

Speaker 1:

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. It's hard to know where to start with all of these scripture passages. There's so much depth and meat in each and every one. I've only got two hours... I'll try and shorten it up. There's a lot of good stuff. Let's start first with Isaiah and what he has to say. This is amazing how he describes the world and the majesty of God. I love the way it starts. Do you not know? Do you not hear as in how many times do we have to explain this to you before you understand and before you believe what God's word is telling you? Now, I find it comforting, quite frankly that Isaiah says this, "Have you not heard? Do you not know?" In other words, God is patient with us, and he repeats himself over and over and over again to reassure us that when we doubt, when we are afraid, when we have our moments of questioning in the darkness and when we're struggling with the way things are going in this world, we have this reminder, Isaiah.

We could say this, "Have you not heard and do you not know?" Or "Have you not heard? Do you not know?" I mean, the inviting nature of God's question. Don't you realize God, who is in control of all things, who laid the foundation of the world, do you not know? Have you not heard that this God loves you, that this God has adopted you as his child, that this God is with you in spite of the way the world is going, in spite of the chaos of our nations and the corruption of this world, do you not know that it is temporary, that it will not last, that the rulers of this world are here today and gone tomorrow and yet, God's will remains?

So I mean, we've been studying the Book of Revelation for a bit, two years now, and in that book, we started studying the book of Revelation because a lot of people were beginning to look around at the world around us and say, "What is going on? Are we in the end times?" And of course, my answer is, "Of course we are. We've been there for a long time now. We're just beginning to realize it." But in that moment of realization, the Book of Revelation tells us that God is in control. That we have hope in spite of what seems to be the world falling apart, in spite of what seems to be our own physical selves falling apart, that God is with us, that he has control of the host of heaven, that he has created all of these things, and if he has created them, he loves them and he takes care of them, which means he takes care of you and me.

Have you not heard? Do you not know that God loves you, that you are his child, and that no matter what comes your way, you have a peace that surpasses all understanding? Now, Paul was excited about this message and he wanted to share that with others, and so he tells us that he is compelled to preach the gospel and that is the beauty of the Word of God. It compels us. It drives us to share the good news with those around us. It is the force that allows us to go out into the world and to share the message of his love with all people. Now, Paul says that to the Jew, he becomes like a Jew, to those under the law, to those without the law, like somebody without the law, to the weak, he becomes weak so that he might proclaim the Gospels to all that some might believe.

I like that reality. Not everybody is going to hear this word and believe it. In spite of the fact that this is a free gift of God, and this God is all powerful, and when he says our sins are forgiven, they are forgiven. In spite of all of that, people are still not going to want to hear the message. But that does not negate us from sharing it to all people. Some will believe, and for that, we give thanks. But why does Paul say to the Jew, I become a Jew, the Greek, I become a Greek, and the weak, I become weak. Is he just manipulating people, trying to get them to be deceived and hook them into the church? No. That's not what he's saying.

See, we need to understand who Paul was. He was a Jew. He was a Jew of Jews. I mean, he was a rabbi. He was trained in Jewish law in the Jewish teachings, so he took his Jewish nature, who he was, and he made sure he connected with the Jews. He was also a Roman citizen. In other words, he had the freedom and lived and understood a people that did not grow up Jewish and have the Jewish law. He

was a Roman citizen, so he emphasized that part of his personhood to share with those who were not under the law and did not know the law. Was he weak? He prayed for that thorn in his flesh to be removed three times, and it was not removed so that he might trust in the strength of God rather than his own strength. So he became weak for those who are weak.

In other words, what Paul was doing was looking at who is out there and finding some way within himself to connect to those individuals so that they might hear the Gospel, so that they might not be offended by one thing or another so that he could reach out to them. And that's what we are called to do. We are called to look at our acquaintances and look at the people that we are around and look for the opportunity for us to connect with them so that they might know the good news of Jesus Christ. We are called to discipline ourselves, to train ourselves up in the Word of God. Paul takes this idea of a runner who runs the race and only one gets the prize. And yet, how dedicated are sports people to their sport? How much training and practice goes into their lives before they ever get to the game itself?

And Paul wants us to look at our own lives and think about how much time do we spend training and practicing the Word of God and his message? We are called to allow it to dwell in us richly. We are called to meditate on his law day and night. We are called to dedicate our lives to the Word of God, not because we're afraid that if we don't, God's not going to love us, not because we must or else, but because God has given us such a free gift and it is so generous and so tremendous that we want to think about how we can show our thanks to him. How could we ever repay God for his generosity in our lives? Well, the answer is we can't. We never could, but that ought never to stop us from trying. What a great joy it is, what a great opportunity. Like Paul, he is compelled to share the Gospel, not because he must, but because it is good news to all people.

That is the message that we have, and that is the message the world needs to know because it's not getting any better out there, but it never has. It's always been off. And the only hope, the only message that brings comfort is the God who created the heavens and earth. Have you not heard? Do you not know that the God of the universe loves you? That the God who can heal the sick, who can cast out demons, knows you by name and loves you? Do you not know? Have you not heard? God's son died for you and he gave you salvation as a gift? Let us rejoice in that gift and seek opportunities to share the love of our God with those around us, that they might know what we do, that his grace, his mercy, and his peace abides for all eternity and will bring us from this veil of tears to the glorious hope of the resurrection and life everlasting with our God. May that grace and that mercy and that peace be and abide with you now and forevermore on your life everlasting. Amen.