightening out that detail. And in our translations, we've, we've bollocks that up, but I'm back to Joseph betrothal got to go to Bethlehem and, and at the word of the angel, he has taken Mary as his wife, kind of some awkwardness and raised eyebrows about the timing because it appears to have not been done in the normal fashion.

He just takes her and now she's very much showing. And there hasn't been nine months after the supposed consummation of the marriage and the rest of it. And it's just really under a cloud and only people who know God well enough to believe the word of God are going to recognize this as a great thing and not as sort of a shameful episode and accuse Joseph and Mary of impropriety of any one of a number of different kinds.

But think about this at the birth of Jesus Christ, the only people who can really appreciate what's going on and have joy, like we just heard about in our music, are those who have a relationship with God enough and faith enough to recognize the truth of God and the movement of God in history. When it happens, anybody, anybody who's just thinking in standard terms and traditional understandings and normal expectations is going to miss this and is going to be completely focused on scandal instead of glory. The shepherds get it.

They're not questioning timing or who betrothed who, when and how and why are you here.

The angels come to the shepherds, the shepherds go and see the Christ child. And the sign is that he's in this feeding trough.

Remember later on Jesus is going to say, I am the bread of life. You eat of this bread and live forever. He's in a serving tray when he's born.

But only people with eyes to see and ears to hear. Jesus is going to say over and over again, he that has ears to hear, let him hear. He that has eyes to see, let him see.

He that's got a heart to understand, let him understand. It's so easy to be deflected. It's so easy to let tradition and expectations and confirmation bias blind us to what's really happening.

But I'm back to Joseph and the betrothal and the house. Where is this house? I'm asking, where do Mary and Joseph live when the betrothal happens? Where are they? Where do they have to leave to go down for the census? Where do they eventually go back to after dust settles for a couple of years? Where are they from? Where are they both from? Nazareth. So if Joseph says, OK, we're betrothed, we've met, we're engaged, we've done this thing, I'm going to go build a house.

Where is this house? Nazareth, Galilee, Nazareth of Galilee. They're Galileans. That's where they're from.

His home of record, his ancestral roots are down in Bethlehem, but he's a Galilean. Mary is a Galilean. They're all from up in Galilee.

That's why they've got relatives over in Cana that they're going to put on the wedding for and his mother is going to be involved in that years later. But they're from up in that area. So where's the house? Joseph's making this house.

Controversy happens. Mary pops positive on the pregnancy test. Everything is interrupted.

And then they have this census and he's got to leave. This is just awkward nine ways to Sunday because he's got to go ahead and take her to himself as wife, but he can't move her into the house because they've got to go to Bethlehem. So this house that Joseph prepared, that he spent the better part of a year making and preparing, can't wait to carry Mary across the threshold.

It's going to be glorious. People outside yelling Matzal Tov and L'Chaim and all the rest of it. All of that's out the window.

All of this preparation, all of his investment in the house. They don't get to live in the house. They're not anywhere near the house.

They're all the way down in Bethlehem, like Blanche in Streetcar Named Desire. I've always relied on the hospitality of strangers and they're down there trying to make their way. So nothing is going according to plan.

Situation is in a complete uproar. Families all looking at them askance. There's people that won't talk to them anymore.

And you're a shame. You're a disgrace. I can't.

How did this happen? I thought you were a good girl. And, you know, all of this, he's got this house that he's invested all this time in. And how nice of a house is it? What's this guy's trade? I've got furniture.

My grandfather was a carpenter and would bring scrap home, scrap wood home and make furniture and stuff out of it. Paneled rooms in his home with leftover paneling and made this wonderful telephone desk that's in the corner of the church here. And beautiful, beautiful work.

He is. Remember, he's a Tecton. So he's making his own house and he's really good at it.

He's got a it's going to be one of the nicest houses in the neighborhood. That's what he does. That's that's his skill set.

He's probably a stonemason or a worker in stone. So he's got the you know, you think about all of his thoughts as he's working on this house for months, weeks and months. This is going to be great.

Oh, Mary's going to love this. Look, I put a little shelf in the in the thing here for her products. And it's going to be so convenient.

This is just look at the kitchen. It's going to be so easy. Look at the access.

Look at the flow of air and the doors and the windows. And got a little courtyard here, got a little window box and a garden. And he's investing himself in this house.

They don't get to live in it, they don't get their honeymoon in it, they don't get to move there because no sooner. And she's pregnant and they can't go to the neighborhood and, you know, and then they then they're displaced. And so they're down in Bethlehem and the child is born and they can't go back home and they don't go back home.

Now, Luke has a summary statement that eventually they returned to Nazareth at the end of his account. And still in Luke chapter two, he says when they had in verse thirty nine, when they had performed all the things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own city, Nazareth, and the child grew and became strong. This doesn't take into account all the things that are recorded in Matthew with regard to the visit of the Magi, the flight to Egypt and waiting in Egypt until those who seek the young child's life are dead.

Luke omits all of that and just says when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their city, Nazareth. This is how I know that's where the house is. But how long is it going to be? Luke just says it sounds like, well, after the after the eight day dedication, they see Simeon, they see Anna pop back up to Galilee and the child

grows and nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Isn't that great? You go to Matthew and you find out it wasn't that way at all. So flip back to Matthew and pick up this story, if you draw a map of all of the travels that Mary and Joseph have to go through with this infant child, bearing in mind that and this is a wonderful point that my mother reminded me of last week. But Joseph is also out of work here.

Unless he can go stand on the corner and in Dallas, there are places where day laborers will stand and wait for a contractor who needs some extra help, you know, wrecking something out or hauling off trash. He needs unskilled labor or maybe some skilled guys that aren't connected anywhere. These guys will stand at certain known locations, their unofficial spots, and a guy in a pickup truck will come and say, I need three guys and three guys will hop in the pickup and they take him to a work site and they're just catch as catch can paid in cash.

It's all, you know, done on a on a handshake, more or less. And so it's possible that Joseph, while he's down in Bethlehem, he might know somebody or say, hey, have you got any construction job I can help with for a few denarii? But he's not at home with his accustomed work and the job that he's had for years that he's used to finance building the home and put all of that investment in. He's not up there.

There's no telecommuting in those days, so he's he's got to catch whatever odd jobs he can. But when the wise men come, you get those expensive gifts. That's what's going to keep them afloat and finance them.

It's a divine intervention of provision that these guys came hundreds and hundreds of miles to deliver. Little did they know when they were coming to honor the king that what they were really doing is feeding the king for the next couple of years. What they think is a gift and an honorific and something that will, you know, glorify and, you know, golden candlestick here and a wonderful incense over here.

And it's going to they're expecting a palace. They're expecting opulence and luxury. And instead, Joseph's going to be taking this gold and exchanging it for food and arrangements for travel and rent while they live down in Egypt.

And he's got to try to find some work down there and so on. But the gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh are expensive. And those valuable gifts are going to be bread and butter, as it were, for them, because if you look at Matthew chapter two and the wise men come in verse 13 of chapter two of Matthew, Matthew two, 13, when they had departed, the wise men, angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, arise, take the young child and his mother, flee to Egypt, because after he was born in Bethlehem and the.

The shepherds find them, they evidently do not or are not able to return to Nazareth, he's got to wait until the census is complete, and so they take up temporary lodgings in Bethlehem and they are still in Bethlehem up to two years later, they never are able to go back to Galilee for

reasons that aren't made clear. But wise men, if you look at the beginning of the chapter came, where is he born? King of the Jews, the star leads them to Bethlehem and Mary and Joseph are still there and they are now in a house. And so verse 11, when they had come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary, his mother fell down and worshiped him and they gave him these gifts, then being divinely warned not to return to Herod, they depart another way.

But this is significantly later than the birth and for whatever reason they have had to stay. It may be that the family was so upset that it was good to just stay away for a while and let tempers cool and bygones be bygones or whatever, but they from Bethlehem, they go to Jerusalem for the dedication from Jerusalem, they go back to Bethlehem and they stay in Bethlehem for the next year, year and a half, two years, and they're still in Bethlehem when the wise men come. So that wonderful house that Joseph built is sitting empty or certainly unoccupied by them up in Nazareth.

All of Joseph's work, all of his tectonic expertise, all of his investment doesn't come into play. Now, instead of finally going home, look, we've got verification. We can show these gifts.

We can show the testimony of the wise men in the mouth of two or three witnesses. The thing is established. We can tell them about Simeon.

We can tell them about Anna. We can tell them about the wise men. We can tell them about the shepherds.

We've got all of this testimony that what we originally told you about this pregnancy and birth is true, but they're not allowed to go back to the hometown and vindicate themselves. You remember years later, Jesus is going to say a prophet isn't without honor except in his hometown among his own people. And that's a that's a tough crowd for the prophet.

Well, it would be a tough crowd for Mary and Joseph, and they don't get to go back and vindicate themselves. Instead, they go the other way, warned in a dream to flee to Egypt. He was there until the death of Herod, which is 4 B.C. This is absolutely rock solid, nailed down history.

Herod died in 4 B.C. Jesus had to have been born two or three years before that. And so all of the human expectation and it's normal. Did Joseph do wrong by making the house? Did he do wrong by betrothing? Did he is and he's a righteous man.

He's an upright man. He's chosen to be the the adoptive father of the Messiah. But his life is nothing but a big, giant excruciating headache from the moment God decides in his sovereignty that this is when and where and how the child is going to come into the world.

And God's plan, which is perfect and God's provision, which is going to bless untold hundreds of millions of people, relies on Joseph being faithful when everything went haywire in his life. Lost his reputation, lost his investment in his house, lost his standing in the community, seemingly lost his future, lost his stability. He travels from Nazareth to Bethlehem, to Jerusalem,

to Bethlehem.

He has to stay in Bethlehem, probably scraping by on odd jobs. The wise men come. He gets this huge provision.

He thinks, OK, now absolution, vindication. I can go home. We've got the we've got the cash.

No, sorry. Got to go the other way because they're going to seek the young child's life. And it seems to me, why didn't God send them to Nazareth? If Herod's going to be looking in Bethlehem for the child, why didn't God send him home? There's something about home.

He can't go back there. And you think about those self-righteous people in the synagogue up there in Capernaum and Nazareth area that wanted to throw Jesus off a cliff. Remember that there's some hostile people up there and it's no safer for them in, quote, unquote, home.

And be aware that sometimes, spiritually speaking. A man's worst enemies can be the members of his own household. I present company all accepted.

I, you know, my whole family's in the church and the whole church is my family, practically. But there are many cases where there is division. Jesus said, I haven't come to bring peace, but a sword and it will divide.

And there are times when you can't go to this family member or that family member or this area or that area, because there is a complete lack of unity when it comes to the things of the faith. And so God sends Joseph the opposite way. Out of Egypt, I have called my son, seems like a small point of prophecy, couldn't we just omit that one? Do we really need that? Do we really need to be able to say out of Egypt, I have called my son? Does that justify going to Egypt and living as a foreigner and an outcast for all of this time? In God's economy, in God's sovereignty, it matters.

This is the perfect will of God. And Joseph goes. Joseph loses so much.

Every time you look at Joseph, he's losing something in this plan of God where he's got Mary, the mother of the Messiah, as his wife. It is nothing but trouble for him. You would think, well, gold, frankincense and myrrh, OK, finally something positive, but they've got to spend it all to support themselves for this next couple of years until the death of Herod in verse 15, that it might be fulfilled, spoken by the Lord.

The fulfillment of the word of the Lord is the most important thing anywhere. And he has made us promises about salvation and resurrection and a future with him. And I fully expect and my hope rests on and your hope rests on God being just as diligent about fulfilling that part of his word as he was in fulfilling this part of his word.

But it comes at a cost. It comes at a cost to Joseph. So in verse 19, when Herod was dead, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, take the young child

and his mother.

And you think. How many prayers, how many days did Joseph spend down there saying, I wonder when this is ever going to end? I remember when the angel came and told him to not be afraid to take Mary as my wife. I remember when the angel came and warned me to flee Bethlehem and come down here to Egypt.

There's a long gaps between divine revelation, isn't there? I used to think about this in studying the Old Testament, our Old Testament is convenient. You know, you can summarize the whole 40 years of wandering by reading a few chapters in Exodus. You can get through the life of Abraham or the life of Jacob or the life of Joseph.

But when you really stop and look at it, there are years between episodes of divine guidance and divine appearance where I'm still operating on the last set of instructions I received. It's like having a really bad radio. And you're separated from command and control by huge distances.

And the last transmission you got was years ago and you're still operating on that last set of guidance. And I wonder if I'm ever going to get an update and a fresh set of orders. Am I ever going to get a change of station? Is anything new going to happen or do I just keep am I marking time? I'm marking time.

So he's down in Egypt for all this time and out of nowhere, unexpectedly, an angel appears and says, Arise, take the young child and his mother and go to the land of Israel for those who sought the young child's life are dead. This is great. I can leave Egypt and go back to Israel.

But he didn't say where in Israel. Where? Israel's, you know, not large by country standards, but. It's, you know, it's, it's a big place when you're figuring out where you're going to live.

So he arose, took the young child and his mother and came to the land of Israel. But he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod. And he was afraid to go there, afraid to go to Judea.

He was going to go back to Bethlehem where he last had a place to stay and some work. But he's now not waiting for an angel to appear to him and say, don't live in Bethlehem. How does he figure this out? He is tracking the situation, the circumstances.

He's parsing what's happening in government and he is aware of what has happened in a change of government. I say again, Joseph is paying attention and is aware of the policies of the government. Of the new people coming to power in government.

And he factors that into his decisions before the Lord as should we. So hearing that Archelaus was reigning, he was afraid to go there. Nothing wrong with this fear and being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee.

Finally, after these years, he's going home. No telling what happened to the house that he

prepared. No telling what happened.

The family probably said, well Joseph has turned into a rascal. So we're giving the house that was built on his father's land. We're going to give it to the next brother in line and he'll have it.

So he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophets. He shall be called a Nazarene. And this is actually his hometown.

And Jesus, although born in Bethlehem growing up, this kind of reminds me of some people in my family. My folks are both from the Tulsa, Oklahoma, but your kids were all born in California. And yet we pretty much consider ourselves to be Okies.

We finished growing up here, but we weren't really born here. And we don't talk like people who were born here. Depending on how much time you spent as a child in California, the twang didn't take.

And you wonder because there was an accent from Galilee. And if there was also divine design in having the child Jesus learn to speak and learn his letters as it were in Egypt and in Bethlehem in Judea. And he didn't have the Galilean accent by the time they go back among many other things.

When Jesus teaches, people don't say, is he some kind of a backwoods? I always used to think about this listening to J Vernon McGee, one of the most erudite perceptive communicating teachers of the word of God in the last hundred years. But you could cut his accent with a knife. His church was in California, but he talked like somebody from the South.

And in many cases you really had to had to get past that to realize that he was sharing some deep truths and some wonderful perceptions. But his, his accent could be off-putting to people who said, well, he doesn't sound like he's been to school. And for whatever reason, I surmise, it's a complete speculation on my part that part of the, the traveling and out of town nature of Jesus early years gave him more of a classic Aramaic speaking voice than he would have had if he had been born and raised in the house that Joseph originally built.

And this is going to make him more accessible and make one less excuse for people to miss that. He's the Messiah, because he learns to speak in Judea, not in Galilee. The Bible makes a point of the fact that he spent his early years in Judea and in Egypt and only returned to Galilee.

I am sure by this time he's talking. So for whatever that's worth, but again, to bear in mind that God's sovereignty is such that many times our personal journey through life is going to be encountering hardship, trying to discern God's will in difficult circumstances amidst many challenges. Joseph is a classic example of this.

And just when he might think that his problems are over with this very unexpected visit from the wise men, it's just an introduction to a new episode. And what seems to be a ticket home is a ticket out of the country. But he's a man of faith.

Like Simeon, he is just and devout when God gives him information. You never see Joseph make a step that isn't completely in accord with God's revelation to him. When God says, take the woman, he takes her to wife.

When God says, stay, he stays. When he says travel, he travels. And he's a wonderful role model of faith and obedience in the face of incredible difficulties.

I just want to close by way of application, by thinking about the circumstances that we are currently in. And this is what they tell you in seminary, never to do. Don't use something as a springboard into something else.

But I tell you right now, I am springboarding off of Archelaus. When they try to come back from Egypt and resume life in Judea, God has allowed a change in Roman government. And Archelaus is even worse rascal than Herod.

And it's not safe for them to return to that area. There is danger from government. There is danger from the forces that support the government and are trying to cultivate an alliance with the government.

Go along to get along. This is what the religious leadership in Jerusalem is doing. And remember Bethlehem is only five miles from Jerusalem.

And so what these religious leaders are doing as they negotiate and go along to get along with the Roman government is telling. So I want to close with something that pertains and I think will help us clarify. As we look at our current circumstances and try to decide like Joseph in the light of God's warnings in scripture, what should we do? This is a summary of a book that was written back in the early 1960s by a man named Saul Alinsky.

You may have heard of him, the book you may have heard of. It's called rules for radicals. And there are basically, this is kind of like the 10 commandments for people who want to wreak social change, but there's 12 of them.

I'm just going to go through them quickly because this is the agenda of government and those who are supporting this kind of government right now. And we don't have an angel from heaven to warn. So I am the angel of this church and I'm going to warn you that this is what's happening now.

And when you look for making application of the things that we've studied, here is something to watch for in current circumstances because this is the playbook for the current radical agenda. It has been in place for years. They've been working this, they've been cultivating it.

There are very famous and well-known names and people who were personal friends with Saul Alinsky and have used this in their political careers. Let me read it to you real quickly. Rule number one, power is not only what you have, but what the enemy thinks you have.

If you can get them to think you have power over you, that's power. You have the power that you, that people will grant you. If you give power to people to intimidate you, to shame you, to banish you from conversation, to shout you down and cancel you out, you have given them that power.

They've got some power, they've got control in different areas, but if you grant them additional power, they'll take it. That's power. Power is not only what you have, but what the enemy thinks you have.

Where is our power on earth or from heaven? Remember it. Number two, never go outside the expertise of your people. It results in confusion, fear, and retreat.

Feeling secure adds to the backbone of anyone. So when organizations are being attacked by radicals, when people are being attacked by radicals, they often wonder why, why can't you get these radicals to talk about the real issues? They don't want to talk about the real issues because they don't actually have expertise in those areas. And so they're baffling you with BS and they say, don't engage at the level where there's actual expertise.

If you don't have it or if the expertise is not on your side, don't, don't go down that road. Don't engage with facts. Go ad hominem, do anything you have to do.

Make an issue out of people instead of facts. Make an issue out of something superficial, but don't go where there's not actual expertise on your side because you'll lose. Number three, whenever possible, do go outside the expertise of the enemy.

Try to find something they don't know and work that. Number four, make the enemy live up to its own book of rules. If the rule is that every letter gets a reply, send 30,000 letters.

You can kill them with this because no one can possibly obey all of their own rules. And this is the problem with legalistic Christianity getting hoist on a petard by radical attack. This is a serious rule.

The besieged entities, very credibility and reputation is at stake. If activists catch it lying or not living up to its commitments, they can continue to chip away at that damage. Number five, ridicule is man's most potent weapon.

Ridicule is man's most potent weapon. We are forbidden to ridicule by the word of God, but we are going to get ridicule because it's the most potent weapon in their arsenal. Personal attack.

Rule six, a good tactic is one your people enjoy. People enjoy getting up in someone's face when they're of this sort. They enjoy trampling rules.

They enjoy tearing down what they did not build. And so when they enjoy it, keep doing that. It's a good tactic.

Number seven, the tactic that drags on too long becomes a drag. Don't become old news. Even

radical activists get bored.

So keep them excited and involved. So organizers are constantly coming up with new tactics, new issues, but let's switch to another issue and use our same radical agenda on that. Rule eight, keep the pressure on, never let up.

Keep trying new things. Keep the opposition off balance. As they master one approach, hit them from the flank with something new.

Attack, attack, attack from all sides. Never give the reeling organization a chance to rest, regroup, recover, and re strategize. Rule nine, the threat is usually more terrifying than the thing itself.

Imagination and ego can dream up many more consequences than any activist perception is reality. Organizations always prepare a worst case scenario, something that may be furthest from activists' minds. The upshot is the organization will expend enormous time and energy creating in its own collective mind, the direst of conclusions.

The possibilities can easily poison the mind and result in demoralization. I'll give you one quick example. People that were sure there was fraud in the election and said so publicly are now ratcheting back and retracting and having to give public, there's somebody who's got a program.

I just saw a blurb yesterday where Lou Dobbs or somebody that's well known in sort of objective news circles gave some credence to the possibility of, and he's been legally forced to have two programs making, you know, that when the enemy, our enemy, gets caught in a lie, the retraction is on page 17. They're making this guy spend two of his primetime programs refuting what he said earlier that there could have been any fraud in the election. Rule number 10, if you push a negative hard enough, it will push through and become a positive.

Violence from the other side can win the public to your side because the public sympathizes with the underdog. Unions use this tactic. Peaceful albeit loud demonstrations during the heyday of unions in the early to mid 20th century incurred management's wrath, often in the form of violence that eventually brought public sympathy to their side.

Rule 11, the price of successful attack is a constructive alternative. Never let the enemy score points because you're caught without a solution to a problem. Old saw.

If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. Activist organizations have an agenda and their strategy is to hold a place at the table to be given a forum to wield their power. So they too have to have a compromise solution.

Number 12, pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it. If you look around today, something gets targeted. You freeze it, you personalize it and polarize it.

Cut off the support network, isolate the target from sympathy. Go after people and not institutions. People hurt faster than institutions.

This is cruel, but effective. Direct personal criticism, direct personalized criticism and ridicule works. So don't talk about positions.

Don't talk about policies. Hurt the man, make him, you know, the big orange balloon or whatever. Personalize it, ridicule it.

You're going to hurt it worse than going after the issues on which you probably don't have expertise anyway. I would encourage you, if you want to parse current events, just get yourself a two or three page summary. You can get it off the web of these tactics.

This is what your enemy, the devil is currently employing against your Christian faith, your Christian values, your Christian culture. Divide it, attack it, ridicule it, cut off support for it, marginalize it. This is the enemy.

This is our Archelaus. Be warned. Look to the Lord, take steps, watch for divine guidance.

Forewarned is forearmed. Your enemy, the devil roams the earth like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Don't be devourable.

I always have the idea that this lion is going to come around and here's a believer with the full armor of God. And every time he tries to devour, here's the point of a spear. Here's the point of a shield.

Here's that helmet. Here's those feet shod. Can't get ahold of the foot.

Can't get ahold of the of the chest. It's got the breastplate of righteousness and got the helmet of salvation and the feet shod with the gospel of peace. It's sort of the spirit, which is the word of God.

I'm not trying to devour that thing. Let me go find something soft and squishy over here. Don't be soft and squishy.

Put on the full armor of God that ye may be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one to stand. Having done all, you're still standing. You can stand now.

You can stand at the judgment. Things are going to be difficult just because you're doing right. Doesn't mean you're going to have an easy time.

Look at Joseph. He was faithful. Jesus said, the things that you give up in this life, he was telling his disciples, if you have to give up a house or land, I wonder if he wasn't also thinking of his own adoptive father who gave up a house and land.

What do you think Joseph is going to have in the coming kingdoms? A lot. Father, thank you for

the truth of your word. Thank you for how it prepares us and equips us to be useful and faithful representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ in this ever darkening age.

We pray that we can shine as lights, that those who are looking for truth and looking for relationship with you can find it as they see a hope in us that is built up and made visible by your word and your spirit. We pray that in the coming year as we seek to live a life that is dedicated to you, that your Holy Spirit will lead us and guide us. Just as these faithful men of old were led and guided by your spirit and by your word.

We pray these things in Jesus name. Amen.