

I. Introduction: The Christian Life and Its Challenges

I think today is going to be a good day for a lot of you. Today, we are going to get into Proverbs 21, and I think it will be a principle and a verse that will help everybody. I know that when you preach the Bible on Sunday morning or Thursday night, it affects everybody because everybody has different issues, and the Holy Spirit of God has a way to just kind of disperse it where it needs to go. But messages like today are going to get everybody in a good way, not a bad way, in a good way. I think it will help us understand a lot of things better.

For many of God's people, the Christian life can be confusing at times. Proverbs 21:1-2 is probably a premier chapter in the Bible. Our verses today are two of the best promises and principles in all the Bible for us as Christians. Life in general, but certainly for the Christian life, will have many dimensions to it. You are going to have Christians who go through some tough times in life. When you go through a tough time in life, you know as well as I do that becomes the focus.

Many of you have gone through a bad marriage, sometimes through no fault of your own, sometimes through fault of your own, but you have come through it, you have learned, you have grown. Some of you have had sickness in your life; you have had tough times where you have had to go through some things. Sometimes, some of you have spent more time in a hospital than you really probably should have. Those things get you down. Things will happen in our lives; things will come into our life that we have to deal with and are not always the most pleasant things.

Many of you have had bad relationships. You thought somebody was the apple of your eye and found out that it was just the core. It was not really what you thought it was going to be. You go through those things in life, and they can be disappointing. Sometimes you have gotten hurt really bad in a relationship. The husband or the wife, or the boy or the girl, did not treat you right. It causes a lot of things. Whatever we go through, here is the problem: whatever we go through as Christians, in most cases, we focus on that one thing, and we have a tendency to paint our whole Christian life with that one little concept. I want to talk to you about that today. I want to try to help you see this thing from a larger perspective.

Some of you have lost your job. That is a really tough thing to go through, losing your job. I know many of you worked for a place for a long time, and then seemingly they just came in and, without any care for where you were at or your feelings, they just gave you the axe, and off you went. I understand. Some of you have lost a loved one, and I understand those things are tough. There are a lot of disappointments in life.

Here is the thing that I want to get across to you today: think of life like a yardstick, 36 inches. Think of life as a yardstick. The job of the Christian is to look at that whole 36 inches of that yardstick and understand it. What happens is that we focus on a half an inch or an inch, and that

becomes the focus, and we lose the whole concept of the whole yardstick. I want to help you with that today if I can.

II. Promises vs. Principles and God's Purpose

I want to talk to you about our verse today, which is two of the best promises and principles for you and for me throughout the whole Bible. I want to explain the difference between a promise and a principle. People ask me this all the time, and here is how I explain it:

All promises will be principles, but not all principles will be promises.

Let me say it again:

All promises in the Bible to you will be principles, but not all principles will be promises.

Let me show you.

1 Peter 5:7

Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.

Now, that is a principle, but that is also a promise to you. But a place like Romans 10:17, which says,

Romans 10:17

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

That is a principle, but it is not necessarily a promise. You see how it works? I want you to be able to understand the difference. Obviously, you can claim anything you want as a promise. If that works for you, that works for you. But I am simply saying that in the Bible, there are some things that are direct principles speaking to an action that are not necessarily something that you want to put down on your promise list in the Bible.

Now, we know, and I am going to give you a great one here before we get into Proverbs, Romans 8:28. We all know that. What a great verse it is.

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Now, there is one that is a great principle, and there is one that is a great promise. That is an incredible verse and a credible promise that you can apply into your life. Many of God's people know this verse, probably all of you, and many of you make it your favorite. But I want to say this: that may be true, but I am going to tell you, very few of God's people ever see this verse and understand it in the light of its true value. We have a tendency to like a verse because it speaks to us a little bit, and that is all the Father never goes. We never investigate it, dig it down, apply it to see where it really fits. I am telling you, many of God's people would claim that as a favorite

verse, but I am going to tell you, very few of them would understand the real value: their ability to understand life and how God will work through it, through all things.

So we can better understand Proverbs 21:1-2 when we get there in just a moment, let us look at a couple of things here in Romans 8:28 to kind of set the stage. The first thing I want you to see is where it says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them who are the called." It just did not say "called"; it said "the called." God has a specific calling for you. I want you to understand that. God has something specific He wants to accomplish in your life. Getting saved is the first step in that. Getting disciplined and beginning to learn your Bible is obviously the second and third steps. Getting to a Bible-believing church and getting to the point in your life where what God wants to do is this: God wants every one of you that are saved this morning to reach your full potential for the calling that God has given you, "the called." He has a specific calling for you. He has something that He wants you to do. Your calling will not be the same as someone else's. God has something specific for you that He wants you to do. He is telling you that all things in our life work together for them that love God, for them that are "the called."

When God looked down in heaven and He saw you get saved, God marked it right on there what He wanted you to do. He had something for you. You go over to Jeremiah 1:5, and it is easy to see the foreknowledge of God that when God saw Jeremiah, He said,

Jeremiah 1:5

Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

God had a calling for him, a specific calling. The first thing I want you to see out of that verse before we get into the rest of it is that God has a specific calling for you.

Now, you know what the unfortunate thing is? Most of God's people today, unfortunately, will never reach their full potential for the Lord. They never will. Some of you here, bless your hearts, I love you to death and I would do anything in the world for you, but you know as well as I do, you have been saved a long time, and you have not yet reached anywhere near the potential that God has for you. Somewhere along the line, you lost that calling, "the calling."

Now the second thing I want you to see here: He says, "the called according to His purpose." Not only does God have a specific calling for you, but God has a specific purpose for you, and it is His purpose. You know why so many of God's people never reach their full potential? I will tell you why: they never reach their full potential because all their life they are too busy trying to fulfill their purpose instead of God's purpose. They want what they want out of life, and they put God on the back burner.

I guess in the class yesterday, you gave the kids an illustration about a jar with sand and little pebbles and bigger pebbles. The little pebbles represented the things that you do in life. The big pebbles represented God. Each one of them, they would say, "Oh, here is a little pebble, I have to call my friend," and you put this in there. By the time they put the pebbles and then you have to eat and you poured the sand in and all that stuff, by the time you got to the big pebbles that were God, there was not any room left in the jar. That is what happens to us. We get so busy with our

purpose, we forget God's purpose. The reason we forget God's purpose is because we do not understand that God has a specific calling for you, and that specific calling will deal with a specific purpose. It is a terrible thing to say. I feel bad even saying it, but it is true: most of God's people will never reach their full potential.

God, you know, we talk a lot about spiritual maturity. We talk a lot about the seven stages of spiritual growth that you ought to go through as you grow. Last week I talked about the chastisement of God, and we looked at how the chastisement of God was so key in our life and for us to understand it, that we did not faint when it comes in, or we did not despise it, or we did not get an attitude toward God because it is going to happen. We talk a lot here about how to use the Bible. We put an emphasis on you learning Bible principles. The key to a mature Christian life in one dimension is learning those biblical principles. That is why we did it the way that we did it on our people ministry that started at the beginning. The only way to logically do it is to start at the beginning and start walking you through the promises as you find them in the Bible. When you do that and you learn those, it is part of your maturing process.

You know what? Sometime in your life, I mean, we can disciple you, discipleship one, discipleship two, but you realize that sometime in your life you have got to open up your Bible, and you have got to go to work yourself. We cannot feed you. You know, one of the dangers of a place like this? It is true. You get so much, and people are willing to give you so much that you just kick back and let everybody else do the work for you. I am going to tell you something: there comes a time in your life where you have got to get the shovel, you have got to get the pick, you have got to get the axe, and you have got to do a little digging yourself.

We talk about developing a life based on those biblical principles. We talk about the ability to deal with people through biblical principles. We talk about you getting to the place in your life where you have discretion and discernment. All that is part of maturity, but I will tell you something: if you want the bottom line of maturity for the Christian, if you want the goal where you and I need to be in our life, it will boil down in the Christian life to one thing, and that is our ability to see every situation and circumstance in our lives and see how it fits into the overall purpose of our lives as God is doing something in our lives. Looking at the whole yardstick instead of just getting our emotions, and that is what happens to young Christians. I get it. I put you folks, you girls with some of the best women I have. I put you guys with some of the best guys I have. They will disciple you, they will bring you through the Bible, they will listen to you, they will help you, they will cry with you, they will laugh with you. They will do everything in the world for you, but they are there for one reason and one reason only: because you get to the place that you quit looking at the half-inch mark of your life and you start seeing what God is doing on the overall yardstick.

You will never be mature; you will never get past the circumstances in life as long as you focus on where you are at right now and what you are going through right now and not seeing it in the scope of God's overall plan for your life. "All things work together for good." Well, not us. "Oh, I am where I am at right now. Everything else goes to pieces." You know why? Because it is immaturity. The bottom line for a child of God, you getting to that mature place, is looking at every circumstance in life and seeing it in the context of that 36 inches.

You know what the real question is today for all of us? Can you see how God will use every aspect of our lives, good and bad, the good and the negative, to bring about His good purpose in our lives? That is understanding. Understanding is understanding the things that we go through, the reason why they are there. When you can understand and grasp that, you will stay on point no matter what happens. There will be a lot of things in your Christian life that the devil will throw your way that will specifically get you off task, get you off point, every day of your life. The only thing honestly that will keep you focused is you seeing all that God is doing and not focusing on that one little time. When you cannot, the situation and the circumstances will pull you down in life, and you will get off point, and you will lose your purpose. You will lose His purpose in your life, and you go back to your purpose.

III. The King's Heart and the River of God

Now let us read our two verses today and let us see how this will all go together for us now that we have looked at this and now that we have kind of laid a little deal here.

Proverbs 21:1-2

1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water he turneth it whithersoever he will.

2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.

Now, verse 1 says that the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. Then verse 2 says, "like a river." In the Bible, water is likened to the Holy Spirit of God. This river here that he is talking about would be found in Ezekiel 47 if you really want to take a deep study on it. In Ezekiel 47, remember chapters 40 through 48 are the greatest eight chapters in the millennium or in the Bible in the millennium. In Ezekiel 47, you have a river coming out of the Holy oblation of the sanctuary. It comes down, it touches the Dead Sea, gives it life, and then it turns and goes to the Mediterranean. The Bible says wherever that river goes out of this Holy of Holies, it brings life. That river is a picture in a practical application of the Holy Spirit of God in your life, the river in your life.

When you start to go through there, you will find that somebody is standing on the shore looking across, and that river is about two and a half, three miles wide. The Bible says that as a man, it says, "Come across, get into that water." The Bible says that the guy goes into the water up to the ankles. Then he says he moves a little farther into this fast-moving river, and he goes up to his knees. Then he moves a little bit farther, and he goes up to his loins. Then he gets in a little bit deeper, and it comes to the place where now he is swimming, and all you can see is his head because his body is immersed in this river.

Now, that is a picture of you getting saved and beginning to move through the process of maturity, of spiritual growth in your life. You got saved, and you just start coming, you move into that river to the ankles. But you keep moving in the right direction, you get to your knees. Because the first thing that gets affected by the Holy Spirit of God in your life when you get

saved is your walk. It starts with your ankles, it goes to your knees. Then it comes up to your loins. Now you begin to get some spiritual strength because the Bible says in Ephesians 6:14, Ephesians 6:14

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

You keep going into this river, and it is a fast-moving river. You keep going into this river, and pretty soon, as anything, you get in over your head. Everybody ever go out wading in a place someplace and hit a drop-off? You know what I am talking about? In a moment, you are in over your head. You know the first thing that we all do unless you are just a really dominant swimmer and somebody that is familiar with the water? We panic. We get scared because when you step off that step and down you go, or if you are in a fast river. I remember one time we were out in Colorado, and they took us rafting on a whitewater deal. But the rafts were just truck inner tubes. We all had life jackets on, but that thing was moving. I will never forget, we had no control over it. We were just going, man, and I was hanging on, and I came around this bend, and it kind of carried me this way, and it was deep, and I ran into the bank, and there was a barbed wire fence right there, and my inner tube caught that barbed wire fence. Down it went, man, and I went down, and I was tangled into barbed wire, and I could not get back up. I was going. I was going. I thought what I was doing, but I was praying. Let me tell you, I was praying. I am down there, and I had to get free, you know, and get back up, and I thought to myself, that river is uncontrollable. I am taking a cab from this point on. I was out of control. I had no control over it, and it scared me. When you step out there, and you are going along, and you hit a drop-off, and down you go, the first thing you do is panic because you are out of control.

But I want to tell you, that is exactly where you need to get to as a Christian. You need to go so deep in the Holy Spirit of God that the river takes your feet off the ground, that you are out of control, because once I was out of control, the river took me wherever it wanted me to go. I did not have any say anymore. The Bible says there in Ezekiel 47 that guy got in so far that he had rivers of waters to swim in. You know when somebody swims, they are in so deep, and they are swimming, all you see is their head. That is the place you need to be in your Christian life. You need to come through the ankles, up to the knees, into the loins, get so far into this river. By the way, the river was impassable. God never intended anybody to get to the other side. He intended you to get in the middle to sweep you off your feet and take the control away from you, and then that river will take you where He wanted you to go. You know what the Holy Spirit of God, the river of God, wants to do in your life today? It wants to take you wherever God wants you to go for His purpose. That is what He wants you to do.

You know when you are in deep water, all you can see is your head. You know that is a good thing because the Bible says over there in 1 Corinthians 11:3,

1 Corinthians 11:3

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.

When you get into the Holy Spirit of God so deep that it takes you off your feet, that you do not have any control, the river of God will take you wherever He wants you to go. That is a good thing, like a river. Where God wants you to go, He will turn it any way. When you understand that the job of you and maturity as a Christian is to get to the point that you understand that. Once you get to that point and you get past the panic mode, it is a fun ride. Once you realize that God has taken you for a ride and He is going to take you wherever He wants you to go, you understand that now this river that you are in, that God is in charge of, is one of the greatest things you ever get into in your life. He will take you wherever you want to go. That is His purpose. As long as your feet are on the ground, and you are wading, and you are in control, you can always revert back to your purpose. But I will tell you one time when you cannot revert back to your purpose and your way and your control: that is when you are in a fast-moving river, and it sweeps you off your feet, and you have got nothing to do but go with that river or drown.

IV. Paul: An Example of God's Purpose

Now, the greatest example of this found in the Bible, in the New Testament anyhow, would be the Apostle Paul. We look at Paul, and we see him, and here again, I want you to see Paul not in the light that maybe I have taught you about it or you study yourself. I want you to see Paul from God's standpoint. You know what happens? He gets saved in Acts 9, and then he goes down to the house of Ananias, and he is blind for a couple of days. Ananias does not know what to do with him because Paul is a persecutor of God's people. But in Acts 9:15, God clearly defines His purpose for Paul. He had a specific purpose for Paul. He had a specific calling for Paul. I want to tell you something today: just as God had a specific calling for Paul and He had a specific purpose for him, He has got one for you.

Now, Paul, fortunately for all of us, let God develop him to His full potential. I hope you are willing to do the same thing. But He said in Acts 9:15 to Ananias, God did, but He,

Acts 9:15

But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

Now, that is the purpose for Paul. Paul had a purpose from God for three things: to bear God's name before the Gentiles, before kings, and before the children of Israel. That is an incredible verse on Paul. "Bear my name before kings." I want to show you this as an illustration of Proverbs 21:1 because he does this. He does it in Acts 22 and 23. He does it again in Acts 25 and 26, and he does it again at the end of Acts 26 when he stands before these kings.

In Acts 22 and 25, he goes before the council, and there is a high priest there by the name of Ananias, and Paul is given a defense, and Ananias does not like Paul, and so he winks to somebody, and Paul is standing there, and a guy goes up and he smacks him right in the mouth. Now, you would think that if you were in a situation where your life was in control, that these people could kill you at any moment, you would kind of bow down to them and just say, "Oh, thank you very much." Not Paul. Paul looks over to the guy and he said, "By whited sepulchre." And he sticks it to him. You know what? Paul was fearless. He is not afraid of anybody. He goes

before Felix and Festus in Acts 25 and 26, and he sticks it to them. He stands up to them, and he tells them what God told him to tell them. Incredible. He goes before King Agrippa over there in Acts 26, and there he does the same thing. He brings a pagan, godless king to the point through his preaching and his power that King Agrippa says, "Boy, almost you persuaded me to become a Christian."

You know what you and I would do in that situation? "Yes, sir." Oh, you would be thinking to yourself, "If I give the wrong answer, they are going to kill me. If I do not do this right, they are going to kill me. I will be in prison the rest of my life." Paul did not care about that. Paul had a purpose, and he had a plan, and he had a desire, and he had a mission from God, and it was specific: to stand before kings, and he did. You know why? Because he understood the great principle that the heart of the king was in the hand of the Lord. You are going to find some situations in life that are not too pleasant. Paul knew his situation in life, and no matter how it looks, he understood that God was still in charge. You read those three accounts, it is hard to believe that he is even in prison. It is hard to believe that he is even being held captive. It looks like they are the ones who are being held captive. You know why? He had the power of God. He had the power of God in his life because he knew that in every situation in life, something that we better learn, in every situation in life, no matter how black it is, how bad it looks, do not look at the two inches. See the whole yardstick because God has got the king's heart in His hand. He knows his purpose. He understands his purpose in life. He is called. He is "the called." He is fearless because he knows the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. He knows whatever happens, God is in charge because it is of God. He understands that in every situation in life, no matter how bad it may look, even when we cause it because of our stupidity, God is still in charge, and He will use it for our good.

Now the question for you and me today, and I understand that many of you are young Christians, so I am giving you a free pass here, but you need to think on these things. Now the question for us today is a simple one: can you see the whole yardstick of life, or do you just live life one inch at a time? That is the question. Is God in charge of our lives really? Are we fulfilling His purpose, or are we fulfilling our own? As I said earlier, most of God's people will never realize their full potential. They will never get to the place that they understand that God has a specific calling for them that has to do with a specific purpose. A child of God who understands that, he will never not know that in any circumstance in life that God will always be in control no matter how bad the situation may look.

V. Old Testament Examples of God's Control

Again, this great truth will be reinforced in my life and your life, and it is the reason why they are in the Bible. Through the study in the Old Testament, I showed you Paul in the New Testament. Now I am going to show you four or five examples in the Old Testament of God dealing with His son, the nation of Israel. You know, many, many times I have talked about the parallels between the two. Remember our verse now, "The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord, as a river turneth his way." When we understand God's purpose in our life, then we will understand how that nothing or no one will ever stop you. You know what? If you are saved here

this morning, nothing on this planet, the devil, the forces of hell, no friends, nobody, no nothing will ever stop you. The only thing that will stop you is you will stop yourself. When you understand this great verse and this great principle, how that God will move through the obstacles in your life and my life and make you better through them, and you will get back and give God the glory for it, and you will come out of the situation a lot better than you went in. Romans 8:28.

Now let us look at some of these. First of all, let me set the criteria here. You do not have to turn to it; you can just sit back and enjoy it for a minute and just let me walk you through it and tell you some stories here.

1.) The Book of Job

First of all, the book of Job. You know in Job 1 and Job 2, by the way, the Bible says that Satan came in before the Lord. That is the first time the word "Satan" is found in your Bible if you do not have it marked. That is always significant. The first time we find Satan showing up, he comes to be an accuser of the brethren. He comes in there, and he says, the Lord says to him, He says, "How are you doing?" And the devil says, "Oh, I am doing pretty good." "Where have you been? Haven't seen you for a while." "Oh yeah, I have been down there on the earth checking things out, you know, this great wonderful creation you got, you know. Yeah, it is not as hot as you think it is." The Lord says, "Oh really?" He says, "Oh yeah, a lot of problems down there." Then God said, "Have you considered my servant Job?"

Now we all know the mess that Job got into. We know the problems that he struggled with. He loses all of his financial possessions. He loses his house. He loses his kids. He loses his health. He loses everything. Sometimes we get the idea that that was all contrived of the devil. I have got news for you. It was not the devil that walked in and said, "Hey, I have been watching Job down there." It was God who brought Job's name up. You know why? Because God understood the principle that the heart of the king was in the hand of the Lord. God understood the whole yardstick that no matter what happens in life, it is going to work to our good. You see, God had a message for Job. He had something He wanted to give to Job, a message for him. Sometimes God will have a message for you. Just like in Job's life, He used the devil for the delivery boy to give the message. But when you do not see the whole yardstick and you are living your life one inch at a time, you get so focused on the delivery boy, you never get the message.

I am telling you something. Proverbs 16:4 says,

Proverbs 16:4

The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.

God made the devil for a purpose. He uses the devil wherever he needs to. The devil cannot step outside one inch what God allows him to do. You know why? Because the heart of the king is in the hands of the Lord. In Job 41:34, the devil is called "the king over all the children of pride." While they have that little conversation, and the first desert, the devil says, "Oh, why should not he love you? Look at all that you gave him." And God says, "Okay, take it all away." I told you last week, remember, the real mark of your maturity is not when you have everything going your

way; it is when God takes it all away. The devil says, "Well, why would not he love you? He has given you, you have given him everything. I mean, he has got Ben Cartwright beat on the Ponderosa. He has got everything he wants." God says, "Okay, take it away." The devil says, "Yeah, take it away." All kinds of wheels are turning. Just as he gets to the door to throne him, God says, "Oh, by the way, take all that he had, but you cannot touch him." Now, you know what that means? That means the devil could stay up that night, the next night, and the next 20 nights in a row, and he could not change that. He could do it in the limitations that God said, but he could not touch him. You know why? The heart of the king is in the hands of the Lord. So Job loses everything.

Then there is another day in Job 2, and God brings his name up again. He says, He says, "Okay, now you can touch him." The devil says, "I have got some plans for that old boy." Well, the wheels are turning. Just as he gets to that door, God says, "And by the way, you can touch him, but you cannot kill him." The devil could not have killed Job. My point is this, just to make this story short because I have got a bunch of other good ones I want to give you: here is the bottom line. The devil cannot step in your life and in my life; he cannot step one inch outside of what God allows him to do. Now, why are you worried about him? Why? I will tell you why: because you are looking at life one inch at a time right now. "Oh, I am going through this terrible time." Forget the terrible time. Look at the yardstick. All things work together for good. You really need to see and understand that.

2.) Pharaoh and the Nation of Israel

I will show you the second one. Now that I laid the foundation, the second one is in there. You do not have to turn to the people. Just sit back. If you have got a boyfriend or a girlfriend here, just reach over and take their hand and enjoy it. Put your arm around and sit back. We wish we had popcorn. You can pretend you have the movies. Our second one is in Exodus 1 through Exodus 12. Pharaoh is dealing with the nation of Israel. Oh, how we look at that and preach on that. Egypt was the world power. Pharaoh, he hates the people of God. The Bible starts out by saying that there arose a new king in Egypt who knew not Pharaoh. The devil used Pharaoh and Egypt, the world system, to try to wipe out the nation of Israel. Now, when you read that passage, if you do not understand, you would think Pharaoh was really in charge of something. He was not in charge of squat. God used Pharaoh to do exactly what God needed him to do to bring His rabble of people and nation of Israel into a strong, mighty nation that could endure the hardships that were going to come their way. Then you know what he did after he used him to do that? He killed him. Yeah, he is down there chasing him in the Red Sea. The Bible says that Pharaoh gets in the middle of that thing, and then God closed the waters, and there he goes. You see, God had a purpose. He used Pharaoh to help him with that purpose because the Bible says the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord.

You ever see that purpose? You know where it is found? It is found in Romans 9:17, a long way from Exodus. It says in Romans 9:17,

Romans 9:17

For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

You see that? God just let Pharaoh think he was in charge. All down through the Bible, you have got the nations. You have got Egypt. You have got Assyria. You have got Babylon. You have got Persia. You have got Greece. You have got Rome in the New Testament. You have got England. You have got Russia. Then you have got the United States. If you do not understand this, you think actually in world history that these nations were in charge of something. They were not in charge of anything. He allowed them to do and used them to accomplish His overall specific purpose. Then when He was done with them, He wiped them out. Anybody know any Babylonians? Anybody know any Assyrians? Anybody know any Persians? They are all gone. They are history. God had a purpose. Was it exactly what God wanted, and never one time could he step outside that purpose? Why? Proverbs 21:1, "The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord." When God was done with it, He killed him.

3.) The Book of Judges and Remaining Nations

In the book of Judges, they finally get into the land after Joshua. But they still have to deal with some nations. We read that, and we look at that, and the average Christian says, "Wow, that is a, that is a, wow, I wonder why God just did not wipe them all out." That is kind of tough because those nations were a problem for them. These nations, as you come through, 12 of them in fact, will come through the book of Judges, will bring them into bondage again and again and again and again, and every time God brings them up a deliverer who judges them, hence the name of the book is Judges. So there were nations that were left. Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, but look, listen.

Judges 2:21-23

21 I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died:

22 That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the LORD to walk therein, as their fathers did, or not.

23 Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered he them into the hand of Joshua.

God left them there. What a terrible thing. How dare God leave some bad situations in our lives? How dare God in your life and my life leave negative things, problems that you have to deal with, problems that you have absolutely no control over? But I have said it many, many times: many times you are not responsible for the bad situations that befall you in life, but you are responsible how you deal with them. "Oh God, He let those nations," and those nations were the stumbling block to them only because they did not follow what God told them. God wanted to prove them.

You know why God will leave some things in your life? He wants to prove you. He wants to see if you are really going to do what the Word of God says to do. Sometimes He will leave things in your life just so you know you do not get too high and mighty. If you are a real pastor and you

are doing the work of God and you are really preaching the book, it is hard for a guy like that to ever get prideful and high and mighty. You know why? Because everybody is trying to kill him. He is keeping his head down. I told you the story years and years ago. How many remember Jack Parr, The Jack Parr Show? Some of you older folks? Yeah. He had on there one time, and I was just a kid, he had on there the only talking dog in the world. I will tell you what, it was an incredible thing. The dog came on the show, sat down there, and he asked the questions. It talked, it conversed back and forth. I mean, it was not like "what is on a tree? bark," "what is on the house? roof," it was not that kind of stuff. He was asking him, and the dog was talking. Well, it got to be a worldwide sensation. They did not have internet back then. It would have been a million hits. But it got national fame, and everybody, this dog was on every show in the world.

Finally, a New York Times reporter went over. This dog had made this guy millions and millions and millions of dollars. He goes over to this guy's house for an interview, an exclusive interview, and he goes in there, beautiful mansion. He walks out on the back veranda, and beautiful palm trees and everything, and there was the dog house. It was the most beautiful dog house you ever saw: air conditioning, three levels, two-car garage that he did not even drive. Incredible. So the guy sits down, he starts to talk, and he says, "Well, where is the dog?" And he says, he calls the dog, dog Ragtail comes in there, you know, dog sits down there, and you know, he is getting ready to ask him the question. All of a sudden, the dog starts going, and he starts going crazy itching, you know. The guy says, "This dog has got fleas." He is saying to himself, "This dog is worth a hundred billion dollars. Why would a guy who has got a dog at that expensive, living in a place like this, have a million-dollar dog and allow it to have fleas?" He says, "I have got to ask," he says, "Sir, I have got to ask this question." He says, "You have the most expensive dog, unique dog in the world. Here we are in this palatial palace of yours, and this thing is crazy. Why do you have a dog that is worth that much money, living in luxury, and you allow him to have fleas?" And the guy says, "Oh, that is so he will not forget he is a dog." You know why God will leave some fleas in your life? You know why God will not just give you all the good things in life? You know why He left some nations that were the fleas in Israel's life? God will leave some fleas in your life or my life to prove us, because He knows, like I already said, if God gives you everything, well, I have got people that are in my own church that you give them everything. All my life you give them everything in the Bible, and they get so lazy, they do not want to, they just want you to keep giving it to them, keep giving it to them, "Give me this, give me this, give me this." And they get mad when you do not. You know why? Because you have everything you want. God allows some fleas. Now, I may be a pretty pedigree preacher, but I have got some fleas. You may be a great Christian, and you may love the Lord. I guarantee you. I saw you scratching over there. You have got some fleas. So, you see, that even though in the book of Judges you have this great thing, God is still in control. Those nations took him into captivity by God's decree to prove them. You will have some terrible things come into your life as a Christian to prove you.

4.) Captivity in 2 Chronicles and 2 Kings

We all talk about hindsight. "Well, hindsight, you know, in hindsight I did this, in hindsight I did that." Let me tell you something. A Christian who develops the ability to understand the whole

yardstick will have hindsight even before the problem comes. You have understanding. I will give you another one. Back in 2 Chronicles 36 and 2 Kings 17 and 18, the nation of Israel goes into captivity. Nebuchadnezzar comes from the south in 2 Chronicles 36, takes the southern tribes. A little bit before that, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, comes down from the north in 2 Kings 17 and 18 and takes them into captivity. Now, these are two of the most wicked, godless nations and two of the most wicked, godless kings on the planet in the history of the world. They go into captivity, Israel, and never return, and they miss all that God has for them. Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, but look. Terrible time, excruciatingly terrible. Let me tell you something. When Nebuchadnezzar came down and finally sacked Jerusalem after he besieged it for three and a half years or three years, whatever it was, when those guys broke down that wall, they ravaged and raped the women, they set the men on fire, they picked up the little babies and threw them up in the air and caught them on the spears. It was a massacre. But Jeremiah 25:9 says and Jeremiah 27:6 says, God speaking, "The king of Babylon, my servant." Nebuchadnezzar, that wicked, godless king, "my servant." I have actually had people look at those verses and scratch their head and wonder what they are talking about. I will tell you what they are talking about: they are talking about Proverbs 21:1. God uses everything on this planet, no matter how wicked it is, how bad it is, no matter what the nation is, God will use it for His specific purpose. He used those guys to deal with the nation of Israel, and then you know what He did? After He had Sennacherib's group come down from the north and Babylon come up to the south, took them into captivity, you know what He did? He raised up the king of Persia to come in and wiped out those two nations, killed them. The quicker you see that God is in control of everything in your life, the good things and the bad things, the better off you will be. Last week I talked about how that even in our chastisement it is a good thing. Hebrews 12:5-11 talks about what we go through. It is not joyous for the time. But when you just focus on that one thing, you lose the fact that the end of the day of chastisement is the peaceable fruit of God's righteousness. You have got to see the whole yardstick.

5.) Return from Captivity in Ezra and Nehemiah

I will give you the next one. Walking through the Old Testament, the book of Ezra and Nehemiah. Now Babylon has been defeated. Assyria has been defeated. The nation of Israel is out of the homeland, held captive. Cyrus, king of Persia, defeats those two. Now he has got the mess to deal with. Now he is in charge of the Jews. You know what? This is where the Jews in Ezra and Nehemiah go back after the 70 years of the captivity that goes on to even this day. Now I want to tell you, Cyrus is a wicked pagan king. And yet Cyrus recognizes God and gives the land back. Ezra 1:1-4. This is the words of a pagan king who was not anywhere connected with God in any way, shape, or form, who followed all of the pagan things that everything that did in Persia. Look what he said.

Ezra 1:1-4

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

3 Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

You see that? There is a wicked pagan king who has nothing to do with God, but God comes down and stirs his heart for the nation of Israel. You know why? Because the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. That is why. It does not matter if he is a believer or not. It does not matter if he references God or not. He could be the most wicked pagan guy on the planet. The bottom line is this whole world, get it down, is about God's purpose. Not Persia, not Babylon, not Assyria, not England, not Russia, not Iraq, not Iran, and certainly not America. It is about God's purpose to fulfill God's promises to the nation of Israel, and He will use everybody. He wants to use you. He has a specific calling for you. Yes, you will go through some disappointments in your Christian life. Focus on the yardstick.

"Thus saith the sire of the king of Persia," verse 2, "The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and hath charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem which is Judea." What? Where did that come from? I do not find anywhere in this Bible where God charged him to do anything like that. You know what God did? God used Assyria and Babylon, got His people where He wanted. Then He said, "Okay, Cyrus, wipe them out. Your turn in the spotlight. Your 15 minutes of fame." He wipes them out. He is king. He said, "You know what, Cyrus? I want you to do something for me. I am going to stir up your heart. I want you to send My people back. I know they have been down here now for 70 years. I need a remnant to go back. You do not need to know why. The reason is because it is the first coming of Christ, I need to have My people back in the land. So get a small number to go back. Thank you very much." So he stirred up his heart. He did it. You know what? You know how God thanked him? He wiped him out.

I am trying to make a point. When you do what is right, listen to me. When you do what is right, nobody will stop you. You can have all the enemies in the world. No one will stop you. The king of Babylon could not stop him. The king of Assyria could not stop him. Cyrus could not stop him. Nobody could stop him. I am trying to get you to see and understand. When you fulfill God's purpose in life and you get the calling, why would you worry about the people out there who are trying to give you problems? You think the Christian life is something you go through problem-free? All my life in the ministry, I have had either people who love me or hate me. I have people that just do everything they can to try to stop me from stepping in this pulpit and preaching the word of God. They will do the same to you. They will shut you down. Some of your own people will betray you, turn on you, and undermine you and try to destroy the work that God has given you, not them. They will sneak underneath the surface. They will get a little

group together. They will have a Bible study, and they will tell those people, "We are all going to leave and start our own church." But you just get out of church for about four or five months or you do not go. Then when we all start our church, this actually happened about six, seven, eight years ago. The most goofy guy on the planet and his wife was the wicked witch of the west. They got a group of people together, and they said, "You know what? Let us just do this." It was a plan, just like every plan in the Bible. "Here is what we will do." You talked to them this week, did not you? Did they have anything good to say about me? No. No. You know what? They got the little group together out the back door, had a nice little plan. That has been what, five, six, seven, eight years ago? You go to that church today, he is running two chickens and a duck. All the people have left. He has got nothing over there, nothing anywhere. And yet everybody else is the problem. "I am the bad guy." Look what I have got. He is the good guy. He has got two people. That guy could not build a good case of hemorrhoids, let alone build a church. They are going to come your way. They are going to come your way. The quicker you realize that nobody can stop you when you are doing what God wants you to do, I am going to tell you the better off you are going to be.

Do not ever get caught up in the bugs on your windshield of life. You are driving down the freeway, and splat! Big old bug guts all over the place. It irritates you at first, does it not? Then when you turn your wipers on, it makes it even worse. It smears the whole thing. But when you stop and get gas, and you get out and you get that spongy thing out of the thing, you just wipe it off. You know what? The church in life is going to get bugs on your windshield, and when you stop for a moment, just get the squeegee and wipe them off. They are always going to be there. Somebody is always going to try to stop you. You are going to allow that to happen if you do not understand that nobody can stop you. When you are doing God's purpose, God has got His hand on your life. Everything that anybody, oh, you know what old Ruckman used to say? Old Ruckman was, you go on the website, there will be 85 pages of some of the worst stuff you have ever shown in your life that was not true. There was one guy one time that was taking Photoshop, and he was taking pictures of Ruckman and Donovan or maybe it was Magee back at that point in time, and he was putting them on, in a Facebook, and he was putting them in, in a bar scene with women sitting on their laps, and then putting it all over the place. "This is the great Peter S. Ruckman." These are lies, lies, lies. You know what old Pete said? He said, "That stuff never bothers me." He said, "You know what I have learned?" He said, "Every time somebody takes a cheap shot at me, every time somebody just tries to stop me or clobber me, God just gives me double blessings, and I just move on." When you understand that concept, you do not worry about those guys. You do not worry about that stuff, man. That stuff is junior varsity. You know why? Because the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. Nobody can stop you. Nobody can stop you. You stop yourself.

Ezra 1:3

Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

Wow! This pagan king, he has got more Bible than most guys got today in a pulpit.

Ezra 1:4

And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

A godless pagan king against everything that God is in his theology who worships all the stars and the gods of heaven. And off they go. He sends a decree to send them back. Ah! But in Ezra 4, just like I told you, they go back to do God's purpose. In Ezra 4, the adversaries show up. The opposition comes. They show up and they say, "Hey, we want to build with you." Then the Bible says they hired counselors against them. Then the Bible says in Ezra 4:6, they made false allegations against them. Then the Bible says in Ezra 4:11-14, rumors and half-truths, all to stop God's purpose. But the heart of the king is in the hands of the Lord.

Ezra 7:23-28

23 Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it diligently be done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?

24 Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them.

25 And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not.

26 And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

You know what he is saying? He says, "I am the one that sent them back. What is your problem with it? I am the king. You are not. If somebody needs to be dealt with, I will deal with them." You know what some of God's people need to know? If somebody needs to be dealt with, let God deal with them. Who puts you in charge?

Are you kidding me? A pagan godless king who has nothing to do with God, who died and went to hell? Probably. God stirred up his heart and sent the Jews back so they would be in the land when the first coming of Christ showed up. You know why? You know how that happened? You better get it. You know why nobody stopped them? You better get it. You know why no adversary could stop the work of God and God's purpose the same way it will not in your life? I know the reason why some of you do not want to get into it up to your head and get into the thing over your head is because you do not want the opposition. Let me tell you something. You better develop a smell and a love for napalm in the morning. You are in into a battle. Do not fear the adversary.

6.) The Book of Esther

The book of Esther. You have Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. Now let me give you this just so you have this. The book of Ezra and Nehemiah tells the story of what happened to the Jews that go back. I want to put that at the beginning of Ezra and Nehemiah. Put a little note in there. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of what happened to the Jews that go back. The book of Esther tells the story of what happened to the Jews who stayed in Babylon. You want to get that down.

Esther is the strangest book in the Bible. You notice this? Only two books in the Bible start with a woman's name. Did you ever see that? Only two books in all of the Bible start with a woman. There are lots of women in the Bible, but there are only two books in your Bible that start with a woman's name. You know why that is? Because in your Bible, there are only two key women in all the whole Bible. One of them is the nation of Israel, and one of them is the church. When you go over to the book of Ruth, which is named after Ruth, you have got a picture of the church. When you have got a book of Esther, which is named after Esther, you have got a picture of the nation of Israel. Now I want to tell you something. That was worth coming this morning for. You may not see that now and evaluate that, but that was worth coming. If you have got nothing else and you have got that, you did a good thing getting here today.

In the book of Esther, what happened? The Gentile queen gets the throne, then the Jewish queen goes on the throne. Esther is a picture of the end of the time of the Gentile. Esther is a picture right now. Israel is coming on the scene, and the Gentile world is soon to be off the scene. It is the only book in the Bible where God is not mentioned. There is no mention of the name of God, no mention of God doing anything. And yet if you study the book, He is behind the scenes orchestrating every event and doing everything that He does. It is a picture of the time that we live in. You would not think that God is doing anything today with all the stupid stuff that is going on. God is behind the scenes, not being mentioned in many churches in a true sense, but He is behind the scenes orchestrating the events for His purpose. You have been recalled to that purpose. How are you doing with that? How are you getting along with that? Hey, I know it is a crazy time today. Very confusing unless you understand Esther.

Now, you know what you have got here? You have got the king, that is Ahasuerus. You have got Esther. She is the picture of the nation of Israel. And Mordecai, he is the picture of the nation of Israel. Then you have a guy by the name of Haman. Haman is the type of the devil in the doctrinal study. But in our story, you have got the king, you have got Esther and Mordecai, and you have got Haman. Now Esther and Mordecai are Jews. Haman is not. The king, of course, is the king. Haman sees what God is doing with Israel, and he wants to stop it. So he goes to the king, and he trumps up a story against Mordecai and Esther, but Mordecai in particular, to try to get the king's wrath on Mordecai and get him killed. That is what he is trying to do. In other words, he is the adversary in Esther. You had another set of adversaries in Ezra and Nehemiah. He is the adversary in Esther that is trying to stop what God is doing. As the devil could not do it one way in Ezra and Nehemiah, he tried to do it in Esther with Haman. So Haman puts this grandiose plan together to have Mordecai and Esther killed, stop the plan of God, stop all that is going on, and as you come down through it, a great elaborate plan. But the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. At the end of the book, Haman gets hung. He gets killed because the king's

heart is in the hand of the Lord, and God is not letting anything. I am going to tell you again, you begin to be "the called," and you fulfill God's purpose. There will be nobody or nothing on this planet that will stop you. You will stop yourself, but nobody will stop you.

VI. Human Nature vs. God's Perspective

Now look at our second verse here, Proverbs 21:2.

Proverbs 21:2

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.

Now that is human nature at its best to think we know more about life than God does. You know why you are in the mess you are in today? If you are in a mess at all. You know why we are in it, we get into the messes we get in life, it is real simple, it is not hard. You have got this problem or that problem. No, you have got one problem, one problem only. If you are saved, you have got one problem. If you are unsaved, your problems are bigger than what you are going through, I am telling you. But if you are saved here this morning and your life is in a mess, your kids are in a mess, your marriage is in a mess, everything is in a mess, you have got one problem, one problem only, one problem only. It is simply this: you think you know more about life than God does. And you do not. I do not. But human nature is to think that we know more about life than God does. The book says one thing, we are going to do something else.

I had parents sit in my office and actually lose their children, lose this and lose that, and sit there and say to me, "You know what, I lost my boy or I lost my girl," and scratch their head and say, "I do not get it." I look at them and I think to myself, "This is a joke, right? This is some kind of a theory thing." You lost your kid and you do not know why? You let somebody else have more influence in their life than you, and you do not understand why? This is a joke, right? It is some kind of skit. You saw the ones at camp, you thought you were going to put one together. I am going to tell you something. We always think we know more about life than God does until our life goes upside down. Then we have the audacity to play stupid and say, "Gee, I wonder what happened with my family. I wonder what happened with my marriage. I wonder what happened with my children." Really? Rationalization and justification to deceive ourselves that we are right when we are really not? I mean, I see it all the time. People get into a situation, they will not face the reality of the situation. They want to stick their head in the sand, and they want to say, "Gee, I do not know how that happened." Then you need to get saved and start all over again.

God clearly saved us to accomplish His purpose, Romans 8:28. He allows all the things of life to help us to do that so we can see and understand it. But when you get to that mindset that you are not responsible, I do not know how many times I have had somebody say, "Well, it was not my fault." Whose fault was it? We always like to blame it on stuff. "Well, my kids were hanging out with this kid." "Well, this happened here in my marriage," or "this happened here," or "this," or "this happened here." Who was in charge? Who allowed anybody to have more influence in your world than you as the spiritual leader or the mother and the father or as a Christian? Who? And I am not an owl. Who? Who? Who allowed that? How did that happen? But we like to blame it on

everything else. You know why? We do not want to take responsibility for who we are. I have got some news for you. "Every way of man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord pondereth the heart." You may not have it down right. He has got it.

Hebrews 4:12 says,

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

God listens in on our thoughts. Like the business you call, you know? You call AT&T, you call the cable company, you call the insurance company, you call your doctors, you call whoever, and you are waiting there, and you get this little recording: "These calls may be recorded for quality assurance." Well, Malachi 3:16 says,

Malachi 3:16

Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.

Your thoughts are being monitored for your quality assurance. God's Book of Remembrance. For the thoughts. I bet you most of God's people here did not even know that God had a book for our thoughts. Yeah, we get the December seed of Christ. We start to explain it all away. God will just pull out that book and say, "Let us see what your thought was on that." It is going to be much more complicated than just standing up there and saying, "Ah, I screwed up."

Psalms 139:1-6

1 O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.

2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.

3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.

4 For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.

5 Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

God ponders what we think about. Right now, as you are sitting here listening to this, you know what you are doing? You have got some kind of attitude of heart going on with what is being said. He is pondering it. He is listening to it. He is saying to you, "Where do you feel that way?" And you say, "Well, I just do not like what he is saying." "Well, when is the last time you won somebody to Christ?" "Well, yeah, I know, but I just think," "When is the last time you read your Bible through?" "Well, yeah, but I just said, 'Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.'" "When is the last time you ever got down on your knees and prayed with your kids? When is the last time you ever

opened up the Bible and got on your knees with them when they had a problem and you prayed them through with it? Did not get up off your knees until the problem was solved?" Or you are too busy doing your own purpose? Oh, I am telling you. God ponders what we think about, and God will take those things we think about. God has a Book of Remembrance for our thoughts. Then He begins the process of establishing them for His purpose.

He will take the common man, every one of you. The greatest asset that all of you have, for the most part, the greatest asset you all have is the fact that you are all stupid. I do not mean that in a bad way. You have never been educated outside your intelligence. You are still dumb enough, most of you, just to believe that God is who He says He is, and He will do what He says He will do. The problem is you are just not looking at the yardstick. I get it. I understand. I was over at Home Depot. I was going to give everybody a yardstick today, but they were too expensive. I did not want your kids sword fighting with them and putting somebody's eye out, so I thought that might be a good thing too. That is our problem. We have got the yardstick of life. All we see is what we are going through right now at that half inch at a time. "Oh, what am I dealing with? How am I ever, ever going to get through this?" Look at the yardstick! All things work together for good. Everything. Even the bad things. But you see, when we do not see God's purpose, we do not fulfill God's purpose, we do not understand the calling. All you see is that life going through life a half inch at a time. How boring is that?

He gave us the Bible, the Holy Spirit of God, gave you a pastor, gave you a New Testament church, gave you the ministry. He will take the common man with a common Bible and then use him to fulfill God's common purpose through the things that He has given you. You have everything you need. The moment you got saved, you got the Holy Spirit of God. Once you got the Holy Spirit of God, you fortunately got the right book, got the right book, got the right church, got the right teaching, got the right people working with it, got everything going. There is not one person in this church that ever taught you anything contrary to what was good for you. If they did, he is not here no longer. Or she is not here, whoever. I am not talking about anybody in my mind. He will take every situation that comes our way and use it for the good of His purpose, if we can see it. The man and the woman, you and me, will develop our understanding in life, understanding to see God's hand in every situation in life. That way, you never have to take it personal. I tell you in counseling, never take it personal when somebody rejects you. Never take it personal when somebody hates you. Never take it personal when somebody slanders you. Never take it personal when somebody tries to destroy you. You know why? It does not matter! All that matters is, are you doing God's purpose in your life? Because if you are, I just gave you five or six examples where if the king of Babylon and Pharaoh and the king of Assyria and the king of Persia could not stop God, whatever little piddly thing you have got in your life today is not going to stop it either. This will give him the burden, the boldness, and the freedom to preach like Paul did. You will have the power to preach the Word of God wherever you are at without being intimidated. You will have the power and the boldness to say whatever God wants you to say, because you realize that God is in control. You will have the ability to teach whatever needs to be taught, because you realize at the end of the day, God is in control. Whoever is around you that wants to stop you or does not like you or does not like this, it does

not really matter. Knowing that the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord. And life like a flowing river, it will go where God wants you to go, and no one will stop it.

VII. Conclusion: The Biscuit Analogy and Final Exhortation

As our verse says in Romans 8:28,

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

Wesley Cripple is a good friend of this church. Wesley, I hope you are listening this morning. He sends me neat stuff from time to time. Wesley, I want to thank you personally. God used you greatly this week in my life because I was putting this thing together. I always like to end with something that kind of pulls everything together, you know. It is part of communicating the truth that you have. I was pondering it, and I got an email on Monday or Tuesday, and it was from Wesley, and he sent me this story. He told me, he said, "I thought you would like this, and pass it on." So Wesley, yes, I did like it, and I am about to pass it on. It illustrates exactly what I just told you this morning. He is a good guy, old Wesley, and he is a friend of this church in my ministry. He sent me a little story that illustrates Proverbs 21:1-2 and Romans 8:28 perfectly.

It goes like this: One Sunday morning at a small Baptist church, a new pastor had just taken over the church. He really did not know anybody, and he was getting ready to get up and preach. He was sitting there, and he had called for one of the elder deacons, one of the older deacons, to lead in the opening prayer. He was focusing on preaching, and the deacon graciously came up to the pulpit, stood up, and said, "Let us bow our heads." He began to pray, and he said, "Lord, I hate buttermilk." The pastor opened one eye, and I am looking up there, you know, and "Where is he going with this thing, man?" Then the deacon continued and said, "Lord, I hate lard." Now the pastor was really perplexed. The deacon went right on and continued, and he says, "Lord, I am not crazy about eating just plain flour. But Lord, after You mix them all together and bake them in a hot oven, I just love the biscuits that come out. Lord, help us to realize that when life gets hard, when things come up that we do not like, when things come up that we do not understand what You are doing, Lord, help us to remember that all things work together for our good. But some of the ingredients we do not care for just have to bake a while. Lord, we just need to be patient and wait to understand what You are making in our lives. Lord, I know this in my life: when You are finally finished baking all the ingredients of my life, it will be a lot better than any biscuits I ever had. Amen, amen, and amen."

"The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of waters, He turneth it whithersoever He will." And we know that all things work together for good to them who are "the called according to His purpose." You see, the real mature Christian understands that. Because tomorrow afternoon, sometime this week, your world is going to fall apart. Something is going to happen, somebody is going to say something, the phone is going to ring, it is going to be some terrible news that you have to deal with, something is going to come up. When that all happens and all transpires and all takes place, you need to realize that it is just part of the whole

yardstick of life. You never judge your life or where you are at by the half-inch marks. You step back and you look at the whole yardstick, and you realize that God takes it all. He takes the good, He takes the bad, He takes the indifference. He bakes it and mixes it all together. At the end, it comes out for His purpose, what He wants. Just like He brought Israel through all the tough times that they did, the heart of the king was in the hand of the Lord. No one, no one, no matter how vehemently they hate you, no matter how detestable you are to them, no matter what they do and how they stay up all night long to destroy you or whatever you are doing, they will never hurt you. The bottom line is God has got your back. When you do His purpose, they just are the bugs on the windshield of life. You just keep moving on and doing what He wants you to do.

That verse, this passage, will change your life. If you walk out of here today with understanding, nothing can stop you. "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world." You do not have to be afraid of anything because perfect love casts out fear. You have everything that you need to be "the called according to His purpose." When you do that, you rest in the fact with the boldness, you rest in the fact with everything that God has for you. Every Christian ought to be three things:

1.) You ought to be faithful to God. 2.) You ought to be fervent for God. 3.) You ought to be fearless for God.

Because you realize it is not about the little thing you are going through right now. It is about where you are going in life and what God is going to do with you.

Father, thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. Thank You for those great verses. May these good people today, people that I love, people that minister with me, and yet they struggle and fight through things just like I have to and all the other things that every Christian has to, help us to see and understand. It is not about the little increments of the issues of our life. It is about the overall process of God. There will be people who try to stop us. There will be people that will hurt us. There will be people that will help us. There will be people that will encourage us, and there will be people that will try to discourage us. It does not matter. You cannot accept the negative from the bad. You have to accept it all and put it in God's oven and let it bake. What comes out will be God's purpose. We rest in the fact that we can be faithful, we can be fervent, and we can be fearless because we know that the heart of the King is in the hand of the Lord. Thank You and praise You. In Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen. God bless you. You are dismissed.