

Matthew 21-12-05b

We're ready now to continue our study here, looking at the parable of the wedding banquet in Matthew chapter 22, and looking at the great importance of that garment that is required to participate at the banquet. Think about this. This man started his day on the road, going about his business.

He heard the invitation, responded to the invitation, came to the banquet, but refused to wear the provided celebratory glorious robe. Because of this, this phrase will sound familiar, his latter end is worse than the beginning. It would have been better for that man had he not left the road and gone to the banquet than having gone to fail to participate.

Now, we wouldn't draw the conclusion that it would be better to never be saved than to be saved and then be in the darkness, which is outside. But there is an element here we don't want to miss, which is the man didn't start the day, bound hand and foot, and cast into darkness. But that's where he ends up.

In the same way that the people who received the invitation and rejected it, their city didn't start out being on fire, and they themselves didn't start out being destroyed. The issue of the Lord Jesus Christ creates a decision point. The issue of God and his plan and his purpose, which is expressed in Jesus Christ, creates a decision point.

We are created as deciders. We are created with volition, with free will, and the way we choose matters. It matters a lot.

It is a central matter. This goes back to prehistory. You can look at Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 in the heavenly realms, where the way that the Shining One, who was the highest of all God's creation, the way that he chose matters and had consequences.

The unfallen angels, certainly represented to us by Gabriel and Michael, the faithful servants of God, the way they choose matters. There is a conflict between those who choose one way and those who choose another. This is why we have the antipathy, the animosity, the conflict between the unfallen and the fallen angels.

The fact that they are fallen doesn't really assign responsibility. You can be tripped through no fault of your own. Several of us know about this.

You can slip or be tripped and you are fallen, but you didn't choose to fall. When we talk about fallen angels, it would be better to say rebellious angels because it is an active decision that produces the fallen status. It is an active decision that enables God to dispense his grace, to cleanse us, to regenerate us, to seal us, to give us an identity in his son and in the eternal future as his children.

Decisions matter. What we choose matters. We talked about this a couple of months ago

in terms of many of the hidden influences that affect our choices that we think are totally free.

That is a fascinating study and I recommended a couple of books on that and some articles. It is good to remember that what we expose ourselves to affects our choices in unconscious ways. People are far more likely to believe a thing regardless of its actual merit or factuality if they have heard it three to five times.

This is why you will hear certain catchphrases in the political scene. A congressman will say it here, the Speaker of the House will say it there, the President will say it here, a Senator will say it there, a Governor will say it here, a news anchor will say it there. It is the exact same phrase.

Just as an example, the January 6th insurrection. How many times have you heard from a variety of sources that the rally slash protest slash riot perhaps that got out of hand, there was trespassing, there was breaking and entering, there was violation of doors and property, people went where they are not supposed to go. That is not insurrection.

Look up the definition of insurrection. Pushing through a police barrier is not an insurrection or we have seen so many insurrections, you cannot count them in the past year to year and a half. But it is couched in those terms so that people just are inured and if you say the January 6th insurrection, people immediately say, oh yes, that was a rebellion fomented against our form of government and our way of life and they were in there hanging senators from their doorframes and no, sorry.

Was it a wrong thing to do? Did they trespass? Did they get too violent and too carried away in the heat of the moment? Yes. Did they in any way endanger, bring down, harm any portion of the government, any member of the government? No. But this is what we've heard.

What I'm getting to here is what we allow ourselves to be exposed to affects our thinking in unconscious ways and we want to be careful to at a minimum balance what we hear with the truth of the word of God. In the same way that a little leaven leavens the whole lump, a little bit of resort to the oasis of God's word and the grace and the faithful presence and power of God's spirit is an antidote to a lot of evil and a lot of false human thinking. This is why we can get together for Bible class just a few times in a week.

We can spend a few minutes or a half an hour or an hour in a day thinking about the word of God and it is so much greater in its truth, in its power, in its reflection of God through Christ that it will neutralize hours and hours and hours of circulating in the world. You can walk down a dusty road for six hours and get all kinds of dirt on your feet. It only takes a few minutes to wash it all clean.

This is why it is such a wonderful example set by David and Daniel among others to at

least three times a day make a conscious effort to stop and remember who we are and why we're here. Evening and morning and at noon I will pray and cry aloud. He will hear my voice.

Daniel prayed three times a day and you look at the career and the life and the example and the blessing that Daniel has been for centuries. One of the keys to his faithfulness was his prayer life and we have that wonderful example of his prayer, Daniel chapter 9. What this brings us to is in order to put on this garment and in order to keep it clean, we have to realize how much pushback and how much attack there is on our efforts to do so. I want to read you something just as an example.

I have been mentioning in recent classes that there is a new form of expression for what we used to call liberal Christianity. Those who free themselves from the notion that the Bible is authoritative for faith and practice and that there are parts of it that we shouldn't pay attention to or we should allegorize or spiritualize and not listen to. Remember, we are clean through the washing of water by the word.

It is the word of God that is alive and powerful and sharper than a two edged sword that exposes the thoughts and intents of our hearts so that they can be cleansed so that that which needs to be removed can be expunged so that we can wash and be clean like Naaman. Naaman didn't get his leprosy cleansed on the first dunk in the river and he didn't go home to the Farpar and all the other rivers that he had back in Syria. It was God's designated river, the muddy Jordan that cleansed his leprosy and it took seven exposures, seven times and on the seventh, his leprosy was cleansed.

Wash and be clean. The thing I want to read you here is representative of what has in days gone by been called the emergent church. We're emerging with a fresh perspective.

It's reworked liberal Christianity. The emergent church emerged, got its knuckles wrapped and sort of stopped calling itself emergent, but it didn't go away. It has actually grown and become more prevalent, more widespread, more vocal.

It doesn't like to call itself this, but it is now the easiest way to refer to it and I'm just going to use this term because it's convenient is progressive Christianity. See how positive that sounds? It's progress. We're progressing and yet it is populated by people who have deconstructed their faith and are going through a process of deconstruction.

They say that they are deconstructing traditions and accretions and misunderstandings from the historical or traditional church and that they are deconstructing baggage and things that they've picked up along the way and they have to deconstruct and then they're going to reconstruct something else. But in order to do so, and I'm going to summarize very quickly, the defining principle I would say, the single defining principle and what is the first foot forward is if you just go to the Bible and treat it as the word of

God, this has been responsible for all kinds of errors. This is how people justified slavery.

This is how people have oppressed women. This is how we have entered into wars. This is how we have refused to acknowledge the wonderful march forward of science.

Because if you take the whole Bible as the word of God, God is a God of wrath. God is a God of vengeance. God tells you to smash baby's heads on rocks in Psalm 137.

God says, go into Canaan and slay the men, the women and the children and the animals. And this is just not God. This can't be God.

So all of the word of God doesn't reflect God. So how do we know if we're going to say all scripture is not scripture, all scripture is not God breathed, all scripture is not profitable for doctrine or proof correction and instruction and righteousness, which is what we're talking about to put on this garment. If we do it through the word and through the spirit, we need to know what the word is and what it isn't.

This rapidly growing, spreading, virulent perspective is all through the church. It is in multiple denominations. It is all over the web.

It is all over YouTube. It is all over blogs. There are books coming out by the scores now.

And just so we know, I'm not going to waste a whole lot of breath on these people because I doubt any of us are really in much danger of deconstructing our faith. But awareness, this is just like when you send out patrols and you do reconnaissance, you know where the enemy is, you know where they've got their ammunition piled. And if they launch an attack, you know where they are and why they're doing it.

And it is important for us as those who hope to have on the full armor of God to nevertheless not be caught by surprise. I don't want to be sleeping at the base of a tree in the full armor of God while somebody comes up and hits me in the head with a sledgehammer. So I want to talk about this a little bit because of its tendency to slip under the radar.

In particular, I want to look at our parable where the man without the wedding garment is bound hand and foot and cast outside. Because this defining principle, this foot forward and basis upon which progressive Christians, deconstructing Christians decide what is and isn't scripture is what they like to call the Jesus hermeneutic. Hermeneutics, science of Bible interpretation, science and art, I would say.

And so you go to, if you're going to be one of these people, you go to scripture and you pick the ones that you like that say, no one has seen God in any time. It is the son who reveals him. If you've seen me, you've seen the father, Jesus said.

So if you want to know the father, you look at Jesus. To look at Jesus, you look at him in

the gospels, but particularly in the red ink sections where Jesus is speaking. And unlike the God of the old Testament, Jesus never sent armies in to kill anybody.

Jesus never repressed, oppressed, or suppressed women. Jesus never condemned a homosexual or a LGBTQ. So Jesus is the lens through which, and I would say, they say lens, I would say filter.

Scripture for them is filtered through WWJD or WWJS. What would Jesus do? What would Jesus say? Jesus would never smash a child on the rocks. So that's right out.

Psalm 137 is just right out. Jesus would never put the harsh penalties in the law that are in the law of Moses. So the law is right out.

It was imperfect. It was created by men. The prophets of the old Testament, only when you find the beatific vision, only when you find the peaceable kingdom, only when you find God forgiving and blessing and being inclusive, is he really God? So, because that's, that's what we see in Jesus.

As a deconstructing progressive, I like the idea that Jesus is in me. I was made in the image of God. And when I have Jesus in me, like Jesus, I can say, you have heard it said in the old Testament, but I say you, for example, just one, you have heard it said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

But I say, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Pray for those who spitefully use you.

So I say, this is a contradiction. Therefore an eye for an eye was never true because Jesus never agrees with it. Jesus never says eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth.

So that is not scripture. That is a man thinking he's writing scripture, but he's not. This is the essence of the thing.

So it begins by saying the law and the prophets are not reliable witnesses to God. Jesus is the only reliable witness to God. And anything that comports with what Jesus says in the gospels, I will accept, but anything that he does not seem to affirm, I will deny.

So it begins by discounting and dismissing old Testament scripture. I'm just going to concentrate on the new Testament. Here's Jesus and his apostles.

So this is good. Well, pretty soon you start running into problems with Paul. I do not suffer a woman to speak in church.

Let her ask her husband at home. Well, that can't be right. Jesus never told a woman to be quiet.

And Paul's got some other problems. So pretty soon you first start, and it's the typical

slippery slope. You start by saying old Testament is not scripture.

Pretty soon you find problems in the new Testament. Well, my Jesus hermeneutic tells me that's not right. And what you end up with is a pair of scissors by which you start creating your own Jeffersonian Bible, Jeffersonian New Testament.

Jefferson didn't like the miraculous and so he would just snip it out. Not real sure what he did with the backs of the pages. I've always wondered about that.

It says he literally cut them out, but there's stuff on the other side of the page. But you wind up. And while doing this, anybody who believes the whole Bible is the word of God is worshipping the Bible and is a biblicist.

And because you memorize portions of scripture, see now your scriptures editor, you're saying some parts are important and others are not. And you're just memorizing the parts you like. You're taking promises out of context and applying them to yourself.

And you've seen this kind of pot kettle black argumentation in the social realm, in the political realm, people who are manufacturing things in press reports and so on, accused the other side of doing the very same thing they themselves are doing. And to say that we who believe all scripture is God breathed and profitable have set ourselves up as editors of the Bible and we decide which parts are important. Well, excuse me, but isn't that what you have done? When I edit, all I do is try to remember parts that are salient and important and that are helpful to me.

I don't chop out and create not just a reader's digest version, but a tiny set of excerpts that are mainly the words of Christ. But these people start down that road and end up with only certain parts of what Jesus said. I am still looking, but I have yet to find a progressive deconstructing Christian who accepts the end of our parable, bind him hand and foot, cast him into the outer darkness.

If you listen to what these people have to say, they do not believe in eternal conscious torment. Okay. There's others of us who don't hold with that either, but they in throwing that out, say the fire that the Bible pictures in terms of judgment is simply a refining fire.

Everyone, all of us are going to go through hell fire and it's going to burn away what isn't suitable. And so it's kind of like the judgment seat, the wood, hay and stubble is going to burn and the gold, silver, precious stones is going to remain because that's the imago Dei. That's the image of God within us.

That's the Jesus within us. And anything we've retained and kept is going to be burned away, you know, that isn't fitting. And so I, all of the fire passages, if I accept it to be scripture at all, it is simply a metaphorical allusion to God cleaning me up.

Many of them not only don't believe in a future punishment or a future judgment of

destruction, but they don't believe in a future heaven either because Jesus is in me now. I am the second coming. Jesus has come back and I'm him.

He's in me. He's in we, he's in us. And because, and so heaven is now heaven is us.

And I'm telling you, the thing starts out with some understandable questions about scripture, some understandable head scratching and doubts and questions. This can come in the form of if the Bible is true, what about science? If you accept the inherent justice of equality for all races and equality for both genders or all genders, depending on how many lines you have erased. Is it true that people should be judged on merit and not on appearance or background or ethnicity or culture or whatever else? Yes, that's true.

By the way, that is a Christian value. Is it true that slavery is, is heinous and has been the source of a lot of abuse? Absolutely. But to take these things, and is it true that eternal conscious torment is really kind of horrifying? And I have an awful hard time with that.

If Jesus died for the sins of the world and he didn't go to hell for all eternity, why is it that God is going to send people there to be bobbing around in the flames forever and ever and ever and ever and ever? I have a doubt about that. I have a question about that. Questions are good.

The disciples learned by asking Jesus questions. We learn by asking questions and seeking the answers in the Bible. When the gospels started spreading through the Jewish world, you have people like the Bereans who searched the scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

What does the Bible say? And they are, they were, they're commended for that, looking to the scriptures and finding answers there. Where progressive Christianity, which I've talked about its roots and its ancestral heritage, where it leaves the road, the narrow road certainly, is saying that I will find the answer in me. I have decided that I've got Jesus.

And so I will know, inherently, what is scripture and what isn't, what is true and what isn't. My conscience is going to tell me because the Bible says, quote, unquote, Jesus is in me. The kingdom is in me.

Doesn't even Paul, who they really don't accept, it's kind of like people use the shorter ending of Mark, Mark 16, 9, and onward to justify evangelism, even though they know it's not really scripture. Progressive people will talk to traditional Christians or historic Christians and say, doesn't even your own scripture in Paul say, God is at work in you to will and to do for his good pleasure. And they'll agree with that.

God is in me. Jesus is in me and Jesus is God. So God is in me and whatever I will and

whatever I understand to be true, that's what's right.

And they don't want to go to the prophets in the old Testament where Jeremiah says in 17, 9, did you know that your heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and you can't even understand how much so there is a, a subjective approach that kicks in. And pretty soon, uh, if you want to talk about somebody proof texting, the whole reason these people leave the church is they believe that, that, that the church in general, traditional Christianity has proof texted its way into many egregious errors. And there are many examples of that.

But as I've told you an infinite number of times, the fact that there are drunk drivers who, uh, go across the median and have a head on and kill an innocent family and oncoming traffic, uh, this guy who out of rage at whatever, uh, plowed his car, his suburban into a parade and killed six or eight people and injured 40 others. Uh, we don't say cars must go. Uh, there's a fundamental flaw in the car.

There are parts of this car that shouldn't even be there. We need to get rid of this steering wheel so that people can't turn it the wrong way. We, and we need to get rid of this gear so that people can't go fast enough to crash into someone and hurt them.

Um, and what deconstructing Christianity, what progressive Christianity wants to do is change the car into something that they can fully control, uh, for themselves and that they believe can't hurt or harm anyone else. And that involves pretty much, uh, making your own mind up about what you consider the word of God to be. Now the, uh, I'm just going to read you one example of this because it pertains to our study here.

And this is on, uh, progressive Christianity.org and it deals with, um, Jesus words having to do with the parable of the talents. Um, because it ends the same way. And we read that about what happens to the unproductive servant.

Um, this, uh, article is by a lady who is a pastor, claims to be a pastor. And let me just read you a little of this. This is enough of an exposure that we won't have to do an exhaustive thing.

Two of the great discourses, Matthew, at this is an article by the way, on progressive Christianity.org called it's the least we can do colon end of a year commentary. This is from a while back to the great discourses. Matthew attributed to Jesus have defined Christianity.

The first is the sermon on the Mount, which is generally thought to go back to the historical Jesus and to reflect his authentic teachings. Meaning the Jesus within me tells me that that's good stuff. The second is the portion of the last judgment from Matthew 25, 34 to 40.

Then the King will say to those on his right, this is the sheep and goats judgment. Come

you who have the blessing of my father, inherit the domain prepared for you from the foundation of the world. You may remember, I was hungry and you gave me something to eat.

I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a foreigner and you showed me hospitality. I was naked and you clothed me.

I was ill and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to see me. I swear to you, whatever you did for the most inconspicuous members of my family, KJV, one of the least of these my brethren, you did for me as well.

And this lady, C Raven is her name, at least on the article, S-E-A-R-A-V-E-N, C Raven. Matthew crafted this out of his own genius. Jesus never said any such thing.

If read to the end, this speech is an admonition that contains a threat of damnation. The quote, unquote goats know very well who was hungry, thirsty, naked and in prison and refused to do anything about it. Therefore they're headed for everlasting hellfire.

What is seldom noticed by traditional Christians is that consignment to hell is not the payback for quote, unquote sin. It is the consequence of not believing that Jesus was the one anointed by God to return the world to God's covenantal rule. If you don't believe Jesus was the one, according to Matthew, you won't follow Jesus' teachings.

And when the transformation comes, you will be found in the company of the goats. 2000 years of Western history and thought have testified to the power of this belief. And she goes on to talk about anyone who declines to do good works and celebrate with the returning master will be cast into the outer darkness beyond the mountains that hold up the sky into the abyss at the end of the flat earth.

This is her belief that, uh, the reference to darkness, which is outside. And so by, by suggestion and by implication, if you believe there is a darkness outside, you believe in a flat earth and, and that the mountains hold up the sky. Um, it's a satisfying thought.

Revenge is sweet. A dish best served cold. If quote unquote God won't get you karma will, but so far as scholars can tell Jesus was not warning about a violent judgment after death, but was declaring a nonviolent feast on God's holy mountain available to all here.

And now this is very different from traditional Christian insistence on belief that Jesus died to save us from our sins and rose again to prove that there is eternal life after death. Well, yeah, whether the last judgment is celebrated as revenge against enemies or claimed as pious reward, Matthew's apocalyptic vision has been reduced to smug band-aids for the horrors of systemic injustice. Soup kitchens, homeless shelters, free clinics, prison visitation, the least possible for the least possible.

The same thing happened with the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King commemorations of

his birthday and celebrations of quote black history month have become opportunities for school children and guilt ridden adults to do community service. Read to kids at the local school, deliver meals on wheels, clean up the local park, donate money to the red cross, etc. Matthew was writing at least 60 years after the death of Jesus.

His point of view is Jewish. He bases his stories of Jesus on prophecies from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel. In his mind, the story of Jesus would replace the story of Moses for the new age.

Jesus was the one anointed by God to set to rights the entire universe. Matthew's is an apocalyptic voice for an apocalyptic time that is coming soon like a thief in the night. Anyone who rejected the message was rejecting God's own promise of deliverance from imperial injustice.

So at the end of his gospel, he has Jesus claim that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, etc. In order for the world to stop its course of systemic injustice and create a world where distributive justice-compassion is the rule, those who would claim the name of Jesus have a responsibility to not only teach others Jesus way, but must follow it ourselves, which all sounds great. But you can see where there is a self-righteousness and a standard that stems from it that sets itself up to arbitrate what is the authentic Jesus and what is Matthew or Isaiah or Jeremiah or some other prophet misstating and misusing and miscalculating.

And so you say Jesus is my standard. Here's my summary conclusion about this. It is a wonderful thing to understand the answer that Jesus gave to John the Baptist in prison.

Are you the coming one or do we look for another? John already understood that Jesus was the suffering servant. He is the lamb of God. It has come to take away the sin of the world.

John understands that. He preached it. He identified Jesus.

That's how the disciples spotted Jesus is because John pointed to him and said, there's the lamb. In Jesus first coming, he is revealing the father in his love, in his mercy, in his grace, in his patience, in recognizing that because we didn't have a choice being born into sin, we don't have to be responsible for a choice to be removed from that sin. That's why Christ in 1 John 2 is the propitiation for everyone's sins.

No one owes the penalty for sin because we were born already infected, already exposed. We didn't infect ourselves. We didn't choose to be infected.

Therefore, when that infection is, as it were removed, the punishment aspect for sin has been born by Christ. He bore the sins of the entire world. Now the question is, what do you do with Christ? Reward and judgment are conditioned on those two aspects that we

saw in this parable.

Do we accept him and do we follow him? There are two different levels of judgment for those who do not accept him and don't come to God through him. There is eternal judgment for those who accept him, but do not put on the robe, do not pursue righteousness by faith and come to God through him. I am the way, Jesus said, no one comes to the father.

That's done in righteousness. It is done in prayer. It is done through the word and the spirit.

There is another level of judgment and that's what we see in our parable. The destruction of the servant persecutors and the burning down of their city, that's the first level of judgment. Being removed from the banquet, bound hand and foot and cast into the darkness, which is outside, is the second level.

This is what happens when we do not put on the garment. What progressive Christianity with its Jesus hermeneutic right out of the starting gate fails to do is recognize that there is more than one dimension to Jesus. He is not only the suffering servant, he is also the conquering king.

He is not only the lamb of God, but he is the lion of the tribe of Judah. He is not only the gentle Jesus with a child on his lap, but he is the king of kings and lord of lords riding the white horse and blood is running as high as the horse's bridle. He is not only extending mercy and grace, but there is judgment and there is vengeance.

And you have to take your scissors to the end of so many of Jesus parables. Every one of these we read this morning where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, any hint of darkness, which is outside people knocking at the door. I want to come in and sit down.

I never knew you. That's not Jesus. You wind up with such a diluted one dimensional edited Jesus that it leads to nothing but judgment.

The very people who reject the idea of judgment are going to be under it. And you say, what is the nature of this man who accepts the invitation, but will not put on the robe, read the writings, watch the videos of progressive Christians. This is that, this is what Jesus is talking about.

It's what Paul talked about with the Judaistic believers who insisted on circumcision, the Jews that Paul talks about in Romans where they not having the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own are blind and our branches broken out of the tree, et cetera. All of that goes away. Judgment isn't a nice thing.

So I'm not going to believe it. Even when Jesus says it, as soon as you throw away the God of wrath in the old Testament, you throw away half of Jesus because he is both. And

I could go on and we may visit as we finished Matthew, some of the other ideas of the atonement.

Wait till we get to the crucifixion and what these people have defined out of our salvation and defined out of Jesus' work on the cross. It isn't anything like what scripture teaches, nothing like what Jesus said about himself, nothing like what Paul teaches, the wonderful truths that are explicit in old Testament sacrifice symbolism. You learn more about the work of Christ on the cross, studying Leviticus than you even do studying Paul.

They miss it all. So I warn you, because if you hear tidbits, it's not going to come out and say, hi there, I'm a progressive Christian and I don't believe the Bible is the word of God. It's going to come in the form of this.

This Bible needs to be interpreted through the lens of Jesus. We need to understand Christianity in Jesus terms, not Pauline terms, not old Testament terms. Jesus, we need to get back to Jesus.

Paul misunderstood Jesus. Only Jesus knows Jesus. Let me tell you what Jesus really said, because I have Jesus in me and the Jesus in you should listen to the Jesus in me and throw out these unsavory parts of scripture.

But it begins, I mean, who's not going to say we come to the father through Jesus, that Jesus has authority, that we should listen to the words of the Lord Jesus. We absolutely should, but we listen to them all. And I saw one of these guys quote, it was John 5, 39, where Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and he says, you search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life.

And then there's a phrase that the man left out and went right to the next verse. But you refuse to come to me. You search the scriptures, but you won't come to me.

What he leaves out, and he quotes this two or three times. He leaves out the part where Jesus says, you search the scriptures because in them you think that you have eternal life. And these are what testify of me.

The old Testament scriptures, Jesus said, testify of me. They just glide that right out. The Jesus in me says Jesus didn't say that.

Some scribe added that later because he wanted to change it. What a danger. We've seen before what happens when even well-meaning people take the teeth out of the word of God and that the judgment passages on believers don't apply to believers.

Oh, he's talking about unbelievers. This is worse. This, this goes above and beyond.

And I tell you, even weeping, they are enemies of the cross because they redefine the cross. They are cut off from Christ because they don't know Christ in claiming to know

him and in claiming to understand him and in claiming to have him to such an extent that they can arbitrate what is and isn't scripture. They have been completely deceived and consumed by the one who roams the earth like a roaring lion looking for people that gullible, that vulnerable.

It's tragic and it is growing like wildfire, like wildfire. This is a brush fire and you're going to smell the smoke. If you haven't already, you will soon.

So be warned to be prepared. Uh, we'll touch on this from time to time as we continue our study in the gospel of Matthew, which will resume next week. We'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you that all these things were written for our instruction, that one jot and one tittle will not pass from your word until all is fulfilled, that we can have confidence that there is a true righteous and objective standard, uh, to which we can resort, to which we can appeal that will judge our hearts instead of our hearts, uh, judging your word. We pray that as, uh, our generation becomes increasingly dark and there are fewer and fewer lights shining in it, that we can be brighter and brighter beacons of truth, beacons of hope, faithful representatives of the Lord Jesus in his absence, um, through whom the spirit can do his work of convicting of sin and righteousness and judgment.

We pray that, uh, you will preserve our hearts through your spirit and your truth, enable and empower us, uh, give us the grace to give an answer to everyone who asks us for our hope and our understanding of your plan and purpose and your son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray it in his name. Amen.