

Matthew 20-08-02b

Let's resume our study now. And we've seen the Lord Jesus withdraw because He is not interested in trying to reform a failing system. This is my understanding of the bruised reed and the smoking wick, no longer capable of serving their useful function to benefit man.

Jesus doesn't bother trying to fix that. He is going to bring justice, justice to the Gentiles, justice to the Jews. You have justice repeated twice in that Isaiah passage.

I thought about going over to Isaiah and really excavating that, but I'm going to move forward because there's some other things I want to cover. And it's a little bit atypical. I don't do this very often, but I'm going to resort to something other than scripture as an illustration and as a factor to consider as we look around during these very politically charged times.

So I'm going to give you a little bit of history. I have this great book. Being the cheapskate that I am, I got it at Half Price Books.

It was a \$14 book and I got it for five bucks. But it's a very interesting book written by John C. McAllister, M-C-C-O-L-L-I-S-T-E-R, not like McAllister, Oklahoma. This is McAllister with an O and two C's and two O's or two C's and two L's.

Anyway, it's called God and the Oval Office. And this is a rehearsal of the role of religion slash Christianity among the presidents. And I'm just going to give you a couple of examples here because of what is being said as people attempt to rewrite the history of the United States.

And what I'm talking about here, my excuse for bringing this up is the bruised reed and the smoking flax. People say we need to set fire to the bruised reed and it may well be bruised. We need to extinguish the smoking flax and it might need extinguishing.

But if the Lord Jesus isn't going to do it because he's got another mission that's more important, this is informative, instructive, and applicational for us. There is something more important than trying to fix society, fix government, fix the neighborhood, fix your city ordinances, lean on politicians and try to get changes. There are plenty of people, and there may even be believers who might be assigned that task.

If they've got that assignment, they will know it. Jesus said, that's not my mission. I am here to declare justice, to deliver justice, and to declare justice, to call people to the rest that comes with the yoke of the Lord Jesus, the spiritual yoke, the spiritual sitting at his feet and learning.

And this, I believe, is our primary *raison d'etre*, reason for being. It's why we're here, to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to be thoroughly

equipped for every good work. Lots of good works that can be done.

And once we are mature and once we are thoroughly equipped, there might be some useful changes. You might be able to pitch in and help widows, orphans, those who are oppressed, but it has to follow from inner transformation. You cannot use it instead of and claim righteousness.

Why is social change so attractive? Why is protesting, peaceful or violent, such an attractive pastime in these days? I will tell you my opinion, and this is my opinion. Cheap righteousness. All I have to do is show up on social media and say, thumbs up to that.

That's a good idea. Is there any element of self-sacrifice? Is there any element of danger? People who pitch in with these movements are not going to be ostracized. They're not going to be canceled.

They're not going to have their, with rare exceptions, you know, they're not going to pay any penalty. They're not going to pay a price. It doesn't take a lot of effort.

It's jump on the bandwagon, be part of the in crowd and the acceptable multitudes. And I'm righteous. I can feel good about myself.

Hey, you know, I may have a few shortcomings and flaws here and there in terms of my personal life, but look at what I'm for. I'm for a good cause. In the Christian world, this has often been, well, you know, don't look at my personal life too closely, but I belong to a great church.

Look at what my church does. Look at what my political party does. Look at what my group does.

Something I'm affiliated with is doing good things. And because that's good, I'm good. It's a faulty, self-serving, hypocritical line of reasoning, but it's easy.

It's easy in days past. And I've mentioned to you before, uh, one of the good things I heard Charles Stanley say years ago is he said, if you think coming to church every Sunday makes you a good Christian, think again, it's too easy. All you have to do is show up for church once or twice a week.

And you're a good Christian. You're not being hard enough on yourself. Being a good Christian is every hour, every day, not something you do once or twice a week, and then pat yourself on the back and say, I'm good.

Well, many things fall into that category and we have to examine ourselves and see if we are in the faith in the faith. Well, speaking of faith and speaking of those in office, I want to read you just a few excerpts from this book called God and the Oval Office by John McAllister. Looks like it was published in, uh, 2005.

So, uh, there's a chapter for each president all the way up through George Walker Bush. It's about 240 pages long. Um, but considering that this was written 15 years ago, listen to the preface.

It's a hot topic of conversation these days. Seldom is anyone neutral on the issue. Politicians fill the air with impassioned rhetoric before cheering crowds, pastors, priests, and rabbis pound pulpits, emphasize their points.

Liberal watchdogs carry picket signs and protest in front of city hall. Why are these advocates so zealous in their demonstrations? It's because they are involved in a controversy that has been debated for more than two centuries. In this experiment of democracy known as America, what is the proper blending of government and religion? What is the relationship? Those of us who consider ourselves to be God-fearing Christians, faithful believers, what is our relationship to and interaction with government? So let me just read you a little bit.

This is the John Quincy Adams. Every one of these is interesting. I'm just going to read you a few, but I want you to specifically watch for a couple of issues that are quite current and a characterization of the history of the United States in terms of its systemic attributes.

Emphasis on the word systemic. You can fill in the blanks. But has it in fact been this way as we are told? John Quincy Adams.

Because John Quincy Adams, like his father, expressed his religious beliefs in different words, some members of the organized church branded him as an atheist. He thereby received from his political enemies many of the same slings and arrows as did his father, our second president. But this did not appear to cause anxiety, for like that of his father, John Quincy Adams' faith was strictly a personal relationship between himself and God.

This was no lame excuse. Throughout his life, Adams maintained a practice of reading at least three chapters of the Bible every day. The astute Ralph Waldo Emerson observed many years later, no man could read the Bible with such powerful effect, even with the cracked and winded voice of old age.

Like his father, John Quincy Adams was not a very large man. He was five feet, seven inches. So he devoted himself to academic pursuits, studying poetry, published a book of poems in 1831, the writings of Shakespeare, the classics, and the Bible.

In spite of his obvious love of Holy Scripture, we have no record that a Bible was used when he took his oath of office March 4, 1825. If this is true, John Quincy was the only president not to use one. However, in his inaugural address, he did conclude by quoting Psalm 127, knowing that except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

With fervent supplications for his favor to his overruling providence, I commit with humble but fearless confidence my own fate and the future destiny of my country. Adams didn't always attend public worship. He says, since I now reside in Washington, I've not regularly attended any church, chiefly because although the churches here are numerous and diversified, not one is of the independent congregational class to which I belong.

That is a very close description of us. Congregational means you're an individual group, and independent means you're independent. To which I was bred and in which I will die.

Later, however, Adams changed his approach. Frank E. Eddington, historian of Washington's New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, records that while Adams was president, he served as a trustee and attended worship there more often than many of those on the membership rolls. On several occasions, according to Eddington, the president loaned substantial sums of money to the congregation to defray current bills.

John Quincy Adams said about his presidency, I can scarcely conceive a more harassing, wearying, teasing condition of existence. You know, teasing as in tearing something apart, shredding it. Consequently, some of his rare moments of contentment were found while sitting inside a church.

Hope in the goodness of God, reliance upon his mercy in affliction, trust in him to bring light out of darkness and good out of evil are the comforts and promises which I desire from public worship. And I hope that's what our worship does. Again, hope in the goodness of God, reliance upon his mercy in affliction, trust in him to bring light out of darkness and good out of evil are the comforts and promises which I desire from public worship.

He said they helped to sustain me in the troubles that are thickening around me. Adams was not a popular president, often setting principle above party. He spoke out strongly about controversial issues such as slavery.

Pro-slavery forces called him the madman from Massachusetts. Eventually he made so many enemies it cost him his bid for reelection in 1828. Two years later, however, Adams returned to the nation's capital as a representative of his neighbors of Braintree, Massachusetts.

That town has been renamed Quincy in his honor. And he used the political platform for 17 years as his sounding board against slavery. Now this is 1828 and following.

And if you count down, John Quincy Adams is the sixth president. This is the early 1800s. 17 years he lobbied in Washington as a former president against slavery.

Adams saw in the organized churches, the potential to challenge and eventually curb the growing evils of slavery. He lamented the fact that neither the clergyman nor their flocks

did much to rid society of the plague. His polished speeches earned him a more respected title, old man eloquent.

In a pointed letter of May 27, 1838, he wrote, now listen, the counterfeit character of a very large portion of the Christian ministry of this country is disclosed in the dissensions growing up in all the Protestant churches on the subject of slavery. This question of slavery is convulsing the congregational churches in Massachusetts. It is deeply agitating the Methodists.

It has already completed a schism in the Presbyterian church. You've got a church that ought to know better. Some people in the church do know better and it is causing schism, division, and agitation because the church can't come together on understanding what's right and what's wrong.

John Quincy Adams spoke his mind. He made enemies. Nevertheless, he was able to maintain respect even from the opposition.

Upon hearing of Adams' death in 1843, political rival Martin Van Buren said of him, he was an honest man, not only incorruptible himself, but an enemy to corruption everywhere. The slave has lost a champion, said clergyman Theodore Parker. America has lost a supporter and freedom has lost an unfailing friend.

In an appropriate farewell, the Reverend William Lunt based his funeral sermon on the famous passage from Revelation 2.10, be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life. His successor was Andrew Jackson. There's a lot you can say about Andrew Jackson positive.

There's a lot you can say negative. His nickname was Old Hickory. The gruff military hero became our nation's seventh president, spurned the conventional formalities of the day while standing on principle.

He was unpopular because he didn't fit the mold of propriety, of gentlemanly reserve, reminds you of people in the modern day, didn't fit the image. After he established himself as a successful attorney in Nashville, he met and fell in love with Rachel, the daughter of Colonel John Donaldson. Rachel was in the middle of a divorce.

Once the divorce was finalized, or so they thought, the two became husband and wife in August 1791. Due to a technicality, however, the divorce was not legal. Once this technicality was satisfied, two years later, they were quietly remarried in Nashville.

Jackson's political enemies, nevertheless, in an attempt to discredit him, delighted in repeating juicy stories about his wife, the bigamist. Jackson even fought duels in defense of her honor, but he could not still the whispers of the Washington gossips. Though he was able to override the rumors and win the presidential election, the strain of the campaign and the scandal took its toll and Rachel Jackson suffered a heart attack and

died one week before inauguration day.

According to biographer Marquis James, the most difficult thing for old Hickory to say was that he had forgiven his enemies. He's made it clear, said James, that only his enemies are absolved. Those who slandered Rachel remain for God to deal with.

The president carried with him a locket containing a miniature portrait of his departed wife. At night, he would open that locket and place it on the table beside his bed so that it would be the last thing he would see before falling asleep and the first thing he would see upon awakening in the morning. Today, a painting inspired by that picture in the locket hangs in the lower east wing of the White House.

Before her untimely death, Rachel Jackson and her husband worshiped together at a Presbyterian church. As a result, several weeks after she died, the president fulfilled a promise to her by uniting with a small Presbyterian congregation located near his home at the Hermitage. Scandal remained a part of his career, but beneath his rough edges and hair-triggered temper, the man who once said, I have only two regrets, that I have not shot Henry Clay or hanged John C. Calhoun, had a deep appreciation for Holy Scripture.

In his diary, he recorded that it was his custom to read three to five chapters from the Bible each day, just like John Quincy Adams, three to five chapters a day. He wrote to one of his sons-in-law, go read the scriptures. The joyful promises it contains will be a balsam to all your troubles.

He had troubles just as did every other occupant of the White House, yet until his dying day, President Jackson maintained a staunch faith that matched his zeal for living. On March 24, 1845, a friend, William Yack, recalled that the 79-year-old former president knew death was but a short time away. He turned to those around his bedside and said, Death has no terror for me.

What are my sufferings compared to those of the blessed Savior? I'm ready to depart when called. As his family gathered at the bedside on June 8, 1845, Jackson uttered his farewell, Do not cry, he said, be good children, and we shall all meet in heaven. Martin Van Buren, the five-foot-six-inch Van Buren was nicknamed Little Magician because he was small in stature and able to do so much with so little.

Tis only by the grace of God, he insisted. His inaugural address struck the same note, I only look to the gracious protection of the divine being whose strengthening support I humbly solicit and to whom I fervently pray to look down upon us all. Van Buren, the first president born after the United States became an official nation, carried this attitude not only in victory but also in defeat.

When he lost his bid for re-election to William Henry Harrison in 1840, Van Buren called

upon his victorious opponent to wish him God's richest blessings. Two issues led to his failure to win a second term. His outspoken rhetoric against the expansion of slavery within the nation and a massive depression generated by the collapse of many banks throughout the land.

In retirement, Van Buren continued to speak out against the evils of slavery and other social ills, but he had lost nearly all of his political clout. When he died, the congregation gathered to pay their final respects and to join together in singing in his honor, O God, our help in ages past. I'm going to read you one final one here, and I apologize for the time, but it's rare and I think it's important.

President Lincoln. You may think you know about Lincoln. People talk a lot about Lincoln.

Here are some interesting things about Lincoln. He was all things to all men. To the slave, he was the messiah.

To the press, he was the rail splitter. To the north, he was the preserver of the union. To the south that knew the Civil War was about to end, he was the compassionate victor.

To the Christian, he could well have been champion of the faith, except for one thing. Abraham Lincoln never joined a church. Nonsense, some say.

President Lincoln was one of our most God-fearing Americans, but look at the record. He never joined a Christian congregation. So consequently, a few scholars are bold enough to ask, was Abraham Lincoln a Christian? The question is not new.

It was raised in New Salem, Illinois, when he began his political career in 1831. And during his six years there, he became friends with the village philosopher who introduced the young Lincoln to the writings of Shakespeare and the teachings of the Bible. Lincoln studied them earnestly, memorizing long passages.

His speeches and private letters often echo the 17th century tone of Shakespeare or the King James Version of the Bible. In spite of his familiarity with and love of the Bible, Lincoln still never became a member of a local Christian church. Early political opponents used this as an opportunity to brand him an infidel.

There's a lot more in this chapter, but Lincoln's refusal to join an organized church still gave rise to many doubts about his belief in God. Lincoln himself enjoyed repeating an oft told story about two Quaker women who discussed his potential success as compared to that of Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States. "'I think Jefferson will succeed,' said one woman.

"'Why does thee think so?' said the other. "'Because Jefferson is a praying man.' "'And so is Abraham a praying man.' "'Yes, but the Lord will think Abraham is joking.' But in spite of the gossip and jokes floating around Washington, Lincoln showed a personal

attachment to the Presbyterian Church. He rented a pew in Washington's New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, located on the right side of the church, eight rows from the pulpit.

He and his family regularly worshipped there on Sunday mornings. On several occasions, the President even attended midweek prayer meetings at the church. But in order not to disturb other worshippers, Lincoln often secretly entered through the back door of the building, sat on a couch in the office of the pastor, Dr. Phineas Gurley, and with the door to the church ajar listened to the readings from the scriptures and prayed with the people.

One Sunday morning when Confederate forces drew close to the city and the fighting was heavy, Dr. Gurley declared from the pulpit that the next Sunday would be the last in which the church could be used for worship. An order from Secretary of War Stanton had requisitioned the church for use as a hospital for wounded soldiers. President Lincoln, who was attending worship that day, rose to his feet and said, Dr. Gurley, we are too much in need of this church these days.

We cannot let it be closed. I countermand that order. Lincoln publicly spoke about this dependence upon help from Almighty God not only in church but on other occasions as well.

February 1861, as he was about to leave for Washington to begin his first term as president, he stood on the rear platform of the Great Western Railway train and spoke heart to heart with his close friends and neighbors in Springfield, Illinois. I now leave not knowing when or whether ever I may return with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington, George Washington. Without the assistance of that divine being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed.

With that assistance, I cannot fail. Trusting in him, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To his care commending you, I hope in your prayers you will commend me.

I bid you an affectionate farewell. Less than a year following the death of his four-year-old son, Eddie, Lincoln learned of his father's serious illness from his stepbrother, John Johnston. Lincoln's letter to his stepbrother reveals the clearest expression we have of his concept of immortality.

Tell father to remember to call upon and confide in our great and good and merciful maker who will not turn away from him in any extremity. He notes the fall of a sparrow and numbers the hairs of our heads and he will not forget the dying man who puts his trust in him. If it is his lot to go now, he will soon have a joyous meeting with many loved ones gone before and where the rest of us, through the help of God, hope ere long to join them.

On the morning of the funeral of another son, 11-year-old Willie in 1862, a shaken President was comforted by the boy's nurse, who assured him that Christians throughout the nation were praying for him. I am glad to hear that, replied the President. I need their prayers.

I will try to go to God with my sorrows. Again, I'm skipping a lot here. Kneeling in private prayer was not uncommon for Abraham Lincoln, but his posture was strikingly different at public worship.

Normally, Presbyterians of that day sat in their pews for prayer during services. Lincoln, however, stood while praying. His angular, ungainly six-foot, four-inch frame created an awkward contrast while those around him sat with bowed heads.

After one worship service, a curious parishioner got enough courage to ask him about his unusual posture during prayer. Lincoln explained, when my generals visit the White House, they stand when their Commander-in-Chief enters the Oval Office. Isn't it proper, then, that I stand for my Commander-in-Chief? Lincoln's pragmatic theology helped keep things in perspective.

There was the time one devout Christian expressed hope that, quote, the Lord would be on our side. The President responded, I'm not concerned about that, for I know the Lord is always on the side of the right. It is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and the nation should be on the Lord's side.

In fact, religion for Abraham Lincoln was always a practical application of biblical truths as the situation called for them. He could be stern when scolding people who shirked their responsibility to earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brows. He could be benevolent when he commanded the death sentence of a young soldier who fell asleep while on guard duty.

In an era when conservative Christians condemned anyone who attended the theater, a den of painted women and rogues, they called it, Lincoln enjoyed watching plays as a means of escape from pressures of the White House. Some historians suggest, this is the part I want to get to here. I'm almost done.

Some historians suggest that Lincoln's freeing of the slaves was the result of some deep religious or moral conviction. We have no evidence to prove such a claim. Let me read that again.

Some historians suggest that Lincoln's freeing the slaves was the result of some deep religious or moral conviction. We have no evidence to prove such a claim. Instead, his primary concern was the preservation of the union.

He repeated often that if maintaining the practice of slavery would guarantee the unity of the nation, he would endorse it. But he would also free the slaves if that would save

the union. He hinted at a moral justification in an 1862 message to Congress when he said, in giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free.

The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just. A way, if followed, the world will forever applaud and God must forever bless. On January 1, 1863, when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln added, upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

Interesting that Lincoln understood his mission and his job, which he saw as preserving the union and would do whatever it took to maintain that unity. You can't fault him for that. A house divided against itself, as he famously quoted from the word of God, cannot stand.

And he was even willing to do as the founding fathers had done. If you go back and read Founding Brothers and some of the other interesting books about the founding and early days of this nation, there was angst about slavery from the beginning. But in order to unify the colonies and achieve the birth of this nation, that conflict was not addressed, not set aside, but left in tension.

It was to be an ongoing debate, something to resolve later, but don't sacrifice unity for that. And it's important in our day that believers who love the Lord Jesus Christ, regardless of their political leanings, their social conclusions, their sympathies, their words, their votes, unity in the body of Christ is quintessential. Do not divide the body over non-essentials.

Faith is an essential. We gather, we unify one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all. We did 1 Corinthians, you saw the condemnation that the Apostle Paul heaps upon divisions in the church, whether they are big or small, unless and until they touch on the essentials, they shouldn't divide us.

Back to our passage, Matthew chapter 12, we've got just a few minutes left here. One was brought to him who was demon possessed, blind and mute, and he healed him so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. It's interesting to see that when evil, this is a principle I draw from this, it's an observation here and elsewhere.

When evil is in evidence, it is almost always destructive. When you find a demon possessed person, they lose abilities, they lose self-control, they throw fits, they are blind, they are hunched over, they are mute, they are blind, they are afflicted in some way. It is always easy to destroy what was created by others.

This was Dr. Criswell's condemnation of the radical wing of the Southern Baptist denomination back in the 1970s and 1980s. He cited the downgrade controversy of 100 years earlier in Britain with Charles Haddon Spurgeon, where biblical, foundational,

Christ-centered churches were being attacked and vilified by the progressives, by the moderates. Dr. Criswell famously in a Southern Baptist Convention address said, these people who are trying to take the denomination off of its biblical foundation call themselves moderates, but a skunk by any other name still stinks.

Regardless of the labels, regardless of the rhetoric, regardless of the rationales, evil always destroys. We must tear it down. What is cited about Jesus in the preceding paragraph here? Even though something is already on the way out, He is not bringing it to destruction.

He is preaching justice. Justice will eventually have its way. The earth and its works are going to be burned up, but not now.

Blind and mute. The demon doesn't confer wonderful superhuman abilities. He can't fly.

He can't jump tall buildings with a single bound. He's not faster than a speeding bullet. He's blinded.

He can't speak. He's oppressed. He's hemmed in.

He's limited. He is bowed down with this affliction. They bring him to Jesus, and he both spoke and saw.

The multitudes were amazed and said, could this be the son of David? Could this be the son of David? Harking back to John's question, are you he that shall come, or do we look for another? John proclaimed him as the suffering servant. Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. But the son of David is the conquering king.

I've rehearsed before the prevailing theories that there was Messiah ben Joseph and Messiah ben David, and one was the one who suffers, the other is the conquering king. When the Pharisees heard it, notice they had to hear it secondhand because Jesus has withdrawn. And there were people, as always, who disobeyed the Savior, who disobeyed Jesus, who said, do not make me known.

And they did it anyway. So now when the Pharisees hear of it, what happens? This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.

Well, we've got a wonderful study coming up on Baalzebul. Next time, and I'm having to bite my lip because I want to tell it all to you now. I've got a whole another two sessions in my head here, and I just hope I can remember it all by next week.

You know, the closer you get, the better you look, but the older you get, the less you remember. So it may be an entirely different study by next week. But right now, the Beelzebub, Baalzebul, there is so much going on here that I'm not even going to attempt

to begin it.

But you want to be here for next week. It's pertinent not only to understanding the life ministry and teaching of the Lord Jesus in this context, but to our present day. But remember, it is individuals and the presidents I read about are examples.

They did not try to weave religion into the structure of government. These men were personally spiritual, personally dedicated to the word of God, and that guided their attitudes towards social issues like slavery. And internalizing that truth is what eventually ended slavery, championed by churches in this country.

But it was a process, and it was a process of learning and realizing and coming to grips with scriptural teaching on what love one another and love your neighbor as yourself and do unto others as you would have others do unto you means in practical application. And that has to be internalized by a significant portion of your population before it can then be expressed in more formal terms. But you cannot squeeze it into someone's soul and heart from the outside.

So if you want social change, if you want the betterment of those who are afflicted and who are oppressed, it has to start with spreading the good news of Jesus Christ, speaking the truth to one another in love, being ready to give an answer for the hope that is in you. And when there are enough righteous people in Sodom, Sodom can change instead of being destroyed. So fruitful meditation upon those truths.

We'll close here in a word of prayer and pick up our study here in Matthew chapter 12 next time. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the clear light that it shines on our path.

Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. And we pray that as we seek to be good stewards and good servants and understand what your will is for us personally, individually, and in contact with our culture, our society, our community, that your Holy Spirit will help us to see clearly what our mission is, what we should cultivate, what we should pursue, when we should speak, and when we should withdraw. And we ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.