

## Sermon Transcript for October 24, 2021

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

All right, so we've got a lot to talk about, the entire creation of the world, the armor of God, and Jesus telling this guy who just wants his kid to be healed, "You're not going to believe anything unless you see signs and wonders. Go away. Your kid's okay." That's a lot to pack into one Sunday, but let's try and get into it. Let's start with our Old Testament lesson and the book of Genesis. And particularly in what we're facing in the world today, Genesis has a lot that we really need to stand firm on and find comfort in because the world is actively trying to tell us the truths that we see in the very beginning are arbitrary and not from God. And we need to understand why we speak against the ways of the culture.

I mean, one of the first things that we can learn from Genesis, and what we often talk about, is that God's Word has the power and authority to do what He says it's going to do. And that God created everything out of nothing, that just by the mere speaking of His Word things came into being. Oftentimes when we have a discussion about the beginnings of the world with someone who is not a Christian, the context is often seen as we're talking about faith and they're talking about science. And you can never really talk because you're never talking about the same thing. But I would argue that the reality is that we all begin from a statement of faith. We believe as well as they do that there was a time when there only existed one thing, that there was one thing that is eternal without beginning or without end.

Now for us, we have a very clear definition of what that one thing is. And it's not a thing. It's a very personal being who is called God, who is the God of the universe, who made everything else out of nothing. But on the other hand, they also believe that there was something that had no beginning. There was the big bang, where matter and energy just appeared out of nowhere. So that matter and energy had to exist before the beginning. So matter and energy had no beginning, just like God. So we both believe in something that has no beginning that we cannot prove. We accept it on faith. Theirs is impersonal and has no purpose and plan and is arbitrary. Ours is personal, knows us by name, and has a plan, not only for the world but for us as individuals. We need to understand that. We are as grounded as anyone else in science and faith and belief, and ours is true because the Word of God is true.

And that's actually the second thing that we need to hold fast to in today's society, because the Word of God is being challenged at every angle and every place. And even many of our churches have begun to say, "Well, maybe God's Word doesn't really mean what God's Word actually means." And there we get into dangerous situations. Again, we get to the point where our culture is defining what the Word of God actually means.... "Well, God doesn't actually mean one man and one woman in the bonds of marriage. What He really means is it's love. And it doesn't really matter how many genders are involved in the process and how many different partners you have. It just matters that you love each other." And I've actually heard that from people who call themselves Christians. I mean, there's 23 genders out there now, for some reason, or maybe more. Are there more now? There's more of them now. But how do we get to the point where there's one man and one woman, God creating them male and female, XX and XY, how do we get from that to 50-some odd or whatever number we happen to have today? We get there because of a false understanding of the world. And it comes from a very ancient thought which is called Gnosticism. Gnosticism is the idea that tries to borrow ideas from Christianity, but it says, Gnosticism says that the spirit is good and holy and the material is bad and evil. And our goal in life is to get rid of the bad and evil matter and stuff of this world to achieve a spiritual high

or a spiritual unity. You can hear this in Eastern thought with Buddhism and Hinduism, where they seek to become one with the universe, to achieve Nirvana, to transcend the physical body and to ascend to the spiritual realm. Because the spiritual is really where it's at. The spiritual is good and the physical is evil and bad. And we hear that in ancient Greek philosophy with Plato and Socrates and Aristotle. Their philosophy is also very, the idea that the material is bad and the spiritual is good. There's this dichotomy and this separation.

But Scripture tells us from the very beginning that when God created the world, when God created stuff, He said it was good. Every single day, He came at the end of the matter and the things that He had created and He looked at it and He said, "It is good." To the end and finally on the sixth day when He created mankind and He said, "It is very good." God loves humanity. He wants us. He has a plan and a purpose for us. Our society is telling us that it's all made up. We make our own reality. We make our own purpose. And it doesn't matter what the realities of this world show us. It doesn't matter what the physical leads us to. It's all up here in our minds. The problem is it doesn't lead to hope. It doesn't lead to peace. It doesn't even really lead to happiness. We've got a pandemic not necessarily of a disease of COVID, but we've got a pandemic of depression and anxiety and fear that is gripping our world. Because whatever idea happens to spring into somebody's mind, that becomes the reality and the goal. And there's no foundation. There's no place to stand. So we don't even know what gender we are. We can't define ourselves. We don't even know what the definition of marriage is because it could be anything. Where God grounds it in reality of the matter, one man, one woman, male, female. We don't say these things because we don't like anybody else. We say them because this is what the Word of God tells us is true. And we need that truth. Otherwise, we got nothing to stand on.

And God reveals that truth and how we are to view that as we look at the Gospel for this day. This man is coming to Jesus and he wants Jesus to heal his son. Now, we don't know whether he actually knew that Jesus was the Messiah or trusted Him. He knew that miracles took place, and he knew that this was the guy that was doing them. So he went to the right source, at least. But it doesn't seem by Jesus' response that he necessarily knew the Word or trusted. He was hoping for a miracle. He was hoping for a sign. The most important thing in his life seemed to be the life of his son. Whereas Jesus forces him to understand that the most important thing is faith in the Word of God, because that's all he had to go on. He comes to Jesus and says, "Please heal my son." And Jesus says, "Well, unless you see signs and wonders, you're not going to believe." And he says, "Please, just come down." He's still focused on his son. But he's going to the right source. So Jesus says, "Go, your son will live." And that's it. That's the only thing this man has to stand on, is the Word of Jesus. It's either true or not true, but that's all he gets. He doesn't get mud. He doesn't get a touching. He doesn't get a sign from heaven. He doesn't get anything. He just gets the Word. And on that, he's got to go back. So he goes back, believing that God's Word is true. And what does he discover? His servants come and let know, "At the very hour that Jesus said your son will live, the son started getting better."

In other words, the Word of God does what the Word of God says it's going to do. So if the Word of God says, "Let there be light," it does that and there is light. If the Word of God says, "Go, your son will live," then your son will live. If the Word of God says that we are dead in our sins and trespasses and only made alive in the light of Christ, then that is what is true. If God says that you are saved by grace through faith and not by works lest any man should boast, then you are saved by grace. God has done it all for you. God's Word is true and that's the only place we have to stand. Even if everything else appears like it's not working. Even when the world seems to be falling apart. Even when our culture is fighting against us. Even when our culture is accusing us of being bigots and liars. Even when it comes to the point where we are going to be arrested for the fact

that we believe that the Word of God is true. We still have nothing other than the Word of God to stand on and that is good enough. In fact, better than good enough. It's the only place to be because it's the only place where we find comfort and hope. And it's the only place we can defend ourselves against the flaming darts of the devil that is out there. Because don't kid yourself, that critical race theory, that white privilege versus everything else, the black lives matter, the politics of hatred and animosity and separation that is going on today, that is the flames of the devil. That is the hatred of the world against our faith that is saying you cannot believe what you believe. You must follow what is told to you. When you think about how we have gotten to the point where we're almost creating, we're trying to make these separations and creating a privileged class and a not-privileged class based on color, based on vaccination status, based on nation... whatever it's based on. But God has said God created all man, male and female. We're all one race. And we're all equally sinful and judged by God. And also, we are all equally saved by the grace of God. All of us. Doesn't matter. There is no distinction between the human race. And we need to make that statement clear. It's going to be more and more seen as wrong and evil for us to say what the Word of God says.

So what do we do? How do we stand? How does that Word of God enable, how can we put our trust in and find security in the Word of God? We need to put on His armor, which He gives to us. See, it's not like God didn't know this was going to happen. Remember, we talked about last week or the week before that the days are evil, and they've been evil and they always will be evil because Satan is in the world and sin is in the world. And we are constantly being bombarded by false teaching and false ideas and ideas that separate reality from thought. And we need a place, we need to stand firm or else we will be tossed to and fro by every wind that comes our way, every new idea. We have no new ideas. We have the Word of God, which is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. It does not change. Therefore, our teaching does not change. Therefore, our belief does not change. But the only way we know that and we can be certain of that is if we take the Word of God that has been given to us, that armor that He has provided for us, that is ours, so that we might be able to withstand in the evil day. And Romans talks about take up the whole armor of God so that you can withstand, and having done all, to stand, and stand, therefore, stand your ground. How? First with the Word of truth that holds everything together, that belt, the truth, which is the Word of God. We can only stand firm when we are grounded in the truth. And we find the truth in the Word of God. And we do not waiver from that.

Having put on the breastplate of righteousness, again, not our righteousness, not our holier-than-thou attitude of self-righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ, which is given to us as a gift, which is His holiness and His righteousness. In other words, we act with humility knowing that we have nothing to offer but the grace of God, for them and for us. So I see the breastplate as sort of that symbol of hope that God loves all and gives His righteousness to all people. So we have the breastplate of righteousness that protects us because it is His righteousness. We don't try and stand on our own abilities, on our own good works, but upon the work of Christ.

Having put on our feet the shoes of the readiness of the Gospel. In other words, the righteousness of Christ drives us to reach out, to share the Gospel of Good News, because people need to hear it. The point is not just so that we can stand firm, but so that we can stand firm and invite others to the safety of the ark of the church, the safety of the armor of God, where they can find peace and forgiveness and hope.

Taking up the shield of faith. Faith in what? Faith in the Word of God being true. Faith in that God said He died for us and He will never leave us, never forsake us. And that no matter how evil the days are, He will carry us through to the very end of the age. Faith that His Word is true and will accomplish what He desires, which may

mean that sometimes what's going on out there is not going to look very pretty. It's not going to be very comfortable. We may not see how it's going to work out. We may not know what the end result is going to be. But we have faith that God's Word will carry us through, whatever may come. And that will shield us against all the doubts and the fears and the anxieties and the cares and the concerns and the false teaching that comes our way, those flaming darts that keep attacking us, the strange ideas that come from the reality of the mind rather than the reality of reality.

And the helmet of salvation to protect not only our person but our thoughts and our ideas, that our ideas are protected by that salvation which comes from Christ. So we don't get ahead of ourselves, and we don't put our reliance upon ourselves, but upon Christ. We don't put our faith in whatever political party might be the best or worst party out there. We don't put our faith in the next election cycle or the next vaccine cycle or the next whatever. We put our faith in Christ. That is where we find our hope and our security.

Finally, all of that defending us and guarding us. And how does all of that defend us and guard us? Because all of that is based upon the Word of God. And that Word of God is our sword. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. It is the only weapon in our arsenal. Only weapon. Our sophisticated theories and ideas, our eloquent preaching, it doesn't matter. The only thing that defends us, the only thing that can guard us is the Word of God. And we are to be wielding that Word of God.

If you are a soldier, if you're an airman, if you carry a weapon, you need to know how that weapon works. Otherwise, it's not very effective. A good warrior's weapon is merely an extension of themselves. It's as if it's a part of them, because they use it as if it was never leaving them. And it's as fluid and natural to use the sword for a soldier than it is to use his hand. Because they use it, they practice with it, they understand it, they have examined it, they have balanced it. They know where the strengths are and where the weaknesses are. They know where the pointy end is and where the secure end is because they've used it, because they practice with it. So much so that, for them, it's no different than just thinking to do. And it must be the same for us. The Word of God that we carry at our side does us no good if it's in its sheath all the time. It may look impressive for us to carry around the Bible, but it doesn't do us any good unless we open it, unless we take it out, unless we examine it and use it, and find its strength, and find its usefulness, and understand it. The Word of God should be an extension of us so that our thoughts and God's thoughts, our thoughts and the Word of God, our thoughts become His Word because His Word is where we find the strength. But you can't do that unless you study it, unless you read it, unless you know it, unless you use it.

So we are called, I think, today, especially when reality can be whatever you imagine it to be. We need to use the Word, allow it to dwell in us richly, to transform us and renew our minds so that we can stand firm, stand firm in our faith and trust our God to protect us. I'm not saying this so that you might be afraid or worried. I'm saying this because this is what is coming and we need to be prepared. And to be prepared means to be filled with the Word of God, the spirit of salvation, to be filled with the joy of our salvation, as we talked about, to greet each other with Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, to give thanksgiving always and for everything, including this difficult time. Because He has given us His armor and we can stand secure, knowing He will be with us always, He will never leave us nor forsake us. And He will carry us through this veil of tears into life everlasting with Him for all eternity. That is our hope. That is our certainty. And that is what the Word of God says. And that is the only place we stand.

May His grace and mercy and peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.