

98-05-15b

We're back now from our break, and in connection with our study of evil, the evil generation, the evil imagination that God sees, that Jesus talked about, that Peter describes, this seems like something that's maybe not as helpful as other things that we could cover as sort of a general principle. I mean, you look around and you say, well, the generation is everybody else, and it's the environment, it's not me. I have my own soul to contend with, I have my own battles to fight, and so forth.

But what we're about to see is what we've been leading up to. In my opinion, we've gotten sort of a slow start to get up to this point, but we needed to lay a foundation, because you have seen the verses that we're about to look at before, but I think now we're going to see them in a slightly different light. And this still has to do with the concept of evil, even the evil in our generation, evil in our hearts.

Take a look with me at Matthew chapter 24. Now remember, the two examples that we have seen in Peter both related this idea of an evil or perverse generation back to the days of the flood. In both of his letters, Peter makes that connection.

If I can make a really bad pun, it's the archetype. The flood is the archetype for the judgment of God on evil. And why is it connected with the flood? Why do we go back to that first illustration? Jesus does the same thing here in Matthew 24.

Look down in the vicinity of verse 37. Jesus is talking about the last days. He says in verse 36, Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. How interesting. No, he doesn't say, as the days in the wilderness, as the days of the Meribah, as the days of the walls of Jericho falling down, as the days of the great captivity of Israel.

He says, as the days of Noah. And what does he say in verse 38? For as in the days before the flood, what were they doing? They were carousing, they were murdering, they were fornicating, they were committing all kinds of mayhem. Is that what it says? What were they doing that was so horrendous that God had to wipe them out with the flood? That Jesus notes here.

What are these terrible evils that they were committing? They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark. When Jesus is going back to this great first and biggest illustration of God's judgment on evil, what does he note about that generation? He doesn't note their terrible crimes, does he? Although I'm sure there were some. What does he say they were doing? They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage.

It was normal. It was customary. It was accepted.

It was just like it always had been. This wasn't a terrible, dark, Blade Runner kind of thing. You know, they had this movie Blade Runner where Harrison Ford was in the future and the sun never shines and you're just being chased down and hunted and squashed by robots and things.

It was normal. Eating, drinking, marrying, giving in marriage. Notice marriage is being engaged in.

We know that this is what the angels did. Marrying and giving in marriage. This is the great deceit.

Peter over and over again says heresies are going to creep in undetected. It is going to deceive. It is going to lead astray.

People are not going to realize how bad things are. It's going to seem like it's okay and it's not. That is the situation that every generation faces, every human heart faces.

You can get along in life and think that things are normal and think that you fit right in. You're eating and drinking. You're engaging in the normal activities of life.

I'm not so bad. I'm more moral than two-thirds of the people I know. God will have bigger fish to fry than me on the day of judgment.

I'm going to just go in in the middle of the pack. I'm just right dead average. They did not know, in verse 39, until the flood came and took them all away.

That's the way the coming of the Son of Man will be. Jesus here is specifically describing the unexpectedness of his return. It isn't going to seem like it's time.

People have always said, well, there's going to be the great apostasy. It's going to go from bad to worse and men will be lovers of themselves and so forth. Paul talks about the last days.

Peter talks about the last days, how terrible it all is. They talk about that it's going to be very evil. Jesus, in describing the last days, and remember the difference between our departure and the return of Jesus is only seven years.

How much different is it going to be? Jesus says, people are going to be thinking it's all going fine. Peter said, there's going to be many that are going to say, everything goes on as it has from the beginning. Where is the sign of his coming? All things go on as they always have.

He doesn't say there's going to be this great dip in the graph. What does all of that mean to us? It means that we have to be alert. It's not good enough to be average.

It's not acceptable in God's sight to be an average Christian. We were not called to be average. Average, if you plot the average, you will find it in the center of the broad road that goes through the wide gate to destruction.

That's where average is. It's not good enough. It's not acceptable.

It is not fulfilling the calling of God to be an average Christian, to be normal, to fit in eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, doing all the normal things. The corollary to that is that if you are asking and seeking and knocking, if you are pursuing the plan of God, what are you going to be if you're not normal? Abnormal. You're going to be an unusual person.

You will not think, and you will probably not make the same decisions that other people in your situation, in your position, would make. We tend, when we find ourselves outside the norm or outside the average, to start feeling self-conscious and maybe embarrassed and maybe ashamed. And we don't really want to talk too much about what we decide or what we do.

We don't want to make an issue of the fact that we're different. Well, we need to decide if that itself is acceptable in God's sight or not. Are we supposed to sort of disguise the fact that we're not normal, cover up, wear camouflage utilities, and try to blend in with all the other Christians? And when they're saying, oh, such and such is really good, we say, oh, yes, I really think it is.

Well, we're all going to go down and attend this, and we're going to all go down and do that. And we say, well, sure, I'll be there. We just want to blend in.

We want to conform. We don't want to stick out or make an issue. We can justify this and say, well, I don't want to cause the weaker brother to stumble or some lame excuse.

The bottom line is that we have to know, part of discerning good and evil is knowing when you stand up and shine like a light in the midst of a perverse generation. Take a look at Philippians 2.15. Paul says in Philippians 2.14, do all things without complaining and disputing. So, if we do stand out, it's not going to be because we are a complainer, and it's not going to be because we are a disputer, is it? Paul says do everything without complaining and without disputing so that you may become just what Noah was in his generation, blameless and harmless, children of God without fault, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom you shine as lights in the world.

If we do have a better understanding of God's Word and of God's plan, then compared to the average believer, who should be the more cheerful? Who should be the more hopeful? Who should be the more encouraging? Who should be the more relaxed? Who should be the happier? If these things come through the Word of God and the Spirit of God, and if we truly are on that path because we have asked for those things from God,

we're seeking those things from God, we are knocking on the door saying, Lord, show me your will, reveal your plan to me, help me fulfill the calling for which Christ saved me. If that's your heart's desire, we ought to be a happy person. We ought to be shining like lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation of believers who don't understand those things, who aren't pursuing those things.

Who should be more relaxed? Who should be more flexible? Who should have a clearer vision of what the better things are and what the things are to avoid? We can be right and still be relaxed. Sometimes we think to be right, we've got to be all clenched up and uptight and sort of frowning with a crease between our eyes like they always like to caricature the Puritans. Say, oh, the Puritans, they were so righteous, but they never had a good time.

You know, they were just sort of a dismal view of life. They were so busy being right that they never had any fun and so forth. One of the great things that understanding the plan and purpose of God does, not only does it enable us to enjoy His rest, it enables us to relax and to develop capacity for life.

And we can enjoy things that would put other people in a state of distress. We can relax and just be amused and realize that here's a challenge, here's a test, here's something going on that's not so great, here's something that's not right. I wish the people around me had a better understanding of the plan of God.

But it isn't a cause for unhappiness and distress and grief and woe and weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. It's an opportunity to relax. It's time for us to take hold of what God has put in our souls and lash ourselves to that mast and be content with what God has called us to.

Be happy with what God has called us to and recognize that everyone is charting their own course. Everyone lives their life before God. But remember what Paul says, Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as unto the Lord.

Hearty is not the word you use for an uptight, crease-between-the-eyes type of person. You don't say, boy, he's really living the hearty life. Hearty is what you see on the chili commercials.

Hearty is what you see on the beer commercials. Gusto is hearty. We ought to be living our life with gusto.

It's a great life. And sometimes we kind of get introspective and we start worrying, we start thinking, well, there's so much wrong going on and maybe I've done some wrong and I've messed up and so forth. God has called us to a great life of gusto.

We have a bright future. And that light from the future ought to shine back through our lives like Paul says here. It doesn't matter how badly we've messed up.

It doesn't matter if we failed yesterday or we failed this morning. Because we know how to be cleansed. We know how to seize and lay hold of God's grace.

We can stand here without complaining and without disputing. We can be blameless and harmless. Children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom we shine like lights in the world holding fast the word of life so that Paul the apostle can rejoice in the day of Christ that he is not run in vain or labored in vain.

Paul went through a lot to communicate these truths to us. And any communicator will tell you that in order to communicate truth, you first have to learn it. You can't communicate what you do not know yourself.

And that's why a lot of us don't have a whole lot to say because we haven't learned very much. But in order to communicate these truths about shining like a light in the midst of a perverse generation, Paul had to learn that himself. And God will take Paul as you follow his career through a lot of what looks like terrible adversity.

I wouldn't wish Paul's life on myself or anybody I know to be shipwrecked, to be stoned and left for dead, to be lashed and go through... Paul gives several lists of all of the interesting experiences he had, being snake bit and imprisoned and so forth. But those experiences that didn't seem great at the time that might have put a frown on Paul's face and might have caused him to think I am the most abused, set-upon man. I am the off-scouring of all things.

Why did God let this happen to me? He could have been sitting around thinking about that. Instead, he had the vision to realize that this was the calling of God and that God was working it together for good. Look at how many millions of people have been blessed because the Apostle Paul understood that truth and shone like a light in his generation, learned these things and was able to communicate them to others.

And he's going to rejoice with those of us who learn those same things. We look beyond ourselves, we look beyond immediate circumstances and see the spiritual truths that pertain. It's not what happens to us or how we fare in life that counts.

It's what God does inside us that counts. And when you see the great things that God is doing for us and in us, it's a cause for rejoicing. It's a cause for celebration even in the midst of trial.

Many of us have looked at the Scripture that says in everything give thanks for this is the will of God concerning you and we think, now let's see, let me just go through my current circumstances. Let me go through my current set of pressures and tests and you tell me that I should rejoice in the midst of all this and be thankful. How can we actually do that? How can we fulfill the calling of God to rejoice and be thankful in every situation?

Situations that would crush a weaker human spirit and yet we can rejoice and be thankful.

How do we do that? Well, the biggest factor is not concentrating on how I feel and what my circumstances are and how badly I have it. It is looking at God and looking at God's truth and what God is up to. When you look past the immediate, you learn the same lesson that a child does when they first go to the doctor and get that shot.

Their parents willingly let some stranger inflict pain on their child. Why? Would you just take your child up to a stranger and say, please slap my child in the face as hard as you can? We would never do that because there's no benefit to it. But when we take them to a doctor and we know that when they get that big owie in the rear end from a shot and it's going to be sore and bruised and hurt them for a day or two, we do that willingly.

Why? Because we're looking beyond the immediate circumstance and we know there's a long-term benefit. The child, when they're young, they can't figure that out. When I am the recipient of a shot, I have a hard time remembering that or any other medical or dental procedure that in the immediate is uncomfortable.

We put ourselves through a lot of discomfort knowing that the end justifies it. Well, we need to bring that same understanding over into our spiritual life. We are in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation and the answer is not to go out and try to reform the crooked and perverse generation by enacting legislation or by exerting pressure or by heckling people when they attempt to engage in some form of behavior.

It's amazing to me that people will stand and heckle young women who are going into a pregnancy counseling center or whatever, but they don't stand outside the bar and heckle people going in and out of the bar. They don't stand outside a brothel and heckle the people going in and out of the house of prostitution. They don't go and heckle people who are going to a loan shark or any other forms of evil that are equally as bad.

They don't stand outside the church and heckle people who came in and were hypocritical and who smiled and shook somebody's hand and turned around and gossiped about them to the next person they talked with. It's a righteousness of convenience to do those sorts of things. It is a matter of looking at the truth of God, living in the light of the truth of God, not trying to change a perverse and crooked generation, but shining as a light within it.

It is only the power of God that can change a generation and people have to be confronted with the truth and accept it. So this is what an evil generation is. When God looks down from heaven and he sees that the thoughts of the heart are only evil all the day, what is that evil? It's not just, I think I'm going to go do a crime.

It's self-centeredness, self-righteousness, it's marrying and giving in marriage, eating

and drinking, giving no thought to God and his plan. It's just as bad. It's just as bad to live a self-centered life as it is to live a life of crime.

So, again, in God's eyes, they are equally evil. You can see the same thing in Luke 17. Again, when Jesus is teaching in Luke 17, verse 26, As it was in the days of Noah, so it will also be in the days of the Son of Man.

Now here we get a little bit fuller description of what he gave in Matthew. They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, as it was also in the days of Lot.

They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built. Sounds an awful lot like our generation, doesn't it? On the day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Now this is not just an illustration of suddenness and of the unexpected nature of judgment.

It's also, why was it so unexpected? Nobody looked around and said, boy, this is really an evil generation. I bet God's going to hammer us. They were doing the usual things.

We don't want to be caught unawares. Now I could refer you also to Paul's comments in Thessalonians. We are not sons of darkness to sleep in the darkness.

We're sons of light. We need to be alert. We need to be awake and not be taken by surprise at the evil that exists in our generation.

Not just the crime, but also the apathy, the indifference, and the rejection of God's truth, even by believers. What does it mean to have an evil imagination? The imaginations of his heart were only evil all the day, it says in Genesis 6. We'll look at 1 Chronicles 28 and verse 9. I don't often get to go to Chronicles. 1 Chronicles chapter 28.

These are some of David's final thoughts and final words to Solomon before his death. In chapter 29, he's going to give his song. Moses wrote a song that ended his life.

David writes a song to end his life. It's recorded in a couple of different places. It's recorded in 2 Samuel 22, and it's recorded in Psalm 18.

But here in 1 Chronicles chapter 28, David charges Solomon. Look at verse 9. As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father. That's an imperative.

Know the God of your father and serve him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind. For the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you.

But if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary. Be strong and do it.

That was Solomon's task. What has God chosen us for? Think of all the New Testament passages that we have seen and where Paul talks and says that we are chosen. Peter says the same thing.

You are a chosen people, a holy priesthood to God and so forth. We are elect. We are chosen.

And what is it for? Romans 8.28 All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. Well, it's an important thing to understand God's purpose. It is amazing and it is depressing.

I just got through talking about the hardy life, so I don't actually get depressed and blue about it. But it is sad to speak with fellow believers, mingle with believers, have conversations, and find that there's no fire in the boilers when it comes to knowing God, seeking God, understanding God and His purpose. Really understanding.

You know, we ought to have almost a little bit of fearfulness that we have somehow misapprehended the purpose of God. It ought to be so important to us that we know exactly what God's purpose is for us. What does He expect? Not circumstantially.

Does He want me to be a preacher? Does He want me to be a husband or a housewife or whatever? What is His purpose for my spiritual life? Does He want me to engage in ministry? Does He want me to learn? Does He want me to... What is the nature of His desire for me? What is His purpose? What am I called to? How many believers have you talked with recently where that came up in conversation? Somebody said, you know, I just want to understand more about God. I want to be sure that I'm in the very center of His plan, in the very center of His will. It's amazing.

You can circulate in rooms full of believers and talk about everything under the sun except the most important thing in life. And it's what David leaves with his son. David knows that his life is measured in hours here when he's talking to Solomon.

And he says, as for you, my son, know the God of your father. Serve Him with a loyal heart, with a willing mind, because the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intents of the thoughts. David doesn't say, be sure you square that temple.

Be sure you get the corners square. Be sure you get all the bricks laid just right. Get the gold in the right places and the implements in the right places.

Be sure you follow the blueprints. Be sure you get this physical task accomplished. He says, be sure your heart is right before God because God looks at the heart.

That's where the measure is. You can succeed in the heart and it may not be visible for people who are looking for impact and saying, well, where are all the people you led to the Lord and where are all the ministries you engaged in and where is all the fruit of the

works of your hands? That's not the measure. The measure is in the heart.

That is where a generation is judged righteous or evil. And that is where an individual is judged righteous or evil. You do not have to lift a finger to generate the righteousness, to generate the faith that is declared righteous by God.

It all happens in the soul. And it doesn't matter what you're doing. You can be completing the commonest task.

You can be doing the most seemingly normal things. You can be eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage. But if you're doing it with a willing heart and a desire to please the Lord, if you're seeking His will in those things, if you're doing it heartily as unto Him and not unto man, every little thing you do is an eternal piece of divine gold that reflects the glory of God.

Every little thing you do. And if you have any other motivation, if you are busy thinking and concentrating on other things, every little thing you do, every big thing you do, is wood, hay and stubble. It does nothing but waste time.

And in a sense, it wastes grace, which is a terrible thing. This is what David tells Solomon. He searches the hearts, understands the intent of the thoughts.

If you seek Him, He will be found by you. Notice it doesn't say if He chooses you, He will be found by you. It says if you seek Him.

It all depends on Solomon. And in your life and in my life, it all depends daily on whether or not we seek Him. Look at verses 17 and 18 of chapter 29 here in 1 Chronicles.

David blesses the Lord before all the assembly. David gives this little song in verses 10 through 15. Then in 1 Chronicles 29, 16, David says, O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have prepared to build You a house for Your holy name is from Your hand and all is Your own.

They're about to engage in a big physical activity here. They're going to build the temple. And David has laid in all of the stuff to do it.

But look at verse 17. I know also, my God, that You test the heart and have pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of my heart, I have willingly offered all these things.

And now, with joy, I have seen Your people who are present here to offer willingly to You. O Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our fathers, keep this forever in the intent of the thoughts of the hearts of Your people. And fix their heart toward You.

David doesn't say, O Lord, when we get this temple built, preserve it forever and don't let anybody ever tear it down. He says, it's not the temple building that counts. It's the

intent of the thoughts of the hearts.

And he says, these people are here willingly. They're about to do this for the right reasons. And he prays that God will fix that good thing in their hearts.

Give my son Solomon a loyal heart to keep your commandments and your testimonies and your statutes to do all these things and to build the temple for which I have made provision. But you can see that David understands that it's not so much the building of the temple in Jerusalem that counts. It's the building of the temple of God in the heart that counts.

And that is what distinguishes the righteous from the evil, whether it's a generation or an individual. Do we honor God in our hearts? Do we seek Him minute by minute? Not just on occasions. Not just when there's an opportunity with other believers to go out and engage in the ministry.

It is every minute of our lives. God has a claim on that time and on our attention, the thoughts of our hearts. In Deuteronomy 31, verse 21, it shall be when many evils and troubles have come upon this people that this song will testify against them as a witness for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants for I know the inclination of their behavior today even before I have brought them to the land which I swore to give them.

God tells Moses, I want you to write a song and give it to the children of Israel because I already know what the inclination of their heart is. And the inclination of their heart is not to remain faithful. They don't have that thought fixed in their heart that David is going to pray for later.

God says, I know the inclination of their heart even before I bring them into the land. They're going to fritter it away if you don't give them a reminder, if you don't give them the Word of God and put it right up in front of their face to keep them fixed. That's what holds our attention.

That's what keeps our compass oriented. That's what keeps us steering a straight course is the Word of God. God says, give them this Word because the inclination of their heart is going to lead them astray otherwise.

Same thing in verse 29. Moses says, I know that after my death you Israelites will become utterly corrupt and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you and evil will befall you in the latter days because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands. It's going to be the work of their hands that is going to provoke God to anger.

And it's going to flow out of the thoughts of their hearts. Same thing in 32, the song of Moses. Look at verse 18 of Deuteronomy 32.

Of the rock who begot you, are these believers or unbelievers? If they're begotten by the rock, they're believers, aren't they? Of the rock who begot you, you are unmindful and have forgotten the God who fathered you. And when the Lord saw it, He spurned them because of the provocation of His sons and His daughters. It is possible.

Some people think, well, you know, the perseverance of the saints, once you're a believer, you're just on an upward trend. It's not so. It depends on what you choose.

And if we become apathetic, if we get distracted, what's going to happen? Look at verse 20. God says, I will hide My face from them. I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation.

These believers are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faith. We begin to see a theme in these passages. In Psalm 14.2, one of the characteristics of the fool is noted by God when He looks down on the sons of men.

And the fool has said in his heart, Psalm 14, there is no God. They, the fools, are corrupt. They have done abominable works.

There is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any who are engaged in ministry, to see if there are any who are engaged in evangelism, to see if there are any who are having a rally, to see if there are any who are gathering together and singing songs of praise. What is it that God looks for when He looks down on the sons of men? What is God looking for when He looks at you? What is God looking for when He looks at me? The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there are any who understand, to see if there are any who seek God.

To ask, to seek, to knock. That's all that it takes. And the Bible hammers on this over and over and over again.

Proverbs 6, verse 16. We are getting hammered on the other side, though, by our peers in the Christian world who say it's not enough to sit and have faith. It's not enough to learn the Word of God.

It's not enough to let God be at work in you. You've got to get out and do. And that's why we need to remind ourselves of what the Word of God teaches.

Proverbs 6, verse 16. These six things the Lord hates, yea, seven, are an abomination to Him. What are the things that God hates? What are the things that will characterize an evil generation? A proud look? A lying tongue? A lying tongue doesn't just go out there and spread all kinds of malicious slander.

A lying tongue can distort the truth. And cause us to play a bigger part in the work of God than we really do. A lying tongue can say, well, you know, we can leave the

impression with someone that we were really instrumental in some good thing happening.

That if it wasn't for us, this good thing wouldn't have taken place. A lying tongue can leave out things. A lying tongue can add things because of the thoughts of our heart.

We're at the center and we want our place. Hands that shed innocent blood. And this goes to shedding blood by way of character assassination.

You can murder someone through hatred. You can murder someone by gossiping about them, by slandering them to others, by cutting them down, by telling their actual sins. Maybe they did everything that you say.

Maybe you're telling the absolute truth. But when you communicate something negative about someone else, you're shedding blood. You're cutting them down.

You're making them pay a penalty. You're setting yourself up to be judge and jury and executioner. You're going to make them pay.

A heart that devises wicked plans. That's what God saw when He looked at the flood generation. That's what God sees today.

Plans that don't include God, that don't account for His power, that don't respect His Spirit or His Word. Feet that are swift in running to evil. And evil can be concentration on lots of good things that aren't a part of the plan of God.

A false witness who speaks lies. What do you think those false prophets are doing who show up in each generation and secretly bring in destructive heresies? What are they doing? They are a false witness speaking lies. They're presenting something as true that's not true.

They're presenting a program to the church that is not the plan of God. They're presenting an agenda to the church. They're leading believers into ministries and into activities that on the surface seem good and in other circumstances could actually be good.

But because of the way they're done and without the foundation of the Word of God and the power of the Spirit and the guiding hand of God, they are evil. And it is a destructive heresy. One who sows discord among brethren.

Inevitably, these things lead to a you-they mentality. And even in the teaching tradition type churches or whatever label you want to put on them, anytime you start feeling this sort of us-and-them mentality where there's an arrogance involved, well, we are the keepers of the flame and these poor Saads over here. Our attitude toward believers who have not sought out the truth of God's Word should be prayer.

And it should be encouragement. And it should be shining as a light in the midst of this generation hoping that they will see that light and be drawn to it. Not criticism.

Not disparaging remarks. Not name-calling. And a sort of unspoken arrogance that, well, we have a lock on the truth and you don't.

And you poor fund these and you poor these and you poor that. It should cause us godly sorrow when we see brothers and sisters in Christ who don't respond to the light. Who are trapped in the kingdom of darkness even though they're saved.

It's a tragic thing. And that's the one thing that can keep us from living that hearty life is the discouragement of seeing that there are so few who really understand the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and are responding to it in an obedient way. That's what we want to avoid.

We want to do what it says in Isaiah 26. Look at Isaiah 26. This is a more hopeful passage.

You know, Isaiah's got a lot of kind of discouraging sections where he's talking about the problems in his generation. But Isaiah 26. We have a strong city.

God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks. Open the gates that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in. Who is it that is going to enter into the gates of the millennial kingdom, the historic boundaries of the promised land? Every single believer that has ever trod the planet? What does it say here? The righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in.

You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever. For in Yah, the Lord is everlasting strength.

He brings down those who dwell on high, the lofty city. He lays it low. He lays it low to the ground and brings it down to the dust.

The foot shall tread it down, the feet of the poor and the steps of the needy. The poor and the needy are going to trot on top of all of these sandcastles that people are building in this life that they think they have accomplished so much. The way of the just is uprightness, O Most Upright.

You weigh the path of the just. Yes, in the way of your judgments, O Lord, we have waited for you. The desire of our soul is for your name and for the remembrance of you.

With my soul, I have desired you in the night. Yes, by my spirit within me, I will seek you early. For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

You can go on and read the rest of this wonderful chapter for yourself, but it's a

wonderful, encouraging chapter. Isaiah 26. Look at Jeremiah 17.

The very next book, Isaiah-Jeremiah. Jeremiah 17.9, one of those memory verses many of us have learned. But look at Jeremiah 17 beginning in verse 5. The Lord says, Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord.

For he shall be like a shrub in the desert and shall not see when good comes. What happened to the generation that Christ lived in? They couldn't see when good came, could they? Shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness in a salt land which is not inhabited. This is the inheritance of faithless believers, apathetic believers who can't see the good when it comes.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters which spreads out its roots by the river and will not fear when heat comes. But its leaf will be green and it will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will it cease from yielding fruit.

The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? Who can understand it? I, the Lord, search the heart. I test the mind even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.

You'll remember in Matthew 15, we don't need to turn there, but Jesus said it's not what goes into a man that defiles him, it's what comes out of the heart that defiles a man. It's also what comes out of the heart that enables us to be declared righteous. So, if you haven't caught on over the last three or four hours of our study of the evil generation, it really boils down to a matter of the heart, doesn't it? Don't let anyone tell you that it's something else.

Don't let anyone judge you. We're going to see this when we start our study of Colossians. Don't let anyone judge you by a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.

What were these? Religious standards of measure. I think you're a good guy because you showed up for the new moon festival. I think you're a good person because you got circumcised.

Oh, I can tell you're holy because you observe the dietary laws of the Bible, the law of Moses, which is God's Word, and it's all dressed up in the trappings of righteousness. Paul says, don't let anyone judge you. Don't let anyone rob you of your reward by entangling you in a false measure of righteousness.

What does the Bible say in virtually every book of the Bible? It's a matter of the heart. If you want to know where you stand before God, if you want to relax and have confidence, live in the light of hope, live by faith, have genuine love, if you want to judge yourself to see if you're in the faith, look in your heart. That's where the fruit of the Spirit is born.

And when the heart is squared away, everything else will follow. And when it is time, and we have overemphasized the heart and we're talking about somewhat at the expense of physical ministry. Physical ministry can be a wonderful thing, but it has to flow out of the heart or it doesn't count.

It's like a guy that runs a 99-yard touchdown. Unfortunately, he stepped out of bounds at the 6-yard line in his own end of the field. Well, it was a great run.

Beautiful form. Evaded all the tacklers and got into the end zone. But if you disqualify yourself by stepping out of bounds, it just doesn't count.

It doesn't matter how fast you ran or how many tacklers you evaded. Well, we can step out of bounds by not having a heart that is pure and blameless before God, by not being motivated in faith, hope, and love. That's the measure.

That's what counts. And if you can look at yourself and know that whatever my faults, whatever my failures, I know I am asking. God knows I'm asking.

He hears me every day. I am asking. I am seeking.

I am knocking. And I am holding God to His promise. He has promised that if we ask, He will not let us get a rock or a snake or a scorpion.

Our Father knows how to give good things to those who ask Him. Well, I'm asking. And I'm seeking.

And I'm knocking. And I may fall on my face. I may embarrass myself and the heavenly hosts a thousand times over.

But I never quit asking. And I never quit seeking. And I never quit knocking.

That is the path to righteousness. That's the path to being pleasing in God's sight. It has nothing to do with what you do ultimately.

It's what we think. It's what we care about. It's what we prioritize in our soul.

And if that's squared away and you know in your heart, and you know that God knows that that is at the core of your existence as a believer, then relax and rejoice. Be happy. Because your reward is great in heaven.

That's all it takes to be blessed by God. That's all that it takes to be used by God. That's all that it takes to be a great big reflector of God's glory.

Now, to shine like a light in a perverse generation, all you have to do is be someone who asks and seeks and knocks. God does all the work. God gets all the glory.

All we have to do is be willing and understand what His plan is, to know God and to be

obedient to what He says. It's such a simple thing. And in mass, we have been led astray into false systems as believers in our generation today.

We don't want to be members of the evil generation. We want to be those that shine like lights in the midst. Let's close in prayer.

Father, we thank You for the opportunity that we have as we live in this time, in this age, with all of the things that You've placed at our disposal through Christ. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enable us to see clearly where our calling lies, that we will receive the encouragement of the Spirit, the comfort of the Spirit, the strengthening of Your Word in our souls to give us discernment and understanding so that we can rightly divide the Word of Truth, so that we can be thoroughly equipped for every good work. We pray that as a result, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be glorified and we will be excited and rejoice when He returns and we'll be prepared for everything that lies ahead in Your plan.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.