



WE DO NOT CONSENT

A STORY OF LOCAL DISSENT &
9 BIBLICAL STORIES OF CHRISTIANS AND THEIR GOVERNMENT



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Prologue

When elected officials taste unmitigated power,
they rarely lose their appetite for it.

When this unmitigated power is wielded without democratic restraint,
people always suffer.

When people begin to suffer,
it is the Christian's duty to resist.

Humbly. Respectfully. Firmly.

Without flinching. Without blinking. Without hesitation.

And in these moments of sacred obligation and resistance, there is a
phrase that has risen to the lips of those who love freedom.

It was the cry of intelligent, principled men that launched the
experiment of freedom nearly 250 years ago we call the U.S. of A.

And it must again become the cry of a new generation standing in
the face of vile narcissism, stunning incompetence, and utter
buffoonery known as the Administrative State.

The way of life we have enjoyed as a free nation may very well be at
stake unless, in the face of unbridled tyranny, the people find their
voice again and utter freedom's battle cry...

We do not consent.

Introduction

An Eerie Sermon

On March 15th, 2020, the elders of Grace City Church canceled church services in response to an emergency order passed by the governor. SARS-CoV-2, the new and relatively unknown virus that can lead to COVID-19, was rapidly spreading through Washington State.

That Sunday, I preached to a camera and an empty room about how to be a good citizen and faithful follower of Jesus in times of uncertainty and crisis.

It remains a vivid and eerie memory to this day.

For a preacher, empty rooms are ominous. We love seeing people, preaching to people, serving people. But on a cold Saturday night, there I sat, coughing on insulation dust, “preaching” to a blinking red camera light in an unfinished, empty chapel void of people.

Each generation has its “*where were you when...*” moments. Where were you when JFK was assassinated? Where were you when Mount St. Helens blew up? Where were you when the towers fell?

This was that moment for me. “*Where were you when you heard church was canceled indefinitely and you found yourself preaching to an empty room?*”

While questions swirled in society and my mind, I looked into the camera and said with sincere conviction,

In times of crisis, wisdom and prudence say that the Christian should extend to our elected officials the benefit of the doubt. They have knowledge we don't and carry a weight not ours. In times of unknown emergencies, I believe the Christian should honor their elected officials, and do what they ask of us. We show up and say, 'What can we do to help?' We make our governor's job easier in an unprecedented crisis, not harder.

Nine weeks later, I sued that same governor.

With a clear conscience before God, I might add, and working from the same theological convictions held the night I spoke those words into the camera.

With the full support and participation of my elder team, I led a coalition of 40+ individuals—local business leaders, single moms, entrepreneurs, and elected officials—to legally challenge our governor's overreaching powers through the established channels given to citizens in the courts.

And I did it all with a clear heart and deep conviction as a follower of Jesus.

Sometimes, Christianity teaches men to respect authority, honor the law, and pray for their government. In so doing, it guarantees that Christianity is always the benevolent government's best friend.

And because Christianity teaches men to think, stand for righteousness, and never violate one's conscience in giving ultimate allegiance to God alone, it has always been tyranny's worst enemy.

I wrote down the following pages in an attempt to help Christians think more deeply about their responsibility to be meaningfully engaged in the culture they live in and the government they live under, even if that participation involves pushing back against that government.

My goal is not to merely suggest that Christians have warrant for such action in some situations. My goal is to demonstrate that Christians have an obligation to act when such situations warrant it.

Our Christian heritage is not one of appeasement and compliance to rogue governments playing god over people's lives. Ours is a heritage of freedom fighters courageously standing against tyranny in every age. It is time for such fighters to rise again.

One Part Proverbs, One Part Romans

What follows is organized in two parts. First, a personal story that serves as an example of walking out these convictions. Second, a few biblical passages that formed the theological underpinning of that action.

I write this not because I think any ideas here are original or unique, but because I believe the principles discussed herein bear rediscovering. After being a husband to Sharon and a father to Ella Mae, Levi, Amelia, and Gideon, my primary responsibility is to pastor a group of extraordinary followers of Jesus; to teach them the Bible and to ensure they are equipped to be faithful witnesses of Jesus in every sphere of life; to make sure they understand clearly the whole counsel of God's Word regarding whatever cultural challenges they face.

Many have asked me about a Christian's relationship to their government, as if there is no teaching or direction given in the Bible. Many are shocked to discover that almost every biblical character and hero in the Old and New Testaments had a contentious and adversarial relationship with their government.

That means almost the entire context of the Bible is one of followers of God navigating how to live faithful to God under adverse magisterial conditions. We shouldn't forget that almost everywhere Paul went he was accompanied by...wait for it...a riot. A riot that was a direct response to the message Paul was preaching to the culture of his day.

The days ahead will not get simpler for us; in fact, I am convinced they will grow more complex. It will require a thinking, discerning, engaging church if we are to be any good to the society we currently inhabit. And certainly, that is one of our charges...to be salt and light, to push against darkness wherever it is found. To be voices for reason, logic, common sense, for the good of all mankind. And ultimately to point people in word and deed to the only One offering hope beyond the chaos.

I pray this will help the church I'm pastoring towards that end. That we will all think rigorously and biblically, thus forging clarity and conviction that spills over in daily courageous action.

For those not needing the story in Part 1, you can simply skip to Part 2 (pg. 35). There, we will look at 9 biblical texts I believe will be critical for Christians to grasp in the days to come. But for those who are interested, here is a personal story...

Part One

A Story*

"The forces of tyranny expand inexorably to fill the space made available for their existence."

–Jordan Peterson, *12 Rules For Life: An Antidote to Chaos*

George Orwell, Back From The Dead

We were told it would only be two weeks. This was the governor's rationale for putting us into a state of emergency. It was essential he had these carte-blanche powers so he could have the necessary legal authority to help our state navigate through this critical window. Two weeks. Everyone working together. Then it would all be over.

But as the "emergency" began to drag on, the "two week quarantine" became month after agonizing month of house arrest. The strange-and-bizarre became the mandated-new-normal. Proclamation after proclamation rolled out of Olympia. Every press conference resulted in more rules, laws, and mandates. Leaving one's house became a gross

*The following was originally written as a letter from Pastor Josh to Grace City Church family on the eve of moving into the new building, October 18, 2020.

misdemeanor. Local business owners were threatened with jail time and assessed crippling fines, while the governor's proclamations simultaneously released hardened criminals. One could go to Lowe's with hundreds of people to buy wood glue, but getting a haircut was illegal.

On and on the arbitrary nonsense grew. Had it been limited to normal government bureaucracy, where incompetent grown-ups pretend to solve problems they actually created themselves, maybe nobody would have minded. But now it was spilling over and affecting Joe Citizen. Industries began failing. Livelihoods were lost. Businesses collapsed...not because of poor products, lousy delivery times, or bad management, but because they were ordered not to open their doors.

All the while, businesses across the street enjoyed a record quarter. And nobody could make a connection between the arbitrary lines drawn. Why was one business essential and the other not? Why were big box stores allowed to stay open and small local businesses forced to close? Who was determining who was "essential" and who was not?

The doomsday predictions continued rolling down from on-high, along with the ever-sickening "We're in this together" message. Were one to take media headlines at face value, one could easily summate we were facing quite literally the end of the world.

"Stay home. Stay Safe." An easy order to pass down to the masses, from government workers who still had jobs. But for the taxpayers who funded those jobs (with businesses they were told they couldn't open), the situation became desperate.

More arbitrary mandates poured out of the capital. Regulations. Rules. No breach in common sense was a bridge too far as long as the magic words "science and data" were used to excuse it. The mighty bureaucratic machine was picking up steam.

Now, in order to control people more effectively (for their own safety, mind you), the threat of hefty fines loomed over anyone who dared act like a free American and open their business. A weaponized Labor and Industries added over a thousand employees to punish hardworking citizens by enforcing the governor's sweeping, draconian, and ever-changing rules.

And the narrative was...stay home or you'll kill everyone. How's that for social shaming and collective guilt?

*People began to feel like they were trapped
in some dystopian, Orwellian nightmare.*

Did someone sign me up for a bad remake of "1984" and forget to tell me?

The media dutifully reported on the occasional brave-soul business who dared to defy the edicts from Olympia; “*Local business owner puts known world at risk by helping a client do push-ups.*” The fear patrol would show up, and the predictable social media beat-down would commence.

Meanwhile, I had friends losing their jobs and church members losing their lifelong businesses. I knew a widow whose business license was threatened by State L&I Inspectors demanding compliance. They threatened her with daily \$10k fines until she closed the store that represented her only source of income. I knew dads who couldn’t get unemployment and were on their 4th straight week of feeding their kids beans and rice.

It was crazy town.

Dad, Is It True That...

The feelings of helplessness and frustration only grew. I was watching my town suffer—not from COVID-19 itself, but from our government’s response to COVID-19. And there was nothing I could do to make it stop. Fear, frustration, and fatigue compounded in the community. Depression spiked. Counseling calls rolled in. People were reaching a breaking point.

The original concerns for how to survive the virus had quickly morphed to deeper concerns for how to survive our state’s response to the virus.

For me, it all culminated in a conversation with my kids. A conversation that flipped a switch.

Sharon and I had been trying to keep them somewhat sheltered from the drama, hoping it would pass so we could get to the other side and talk about it looking back. But that approach was quickly failing as the tunnel only got darker and darker. Dang. This thing might be longer than we thought.

On this particular night, we were having a family chat. I don’t even remember who asked the question—but it was innocently offered up by one of the four human beings who look to me as the man who can fix anything. “Dad, is it true that it’s currently *legal* to buy marijuana at a pot shop, alcohol at a beer store, and get an abortion?”

“Yes, that’s true,” I answered.

But they weren’t done. This line of questioning was going somewhere. “And is it also true that it’s currently *illegal* for Miss Kristi to cut hair for her business and for our City Group to come over for dinner?”

“Yes,” I answered, “that is true.”

Another one chimed in, almost like they had coordinated it.

“So you’re saying it’s legal to leave your house to kill a baby or shop at Lowe’s for screws or gamble at a casino, but *illegal* for small businesses to open, and the church to gather to worship Jesus?”

Up until that point, I hadn’t heard it all put together quite like that.

We adults can make simple things so complex, can’t we? Leave it to the children to keep it all straight and simple.

“Well yes,” I said quietly, almost in disbelief, “that is all accurate.”

There was a moment of silence around the circle of our family as the reality of it all sank in. Then the zinger.

“Well, Dad, what are we going to do about it?”

It came so matter-of-fact, so confident, so clear.

Not chiding, not challenging, just an honest question by genuine kids who saw blatant hypocrisy and assumed we would make a plan to make it right.

Obviously.

“Well,” I replied, a little helplessly, “I don’t rightly know, kids.”

“You’ll think of something, Dad. Because this isn’t right.”

The watching eyes and innocent expectations of one’s own children are a powerful thing. I realized in that moment that they knew full well the injustice that was happening in our town, in our state, on our watch. The governor may have buffaloeed the public, but he wasn’t fooling my kids. So naturally, they wanted to know what their dad was going to do about it.

I left that conversation a changed man.

My discerning children had asked a few innocent questions, and in so doing had lit a match. I didn’t have an answer for them yet, but I resolved then and there...I would have one the next time they asked.

Camp David

I began reaching out to local community leaders, elected officials, pastors, anyone...what were they hearing? Thinking? Doing? Was there anything we could do to help? One by one, they began showing up at my house. This was new territory for everyone and no one knew what to do. One group was working on getting us approved to move out of Phase 1. Would I be willing to help by coordinating with local pastors to help with the required application process of the state? Certainly, I said.

So, in conjunction with our local health district, 30+ pastors sent a joint letter to Olympia along with the massive application requesting our county be

moved to a different phase. It was an appeal to allow our county to have local authority restored, with an earnest commitment to work closely with the state in moving safely through the “phases.”

Without even being reviewed, it was summarily dismissed.

We were doing everything we could within the law to attempt to work with the governor’s office for solutions. As every door we tried to open was unceremoniously slammed in our face, the local situation grew more and more desperate.

The words of the Declaration of Independence popped into my brain as I watched each attempt at reason slapped down:

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

We were running out of options.

My house turned into Camp David.

Officials and business leaders and health officials were coming and going almost daily. Commissioners, council members, state representatives, medical directors, pastors, faith leaders, other elected officials and many community leaders poured in. I was getting baptized in the world of politics and they were appreciating the opportunity to process together. Collaboratively we were looking for a way to help free our community.

We’d sit on my back porch to brainstorm and strategize, process and compare notes. Different political parties, different religious convictions, all at the table working overtime to serve their town. What I witnessed was earnest people of deep integrity¹ carrying a heavy burden of responsibility to help the community they love, frustrated that their hands had been tied. Worse than feeling overwhelmed by a problem, they felt helpless to fix it. Nothing was working. We were running out of options.

A Plan of Action

I called a meeting with my elders the next morning. We took stock of our situation.

¹For instance, I didn’t know that people serving on the same committee were not allowed to meet together to discuss public issues without a quorum. Which meant, if one showed up and another member of their particular public committee happened to be there, they would talk briefly and decide which one would dismiss themselves. I didn’t understand it at first until I asked. It was a display of integrity. Even in a crisis, they refused to play “closed-door” politics. In those meetings, I grew in my respect and new-found appreciation for these public servants...how hard they work, the burden they carry, and how committed they are to working with the public they serve to lead our community well. No wonder Paul charges Christians to pray for them...what they do is not easy.

It had been weeks since our church had met together for worship, prayer, communion, the Word. I was filming sermons mid-week to a camera. We were practically producing a tv show every week to try and keep our flock united, fed, and encouraged. Creativity was flowing, but the effort required with the pivot was Herculean. Our team had responded with eager hands. They were running hard and doing good, but it wasn't sustainable. We were producing daily devotionals and videos, calling every person in the church to check in every week, texting, emailing, calling some more, working from home, scrapping every plan we'd made for six months, and writing an entirely new playbook.

Our City Group leaders were killing it. The infrastructure of our small groups was working beautifully. People were connected, loved, pastored.

But the Church had always weathered hard times in the past by *getting together*, and that was the one thing we weren't allowed to do. Our rented facility wouldn't let us back in, and every alternative we tried...schools, county fairgrounds, parks...all were closed to public gatherings indefinitely. Never before had we needed our own building so badly, and never before had we been so close to having one. But there it sat, 30 days from completion, shut down, totally dead in the water. All the while, the government's construction jobs around town continued without a hitch.

Infuriating.

We sat together in my office (that in itself an illegal act...rebels!!) and asked a single question: In light of our town being choked to death, what could we do that would bring about the most relief for the most people as quickly as possible?

We started whiteboarding ideas. We didn't need a large whiteboard. There weren't that many ideas.

I called a member of our Elder Support & Advisory Team—a wise man well versed in local politics and business. He made a wild suggestion. I listened dumbfounded. This was my risk-management, level-headed, calm-demeanored ESAT guy. Had I heard him correctly?

“Josh, from where I sit, and from the conversations I'm hearing, it may be our only shot. All diplomatic options have been exhausted. Nobody's getting through. Olympia isn't moving, isn't talking. They've gone completely dark. I think it's probably our last, and only, resort.”

I hung up and voiced his idea to the elders. “He thinks we should sue the governor.”

We all sat in silence, each lost in thought, more than a little stunned. This was not how we saw our day going.

But the more we thought about it, the more it started to make sense. We were completely out of options. And it was not in us to sit helplessly by. Inaction was

not a strong suit of this group. This was coming from one of the most patient, reasonable men I knew. He was on ESAT for a reason. He brought wisdom, stability, and sense. If *he* thought it was this bad...holy smokes.

I started making calls. Mayors, sheriffs, county commissioners, state representatives, city council members—I wanted to float the idea and vet it with more perspective. Would that be helpful? Were there better options? Had every other alternative been tried?

Call after call, the word was unanimous. Everyone was being stone-walled. Olympia had gone into a bunker and closed the door.

When I shared the idea with them, each in turn affirmed it as the only option left.

One official told me, “You have to do this. It’s probably the only shot we’ve got. Otherwise, if I’m reading my political tea leaves right, I predict we’ll be in a modified version of Phase One all the way into August or September. We’ll lose in-person schools and there will be untold economic devastation. From there, it just gets worse.”

We both sat lost in thought. How had it come to this? He finally broke the silence, “If you do it,” he said, “I’ll back it 100%. This may be our community’s only shot. Inslee is totally out of control. We have to find a way to get back control of our town.”

I hung up a few hours later, having talked to almost every elected official in our community. The sentiment was the same. A path was beginning to emerge.

The elders talked in earnest. I was reminded again of my love for them as they processed each option with biblical wisdom and discernment. These were men of action, men of backbone, men of courage. They were leaders, fighters, shepherds, unafraid to answer the bell. They were serious men, intelligent men, able to think through complex problems and see three-dimensional solutions. Each man brought unique and substantive insight, each man’s input bringing us closer to our decision.

I made one more phone call to a political operative with connections to legal counsel. In 5 minutes I was on the phone with one of the sharpest constitutional lawyers in the state of Washington, Joel Ard.² I put him on speakerphone and laid out our proposal. He was a wealth of information. And a kindred spirit. An hour and 10 pages of notes later, we thanked him and told him we’d be in touch.

We debriefed. To the man, every elder agreed. This was our best play.

The decision was made. With the counsel and support of all nine ESAT members, we would initiate and lead a plaintiff coalition to legally challenge our

²See “Meet Our Attorney” on page 33 for a personal story on Attorney Joel Ard.

governor's overreaching powers through the established channels given to us as citizens in the court of law.

That is to say, we were going to sue the governor of the State of Washington.

A Warm Gathering of Perfect Strangers

Looking back now, the story of how it all came together through a simple conversation with my kids and a morning brainstorm with my elder team is remarkable. But what happened next was even more remarkable.

The afternoon we decided to move forward, I sent out a few text messages. "Meeting at my house tonight to discuss legal action against the state. Bring anyone who can articulate legal harm from the Phase 1 mandate and would be interested in being a plaintiff." I had no idea who would show up.

Three hours later, people started pulling in. Truck after truck rolled up to my farmhouse and out hopped patriots. Most were new faces to me. We greeted each other at the door, smiled, and broke the law with a handshake. We then made our way to the back porch where we continued to break the law by eating cherry pie and swapping names and stories. What commenced was one of the most endearing moments I've experienced as a citizen of these United States.

I met moms fighting for their kids, farmers for their family's legacy, husbands for their households, business owners for their employees, elected officials for their constituents, lovers of the law fighting for the law to be followed—a small town banding together to fight for the community they loved. It was right out of a Frank Capra movie.

We sat in a circle and shared our stories. And oh the stories. They were moving, mind-numbing, engaging, disheartening, and heart-warming all at once. I knew I was witnessing a special moment. A band of strangers being bonded by a common fight for survival, a common love for their community.

These people were some of the most remarkable, humble, courageous, community-minded people I had ever met. Owners of landmark businesses I'd enjoyed my entire life, but had never actually met in person, sat on my back porch and poured their hearts out.

These were salt of the earth people. Self-starters. Risk-takers. Action-oriented, up-before-the-sun kind of folks. The kind populating every small town across America. As they sat in a circle talking, sharing, laughing, and yes, crying, I was struck with the thought...it's not the politicians that make America amazing, it's the law-abiding, hard-working Americans who make America amazing. Shame on the politicians whose breathtaking arrogance assumed these people needed the government to tell them how to live their lives.

Finally, I stood, thanked them all for coming, and officially opened the meeting. I laid out the legal theory and strategy. It would be a long shot. If the legislature could reconvene, and the whole grip of power would be broken. We had three state representatives who were pulling for us, saying this might be the state's best shot at breaking the governor's stranglehold of power.

The stories of harm represented in that circle were truly heartbreaking. And though the economic devastation was catastrophic for some, terminal for others, and looming for all, we collectively decided to not seek damages from the state. The heart of the "Noble 46," as I would endearingly refer to them, was just that. They were not out for their pound of flesh. Nor was their posture that of victimhood. They were not asking for handouts; they were fighting for the right to go back to work.

This was not a spilled-coffee lawsuit for billions of dollars in "emotional harm suffered." These were real people whose life work and livelihoods were being burned to the ground.

And all they were fighting for was the right to live an un-harassed life. To get up every day and work hard for a living. No handouts. Just the right and freedom to run their business, work their job, make a living in their community by providing a service that benefited all. Remarkable.

The meeting went a little longer. There were a few questions. I answered what I could. I told them, if they were interested, to put their name on the list in the back. I asked if we could close in prayer. I said "amen," and we mingled on my back porch, breaking the law a little longer and eating Homefires Bakery cherry pie. Someone had brought a keg of homemade brew...he couldn't sell it at his restaurant so he handed out free pints. Nobody wanted to leave. The spring air was clear and it smelled like freedom.

After the last person had left, I checked the sign up sheet by the pies. Every person had put their name down.

We had our team.



The Play

The decision to move forward with legal action against the governor came after a long discussion between the elders on how best to act for the good of our community. We decided that it would be more effective for the community if the lawsuit was initiated by us acting as citizens rather than church leaders.

That tactic was intentional. The hope was to keep the case in a local court rather than a federal court, which would promise a quicker ruling and have a more broad-sweeping benefit to our community, as a whole, were we successful.

If we had taken the religious freedom road, it would have immediately put us on a federal court track rather than a local court track. This would take much longer. And if we won as a church, the victory would have limited application. Sure, we could have started meeting again on Sundays (which would be amazing). But how would that bring relief to the local business owner?

However, if we won as private citizens, the county would be released from the emergency order, local officials would be restored to power, the blanket proclamation would be broken, the state reps could call for session, and the governor's chokehold could be challenged state-wide. Every business could reopen in whatever capacity they worked out with local health officials. Small government would be restored. The potential impact for community good was much wider if we acted as citizens, so that was the road we took.

After much deliberation with locally elected officials and legal counsel, we decided to make the focus of the lawsuit not COVID-19 itself—our concern wasn't with the disease—but rather the governor's blatant usurping of local government when it came to legislative law regarding how the state *had already determined* we would handle a pandemic response.

The goal was to win back the right for our local community to govern itself. To allow our locally-elected officials to lead with the response they thought most effective in the face of the local crisis, just as the 2006 legislature had established as law.

In short, our goal was to put the decision-making power back in the hands of the capable people we had elected to run our community and who had been functionally put on the shelf overnight.

Our conviction was that the people who live here know our community. They could see firsthand what was happening and had the best perspective to make the best decisions for an effective response in our local community. They had the ear of the people and would know how to best use our community's vast resources and capacities. We are an exceptional

community of sharp thinkers and hard workers. Our confidence was high that we could handle this “pandemic” response. After all, firsthand knowledge is always better than second-hand hearsay when making leadership decisions. The sheer arrogance, let alone poor leadership strategy, of a centralized government response to uniquely local challenges was breathtaking. And exactly why the legislature had already spelled out with specificity that flu-like pandemic response was to be left in the hands of local authorities.

The goal was clear—restore the broad resources of our local government that had been neutralized by the governor’s emergency order, and decentralize power so that local citizens could once again have direct access to those making the decisions that would impact their daily lives. Having bureaucrats tucked safely away in capitol buildings making economic decisions they won’t feel, for people they’ll never meet—who have no recourse to challenge the unelected bureaucrats—was an abuse of power and a recipe for disaster.

With the mission clearly before us, we were off and running hard.

What ensued was the craziest 8 weeks of my 41 year life. Exhilarating, exhausting, educational, enlightening. I’ve never had an experience to match it. I met extraordinary people. I had extraordinary conversations. I ate a ton of Homefires Bakery cherry pie. I got an honorary degree in legal theory, constitutional law, and civics. I participated in Zoom calls I had no business being a part of. I strategized with elected state officials and brilliant legal minds. I witnessed firsthand acts of selfless generosity and teamwork. I picked the brains of some of the most interesting and intelligent people I’ve ever met. And in so doing, I encountered the heart and soul of what makes our nation so great—small town America still pumping strong with patriot lifeblood.

And with every meeting, the situation grew more complex. The state assigned 4 full-time attorneys...salaries paid by the tax dollars of the plaintiffs suing the governor for the right to go back to their jobs and make a living so they could keep paying their taxes. We had one volunteer attorney working pro-bono. The state had the entire media machine. We had a few of us writing and blogging and posting on social media. Governor Inslee was claiming to act for the little guy. They had a governor-appointed judge who had COVID during our trial and had to quarantine at home; we had a Hispanic lead plaintiff who couldn’t feed his family. The optics were wild, right out of a John Grisham novel.

Hours bled into days, days into weeks. We worked relentlessly. We were the very definition of grassroots. There was no morning, afternoon, or evening, just one steady stream of work.

You just couldn't make this up. It was epic.

The story is full of small town heroes and heartwarming moments. I've never been more proud to be an American than when working with those 46 gutsy plaintiffs. They weren't suing for lost earnings or millions of dollars in damages (that they would have been right in asking for). They were suing for the right to open their businesses, work their jobs, and have their own locally-elected officials make critical decisions for their community. It was a noble battle.

The point is this. The lawsuit wasn't an act of thoughtless emotion and anger (think rioting, burning, looting). It was not rebellious, roguish, or rash. It was not illegal. It was not even civil disobedience. It was a civil, measured act—extending our governor the courtesy and respect his office required. It was a mechanical step to set a legal process in motion. It was a lawful exercise of our right (and obligation) as citizens to use the *judicial* arm of our state government to challenge the *executive* arm because the *legislative* arm had been successfully usurped by an executive "emergency powers" declaration.

In other words, people's rights were being trampled by a rogue governor and his administrative state, and this was the legal means afforded us to address it.

The story of the actual suit itself is worthy of a book. Three hearings—replete with legal shenanigans from the state—kept us on our toes for weeks.

The energy the state threw against our case—from fighting tooth-and-nail, to getting it moved to the governor's home county, to dedicating four of their top litigators to fight our case—told us we were on the right track. Our suit was the single greatest threat to the governor's ongoing exercise of sole authority in the state. It was a dog fight at every turn.

The judge affirmed our legal theory and signaled a ruling in our favor, IF we could produce a plan from our local health department demonstrating both willingness and ability to respond to the COVID situation on their own, apart from the state.

Perfect, we thought. We had secured both of those things before we even started the suit, knowing the judge might ask. We had a signed letter from a local health official stating that COVID was not in danger of overrunning the hospital and they were ready to take control; we had health officials saying they were ready and willing; we had the plan they had written for just such an event. It was a slam dunk. All they had to do was produce a statement to the court affirming what they had already said.

They refused.

It was a dark and disheartening turn in the story. For brevity, the simplest way to put it is that the local health district failed us. By refusing to produce a legal statement to the court stating their readiness and ability, they were

essentially telling the judge that they were not ready to handle a local response. They were essentially asking the state to continue exercising its centralized control.

What they had said they wanted (local control) and what we had been fighting for (local leaders leading the response) was hanging in the balance. They simply needed to step forward and say, "we're ready."

The judge bumped our final hearing in an effort to give them more time to respond. But what we needed wasn't time, what we needed was a Health District that was willing to do its job.

They refused.

The judge had no choice but to rule against us, not because our legal theory was weak or our assertion of the governor's illegal proclamation of an emergency was wrong, but because the judge couldn't overrule the governor in the context of a pandemic unless the local health department said they were ready to do their job. At that point, it was an issue of public safety.

The judge ruled against us, with an apology for her ruling and an affirmation of our efforts.

We had gotten it to the 1 yard line, and the people who had said "give us the ball" failed to get out on the field for the final play. Time expired, and we lost.

I'm leaving out a ton of details for the sake of time and my sanity, but suffice it to say, this firsthand experience with cowardice, dereliction of duty, and the unwillingness of a few people in key positions of authority to lead locally was disheartening, to say the least. They failed the test of leadership and let down their community.

But I also witnessed the extraordinary grit, heart, and determination of a large number in our community that made me proud to live here. The doers, the makers, the true leaders of our town had shown their colors...they were up for a fight and were willing to put their names on the line.

When I considered all they had risked and accomplished in the face of crazy odds, when I considered how close we had come and what it would have meant for our town and our state had we won, this stands out as one of the proudest and saddest moments I can remember.

Time to Think Hard (Buckle Up)

That's all context and backstory to put the real issue I want to get at on the table. *Can you be a Christian and disagree with your government? Push back when they abuse power? Challenge them in a court of law? Exercise civil disobedience? Even refuse to obey them at times?*

How could I preach a sermon about respecting the governor and then lead a coalition to sue him two months later?

The answer is quite simple. Both the sermon and the lawsuit came from the same biblical and theological convictions. I did not change my beliefs. This wasn't principle whiplash. I did not use one verse for the sermon and another for the lawsuit. I functioned out of a consistent and cohesive worldview, stemming from theological convictions articulated most clearly by Paul in Romans 13 (but taught all through Scripture) and modeled by almost every major biblical figure.

In other words, the conviction that one could and should challenge a rogue government was deep in my heart even as I preached the sermon on extending our state's executive leader the benefit of the doubt in a moment of uncertainty and crisis. And the desire to honor the rule of law and those in authority was deep in my heart when I addressed those crazy patriots on my back patio and said, "So, thanks for coming tonight. I know I haven't met most of you. My name is Josh. What if we sued the governor?"

But to my surprise, I discovered some Christians who had not thought deeply on these issues.

Early in the process, I got a call from an out-of-town friend. He suggested to me that to be a Christian meant to honor and respect those in authority over us. I said I totally agreed. So when he asked me how I could square that with suing the governor, I was confused.

"Are you equating challenging him legally and requesting a court review whether or not he's acting in-line with the laws of our state and our Federal Constitution with being disrespectful?"

"Well, yes," he answered.

When I asked if he equated honoring and respecting with unequivocal obedience, he said, "But of course. What else could it mean?" And again, he referenced Paul in Romans 13.

I found this to be quite fascinating. I pointed to the difference between "honor" and "obey" when Paul talks about the relationship of little children to their parents (obey) and the relationship of grown children to their parents (honor).

"Do you think a child should obey a parent if the parent asks him or her to rob a bank?" I asked.

"Well of course not," he responded.

"But," he continued, "Paul said in Romans 13 that we are to obey whatever the governor says because they are in authority over us."

When I flatly denied that Paul meant anything of the sort, he bristled, then looked confused.

I changed tactics. Maybe church history would help. "Ever heard of William Wilberforce?" He had not. "You know, the guy who defied his government and broke the back of slavery? Or Martin Luther, the guy who defied his government and started the Reformation?" He was unfamiliar with these men. "Well, have you read anything by Francis Schaeffer?" I asked. Bingo.

"Oh yes, Schaeffer was a brilliant Christian author and thinker," he replied.

Great. Let's start there.

"Have you ever read his classic work, 'A Christian Manifesto?'" I asked.

He couldn't recall if he had. I continued.

"Well, I read it in high school. Do you know what the last four chapters covered? A biblical defense and argument for the Christian obligation to exercise civil disobedience against a rogue government, and he was speaking specifically of America in the late 70's and 80's." That seemed to surprise him.

I pointed out that our lawsuit was the furthest thing from civil disobedience (which is sometimes easier, faster, and certainly cheaper) and that it was actually the harder, slower, and more expensive way to go about challenging a government. Burning, looting, and rioting apparently get faster results these days.

But we chose to do it because it was the honorable, legal path to challenging the government in order to maintain healthy checks and balances for the good of the community and to attempt to restore authority and integrity to local government—the backbone of law and order. We weren't even coming close to approaching civil disobedience! Even so, civil disobedience, or at least the option to practice it, has always been an action that Christians have held as right, godly, and at times, absolutely necessary.

Whether I convinced him or not, I don't know. But the conversation was helpful nonetheless. What I assumed was common knowledge...namely, Christians having a working grid for active and even obligatory resistance to government and authority should government persistently act in evil or potentially abusive ways...was not. And why should it be? We haven't really had to think hard on this stuff before.

Snoozing Under the Warm Blanket of Freedom

The warm blanket of freedom enjoyed by Christians in this country has lulled many of us to sleep. We haven't had to think critically about critical issues. We haven't done good reading on the relationship between the Church and the State. We haven't thought deeply on the Christian's role in politics. We haven't reflected carefully on the rich history of Christian leaders and heroes who spent their lives locked in conflict with their governments. We've barely given thought to issues most Christians have been forced to confront and wrestle with the world over for millennia.

*In other words, we've had it pretty easy.
And as a result, we've gotten pretty soft.*

But most Christians throughout history have not had the luxury of our current ignorance.

The honest questions of my friend started the wheels turning in my head (small wheels, but they're there). So I started jotting down some thoughts.

The following 9 passages of Scripture came to mind the day I put the phone down after the previous conversation. I jotted them down in my journal and taught on them over the next two weeks to Grace City staff during staff lunch. I called it, *"A Biblical Case for the Obligation to Challenge the State and Exercise Civil Disobedience If Necessary in order to Live Out a Higher Allegiance to God than the State."* An Edwardsian title if ever I wrote one.

The staff all found it helpful and suggested I flesh it out more.

Below is a start.

It's not detailed. It's not thorough. It's not impressive, earth-shattering, footnoted, or fully-developed. It's a start. It's a sampling. An appetizer, if you will. A window into my thinking and the theological convictions and framework that existed when I preached the sermon in March and when I initiated the lawsuit in May—and what I think we will all need as the Church moving into the future.

Two different acts, same convictions at play. Two different sides of a house, same foundation supporting both.

As your pastors, the elders and I want to emphasize the need to think deeply on these matters. The days for this are not over. We want to teach the Bible in such a way that prepares us to live well in the face of crazy.

War Is Upon Us

There's a particularly great line in *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. Theoden, King of Rohan, is arguing with Aragorn about how to respond to the threat of imminent attack. In a telling moment, the king says, "I will not bring further death to my people. I will not risk open war." To which Aragorn responds, "Open war is upon you, whether you would risk it or not."

Aragorn's purpose is clear. He's trying to help the king realize that, like it or not, there is no safe play. War is upon him.

When I saw that scene, I thought...this is every pastor's job every Sunday—to help people see that the backdrop to every day following Jesus is open spiritual war.

Signing up to follow Jesus is signing up for battle. No two ways about it.

My motivation in articulating this to our church family is not to be pedantic but pastoral; not academic but practical. I want to stir an awakening. I hope to spark an interest in thinking about these issues more deeply.

Because, unfortunately, it is my prediction that our time is not over.

When governments get a taste for power, they rarely lose their appetite. When government control reaches into private lives, history shows that it rarely recedes without bold pushback.

When a government says they're doing something for the health and safety of its citizens, a thinking person has reason to be duly suspicious. Not because they're a "conspiracy theorist" but because they've read their history.

Do not forget...the 20th century began bright and full of hope. Building on the momentum of the enlightenment and the industrial revolution, the 20th century brimmed with the possibilities of ushering in a science and technology driven utopia for all mankind.

And by the end of the 20th century, governments the world over had killed more than 150,000,000 of their own citizens.

World Wars and a dozen smaller wars took millions more.

Because...ideas have consequences. Ideologies have inevitable outcomes. There is nothing new under the sun. Who's to say the 21st century will be any different? There's certainly no reason to think it will be, especially given the most recent fad of regurgitating terrible ideas—like marxism, socialism,

communism—and thinking they will usher in some sort of human bliss in ways they have *never done anywhere else when tried*.

Bad ideas are bad ideas no matter where they are tried or who tries them.

For those in academia, activist groups, and even our very government who are pushing and promoting these ideas, there can be only two alternatives. Either they possess *stunning ignorance* of history so as to be completely unaware of the inevitable outcome of their terrible ideas, or *staggering arrogance* so as to think they could take the same ideas that have historically led to mass bloodshed and employ them with the hope for a different outcome.

History is clear...no government that increasingly centralizes power has ever remained benevolent. This is why we have our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution. These documents are not mere paper, they are ideas. Ideas and ideals that we have lived into for almost 250 years. And living towards those ideas created the freest and most prosperous nation on the earth.

But it will take a thinking citizenry to keep it.

It would be the height of hubris to think that we would be immune from becoming what our forefathers despised. We're not that good.

The danger has not passed. No, the hour for us to stand against our greatest challenge may still lie before us. In fact, I will say it with more conviction...it most certainly lies before us.

We're going to have to ask God to help us be better men, better women, better Christians than we had to be yesterday. And the time to start is now.

My prayer is that this little booklet will help galvanize us as a church for when we are called to stand and walk a straight line through the foggy haze of war. As I write, I'm listening to the rain fall on my tin roof and all is peaceful in my little world. For the moment. But I do not think it will stay that way for long. The breach of personal sovereignty by the governor of our state will lead to more challenges, more intrusion, more battle. It's always the way these things go. Once men get a taste for power, their hunger is never satisfied. Combine that with a hostile culture to all things Christianity, and it is a recipe for conflict.

I'm not a doomsdayer, I am simply aware of history and its patterns. It would be arrogant to think we would be any different.

This is hard for us to picture in America, where we have enjoyed protections and freedoms unique to most humans throughout history. We have enjoyed a cultural pass. But those days appear to be coming to an end. Ours is now a culture that is ever-increasingly hostile to true tolerance and actual diversity. And, unfortunately, politics follows culture, which is why there are hard days ahead for the Christian and the Church in the U.S. of A.

But I also believe they will be glorious days, too. As a good friend often says, Jesus will advance His Kingdom, even if through a series of victories cleverly disguised as defeats.

And so I pray the previous short story and the following biblical teachings will help all of us, as a church, think critically about the Christian's relationship to their government. At the very least, what it will most certainly show you is the simple fact that biblical history is full of examples of people acting intentionally to defy their government, and doing it to the glory of God with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Our nation desperately needs (as every nation needs) Bible-saturated, critical-thinking, locally-active, Jesus-loving patriots. It is my prayer that these stories move us more towards that end.

What Will We Do With Our Moment?

I've heard many bemoan both the times and the state we currently live in (Washington). I do not blame them. I have done the same myself.

But my tune has changed. My heart has turned. As Spurgeon once said, "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me upon the Rock of Ages." With the rise of cultural Marxism, Black Lives Matter, anti-cop rhetoric and defunding police movements, cancel culture, #metoo movements, critical race theory, and COVID insanity, one would be tempted to think these are complicated times.

And one would be right.

And I believe we'll be better for it.

We'll be forced to think more deeply, read more widely, and act more courageously than ever before. We'll be forced to figure out what we actually believe and why we actually believe it. The days of middle-of-the-road, milk-toast Christianity are long gone. Thanks be to God.

We'll be forced to think for ourselves about the precious topics of liberty, freedom, justice, and the rule of law. These are things we took for granted, that others before us laid their lives down for, that we'll now be forced to

reckon with ourselves. We'll have to study the foundations upon which our little corner of the world was built and decide for ourselves, "Keep, or throw away?" Because, make no mistake, America is being presented with an alarming variety of leaders who are willing to do both.

Along the way, I hope we grow in appreciation and respect for the giants of generations gone by on whose shoulders we have unwittingly stood, and whose careful thinking resulted in the world of bountiful blessing we were born into. We've been given so much. What will we do with it?

My generation was handed a freedom we could not appreciate, obtained through blood by a generation gone by. We were born into the daylight reality of what they could only see at night in their dreams. But fight for it they did, and here we are now holding it. They had their moment. This will be ours. The only question left is, will we fight to keep it?

Oh, That's What He Meant!

Before 2020, when I read Patrick Henry's infamous words, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" I thought...wow, that guy was intense! But then I had a taste of my own liberties being curtailed, of the lives of my fellow citizens being dictated to them. I had my own personal taste of the human dignity of personal responsibility being taken away with the wave of a politician's hand, and I suddenly realized...oh my goodness...I get it. That's what he meant! Patrick Henry wasn't born brave, roaming the earth looking for ways to show it. He was a simple, faith-filled man with conviction and backbone, who was forced to deal with evil and tyranny. He wasn't a hero looking to pick a fight; he was simply a good man pushed too far.

As I read Henry's fiery speech to my kids on our summer road trip through the Badlands of North Dakota, I understood it for the first time. He'd rather be dead than be a slave to tyrants. He'd rather die fighting for freedom than live cowering to bullies.

Where is that generation? May God raise them up once again.

For the alternative is not really living.

There is God-given dignity in every human being, experienced through freedom, liberty, and the exercise of personal responsibility, that, once surrendered, changes a man forever. I remember the night I had told Sharon, "Something would have to die in me to just sit and watch this happen to my community. And I don't want to let it die."

That is the spark of dignity that God has put in the heart of every human being that tyrants have feared for millennia and have tried to bribe, threaten,

coerce, or squash. Even if we fail, when we stand and resist, we ensure the spark of freedom stays alive. When we cower, cave, and compromise, freedom *dies* in the heart of man. When we stand and fight in the face of evil, freedom *ignites* in the heart of man.

That's the kind of stuff I think about when I'm told it's illegal to leave my own house.

So yeah, you could say these have been strange days. And there is an opportunity to rise and meet them and be better for it.

Our Rich Tradition

The historical examples of galant and noble men, women and children of times past are legion, if we'd only take time to listen. Their stories rise from the ashes of history to speak courage and conviction to the land of the living.

Most of us forget that the vast majority of Christian heroes whose names we recognize are heroes precisely because they spent their life (and sometimes gave it) fighting against their governments. Luther, Calvin, Tyndale, Rutherford, Bunyan. These are but a few of the dozens of names we hear and think, "Now there was an exemplary Christian!"

Yet, would you be surprised to learn that most of them spent their days writing, working, and fighting against a government that oppressed the people of their day?

For example, many millions have read *Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*. It is the most widely read book in the world, second only to the Bible.

Yet few know that Bunyan spent years in prison because he refused to obey his government when they told him to stop gathering his church to worship Jesus and preach the Gospel. They viewed his preaching as a threat to public safety and order. And Bunyan did it all with his young handicapped daughter at home (without her dad) praying for her father to have the courage to hold to his convictions as he sat alone in his prison cell. A father aching for his daughter, a daughter growing up without a father, separated by force because he was a man of conviction.

Yeah. Like I said. We're pretty soft.

One of my prayers is that God would give me the wisdom to lead a church with grit and fortitude. I don't think we're in danger of being overwhelmed by Christians with grit and fortitude these days. But I'm praying God would raise us up to be such Christians. And who's to say these times aren't preparing us for just that?

There are better things than living an easy life and dying quietly in the night. Who knows, maybe God will grant us the grace and privilege of a few tussles on the field of battle before we live out our four-score-and-ten. Personally, I don't want to waltz into Heaven and Eternal Glory with my sword sheathed and a freshly-showered glow about me. I want to be dragged in bloodied and spent, with the vile stench of slain dragons dripping off a dull and battered sword.

There is good battle to make for those who have a heart of courage. I want to answer the bell when it's rung.

"Only one life, 'twill soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last."³

Now let me be perfectly clear—this is not a call to arms. But it is a call to think. And reason. And discern. And act with love, clarity, conviction, and boldness.

Peace-time often makes for sleepy citizens. Let us wake up. Let us read and wrestle with ideas. Let us consider what it might mean to lean boldly against the secular, hurricane-force winds of our day and get our feathers ruffled a bit. Let us not bemoan the times we live in, but let us thank the Lord that He would count us worthy to live in such times—ripe with opportunity for those ready for battle.

Let us resolve to be people who are not looking for the easy path but searching for every good path.⁴

Let us not make any deal with the devil for a little personal security today at the expense of our children's future. Let us not be ignorant of the trajectory of the human heart—so plainly painted on the canvas of the 20th century—that we miss the tell-tale signs of tyranny around us. Words matter. Ideas have consequences. We've been here before. Let us discern the times and know how we should act.⁵

³From *Only One Life* written by the missionary and poet, C.T. Studd.

⁴"For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding. He holds success in store for the upright; he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who have left the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways." Proverbs 2:6-15

⁵"From Issachar, men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do." I Chronicles 12:32

Let us not be so proud as to say, “Evil and atrocities would never happen in my lifetime in my America!” And let us not be so naive as to think that what is good and noble and true will come to pass without a scrap. So let us resolve, Grace City Church—here on the precipice of a new day in our new home—to answer the call to spiritual arms. To be men and women who pray. Men and women who read. Let us be men and women who bow their knee to the King, so they can stand in the face of the enemy, to love people and serve their community.

Let us not be men and women known for our witty tweets but men and women known for our noble lives. To not leave a string of people burned on social media but a lineage of lives redeemed and legacies restored. To be active in the public square and present in our homes. To be men and women of thoughtful action. To gird up our loins, dress for battle, and stand.

It only takes thumbs and a little effort to tweet out pithy sayings. It takes heart and sustained grit to live out a worthy life. May we always be found striving for the high country of a life well-lived, not wallowing in the lowlands of a social media grand-stander.

We modern-day Christians are mostly aware that the man who wrote some of our favorite verses in the New Testament about love (“Love is patient, love is kind”), wrote most of his best work from the floor of a prison cell. But have we ever asked why he was in prison? Because, dear friend, Paul acted in direct defiance to the government of his time. He wouldn’t stop preaching the Gospel, proclaiming a higher allegiance to Jesus than Caesar, because he wouldn’t stop gathering the Church to worship.

And we’re afraid of some fines?

Dear Christian, do you realize that the Apostle Paul was in jail precisely because he sued the Roman government and challenged the governor of his region?! He was accused of spreading “misinformation,” and therefore deemed a threat to public safety and order for his preaching of the Kingdom of God, and thrown in prison.

And if you think that sounds far-fetched today, you aren’t paying very close attention.

There really isn’t anything new under the sun.

Is This Our Bonhoeffer Moment?

One last historical figure. We’d be hard-pressed to talk about Christians and their relationship with hostile governments and not mention the great theologian, writer, pastor, spy, and martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

In this time of unprecedented government intrusion into our daily lives, I've heard people ask the question, "Is this our Bonhoeffer moment?"

In case you're not familiar with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he was a German theologian in the 1930's. He was also a pacifist. It wasn't until he was deep into the Nazi reign of terror that he changed his position from appeasement and compliance and understood that it was actually his Christian duty to stand up and act—to the extent that he planned to assassinate Adolf Hitler.

Quite the change of heart, wouldn't you say?

But you can't fully appreciate it until you read of his mental anguish, the philosophical blood, sweat, and tears he shed to arrive at that position. It's a beautiful journey to watch unfold by the pen of an exceptionally talented and articulate man.⁶

So is this our Bonhoeffer moment? Not in the sense of considering acts of violence. But rather, in the sense of waking up to the reality of tyranny and doing something about it. Or should we lay low and go quietly into the night, hoping to not draw any attention now or offend anyone, lest they say something mean about us on Facebook?

Here is my response: I think Bonhoeffer blew it.

I hope that doesn't sound arrogant or disrespectful. That is not my intention.

He was an extraordinary man. Allow me to explain.

What if he had stood up years earlier? What if he had spoken up louder, longer, sooner? Would there have been need for bloodshed had he acted before Hitler had grown the Third Reich into a superpower?

I simply don't think we should wait for our "Bonhoeffer moment." I think we should live so as to avoid the need for it. Waiting for a "Bonhoeffer moment," by definition, means waiting too long.

I'll steal a line from the early pandemic crazy days: "All things done before a pandemic will seem extreme; all things done after a pandemic will be not enough." Or something like that.

Ok, let's apply that to tyrants. To rogue administrative states. To executive branches at both the state and federal level who increasingly void the need for legislatures or courts with their autonomous exertion of authority and

⁶Eric Metaxes' biography of Bonhoeffer would be a worthy read for you if your interest is piqued.

power. Speak up too soon and you'll sound like a lunatic conspiracy theorist. Speak up too late and it will be, well, too late.

So yes, Bonhoeffer became a model of courage when the conviction finally came, but he's certainly no model for timing of when to stand up. Whether it was cowardice or a true conviction of pacifism, we may never fully know. We do know he waited too long. And with the capacities of his mind and pen and influence, *he could have done more, sooner.*

What if he had been bolder, louder, sooner? What if he had stood up against Hitler when Hitler only had 37% of the vote and was bullying people around wantonly and making people nervous? There was a time when Hitler could have been opposed without bloodshed.

Appeasing bullies never works. Compliance with coercion never ends well. Asking and begging for that which God granted as an inalienable right is to sacrifice one's dignity as a human.⁷ And to be thankful when the tyrant grants you a cup of goulash is to have lost the plot for what we were made for.⁸

Waiting too long only gave Bonhoeffer fewer options, not more.

And waiting around certainly didn't help the witness of the Church who (mostly) stood by silently while Jewish friends were carted off towards the rising smoke on the horizon.

The point: I don't think it's noble or admirable to miss the signs of tyranny and wait until they're burning Jews alive in human ovens before you finally take a stand. I'd rather be the guy who stood up before we got there, stopped the slide into madness, died quietly, and was totally forgotten by history because all was peaceful and calm when I left. That sounds like a good way to go.

But enough talk about dying for our faith. Let's talk about living for our faith. The times they are a-changin'. And I could not be more excited. These are days for courage. These are days for grit and fortitude. These are days for backbone and humility, tenderness and toughness, love and patience, razor-sharp logic and Spirit-born discernment.

These are days for clarity and conviction of heart, courage and confidence in the face of threat and coercion. These are not days to cower to empty

⁷Which so many local officials did when asking for "permission" to allow businesses to open.

⁸ Which so many local officials did when they gushed over how kind the governor of WA state was to allow us to move to the next "phase," once he had deemed it safe.

threats...stand now while we still can. These are not days to be “measured and reasonable”...the enemy is counting on that, and while we’re sitting dutifully at the table waiting to have a reasonable conversation to see if we can “work this out,” they are flanking us with soldiers and putting our towns to the sword, laughing all the while at how dimwitted we are. These are not days to hold back; these are days to push back hard and check rogue actors crossing jurisdictional lines.

These are days for the Men of Issachar to rise again—for Christians to know the times and discern how the Church should live in the face of great evil and opposition.

In other words, these are great days to be alive, Grace City. It’s a privilege to be on Team Jesus with you.

I realize what I say next may make it irrelevant to the future, but context is everything, so allow me to time-stamp this moment. I’m writing this letter to you through the middle of the night in the middle of what some would call a tumultuous week. It’s the middle of October 2020 and we have been scrambling to finish our building and obtain our occupancy permit for our new church home. We’ve been homeless and online for seven months. I’ve preached 31 sermons to a camera. I’m ready to see our church family face-to-face!

In a few days we will gather as a church for the first time in our new home, and in so doing defy whatever recent proclamation the governor of my state has deemed law this week.⁹ Not that anyone could actually keep up with his rule-making, but there’s a good chance our gathering will be deemed “illegal.” We’ve been blogged about, lied about, threatened with lawsuit, threatened by L&I, the health district, and other nefarious actors. We will not comply. They don’t get to tell us when we can or can’t worship Jesus.

But the future is unknown. I’ve received multiple emails from people screaming that we are in the middle of a world-ending pandemic and that if we meet as a church, we will become a super-spreader and hundreds of people will die in our valley. And their blood would be on our hands.

I know. Oh joy. Just how I was hoping the opening weekend our new home we’ve been dreaming of and working on for six years would go. People accusing me of killing our valley.

Oh, and we’re three weeks before an explosive election. And the next Supreme Court Justice is being grilled before the nation, as I write. And the media is losing their mind. What could possibly go wrong?

⁹One of the ways you take away a tyrant’s power is to ignore them and refuse to pay attention to their narcissistic demands.

So allow me to end this story like this.

Remember, dear friend, beloved brother and sister in Christ, for the Christian, every day is the History Channel.

We know the outcome. We know the end. Jesus conquers all and sweeps all who are with Him up and into a victory the likes of which this world has not yet beheld.

These aren't sentimental musings, these are rock-solid realities: Jesus wins in the end, the rest is just details.

And remember, the Father does His best work in the hardest times. The hotter the fire, the brighter His presence. May we know His presence more and more every day, especially in times that grow darker and darker by the moment.

Well, night has slipped away. The rain is still pouring on my tin roof as I write.

But the morning light has started to break on the eastern horizon.

What a lovely reminder that though the darkness of the night is long, lonely, and cold...the morning, the morning! It always comes. Bright. New. Full of hope and pregnant with possibility. So, too, will the Son dawn on the horizon of history again, and when He comes He will scatter the night and usher in a new Forever-Morning—full of eternal hope, ushering in infinite possibilities of discovery and joy.

Oh what a day, a glorious day, that will be.

I love you Grace City. Let's live *this* day in light of *that* Day.

No fear. No regrets. All in for One Name.

Sharon and I pray for you often. We can hardly wait to be with you, in person, in our new home, soon. We have nothing to fear. And for the times to come, I pray the following helps.

Who knows? Maybe by the time you read this we'll have shared a long-overdue bear hug. I would like that very much.

Pastor Josh

October 14th, 2020
Monitor, WA

Meet Our Attorney

I first met Attorney Joel Ard on the news when watching him represent four State Representatives challenging the governor's emergency powers. He was at a press conference in downtown Seattle, fielding questions from a hostile media. His poise and quickness on his feet impressed me. I sent the clip to dozens of friends, commenting, "Look at this guy go!"

I had no idea I'd be on the phone with him two weeks later.

On that call with our elders, we were all impressed by his measured, intelligent, principled, and passionate patriotism.

He would go on to put in hundreds of hours to represent us as our legal counsel. At every turn, and with his every word and action, I was honored and proud to have him speak for us. He stood and did battle against the entire legal force of Washington State. He was one legal mind, they had hundreds at their disposal. He made them sweat and took them to the mat.

When I asked him how we should pay him, he looked at me and said, with an earnest conviction in his eyes, "Our lead plaintiff is being told by our governor he can't work. He can't get unemployment. That means Jose can't feed his family. His kids are eating rice and beans. Our 45 other plaintiffs can't go to work. This isn't about money, I couldn't in good conscience charge for this. We need to win this so the people can get back to work."

No fanfare, no gimmick, just an earnest conviction that this kind of injustice shouldn't be happening in his America. He represented us pro bono.

I've often made jokes about how lawyers and attorneys are the problem with our country. Joel Ard isn't one of them. He represents the best. Over many weeks, I got to know his family as they stayed in our home. His children are kind, mature, thoughtful, intelligent. They have a warm relationship with their dad. They are proud of the work he does, and he's proud of the adults they're becoming.

I'll never forget eating dinner on the back porch of my home with 20 or so of the plaintiffs after the day we had our first hearing. We sat eating steak from Mike's Meats (that Mike donated and grilled himself!) and cherry pie, laughing genuinely and talking earnestly.

At the end of the meal, we raised a toast to our attorney, Joel Ard. I will never forget his words. As the good-natured cries for "speech, speech" died down, all eyes turned to him. He bowed his head and, beginning in a low voice, started speaking:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,

that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it..

What we are doing here with this action, and even in the eating together of this meal, is saying with one voice, 'We do not consent.' And in the face of injustice and tyranny, that is a noble thing."

There was a murmur of "hear, hear" as we solemnly raised our glasses of iced tea and let the weight of his words land on us. Until that moment, I don't know if I had ever fully felt my responsibility as a citizen to my country. My throat tightened and my vision blurred. What others had bled and died for, I was just beginning to feel the gravity of. Never again would I take for granted the freedoms I had enjoyed for 41 years. It changed me. It was a moment I'll never forget.

You would be hard pressed to find a better man than Joel Ard. For his passion for justice, his knowledge of the law, his relentless work ethic, his deeply-held morals, his earnest faith in God, his military service, his tactical mind, his no-quit heart, his intelligent wit, his hearty laugh, and his fundamental goodness, I am forever grateful. He's the kind of man you're better for knowing.

Perhaps the most telling thing I could say is, as I recall his friendship and noble effort throughout this ordeal, hot tears sting my cheeks.

He is a devoted Catholic, a loving father and husband, and someone I count as a dear friend. For what he's taught me in both word and deed, I will be forever grateful.

Part Two

9 Biblical Stories Of Christians And Their Government

What follows is not an attempt to say everything there is to say on these topics or these passages. It's intended rather to lay a beginning foundation. To whet your appetite for further study. My prayer is that the following would help give solid footing in slippery times. I offer this with the same words my grandma would use any time she put a plate of food down in front of me, "such as it is..."

1

Paul Teaches on the Church and State

Romans 13:1-7

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. 4 For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. 6 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7 Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Some Textual Observations

1. God has established the jurisdiction of government. It's His idea.
2. Submission to authority is a consistent theme in scripture and the foundation for order, blessing, unity, and human flourishing.
3. God gives the jurisdiction of government authority to exercise power for the sake of peace and the good of those it oversees.
4. Government has a very clear and limited role—to discourage evil behavior by punishing it and to encourage good behavior by rewarding it—so that society can flourish. It has no jurisdiction over the household (i.e. parents over children) or matters of the Church (i.e. elders overseeing a church). The focus is civil government and society. Government is to be a friend of the one who lives righteously and an enemy to those who do evil.
5. Punishing evil and rewarding righteousness begs the question...who gets to define what is evil and what is righteous? If a person in a government calls robbery a righteous act and worshipping God an evil act, does that make it so? No, it does not. God defines what is righteous and what is evil. Therefore, government rules not on the foundation of its own law but on the foundation of God's moral law. If you remove God's moral law from the foundation or context of government, you will quickly get an unrighteous government that abuses its authority and thus, goes against God Himself.
6. Officers in government are *in* authority as ones *under* authority. They act on *behalf* of God and answer to God. Their authority is a *delegated* authority not an *autonomous* authority. Their authority is *derived* from God's moral law not *independent* of God's moral law. This is very important to remember, especially when governors act as if they are not accountable to anyone. They may be able to twist the law so as to avoid the accountability of the people, but they will one day answer to God. This is a sovereign (and comforting) reality.
7. God put the government in authority over its citizens to uphold the moral law of God. When the government fails to do this, they fail in their sacred responsibility and should not be followed down the road of folly.

Implications and Applications

- When the government rewards or tolerates the actions of evildoers (let's say, rioters, looters, and abortionists) and punishes those who do good (let's say, hairdressers, restaurant owners, small businesses, and nurses who won't violate their conscience by taking a vaccine), it is violating its sacred responsibility before God. That government is in the wrong and should be righteously opposed.
- When the government violates its sacred responsibility before God, and steps outside its very limited bounds of authority, it is the responsibility of pastors, church leaders, and Christians to remind them of that as loudly and firmly as is necessary. We see this in the testimony of all the apostles.
- When a government steps into the Church and tells it what it can and can't do, it is in the wrong. It has now moved outside its jurisdictional bounds, violating its sacred responsibility before God and working against God Himself. To submit to that would be to violate God's command to submit to Him over human authorities when human authorities make laws contradictory to His.
- When a government steps into the home and tells parents what they can and can't do in the raising of their child (sex ed, school choice, homeschooling, school curriculum, quarantining sick kids), it is violating its sacred responsibility before God and working against God Himself. Parents have an obligation to stand up and say "no."
- When a government steps outside its jurisdiction, it does so without the blessing of God and places itself in opposition to God. It has now become the lawbreaker. It has now become the scofflaw undermining the value of rule of law. It is then the responsibility of the other jurisdictions (church and family) to remind the government, as a healthy check and balance, that it is out of line. Gently at first, stronger over time if necessary, but always in an attitude of honor for the role of government, as a friend of the government, as a lover and respector of the rule of law, and bound by ultimate allegiance to God.

- There is a law higher than the government, and that is the moral law of God. When the government becomes the lawbreaker, as has happened over and over throughout history, it remains the obligation of the other jurisdictions to stand against it without flinching. When the government (or a specific actor within a government, such as a governor) acts out immorally, it is the role of the Church to speak against that immorality in the clearest possible terms. Blind allegiance and unthinking compliance to any and all government laws and mandates could lead to sin and put one in opposition to God.
- God put the government in authority over citizens for the good of the citizens. When the government harms its citizens, it fails in its role and must be addressed by its citizens.

Conclusion of the Matter

This passage has often been wrongly used by pastors and Christians to argue for blind allegiance and unthinking compliance to any and all government laws and mandates. Paul teaches *no such thing*. He teaches that the government is under God's authority, limited in its scope. Just as individuals should fear going against a righteous government's rule, governments should fear going against God's moral law. When citizens respond with naive or cowardly appeasement towards a government's unrighteous rule and law, they could actually be in sin and in opposition to God.

Paul is describing jurisdictions and responsibilities. The Christian has an obligation to submit to the authority of government when it acts righteously. The Christian also has a higher obligation to act in obedience to God when that government acts unrighteously or requires the Christian to act in an ungodly way. Governments are under God's authority. God does not stand behind or in support of the abusive parent, the heretical pastor, or the tyrannical government, and failing to oppose them could actually align oneself with them (silence is support) and put one in opposition to God.

We see this most clearly in Paul's example of how he acted when he ran into unrighteous authority in government, which leads to our next passage.

2

Paul Challenges Civil Magistrates, Sues The Roman Government, and Acts Out Civil Disobedience

Acts 22:23-39

As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 24 the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. 25 As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" 26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen." 27 The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am," he answered. 28 Then the commander said, "I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied. 29 Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

Some Textual Observations

1. The reason for Paul's arrest is that he is preaching the Gospel and stirring up division in the culture, because his Gospel demands allegiance to God above Caesar. In other words, Paul is deemed a threat to public health and safety.
2. Paul is illegally detained by the Roman government, and he points this out. He does not "go along" with them violating the law, even though they are the government. He calls them out on their hypocrisy and lawbreaking. His question is a threat. With the power given to Roman citizens, it was the equivalent of him lawyering up.
3. Of important note, Paul doesn't make a *biblical* case for the wrongness of his arrest, he makes a *civil* case by appealing to Roman law. Paul is saying, "What you're doing is wrong, and I'm going to hold you accountable for forcing the issue." He's working within established law to demand righteousness from the governing authorities. Later in the chapter when they try to sweep their error under the rug, he will have none of it. He demands public accountability.

Implications and Applications

- The application of Paul's teaching in Romans 13 is fully on display through his actions in Acts 22. The same guy who wrote about respecting the government brazenly challenges that same government. And that's where we can be grateful that, in God's wisdom, He not only gave us the teaching of the Apostle Paul but the testimony of how Paul lived it out. In Paul we have both, "*This is what God teaches about government*" and "*This is what it looks like lived out in the face of a scofflaw government.*"
- No man is above the law or a law unto himself, even if he is in a supposed position of authority. Notice, Paul was holding them accountable when they stepped outside established Roman law. This applies to legislators and governors. They are not free to act as they want; they are bound to the law. And it remains the responsibility of the citizens to remind them of that when they step outside the law.
- Paul's actions here were founded on his extensive knowledge of Roman law: he knew his rights and he stood for them. It is incumbent upon the Christian to do the same. We must know the law and hold publicly elected officials accountable when they act unrighteously and step outside the law. This would be today's equivalent of us knowing the Constitution. We must never forget...the highest law of the land is not a police officer, a mayor, a legislature, a governor, or a president...it is our Constitution of the United States. All citizens and government officers must submit to it. When the government acts out of line with that Constitution, it is the obligation of the citizen, and especially the Christian, to stand against that government and expose its

abuse of the law. When a Christian does this, he or she is not acting in hostility towards government, but as a friend and advocate of righteous government. To dismiss one's obligation to this responsibility by simply saying, "the governor said it, so we must obey it," is lazy, irresponsible, and unbiblical. As Paul's testimony clearly shows, God demands more from us as followers of Jesus. The Christian's hands are never tied. We will always have the obligation to find a way to act so that righteousness and justice prevail.

Conclusion of the Matter

We have no need to wonder how the author of Romans 13 would live in the face of government malfeasance. We have it detailed for us in the last 8 chapters of Acts. Acts 21-28 is a worthy read, especially in light of recent (and unprecedented) experiments of government intrusion into our personal liberties, despite being citizens of a country that has constitutionally-protected rights.

To conclude from Romans 13 that a Christian's duty is to obey the government at all times and under any circumstance is to take the divinely inspired *teaching* of the Apostle Paul and disconnect it from the divinely inspired *witness* of the Apostle Paul.

Paul saw ruling authorities as being under authority themselves. They weren't an authority unto themselves; they were under the authority of the law. And that authority was under the authority of God. Paul had no problem challenging these men legally and publicly when they stepped outside the bounds of Roman law. He didn't care how important they were or what position they held. No one was above the law.

So we see that when the government overstepped its authority and acted unjustly, Paul used the legal channels and means available to him to confront and challenge the government to act justly.

But the story does not end there. Further on in Acts, the government, upon realizing they had acted outside the law, attempted to cover it up by bribing Paul with his freedom... "We let you go, you agree not to say anything about this little, um, misunderstanding, see?"

But Paul would have none of it. This attempt at bribery to silence him only spurred him on. He made a public spectacle of their malfeasance by demanding a public trial and airing their abuses in authority to the entire world. In other words, he sued them. He challenged and confronted them and appealed to the authority that was over them, which was the law.

This is critical for the Church to understand. What Paul gave the government was not a blind, unthinking submission to the tribune. No. He said, you and I both are men under authority, and that authority is the law.

It's not just blind obedience to a governor or state actor that the Bible requires, but a higher allegiance to God, because governors, too, are men and women under the law.

Churches have gotten stuck this year bemoaning that "the governor said we can't do this or that." And out of a desire to honor this authority and obey Paul's teaching in Romans 13, they fail to remember Paul's example in Acts 21-28. When Paul was about to be abused, he appealed to the law. When he was inhibited in exercising his freedom of religion, he pushed back. When the law of man contradicted the law of God, he stood and challenged it. And churches fail to remember Paul's jurisdictions. The government has no jurisdiction over the Church. The government has no God-given authority over matters of the church. That is the jurisdiction of the church leaders, not a governor. We do not look to the governor for permission to worship God.

Thanks be to God we live in a Constitutional Republic. Neither our governor nor our president represent the highest law of the land. The highest law of the land is the Constitution. When our rights are trampled, just as Paul's were, we have every right, even a responsibility as a Christian, to step up, challenge the wanton rogue authority, and appeal to that highest Constitutional Law.

In Acts 28:31, we read, "*And Paul finished out his days preaching the Kingdom of God...*"

What does this mean? It means that Paul didn't bow to the government's proclamations that told him to stop. Paul finished out his days *practicing civil disobedience every day*.

When living out one's Christianity becomes illegal, civil disobedience becomes obligatory.

Paul preached that in the Kingdom of God there was a King who was higher than Caesar. And they eventually killed him for it. But why exactly? The Romans were not anti-religion. Rome was very religious. You could worship any god you wanted, including yourself. They killed Paul because *his preaching of the Kingdom of God was deemed to be a threat to public interest and safety*.

Don't miss that. We often do, and it's a big miss. Paul's preaching of freedom in Christ was a threat to tyrants who controlled the populous with fear and threat of punishment. They recognized the threat to their totalitarian regime that gave people the illusion of freedom, so they attempted to squash it.

In Christ, the believer has no fear of man; therefore, a tyrant can have no power where Christianity takes hold. Which is why true Christianity is a threat to tyranny everywhere, in every age.

3

John the Baptist Publicly Calls Out a State Leader's Sin

Mark 6:14-29

King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." 15 Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." 16 But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!" 17 For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 20 because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

21 Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. 22 When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." 23 And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom." 24 She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered.

25 At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27 So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, 28 and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. 29 On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Some Textual Observations

1. Herod, the highest-seated government official in the region, was living an immoral life, and John the Baptist called him out on it publicly, repeatedly.
2. Herod, the highest-seated government official in the region, was not above a) sinning, b) violating the law, c) nursing petty grudges, and d) breaking the law himself and using his authority to silence voices of reason and righteousness.
3. John's witness and testimony had won him a friend in Herod, even though he spoke against Herod, because Herod respected John's integrity.
4. Cowardice will make a man do terrible things, like violate his conscience and break the law, which Herod did in killing a righteous man to cover up his sin and protect his reputation with the dinner guests.
5. Standing up for righteousness will not always mean you win in the short term. It might mean you become an example of righteous courage to the world but lose your head.

Implications and Applications

When the governor of Washington State began stepping out of legal bounds with COVID-19 policies and demonstrating breathtaking incompetence in leadership, I wrote about it on social media. I believed his actions to be reckless, unethical, and immoral. I didn't mince words. I spoke plainly and with conviction. I posted it with a clear conscience, went to bed, and woke up to a social media hailstorm.

The post had gone viral in less than 12 hours. We weren't in Kansas anymore. People I'd never met from community leaders to politicians to media outlets were contacting me for interviews, speaking engagements, and requests to meet. It was overwhelming—but not surprising—given the number of people who were being so negatively and drastically impacted by our governor's overreach.

But what did surprise me was a conversation I had with a fellow Christian.

The call came later that day from an out-of-town friend I rarely heard from. "You're being unnecessarily harsh on the governor and I can't support you doing that." Okay, I thought, great to hear from you too.

This believer was in a state that was completely open. When I suggested that his context might not give him the best perspective on the situation the people in my church and community were facing, he didn't budge an inch. "You're still wrong."

While it didn't surprise me that someone would disagree with me, I was surprised by the reasons he gave for his disagreement. "You're a Christian. You disagreeing with the government is going to hurt your testimony and the witness of the Gospel."

When I asked this believer if he thought what our state's governor was doing was immoral, he said, "Yes." When I asked if he thought what I had written was an accurate and fair representation of the facts, he said, "Yes." When I asked him why he thought it inappropriate that I express that and call the governor out on it, he said again, "Well, you're a pastor, you're well respected, you should think about the reputation of your church. It just doesn't seem very nice to say things publicly like that about an elected official."

So to review, he agreed what the governor was doing was immoral and unjust—and that it would result in many people being hurt—but still felt it was "wrong" for a Christian pastor to point this out publicly.

When I asked him for further reasons why, he couldn't get beyond, "Well, it just doesn't seem nice."

And that, in a nutshell, is what's wrong with some Christians' responses in these days.

They have a higher allegiance to being "nice" than standing for righteousness. This is an example of American Christianity, in which we think the highest virtue is being perceived as likable, rather than doing the hard work of thinking and articulating truth.

I was genuinely surprised by the shallow reasoning of this fellow Christian.

Now please don't get me wrong. I'm not arguing for being a jerk. But we have to start thinking a little more critically about how we engage with culture.

Winsome? Yes. Godly? Absolutely. Humbly? A must. And if Jesus is our example, let us not forget that He wielded biting sarcasm, insulting irony, and gut-punching logic to totally and completely undress and destroy His enemies. And He did it very, very publicly.

And we see it over and over again in the Bible—both Old and New Testaments—example after example of God's servants, filled with the Spirit of God, speaking biting truth to those in power.

This is not a justification to fire off at any moment. It is merely to point out the biblical precedent of God's servants calling sin "sin," no matter who's committing it.

John the Baptist was a man full of the Holy Spirit and was anointed by God for ministry.

John taught that the moral law was God's and that even government officials were under its authority.

John called out phony church leaders and called them slippery snakes and rats trying to scramble off a sinking ship (see Luke 3:1-9).

And in our text above, John the Baptist told everyone who would listen to him, through multiple open-air public sermons, that Herod was a sexual deviant and was carousing around with a woman who was not his wife.

In other words, he used the public communication channels of his day to make as many people as possible aware that their governor was acting outside the law.

When Herod made a mockery of it, John openly confronted and condemned them both, by name.

John the Baptist's public exposure and condemnation of Herod's infidelity was so offensive and threatening and disruptive to the powers that be that they cut off his head.

But here's the clincher. When Jesus heard that John had lost his head for standing up and speaking against the governor of his day, Jesus did not condemn John's actions but rather wept for the loss of this courageous and faithful servant. Jesus did not reprimand his followers for calling out sin in the world—He encouraged it.

If not John the Baptist, who? If not the pastors and preachers, who? Truth isn't just for Sunday morning church, it's for Monday afternoon life.

4

Samuel Obeys God...And Commits An Act of Treason

Samuel 16:1-4

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king." 2 But Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me." The Lord said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' 3 Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate." 4 Samuel did what the Lord said.

Some Textual Observations

This one struck me upside the head when I read it. Several shocking points stood out to me. I'll list them here in descending order.

1. Saul wasn't voted into office by popular vote. No, God was the One who hand-selected Saul for His role as king. Therefore, we have a clear example in which Saul was God's anointed king and put in authority, quite literally, by *God Himself*.
2. Saul is still king when this story takes place. He's still in the office with the title and the key to the nuclear codes. That is important for what follows.
3. God can reject a man's *moral* authority even when he's still in *positional* authority. Here, God has clearly rejected King Saul and is moving on to prepare another king.
4. God's assignment to Samuel is dangerous because God's command to Samuel is treasonous. *What God is telling Samuel to do is treason*—anointing a different king while the current king sits unaware on the throne.
5. Samuel confirms the treasonous order of God by noting that if he's caught, he'll be killed for...wait for it...*treason*. To put it bluntly: those who say following Jesus requires unquestioned obedience to any and every government actor have simply never read their Bible.
6. God gives Samuel a cover story. This is amazing! God not only gives Samuel a treasonous command (go anoint a new king) but also gives Samuel a cover story (tell them you're going to make an offering). God tells Samuel to be prepared to lie, and use worshipping God as the lie, in order to not get caught and so be able to carry out God's treasonous command.

Conclusion of the Matter

Was God's command truly treasonous? In one sense—in Samuel's immediate political context—absolutely yes. But in the cosmic context—absolutely not. God was Samuel's ultimate authority. The only treasonous act here would have been if Samuel disobeyed God. So too, Christians hold a higher allegiance to God than to man. When the two come in conflict with one another, we don't blink, hesitate, pray or ponder; the Christian has an obligation to obey God over man. We give respect to the office of governor or president; we give ultimate allegiance to God.

5

Hebrew Midwives Lie to Pharaoh

Exodus 1:15-21

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 16 "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." 17 The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. 18 Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive." So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

Some Textual Observations

1. The most powerful man in the world gave the Hebrew midwives a direct order to perform certain medical procedures. If they did not comply, there would be dire consequences.
2. The Hebrew midwives disobeyed this direct mandate from the king. But let's not miss the significance of their actions. This was not a power-tripping governor issuing edicts from press conferences. This was the man who was viewed by the entire nation as a god. The King of Egypt was himself the highest rule of law. To put this into an American context, his word was akin to a living Constitution. So yeah, this was a big deal.
3. The Hebrew midwives had backbone and convictions. They would not violate their consciences with the weak excuse, "Well the king made me do it, so I had no option." They knew this would have been the cowardly, compromising response. They feared God, not man, and determined that even though the order was law, it violated the higher moral law of God. Their decision tree was simple. They were free to obey God.
4. This is perhaps the most shocking to our soft sensibilities as American Christians. When asked about whether or not they had obeyed, they lied to cover it up! They, in absolutely good conscience, lied to the most powerful man in the country. They were clear...we do not owe absolute allegiance to a man pretending to be god. They were not bound to unrighteous and immoral "laws." They were free moral agents bound to the higher law of God.

Conclusion of the Matter

In response to the Hebrew midwives lying to the king and sparing the Hebrew babies, God rewarded them richly. Don't miss that. God was pleased with their actions. God rewarded them for their faithfulness to Him, which they'd demonstrated by opposing the government they were under, lying to cover it up, and protecting those involved. In so doing, they upheld the moral law of God and serve as a courageous example to us, in our day.

If there would have been American Christians there that day, instead of the gritty Hebrew midwives, I wonder if some babies would have died. And God would have held them accountable.

We've grown soft in our day and age. We've become accustomed to waiving our moral obligation off and blaming those in authority, "Well, they said I had to do it, so I didn't have a choice." Friend, you always have a choice. The follower of God is under no compulsion or obligation to do anything outside of obeying God. To think any other way is cowardice-in-spirit or cloudy-in-thought. It is lazy Christianity, not true Christianity. We are not victims of unrighteous rule of law; we have the permission and authority from God to act as free moral agents in courageous ways that uphold God's moral law, as far as we are able.

6

David Demonstrates Noble Respect for His King (Then Publicly Humiliates and Shames King Saul)

1 Samuel 24

After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En Gedi." So Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats.

He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. The men said, "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." With these words David rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'? This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the LORD's anointed.' See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you.

"Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."

When David finished saying this, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And he wept aloud. "You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. You have just now told me of the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today. I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family."

So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Some Textual Context

This is a fascinating account of a man (David) filled with God's Spirit in relationship to a rogue government actor (King Saul). Some key points to get us caught up with the context:

- God anoints King Saul in response to the people's request for a king (I Samuel 8, I Samuel 11:12-15).
- Saul previously sins against God and refuses to repent, so God removes his anointing and looks for another king (I Samuel 13:1-15, I Samuel 15).
- God chooses and anoints a new king over Israel...David (I Samuel 16:1-13), which is slightly awkward, since David works for King Saul (I Samuel 16:14-23).
- Saul finds out and initiates a campaign to try and kill David (I Samuel 18-19).

Some Textual Observations

Saul has set out with 3,000 men to kill David. David and his men sneak up to Saul while he sleeps. Here's the play-by-play account:

- Saul takes a pit stop and goes into a cave to relieve himself. Don't believe me? Read it for yourself.
- Lo and behold, David and his men are hiding in the cave.
- While Saul is taking care of business, David sneaks up and cuts off a piece of Saul's robe, undetected.
- Later, David confronts Saul from a safe distance and shows him the robe, proving that he could have killed him but didn't.
- David confronts Saul publicly before all of Saul's men, calling out Saul's hypocrisy and sin.
- Saul feels like the worm that he is, acknowledges that David is the better man, and leaves, promising not to hunt David anymore.

Ok, so there's a lot here. An interesting point we skipped was in verse 5, which says that after David cut off Saul's robe, he was "conscience-stricken" for touching the robe of God's anointed. David had an extremely healthy respect for authority.

And yet, commentators are divided on whether or not David was right in sparing Saul's life. His assertion that Saul was God's anointed is not accurate as we're already told in the story that God had removed his anointing from Saul and put it on David. Furthermore, David was known as a warrior and had killed many soldiers and kings, so it wasn't that he had a problem with violence.

To add even more curiosity, the story repeats itself almost verbatim a chapter later. This time David sneaks into Saul's camp and takes Saul's own spear and water jug. Again he refuses to kill Saul, citing that Saul was God's anointed (1 Samuel 26:9-11). The next day, he confronts Saul and shows everyone what he took. Everyone knows David could have killed Saul but didn't. Saul admits David is the better man (again). The end.

Conclusion of the Matter

So how does this help us in relationship to thinking about our attitude and posture towards those in authority. Three things to note:

- 1. David showed utter respect for Saul,** believing he was God's anointed, even though Saul was evil and actively trying to kill David. David shows extraordinary restraint in not killing the man who'd issued a hit-job on him. David's demonstration of respect for authority, misplaced or not, is impressive.

Lesson for us: respect those in authority.

- 2. David respected Saul and still called out his sin publicly.** Twice, in front of a crowd of thousands, David articulates Saul's hypocrisy, foolishness, and pettiness. He exposes Saul's evil intentions...again, don't miss it...publicly. He confronts Saul with the truth and publicly holds him accountable to it.

Lesson for us: you can respect authority and still call out their hypocrisy and foolishness.

- 3. David's respect for authority did not mean he was obedient.** Just because David respected Saul as king did not mean he submitted to Saul, obeyed Saul, or complied with Saul's commands. Don't miss the context of the story...Saul is actively hunting David and trying to kill him, and David is actively avoiding him and running from him. Even when Saul admits David is the better man and invites him to come down, David ignores him and continues living life on the lam. David had a high respect for authority but did not always obey. He had no problem acting in direct and open defiance to their proclamations, mandates, and laws.

Lesson for us: you can show respect to those in authority and still not do a single thing they say. Respect for authority does not mean obedience, compliance, or appeasement.

7

Daniel and How to Disagree with Those in Authority Over You Daniel 1:9-16

Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, 10 but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." 11 Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." 14 So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

Four Things to See

1. The enemy traffics in fear.

The spirit of Babylon traffics in fear. Afraid to speak up? To stand for truth? To be called a hater or a bigot or intolerant?

Fear is the key to manipulation and control. Notice that the chief of staff for the king doesn't disagree because he himself believes Daniel is wrong. He doesn't want to do it because he's afraid of what will happen if he disagrees with the king.

Tyranny does that.

The key to tyranny is the quick and brutal assassination of any ideas or people that run against its own thinking.

Freethinking people are a threat to tyranny everywhere. Which is why Christians have always posed the greatest threat to tyrants—we refuse to be controlled. We refuse to bow the knee to any man other than Jesus. We refuse to drink the Kool-Aid. We refuse to give over our ultimate allegiance. We refuse to look the other way.

Whenever a government sets itself up as higher in authority than God, it is a Christian's duty to stand against it. And a government does this (sets itself up higher than God) often in the simplest of ways. It does this whenever it takes away an inalienable right granted by God.

This means there is a law in relationship to man that is higher than what governments make up. Governments are set up by God to live *under* His law, not *over* His law. To ensure God's laws are obeyed, not to make up laws and subvert God's law.

God's law is the foundation for righteous governments to do their job faithfully, as assigned by God, and to serve the people in a way that brings about the most human flourishing. Without connection to the law of God, a government has no anchor or mooring point for doing its job.

Remember, rights aren't things we demand our government give us; rights are what our government must stay out of. It's not about getting things (I have a right to a free meal!), but about having the free and unfettered right to work hard and provide yourself with a meal! Don't beg from another man what God has given you freely.

2. There is a gracious way to disagree.

Notice that Daniel doesn't stand up and start screaming about his rights like he's a spoiled brat or a persecuted victim. He's a servant of the King of kings, and he knows it. He doesn't act like his earthly boss holds the final say over his life and days. He isn't panicking. He isn't hopeless. He carries himself with dignity and poise. He approaches his boss and makes a well-reasoned, gracious appeal through the appropriate channels afforded him under that government.

In other words, he doesn't roll over and acquiesce; he appeals by making an ask. He provides a creative alternative, a "what if..." He's a solution-oriented problem-solver, not a problem-identifying whiner. He doesn't expect a handout from the state; he's got a plan to not be a burden to his boss, but neither will he violate his conscience. He approaches the matter relationally and professionally. Obviously, he's built a good reputation with his manager, and he draws on that here.

Daniel had no reason to think his request would be granted, but that did not keep him from trying. He did not quit. He did not conform. He shared his convictions and offered a solution. He was gracious and magnanimous, not demanding and brash. He was willing to give them the benefit of the doubt (and the option to work with him)—but not with an open hand. He was not bartering with them. He knew where he stood and why he stood there. He had clarity of conviction that gave him courage to not compromise.

And we see that Daniel's conviction was actually deeper than the State's conviction. In this scenario, he won them over, and everyone benefited from it. So it should be for us. We don't only advocate for ourselves—we stand up for all and advocate a better way for others. If we win, everyone benefits. But make no mistake, Daniel was ready to go to the mat for his convictions.

But what do we do when the government refuses to dialogue or work back-and-forth toward a solution? Then we respectfully use the channels afforded us—petitions, voting booths, city council meetings, or the courts. When we know what we're not willing to compromise, it can sometimes make life hard, but it can also make life simpler. This worked out in a wonderful compromise from Daniel's employer. But this would be different later in the story, and Daniel would go into the lion's den. But when you know what you believe, you can't be bullied or bought. Such a great model for us as Christians.

3. Following Jesus will require standing against the flow.

Satan, Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar all threatened to judge Daniel, but he just doesn't care. His name literally means "God is my judge." He is living for the approval of the Judge who is over His earthly judges. He is living for an audience of One. He knows that one day he will stand before the true Judge, the King, and—if he lives for the glory of that day—he will win over the trial of the current day he's in.

4. The calm courage of believers can turn the fear narrative around.

Did you notice that Daniel's courage turned the narrative? It started with a respectful conversation with his boss, and it ended with an audience before the king. And it resulted in wholesale policy change kingdom-wide.

Don't underestimate the ripple effect of small acts of courage.

Which is why tyrants must act swiftly against those who stand up boldly. They know that those small acts of courage and defiance, if allowed to go unchecked, will spread to others and they'll soon lose their power. That's why tyrants suppress opposing views (which is why they censor and cancel people) and refuse to allow a free market of ideas (which is why they accuse others of misinformation).

We've seen this in our own state—a mandate is passed, someone challenges it, and they are made an example. This is a tyrannical tactic, to make an example out of anyone who challenges their authority.

Thanks be to God we can live for an audience of One. And if we're kneeling in the closet with the King of kings, we can stand with boldness and courage in the presence of earthly kings and governors.

8a

When the State Becomes God

Daniel 3:1-3

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 Then King Nebuchadnezzar summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. 3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other officials of the provinces assembled (gathered) for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they stood before the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Textual Observation

This is a calculated effort by the king to consolidate power in his office through pressuring experts to publicly declare their allegiance to him.

Cultural Applications

1. When the State becomes the Church, rank abuse always results.
2. There is a spirit of Babylon behind the King of Babylon. Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers of darkness that oftentimes present themselves through people in flesh and blood.

Personal Application

1. When people think they're king, other people will suffer.
2. "Believing in Yourself" is a recipe for disaster.
3. What often drives our desire to be big is the nagging knowledge we're small.
4. You don't get to change history by sheer force or power, even if you're a nation-state superpower.
5. It's often the experts who sell out first.

8b

When the State Becomes the Church

Daniel 3:4-7

4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." 7 Therefore, as soon as all the people heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

WHY WE SING

State gods don't only demand public allegiance, they demand you publicly celebrate them. As Christians, we don't sing so as to avoid being thrown into the *human* incinerator; we sing because we've been saved from the *eternal* incinerator.

THE GOSPEL VERSUS TYRANTS

Tyrants wield power with coercion, threat, and imposition; Jesus wields power through proposition, love, and invitation. One uses external force, the other brings about internal transformation. Followers of tyrants sing out of fear of punishment, followers of Jesus sing out of gratefulness and joy.

8c

When the State Becomes Your Final Judge

Daniel 3:1-3

8 At this time some Chaldeans came forward and denounced the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! 10 Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, 11 and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. 12 But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, 14 and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? 15 Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

When the State Becomes Your Final Judge

1. The State-god always gives you something to lose, as a means of control and manipulation.
2. The State-god always uses fear to control and manipulate you into obedience.
3. The State-god always demands an allegiance the Christian can never give, which means the Christian will always be in conflict with tyrants.
4. The State-god sets itself up as the ultimate judge to be feared, while simultaneously the savior to be adored.
5. Christianity is, and always will be, a threat to the State acting like god, because Christianity frees the believer from the fear that tyrants count on for control.
6. The State acts like god when it claims to give rights only God can give, or attempts to take away rights God has given. The State's role is not to give or take rights, declare or make up rights, but rather to protect and defend those rights God has already given mankind in His wisdom.

Conclusion of the Matter

Earthly kings can touch the temporary body, but they cannot harm the eternal soul. God is our Judge and Jesus our Advocate. When we bow before God in worship and allegiance, we can stand before tyrants in humble and courageous defiance. God holds our destiny, not them. Their fear tactics are broken. We are free to obey Jesus and follow our conscience. Even if they kill us, we still die free men before God!

"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!"

–Jesus (Lk. 12:4-5)

Am I now trying to win the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Galatians 1:10

9

Peter Teaches on Honoring the King (Then He Breaks Out of Jail, Lives Life on the Lam, and Disobeys the King Until He Is Caught and Executed)

Part One I Peter 2:13-17

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. 15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. 16 Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. 17 Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

Some Textual Observations

An important distinction should be made in Peter's teaching. He exhorts us to "submit" to whatever is the "supreme authority." In doing so, he's telling us to value the highest rule of law. In Peter's day, that was the emperor. Whatever the emperor said, went. In America, it's the Constitution. We do not owe our governor or president the kind of allegiance Peter owed the emperor. They are constructs of two completely different types of government. We owe allegiance to, and must submit ourselves to, the highest law in the land. This means we need to know and respect the Constitution and hold accountable any political leader who violates it.

The submission we are to give to those in authority over us is done as an act of worship to God (vs. 13). He is our ultimate authority, not man.

Peter outlines for us again the purpose of government: to punish evildoers and reward those who live righteously. It has to do with justice, peace, law, and order. It includes using force against evil and establishing courts to prove innocence or guilt. This is a very critical role the government plays for a society to flourish. It is also a limited role, one that our current politicians would do well to heed.

Peter exhorts Christians to live as free people. They are not slaves to man or government. They owe ultimate obedience to no man. They are slaves to God (vs. 16).

Conclusion of the Matter

Peter is exhorting Christians to be good citizens of the land in which they live. To honor the emperor, to pray for him, to respect law and authority, to be a blessing to those who carry the burden of authority and leadership. In short, Peter is exhorting them to be patriots. Be the best citizens your nation has! We are to give honor and respect to all, including the emperor and local governor. This means that we should display integrity and respect.

But this is a far cry from obeying them, complying with them, and acquiescing to them. We know that's not what Peter meant because we have a clear testimony of how he lived out this teaching in opposition to the oppressive, tyrannical government leaders of his time. Which is the focus of our next passage.

Part Two

Acts 5

The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.

Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people all about this new life."

At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings! The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while.

Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: "Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God."

His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Some Textual Observations

1. It is not clear whether or not Peter was violating the law for preaching the Gospel or if he just offended those in authority. Either way, they arrest Peter and throw him in jail. This would be equivalent to the governor telling us to stop doing church, us refusing, and him throwing all of the pastors of Grace City in jail.
2. Apparently, God is pro civil disobedience because he sends an angel to break Peter out and immediately tells him to go break the same law that got

him thrown in jail...preaching publicly that Jesus was to be worshipped and obeyed over Caesar.

3. When the Apostles are arrested a second time, the law of the land gave strict orders to Peter and the Apostles not to preach about Jesus. In other words, they made it very clear at their press conference that the mandates and proclamations they were making were to be obeyed as law.
4. Peter has a very clear answer for these leaders...“we must obey God not man.” Peter, the man who wrote the epistle in which he exhorted all believers to give respect to authority, clearly states here that all human leaders in authority are also under authority. If they issue commands and edicts and proclamations that would cause a Christian to violate their conscience, they are to obey God, not man.
5. Peter and his buddies found their line, held their line, and got flogged for it. Obedience to Jesus will sometimes mean personal suffering.
6. The apostles were exhorted again with a government order to fall in line, and they left the court, went right outside, and immediately began practicing civil disobedience. Day after day, they disobeyed the proclamation they had been given by those in authority over them. And God blessed them for it.

Conclusion of the Matter

It's so helpful to have both the teaching of Peter and the example of Peter. Many have quoted Peter in his epistle as proof that Christians should not push back against their government. But Peter's example gives us a completely different picture. Peter lived his entire Christian life in opposition to his government. His teaching is clear: give respect and honor to government and even obey when possible. His testimony is even clearer: ultimate allegiance only to Jesus.

Part Three

Acts 12:1-10

It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Festival of Unleavened Bread. 4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. 5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.

6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the

cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.⁸ Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. ⁹ Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. ¹⁰ They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

Some Textual Observations

1. Peter gets thrown in prison because he disobeys the local governing authority for refusing to obey their press-conference, fiat proclamations. This is not to say that Christians are free to do this anytime. Christians are to be friends of the benevolent and righteous government. Submitting to authority as unto God is a huge theme in Scripture. It is simply to point out that there is warrant for and examples (amply so) of faithful Christians (men who wrote the Bible!) defying their government when that government asked, coerced, bullied, or otherwise attempted to force them to violate their conscience and disobey God.
2. Some have argued Christians are to show respect and honor to government authority, and they interpret that to mean never pushing back, never speaking out, and never disobeying. And yet here, Peter breaks out of the county jail so he can continue disobeying them by preaching the Gospel. I'm not sure where you'd put that on a civil disobedience continuum, but it's got to be pretty far to the disobedience side. And let's not miss who broke him out of jail...God did!

Conclusion of the Matter

We hear nothing of Peter after this story because he lives the rest of his life running and hiding from government officials ordering him to surrender. Peter lives in direct disobedience to the governing authorities for the rest of his life, in order to faithfully preach the Gospel and plant churches. We only learn of his martyrdom through historians. Peter was faithful to Jesus to the end, and his faithfulness included blatantly disobeying the civil magistrate every day for the rest of his life. He ran, hid, and kept preaching the Gospel until he was caught and killed.

The conclusion of the matter is not to say that every Christian everywhere should disobey their government. Surely not. The point is simply this...if you are a Christian with no category for public civil disobedience that acts in direct defiance of government mandates—in order to demonstrate obedience to Jesus and follow your conscience—you are out of step with the apostles who wrote the New Testament. These are the men whose testimonies were intended to inspire the Christian Church as exemplary followers of Jesus, especially in the face of tyranny.

A Final Word

These biblical stories are just a sampling. Many more could be referenced: Esther disobeying the king's edict to save her people; Mordecai defying the edicts of a petty despot; Daniel's public disobedience of his king's proclamation to cease praying; the wise men refused to tell Herod about the location of baby Jesus. All of these, and many others, demonstrate the biblical and historical reality that faithfully following God will sometimes put a man or woman at odds with the standing government of their day.

As American Christians, we have been largely sheltered from this reality. But that is not the normal experience of Christians throughout history. The unique protections our Constitution afford have sheltered us until now. But that shelter is quickly eroding. It would serve us well to brush up on convictions and first principles that should guide the Christian's conscience and behavior when living under a hostile government. The days for letting others do the heavy intellectual lifting are gone. The days are coming, and in many cases are already here, when our faith and fidelity to God may very well put us on a collision course with government actors, mandates, even laws.

May God give us grace to be as innocent as doves, as wise as serpents, and as courageous as lions.

We won't always get it right; we concede that at the outset. We are imperfect people struggling with our own sin and shortcomings. But we will try.

We will read. We will wrestle. We will wade into the fray. We will be active in prayer and word and deed. We will ask God for supernatural strength to make good battle.

And may the Lord not find us sitting on the sidelines twiddling our proverbial thumbs. Rather, may He find us all, each in our own way, on the field of conflict, acting with grace and love towards all. This is the way of the good life.

It's my prayer that the stories in this booklet would fortify you to that end.

With you, Into The Storm,

Pastor Josh

