

LITTLE CHRISTS IN BIG CRISES PHIL. 2:5; 1 PET. 2:23

Today, we are winding down our series called, “Living Right Side Up in and Upside-Down World,” in which we are addressing some of the issues that have arisen in our current national crises. In the course of this series I have had several conversations and received numerous texts and emails from people who are trying to thoughtfully navigate their emotions and convictions and attitudes and reactions to the things that are unfolding in our culture regarding public health and safety, the role of government, the legitimacy (or not) of protests and other forms of resistance, and movements such as ‘Black Lives Matter’ and ‘Defund the Police’. Most of these people sincerely want to know what the Bible says about these issues, or what Jesus would do, or how God would have us think and respond.

I want to say, first, that I have appreciated these questions, and, even more, the desire and attempt of the people who posed them to think critically and carefully. Please continue to do that, and in the process don’t forget to frequently ask God for wisdom. He *wants* to give it and *will* give it if you ask Him in faith. Also, don’t forget to humbly go to His Word for clarity and insight on how to evaluate and respond to these matters. Though some of the specific issues are not directly addressed in Scripture, most of the general themes are—like racial tension and race relations, national insecurity, the apparent triumph of evil, attitudes toward those in authority, attitudes toward those with whom we disagree, etc.

I also want to say that I will not be answering all your questions from the pulpit this morning, not because they are not good questions that are worth discussing, but because I have a conviction that the pulpit needs to be preserved for expounding the Scriptures rather than discussing current events, even if we try to look at those events in light of Scripture. As your pastor-teacher, I am most interested in feeding you solid food from the Word of God every week, and I believe that if I do, you will grow in maturity. I also want to equip you, through my method of preaching and teaching, to find those answers for yourselves—to have the competence and confidence to hold your Bible in one hand and the newspaper or your device in the other, and be able to interpret current events and political discourse and popular thought in light of what Scripture says.

So, instead of addressing specific issues or answering specific questions, I would like to spend our time reiterating God’s general purpose for Christ-followers in times of crises, and then what it looks like to live out that purpose in times of crises. One of the things that we have had to fight during this difficult time is the tendency to have a knee-jerk reaction to all the things we have heard and seen in our various forms of media. It is easy to get angry, irritated, frustrated, embittered, defensive, and combative during this time. It is easy to take sides, to enter the political fray, and, perhaps most of all, to make assumptions about those who are doing things we do not like or who disagree with our views.

But all of the things I’ve just described are fleshly reactions (they emanate from our old nature), and none of them are God’s intentions for us as Christ-followers. We have been called and commissioned by God to be little Christs in this world. The word, “Christian,” means “little Christ,” and the implication is that those who are called by that name think like Jesus, act like Jesus, and respond like Jesus. Someone said it this way: “A Christian is someone who has a mind through which Christ thinks, a voice through which Christ speaks, a heart through which Christ loves, and a hand through which Christ helps.”

And we are capable of doing this, too, because when we were born again, we were given Christ’s nature and His Spirit to dwell in us as our operating system. It is God’s intention for us to be filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit all the time (so that Christ can be

expressed through us), but it is absolutely imperative that we be filled and controlled by Him during *this* time. Jesus' reputation is at stake; people's eternal destinies are at stake; our nation's stability and security are at stake.

I want to show you what it looks like to be "little Christs" in big crises. The appropriate way to begin is to see how Christ Himself responded during big crises when He lived on earth. Keep in mind that the Palestinian world of Jesus' day was engulfed in political animosity, religious sectarianism, and racial tension. The average Jew was hostile toward Rome and resented their civic rule and role in Jewish society. Bitterness between Jews and Samaritans was so great they did not even speak to each other. And the religious divide within Judaism was so wide that members of different sects could hardly stand to be in the same room with each other.

That is the world Jesus lived in. However, it is important to note that Jesus never entered the fray in any of these political, racial, or theological skirmishes. He did not identify Himself with a particular political party or religious affiliation. He did not pander to a particular theological constituency or parrot the popular pundits of the day. He spoke the truth. He lived the truth. He was the truth. And it cost Him dearly.

The night Jesus was arrested and put on trial He was with eleven of His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Judas led a Jewish paramilitary group into the Garden to arrest Jesus, these eleven men went into panic mode. Peter pulled out a sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus calmly picked it up, reattached it, and said, ⁵² *"...Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? ⁵⁴ But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" ⁵⁵ At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. ⁵⁶ But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." Then all the disciples left him and fled (Matt. 26:52-56).*

Do not assume for a minute that Jesus was dispassionate during this circumstance. He had just finished praying, and Luke says He was in such emotional anguish that His sweat was like great drops of blood falling to the ground (Luke 22:44). Jesus was fully aware that the greatest concentration of evil at one place at one time was converging on Him. If there was ever a time for the Son of Man to panic, it was now. If there was ever a time for Him to take matters into His own hands in order to protect and defend Himself, it was now. But He resisted those temptations and laid aside His personal feelings and fears because He was committed to doing what He had come into this world to do.

Later in the evening, when He was on trial before the High Priest, then Pilate, and then Herod, we are told, *When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly (1 Pet. 2:24).*

Here's the point: Jesus, was the victim of the horrendous injustice of the local governing authorities, He was the Object of terrible brutality and mockery by an out of control mob, and He had just been abandoned by His own disciples. Yet in this, His hour of greatest need, He did not take matters into His own hands. He did not retaliate, He did not shame or condemn His adversaries, and He did not use His divine prerogative to dispatch heavenly reinforcements to rescue Him. Instead, He put himself in His Father's hands, and trusted Him to turn this tragic circumstance, this horrible travesty, this humiliating ordeal into something that would turn out for His honor and glory. Jesus saw the bigger picture and chose to rest in His Father's perfect plans.

My brothers and sisters, since this is what Christ did in His biggest crisis, this is what

it looks like to be little Christs in our big crises. Is God sovereign over the crises we are experiencing right now? Yes! Does God have a purpose for them? Yes! Will God accomplish His purposes? Yes! Does God intend to use us, as Christ-followers, to accomplish His purposes? Yes! How?

I can tell you for sure that it is *not* by adopting the narrative of your favorite talk show host. It is *not* by getting on social media and ranting about how wrong our government is, or how inconsistent they are, or how ridiculous it is that anyone would follow their rules. It is *not* by isolating yourself from people who don't agree with you and huddling in groups of like-minded people where you can collectively castigate those poor folks who just don't get it. We are little Christs! When we are troubled or when our backs are up against the wall, we are supposed to act and react like Jesus. We are supposed to speak His words and express His love.

So, what does that look like in a world turned upside down? I believe I can tell you with confidence what it looks like, because the same Holy Spirit who lived in Jesus now lives in us, and whatever He compelled Jesus to do He will compel us to do. And Paul specifically told us in Galatians 5 the qualities a person displays when He is under the influence of the Spirit.

Love—Treating even my enemies with respect and dignity.

Joy—Even when the things I love (like my country) are crumbling and my circumstances are falling apart.

Peace—An absence of animosity toward people who disagree with me or are against me.

Patience—With people and circumstances that are unbearable.

Kindness—Toward those who say annoying things or do foolish things.

Goodness—Wanting the best for those who don't deserve it.

Faithfulness—Not giving up on those who have given up on me, or not giving up on what I am called to do even if I don't see any results.

Gentleness—Responding in humility to those who criticize or attack me.

Self-control—Not speaking rashly or reacting impulsively.

Do you know what all of these fruits of the Spirit have in common? They are not natural in times of crises. They are just of the opposite of what we are naturally inclined to do when our backs are up against the wall. At such times we tend to revert to self-protection, self-preservation, and self-assertion. It's every man for himself, survival of the fittest. It's all about making sure I'm okay, making sure I won't be exploited, or put out, or inconvenienced, or be made to do something I don't want to do.

And those attitudes are as opposite of Jesus as can possibly be. Jesus was all about doing His Father's will, first, and serving others, second. That's why when Paul admonished us in Philippians 2 to "*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves,*" he followed up by saying, *"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus"* (2:4-5).

We *can* have that attitude because we are little Christs. We have the same nature and the same Operating System—the Holy Spirit. And one of the reasons I am emphasizing this is because, if indeed, it is not natural to display the fruit of the Spirit when our world is caving in or when people are pushing our buttons, we had better have some self-awareness before we open our mouths or before we act. Because we might be speaking or acting in the flesh and not in the Spirit. A Spirit led reaction looks like Jesus.

Incidentally, please don't quote the passage where Jesus drove out the crooks in the temple and say, "See, Jesus was angry, so it's okay if I'm angry." I know very few people

who have had righteous anger like Jesus had. I doubt if I have ever had it.

So, if your primary, lingering attitude about the things that are going on in our nation right now is *anger*, don't assume that it is a Christ-like attitude. Best to humbly go to the Father and ask Him about it. Better yet, ask Him to give you *His* attitude and *His* perspective.

If you have animosity or disdain toward the Black Lives Matter protestors, don't assume you are walking in the Spirit. You are not. You are walking in the flesh. The fruit of the Spirit is love, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.

If you have hatred or contempt toward our governor or any other elected official, don't assume that God endorses your attitude. I assure you; He does not. He is grieved by your attitude. You may not like what your governor is doing, or what your health officers are doing, or what your president is doing, but don't be contemptuous of them. Pray for them, honor them (1 Peter 2:17). And when the next election comes, quietly cast your ballot for someone else.

If you have anger toward the leaders in our church because we have made decisions that you don't like or agree with regarding the Coronavirus pandemic, please don't assume that your anger is righteous anger that comes from the Spirit of God. Don't assume that because you can find others who agree with you that your anger is justified. It is not justified. It grieves the Holy Spirit, and it reveals a carnal immaturity that Paul condemned in the Corinthians.

We have had people leave the church over our response to this Pandemic, and the elders and I are overwhelmed with sorrow because of it. We have spent many evenings weeping and praying for our loved ones who have reacted with such anger that they have said in effect, "We no longer want to associate with you people. We no longer trust you." Brothers and sisters, I plead with you, don't go down that path.

Let us be little Christs. Let's think like Him, speak like Him, react like Him, and act like Him. We CAN do that! But the only way we can do that is by letting the Spirit fill us and control us. When He does, we will rest and be at peace in the midst of this turmoil. Because that's what Christ did, by the same Spirit.

Several decades ago, during the Boxer Rebellion in China, it seemed apparent to the many of the Christians that lived there that all their efforts of reaching the lost and building the church were going up in smoke, and that the progress of the gospel would now be thwarted. Hudson Taylor, pioneer missionary, founder of the China Inland Mission, was in an isolated part of the country at the time. A group of his colleagues decided they would go to where he was and try to encourage him. They were fearful now with the devastating effects of the rebellion that he would be a distraught, discouraged, despondent man. He had already lost his wife and child during his ministry in China. Now, his entire life's work appeared to be in danger.

As the group came to the little village where Hudson Taylor was living, they walked beneath the little compound house where he was staying, and the window was open, and they heard Hudson Taylor's voice coming from inside the house. You know what he was doing? He was singing: 'Jesus, I am resting, resting, in the joy of what Thou art, I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart' (David Burnham, *Apathy or Adventure*, Jan. 1979).

That's what it looks like to be a little Christ in big crises. Like Jesus, who, during His biggest crisis, entrusted Himself to His Father and rested in His good plans and purposes, so must we entrust ourselves to His sovereign will and rest in Him. If we do, I'm convinced the Lord Jesus will reveal the greatness of His loving heart.

Little Christs in Big Crises Philippians 2:5; 1 Peter 2:23

Main Idea: Crises may expose and exacerbate the worst in humanity, but Christ-followers get to express the Solution to humanity's woes.

God's Purpose for Us in Crises: To Be "Little Christs"
How Jesus responded to Crises

How Little Christs respond in Crises
The fruit of the Spirit
Thoroughly unnatural

Thoroughly supernatural

A measure of self-awareness
Differentiating between Spirit and flesh reactions

Little Christ versus big ego

A big picture perspective
Resting in God's perfect plans

Looking for our Blessed Hope

A Christ-Centered, Gospel-Focused Response in Crises
Jesus is the King of kings

The gospel offers the ultimate solution