
PROGRESSIVE IN THYATIRA: MORE TOLERANT THAN GOD

Part 6 of The Seven

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Rev. 2:18–29 | May 27, 2012

Revelation 2:18–29

¹⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

¹⁹ “‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. ²⁰ But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. ²² Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, ²³ and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. ²⁴ But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. ²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come. ²⁶ The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷ and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. ²⁸ And I will give him the morning star. ²⁹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”

INTERVIEW WITH PIERS MORGAN

Piers Morgan: How many people in the world of religion take it too seriously? Is that part of the problem?

I think we should take Jesus seriously, we should take the Bible seriously, probably shouldn't take ourselves nearly as seriously. And that's how I approach it.

Piers Morgan: Do you think you're a tolerant kind of guy?

I love people very much, and it's—

Piers Morgan: That's not the same thing.

Well, it's how do you disagree sometimes with people that you love? That's a very difficult issue for everybody, but for a pastor in particular, because—

Piers Morgan: Because you preach tolerance.

I preach that we should love our neighbor, that we should accept—

Piers Morgan: But tolerance, tolerance in particular.

You keep hammering it, what do you mean by tolerance?

Piers Morgan: Tolerating people who may have a lifestyle or a belief that you don't agree with.

Yeah, we have to. When Jesus says, “Love your neighbor,” you know, he knows you're not going to agree with all your neighbors, but he wants you to love them, to seek good for them, to care for them.

Piers Morgan: What do you make of the whole Kirk Cameron scandal, as it's become, where he, you know, for fifteen minutes here, he sat here espousing what I think he thought were perfectly normal Christian views. But he did it in a way that people saw as really very bigoted toward gays. What did you think of that?

To be honest with you, I haven't seen the whole thing.

Piers Morgan: You know what he said.

I saw some of the Twitter, and you know, some of blogging and stuff, but that's not always the best snapshot of the full context of the conversation. So I don't know, to be honest with you.

Piers Morgan: Okay, do you think that homosexuality is a sin?

The Bible says on six occasions—

Piers Morgan: What do you think?

I believe that all sex outside of heterosexual marriage, so me as a teenager having sex before marriage, that was wrong. People looking at pornography is wrong. Single people having sex is wrong. Homosexuality is wrong. So there's a long list of things that the Bible says is wrong.

Piers Morgan: But given eight states in America now have legalized gay marriage, that's fine, right?

Well no, I mean, it's amazing because there were anti-sodomy laws and anti-fornication laws on the books just a few generations ago.

Piers Morgan: But no one's taking much account of the anti-fornication laws.

Yeah, I don't want to be the one to enforce those laws, or go around—

Piers Morgan: But my point is, the Bible is what it is. It's an extraordinary book—

Right.

Piers Morgan: Which has governed people's moral and personal behaviors now for—

Thousands of years.

Piers Morgan: However, like everything in life, shouldn't it be dragged kicking and screaming into each modern era, and be adapted, like the American Constitution. Because in my view about this, it's not that I don't respect Christians, or Catholics, or whoever, who absolutely swear by every word in here, it's just, I just don't believe anyone who's genuinely Christian should be spouting bigoted opinions about sections of the community for their sexuality.

Well, I think, when it comes to the Bible you've got three options: take it, "I believe what it says"; leave it, "I don't believe what it says"; or change it.

Piers Morgan: Or adapt the wording for a modern era.

Which would be the changing of it. That's exactly what, for example, Thomas Jefferson did. He literally sat down in the White House, with scissors, and cut the parts out that he didn't feel should be in there.

MORE TOLERANT THAN GOD

Aren't you glad you don't have my job? How would you answer that question, "Are you a tolerant person?" If you're a Christian, you're probably getting asked that question. If you're a non-Christian, you're probably the one asking that question. What's the answer to that question? Are you a tolerant person? Is Christianity a tolerant people? It's tough, isn't it?

How many of you, your first thought is, "Yes, I'm very tolerant. I'm open, diverse, evolved, progressive, loving, amazing. Yes." How many of you say, "No, I believe the Bible. I have convictions. I don't want to be a compromiser. I don't want to be lukewarm. No, I'm not tolerant." Some of you are wondering what you would say. "Well, yeah. No. Depends on what you mean." This is a massive issue in our culture. It's a massive issue for our church.

What's the answer? G. K. Chesterton said, "Tolerance is the virtue of the man without convictions." Some would say Christians are intolerant, and some Christians would say that others are intolerant of us.

It fits in the framework of what we'll call a plausibility structure. There was a sociologist named Peter Berger. He coined and popularized a term called "plausibility structure," and it means that there are certain assumptions, presuppositions, presumptions in every culture that are so widely held that they're unquestioned.

So, for example, if you go into an Asian cultural context, the thought of saving face and not experiencing shame, it pervades, permeates everything: the decisions that are made, the identities that are chosen, the lives that are lived. In the western world, particularly in Europe, Canada, and the US, what you're looking at is a plausibility structure of tolerance.

Tolerance is an assumed virtue. If you don't hold to an open, tolerant view, where you agree with, and support, and embrace everyone and everything, then you're bigoted. You heard those words. Narrow minded. You're discriminatory. You're prejudiced. You're outdated. You're primitive. You're two guys back on the evolutionary chart, with a sloped forehead. That's who you are.

Now, as Christians, it puts us in a tough place. I mean, that was what I was trying to explain to Piers. I enjoyed my time with him, I like him, I didn't feel he was very tolerant, but that's a whole other sermon. I gave him a Bible, and I hope that he reads it, and I hope he learns more about Jesus. I don't know where he's at with Jesus, but I pray he'd come to know Jesus. And that was part of my hope and prayer in giving him a Bible.

But how do we answer that question, and where do we go, and where do we start? Interestingly, we're going to go today to the Scriptures. How about that? We're going to go to Revelation 2. We're going to go to verses 18–29. We're going to look at “Progressive in Thyatira: A church that was more tolerant than God.” We're going to look at a two-thousand-ish-year-old letter, where Jesus writes, through John, a letter to a church. And this is going to blow your mind, he rebukes them for being tolerant. Let's just read it.

“And to the angel,” that's the spiritual leader, “of the church at Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God,’” so here's Jesus, “‘who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.’”

Here we go. “But—” didn't take long to get there did it? Hey, congratulations, but— “I have this against you, that you,” what? What's the word? There it is. I'm not the mail writer, I'm the mail deliverer. I didn't write this letter, my job is just to deliver it. The rebuke is, “You tolerate.” Now some of you, your mind just exploded. “What? Jesus doesn't want us to be tolerant? How could that be?”

And he says, “I have this against you, you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice,” not alternative lifestyles, but what? “Sexual immorality.” Now when Satan and marketers got done with it, sexual immorality became alternative lifestyle, because alternative lifestyle sounds like, “Oh, I don't know, chicken, ham, fish, I just don't know, there's so many alternatives.” Sexual immorality has a bit more of a loaded, moral implication. Amen? So it goes from being a menu of options, to obedience and disobedience. You can see why they killed Jesus, and were he not in heaven saying this, they'd try again.

“And to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed,” a hospital bed. She's been messing around on a regular bed, going to end up in a hospital bed. “And those who commit adultery.” “What? I thought that was yet another alternative, diverse lifestyle.” No, it's adultery. “With her and I will throw you into a great tribulation, unless they repent of their works, and I will strike her children,” spiritual followers, “dead.”

“And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.” You get the impression this isn't hugs-and-muffin Jesus, amen? Like, he's just not walking around in a dress, hugging people, throwing out Zen-like fortune cookie statements. You know, riding a unicorn. He's just not, that's not this guy. This is resurrected-from-death, ruling-and-reigning, living-in-heaven, judging-the-living-and-the-dead, big Jesus.

“But to the rest of you in Thyatira,” the faithful Christians and the faithful Christian church, “who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.” It's strong language, right? “As when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Jesus is talking, and the question is: Is anyone listening? The Spirit is speaking through the Scriptures, the question is: Will we have ears to hear?

CHRIST

We're going to talk about Christ and then his commendation of the church, and then his correction of the church. We'll start with Christ. You always, everything, have to start with Jesus. If you start talking about morality, politics, culture, lifestyle, orientation, you're going to get confused. Start with Jesus Christ. Who is he and how is it connected to him?

Here he is called the Son of God. Big title. The one that the Muslims just trip right over. Because it's saying that he is God. That he is equal to God the Father. That he is the maker of heaven and earth. That he rules and reigns over all peoples, times, places, cultures, preferences, and lifestyles. This is big Jesus. This is after he died on the cross. This is after he rose from the dead. This is after he ascended to his throne. This is him speaking authoritatively.

Here's the point: the church belongs to Jesus. Jesus is the one who has the right to say whether you and I, individually and collectively, are being obedient or disobedient. Whether our belief is orthodox or it is heretical. We all give an account to Jesus, and the church belongs to him. It's Jesus' church. The church in Thyatira, Jesus' church. Mars Hill Church and all of our fourteen churches, Jesus' church. Doesn't belong to you, doesn't belong to me, doesn't belong to us, doesn't matter what we think, how we feel, or what we vote, it matters what he says. It's his church and he looks at the church and he says, “I want to give you commendation and correction.”

Jesus here is typified with bronze feet. In Thyatira they had a lot of bronze workers. They would make weapons of war out of bronze. Showing here, Jesus is immovable, unshakeable, and faith in him is built on a sure foundation. And that his eyes are like fire, that he sees and knows all. Jesus doesn't just have a perspective, an ideology. He does not have his own interpretation. He sees the truth, he knows the truth, and he says the truth.

COMMENDATION

And from there we proceed to hear about his commendation of, and correction for, the church. His commendation of the church is in 2:19. “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.” Jesus says, “First of all, let's start with a little encouragement. You are loving and serving, better and better, greater and greater.”

See, while he was on the earth, Jesus fed the hungry, he healed the sick, he cast demons out of the possessed, he welcomed into friendship women, children, those marginalized and ostracized. And part of being a Christian is living by the power of the Holy Spirit, the lifestyle of Jesus. We give to

those in need, we serve, we love, we care.

Jesus would look and say, "You know, the Redemption Groups, for the assault victims, that's great. The coat drive around the holidays to help those who have nothing, that's great. The canned good drive, to help feed those and stock the food banks, that's wonderful. The Community Groups being unleashed into the community to love their neighbors, and serve their neighbors, and partner with organizations that aren't even Christian, and just love and care for people is awesome because people are made in the image and likeness of God."

That's what Jesus did, he loved, gave, cared, served. And Jesus says, "That's good. It's increasing, keep it going, don't be discouraged, don't be distracted, don't be dissuaded, be a giver not a taker." How's it going for you? How's it going for us? Is there a generosity, a love, a humility, a service, a sacrifice beyond your family, beyond our church, for the well being of the city?

CORRECTION

That's the commendation. The correction. And the correction is lengthy, it's extensive, it's painful. While he commends their actions, he corrects their doctrines. He says it this way in 2:20-21: "But—" And a lot of the churches would just simply talk about, and a lot of Christians would simply talk about, "Look at all the good things we do. Look at all the people we serve. Look at all the help we provide." And Jesus would say, "That's great. What about your doctrine? What about your theology? What about your beliefs?"

"But—" "Yeah, but look at all the things that we did." But it's not just how you behave, it's what you believe. "But this I have against you, that you," what? "Tolerate." So this is the issue. This is not just a new issue. This is an ongoing issue. Because Satan and demons oppose Jesus and Scripture, and there's always a conflict. And the church is always being tempted to compromise. And even though it might be an issue that the culture is still very much discussing, it's an issue that the church has been discussing, quite frankly, for two thousand years. How do we retain biblical conviction and kingdom commitment in the midst of a culture that does not love Jesus or believe the Bible?

He says, "But this I have against you, you tolerate." We're going to unpack that, but what does that mean? "You tolerate." "You tolerate that woman Jezebel," he says, "who calls herself a prophetess." A spiritual leader that God didn't appoint, but she appointed herself. "And is teaching and is seducing my servants to practice," what? "Sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality."

Here's the doctrinal correction. He says, "You tolerate that woman Jezebel." Now, Jezebel is a type of person, like a Judas or like a Benedict Arnold. The actual woman Jezebel lived quite a bit of time prior to this in the Old Testament, in the days of Elijah. And she was a very powerful woman. She had political authority, she had spiritual authority, and she had financial ability.

What she decided was, "I don't like the real leaders that God raised up, so I'm going to persecute, put them to death. Instead I have some alternative spirituality, a new religion, I'm going to start a cult as an offshoot of biblical faithfulness. We're going to have a new, involved, evolved, enlightened, spiritual ideology. It's going to be more tolerant and diverse, and less historical and biblical."

So she encouraged the worship of a false god named Baal. So this is demonic idolatry. And she is powerful, but not everyone who is powerful and successful is empowered by the Holy Spirit. You can't just look at somebody and say, "Look at how rich and powerful they are, God must be blessing them." No, or Satan is blessing them, and demons are empowering them and enabling them. And that was the case with Jezebel.

So she starts her own religion, she starts her own Bible college, her own seminary. It's kind of like biblical faith, but it's kind of not, and it takes Baal worship and it integrates it with something called syncretism. This is biblical belief, plus other religions, ideologies, and perspectives. What it is, is it's a compromised faith, it's a hyphenated faith, it's a syncretized faith, it's a diluted faith, it's a compromised faith. It's a "both/and," when Jesus says, "Either/or." And the result is she becomes very powerful.

Now, there's a woman like that in the church at Thyatira many years later. We don't know if she started off as an official leader in the church, we don't know. What we do know, she's very influential, she's very powerful. She is divisive. And what she's saying is, "Don't listen to the teachers. They're not as evolved, they're not as enlightened, they're not as advanced as we are. We have new insights, we have deep knowledge, we have new scholars, and new interpretations, and new books, and new perspectives, and new experiences because we've spiritually evolved beyond some of those primitive beliefs." She's becoming very powerful, very influential.

Couple things I want to say about this. Number one, in the church usually theological problems are just moral problems in disguise. Meaning, here Jezebel is teaching things, but the reason that she's popular is not because her teaching is so biblical, but because it allows sexual sin.

So this would be like in our day, someone becomes very popular because they say, "You could be a faithful Christian and a homosexual. You could be a faithful Christian and an adulterer. You could be a faithful Christian and a fornicator. You could be a faithful Christian and a porn watcher. And you can have both, and God doesn't judge, and we shouldn't judge, and we should be tolerant and diverse. And Jesus loves you, and we love you. And who are we to judge?" Jesus says, "This I have against you, you tolerate that."

Oftentimes, when I have seen pastors or preachers start reducing their belief in the authority of Scripture, the necessity of Jesus alone for salvation, his sinless life, his substitutionary death, his bodily resurrection, turning from sin, trusting in him, when I see that diminishing, "People aren't really going to hell. Maybe we're not that bad. Other religions aren't that wrong," almost invariably behind it is sexual sin.

Here's the big idea: Let's not change the Word of God, let's allow the Word of God to change us. That's the difference. And here, what looks like a

theological disagreement is really a moral disobedience. Almost invariably, when I have some pastor come up at a conference and argue with me, "I don't believe that the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, dah, dah, dah," my question is always, "Who are you sleeping with?" They'll say, "What does that have to do with anything?" That has everything to do with it because oftentimes the issue is not an unconvinced mind, it's an unwilling heart. It's someone that says, "I don't like what it says, and it's trying to change me, so I would rather change it, so I can do what I want."

Number two, there is a price to be paid for faithfulness to the God of the Bible. There's a price to be paid. In that day, in Thyatira, most of the commentators agree, the big issue was something called the guilds. And the guilds were complicated. It's like an extended family, like a trade union, like a fraternity or sorority, like a governmental social service, welfare net. It's a lot of things together. Like a cult or religion. It's all of that together.

So here's how it generally worked. You would inherit the business of your father. So if he was a blacksmith, you were a blacksmith. He's a banker, you're a banker. And the people who worked in various trades had guilds, where they would work together. So here's your blacksmith guild, and here's your bankers guild, just as examples. And you would join it.

Now, the government didn't have the social service, welfare, safety net. There weren't food stamps or support when you're hungry, there's not unemployment, there's not disability, there's not retirement. What you do is you pay dues into a guild, and then they take care of you in your time of need, or take care of your family. Maybe you have your wedding, your children's wedding at the guild. Maybe you die and they have your funeral at the guild.

And because it's a lot of coworkers, these are people that are friends of yours. And because many of the people working with you, or for you, are family members, here are your aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, big extended community. And they would get together and they would have a god or a goddess that was representative and worshiped by them. Some powerful demonic spirit. And they would get together and they would sacrifice food. Make sacrifices to the idols, and then eat the food of the animals that were sacrificed.

Now here's the problem. You become a Christian. You're in a guild, and all of sudden they say, "Hey, pay your dues." And you're like, "But I don't like where all the money is going." "Show up to the feast and worship the pagan, demonic, false god." "Well, I worship Jesus, I can't do that." "Eat the food sacrificed to the idols." "I can't do that because it's a worship act." "Oh, and by the way, after we're done eating and drinking, we tend to wife swap, and sleep around, and it just turns into crazy, fraternity meets Mardi Gras, you know, Romans gone wild. It goes nuts." You say, "Well, I'm a Christian now. I can't give money to a cause I don't believe in. I can't worship a false god. I can't commit adultery. What do I do? Because if I tell them I'm a Christian, they're going to kick me out of the guild. I lose my job. I lose my income. I lose my health benefits. I lose my retirement. My family turns their back on me. My friends reject me. I'm destitute, poor, and I'm cast out and exiled."

So this woman comes along and says, "You can have both. You don't need to pick and choose between faithfulness to Jesus, and comfort and convenience. You can have comfort and convenience and Christ." And a lot of people raise their hand and say, "That sounds great. So I'll worship Jesus and false demon gods. I'll give money to the guild and the church. I'll go to church and hear about sexual purity, but then if the guild has a crazy event, you know, nobody's perfect, and I might fornicate or commit adultery, or at least if those who do commit adultery notify me, I'm not going to tell their spouse. Because after all, who am I to judge?"

Dear student, your grade point average probably will go down if you raise your hand for Jesus on campus. Dear middle manager, you may not get promoted if you raise your hand for Jesus in your place of work. Dear senior executive, you may lose a lot of money, status, and power if you raise your hand for Jesus at work.

And it doesn't mean that we are to impose our faith on others, but that we should propose our faith to others. And as we do, they will ask us, "Can't you bless this? Can't you participate in this? Can't you ignore this? Can't you just cover your eyes and pretend like you don't see this?" And if this answer is, "I love Jesus and I love you, but the truth is I love Jesus more, and I need to be faithful," it's going to cost you money. It's going to cost you power, and prestige, and prominence, and position. It might cost you family members or friends.

Number three, time doesn't heal all wounds. Some of you say, "Yeah, I'm in a hard place like that. I understand, but I'm just waiting it out. I'm sure in time it's all going to get better." Not necessarily. He says, Jesus does, "I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality." Sometimes you can wait a long time. It's not going to get better.

Your family still may not love the fact that you love Jesus. Your boss may not love the fact that you love Jesus. Your professor may not love the fact that you love Jesus. The culture we live in, the city you live in, it may not be excited that you're excited about Jesus. You need to accept that. You need to own that. We worship a guy who got crucified. And those who loved and served him most faithfully, they followed in his footsteps.

I'm not saying that we want to suffer, we want to be opposed, we want to be persecuted, but I'm saying that if we're not it may be because number one, we don't talk about Jesus, or number two, we talk about him but we don't tell the truth.

Number four, it's a sin for Christians to be more tolerant than Christ. He says, "But this I have against you, you tolerate." Some of you are more tolerant than Jesus. Hey, bottom line, not everybody is going to heaven. Bottom line, not all religions lead to the same path. Bottom line, not all saviors can save. Bottom line, not all sacred books say the same thing or tell the truth.

It's hard, isn't it? It's really hard. And initially those of you who are Christians will hear, "Yes!" And then you'll say, "Ohhh," then you'll, "but this is going to cost me a lot." And that was the exact tension that they were feeling.

CHRISTIAN TOLERANCE

So let's talk about Christian tolerance. What is it? What is it not? Christian tolerance.

Number one, how about legal tolerance in culture? Should we practice legal tolerance in culture? Meaning, we believe Muslims have the right to worship, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Buddhists, Baha'is, atheists, agnostics, they're welcome to their belief, Scientology—as goofy as it is, you know—it's okay. It's not that we agree with it, but that we'll tolerate it.

Should we have legal tolerance of other views, other religions, other ideologies, other perspectives? Yes. Yes, we should, because Christianity is not a religion, not a belief system that is imposed. It's about loving Jesus Christ. You can't simply pass a law that says everybody love Jesus. It doesn't work like that.

So, we don't impose Christian faith, but we propose Christian faith. "We'd like to talk to you about Jesus. He loves you. We want you to love him." So we don't think that we can in any way impose faith by making Christianity the legal religion, and then making other beliefs illegal.

So if somebody comes along saying, "Do you tolerate other religions?" Say, "I defend the right of religions, ideologies, spiritualities, and perspectives that I disagree with because I believe in a marketplace of ideas, you throw Christianity in the mix, and the truth always wins, and it is the one that will prevail. But I'm not afraid of other beliefs. And I'm not going to make illegal other beliefs." So yes, we will tolerate, and we do tolerate.

Number two, how about social tolerance in community? Meaning you have a family member that disagrees with you, you have a friend that disagrees with you, you have a coworker or a neighbor that disagrees with you. They hold to another religion, spirituality, ideology. They're an atheist, they're an agnostic, they're something else. Should we tolerate them socially and personally? Totally.

That's what I was getting into with Piers. Jesus tells us to love our neighbor. He doesn't say agree with them. They don't agree with us. They're very intolerant of our intolerance. But yes, you should love, serve, be good friends with, neighbors to people of other beliefs, and ideologies, and religions, and perspectives. Absolutely, because Jesus says, "Love your neighbor." The Bible says, "God loves the whole world. People are made in his image and likeness." And we want to love people and serve people. So yes, we should practice social tolerance in our community.

Number three, how about theological tolerance in the church? And I'm talking here, within the bookends of orthodoxy. Yeah. So in Mars Hill Church there are some who believe in the rapture and some who don't. Speak in tongues and don't. And, you know, some who homeschool, and some who private school, and some who public school. And, you know, there are all kinds of secondary issues, that, yeah, we just tolerate a little difference. We could talk about it, but we're not going to declare war over it. These are distinctions, they're not divisions. Get the difference?

And so, yeah, they're members of our family, our church family. You say, "Well, I disagree. Let's talk about that." But ultimately, we're not going to file for relational, friendship divorce over this issue. You tolerate me, I'll tolerate you. We disagree on a couple things, but we agree that we love Jesus, and we're family.

There has to be that in the church, otherwise the church becomes a very, a very narrow group. We want to invite all of God's people to come in. And you're all coming in from different places and perspectives. Even those of you who are Christians, you're going to study, and learn, and change, and grow. And Lord knows I have and am. We need to be that kind of community that loves, and serves, and tolerates, and brings along fellow brothers and sisters, and reconsiders ideas, and learns to live together peaceably. Absolutely.

How about beyond our local church partnering with other churches? Should we tolerate other churches? Yeah. They may disagree with us on certain secondary issues. Our church has male pastors, their church may have women pastors. But they really do love Jesus, believe the Bible, they are family, we'll be with them in the kingdom of God. So, yeah, we need to be friendly and, for the sake of evangelism, partner that people might meet Jesus. And lovingly have a discussion about some of the things we disagree about. But that's not war. This is just dialogue between brothers and sisters.

Number four, how about heretical tolerance in the church? See, there are certain beliefs that are national borders, others that are state borders. The Bible is God's Word. Jesus is God's Son. Jesus lived without sin, died on the cross in our place, rose as our Savior. The Bible is the Word of God, right? Those kinds of things: national boundary. State boundaries: you Baptist, you Lutheran, you Presbyterian, you Assemblies of God, you Four Square, you Reformed, you Arminian? Where you at? State borders. State borders. We should get along across the state borders, but we still have to protect the national borders.

So, somebody comes along, and they're teaching heresy. They're claiming to be a Christian, we're not talking about Christians, they're claiming to be Christians, and they're doing what this woman is doing. Teaching false doctrine, encouraging false thinking and behaving. Say, "No, we don't tolerate that."

Because here's what the Bible says, "Sheep, shepherds, wolves." The people are like sheep. The pastors are to be shepherds. Jesus is the chief shepherd. And Satan sends in wolves. Spiritual leaders who are powerful, influential, winsome, and evil. And so, in the name of tolerance, it would be very unloving—see, this is my heart for you as your pastor—I love, I love this church. Given fifteen years of my life to this church. And some will say, "Boy, man, he gets a little frustrated right there." Yeah, shepherds tend to get fired up with wolves. Right, when there are wolves, shepherds wake up, they stand up, they step up, because they love the sheep. "No, you can't teach that here. You can't promote that. That's not biblical. That's not right. You can't just use these people. You can't just lead them astray. The answer is no."

Do we allow wolves? No. Again, non-Christians aren't wolves. What we're talking about is those who say they're Christians, and then lead people away from Christianity. That's exactly what's going on at Thyatira. He says, "But this I hold against you. Not only are you good at hugging, but you're

good at hugging wolves. Keep hugging, but stop hugging wolves.” Anytime a shepherd allows wolves, they really don’t love the sheep. They really don’t love the sheep.

So, yes, there are doctrinal distinctives at Mars Hill. Yes, we have a full doctrine membership class. Yes, I wrote a systematic theology. Yes, we teach the Bible. We’re not ashamed of the gospel. We’re not ashamed of what we believe. We’re not going to hide anything from you. We just put it all out there because we’re not trying to lie to you, or bait-and-switch you, or con you. We just want to tell the truth and let the Holy Spirit do a work in your heart and mind, to see if you would come to agree with us on what the Bible says. And if you love Jesus, and disagree with us, maybe you could even teach us some things, so we could be more faithful.

But at the end of the day, yes, we believe what Christians have believed for two thousand years. We believe what the Bible has written from the beginning to the end. We do love Jesus. We have deep convictions. Among them are to love our neighbors, to love our enemies, to love our brothers and sisters, but above all else to love Jesus and to be faithful to him. And though people might be offended, our primary hope is not to offend him.

Number five, how about immoral tolerance in the church? That’s the issue here. He says, “This I have against you, you tolerate sexual immorality.” Should we as a church tolerate, from those who are professing Christians, immorality? I’m not talking about non-Christians. The problems in the church, the divisions in the church, is not because of the non-Christians, it’s because of those who say they’re Christians. They profess a faith that they do not practice, and may not possess.

Some of you’d come in and say, “Why do we have to talk about sin? Why, if somebody lives a life of habitual, unrepentant sin, and they say they’re a Christian, why is there this thing I heard about called church discipline, where you try and get them to change?” Because Jesus says, “This I have against you, you tolerate things I don’t tolerate.”

Now, let me say this, Christianity begins with tolerance and moves to repentance. Meaning, it doesn’t matter who you are, where you are, what you’ve done, come to Jesus just like you are. And he’s going to change you. So it begins with tolerance and it moves to repentance. Do you see that? Jesus says, “Come to me. And you’re going to change.” So the issue is, can we welcome people? Absolutely, we welcome them to change.

This was something that was impressed upon me some years ago, and I’ve used this analogy previously. I had the great honor of meeting someone that I respect very much, Dr. J. I. Packer. Well-noted scholar, theologian, Bible teacher, super faithful. He’s an older man now, he’s like John writing this letter. He’s an older man. He’s lived a long, faithful life. He carries a lot of spiritual authority.

And I had an opportunity to meet with him. And he’d been pastoring in Canada for many years, and his denomination kicked him out. They kicked out J. I. Packer. That’s just unbelievable. They kicked out J. I. Packer. If he doesn’t fit, you’re all wrong. That’s kind of my view of the thing, you know?

So I meet with J. I. Packer, and I said, “What happened?” He basically says, here’s my summary of our conversation, he said, “My denomination has become heretical, apostate.” That’s a big word. I’ve said this before, if a blogger uses it, doesn’t even count, right? Doesn’t even count. But when J. I. Packer says it, that counts. That’s a big deal. So I said, “Okay, explain that.” He said, “Christianity is about repentance, and anytime we don’t practice repentance of our sin, and preach repentance for other’s sin, we’re heretics. Because Christianity is about repentance.” That’s right. That’s right.

Christianity presumes we’re wrong, and we need to change our mind. It presumes that what we’re doing is wrong, and our behavior needs to change. And so, Christianity starts with tolerance, come as you are, and then Jesus says, “I’m going to change you.” And if we never call people to repentance, if we never say, “The way you’re thinking is wrong, the way you’re acting is wrong, the lifestyle you’ve chosen, the identity you’ve embraced, the actions that you celebrate are ones you should be mourning,” then we’re no longer Christians. We’re no longer faithful. We’re cult leaders, we’re heretics, we’re apostate. Meanwhile, those in culture will cheer us, and Jesus would rebuke us and say, “But this I have against you, you tolerate.”

Christ, commendation, correction, and consequence. Revelation 2:22–29, here’s Jesus—

Let me just say this to you, I just feel impressed of the Holy Spirit to just say this before I proceed forward. Categorically, for some of you, this makes sense, but emotionally it gets tested when someone you love goes astray. Right?

So, you can hear me preach with conviction in my voice, and a Bible in my hand, and say, “That sounds right. We need to hold the line. The truth is the truth. Jesus is Lord. People need to repent. That starts with me. I’m not perfect. I need him first. And then I can humbly proclaim him to others. That makes sense to me.” And then your child comes home and says they want to explore their sexuality. Your grandchild comes home and says they want to choose to explore an alternate sexual identity.

Your mom or your dad decide they want to try a new form of spirituality that’s kind of Christian, kind of not. Your spouse decides they want to start going to a church that doesn’t talk about sin, repentance, and Jesus, but maybe everything and anything but that. The person in your Community Group that you really care for, and maybe they’ve loved you, or served you, or helped you, they go astray. What they’re believing is not biblical. How they’re behaving is not ethical.

And all of sudden what moves from a mental conviction becomes an emotional confliction. You’re like, “Oh, man. Are they not a Christian? Are they going to hell? Are they wrong? When I talk to them about it they smile, they say they’re happier than they’ve ever been. They say they love me and it’s working. Maybe they even say they feel closer to Jesus than ever.” This is where we need to humbly hold the line. Humbly tell the truth. Humbly love and serve well.

CONSEQUENCE

Revelation 2:22–29, “Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed.” Again, behind much theological conflict is often sexual sin. So they’ve been messing around in the bed, and now they’re going to go to a hospital bed. “Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her.” This may be physical and spiritual adultery. It’s sexual immorality, which is behind a lot of demonic teaching, and false leaders, and cults, and errant doctrine, but it’s also spiritual adultery. That the church is to be like a bride, and Jesus is like a groom, and if a church starts whoring around with demons and other religions, and being disobedient, it’s spiritual adultery. This is a massive theme in the Old Testament.

“I will throw her into great tribulation, unless they,” what? What’s the word, Mars Hill? “Repent.” Christianity, Jesus Christ, is about repentance. This means we don’t change God, God changes us. We don’t change God, God changes us. We don’t look at God and say, You’re old-fashioned and outdated.” Because he would say, “I’m eternal without beginning or end. You’re the one who sinned. You’re the one who’s aging. You’re the one who’s dying. I’m perfect, you’re not. I don’t need to change, you do. I don’t have any defects, you do. I don’t have any shortcomings, you do. I’ve not said or done wrong, you have.” See, if there’s a problem between us and God, the problem’s with us. And we’re not God.

This really comes down to the root issue of authority. Who is going to be God? And Jesus says, “Repent.” That’s a change of mind. “I’m thinking wrong about this. I don’t care if I went to Bible college, and seminary, read books from a guy with more degrees than Fahrenheit, educated beyond his intelligence, and we took a vote, and everybody on my Facebook page said they liked it. It’s wrong. And I need to repent because what I’m thinking is wrong. And the way I’m feeling is wrong. And the way I’m acting is wrong. And the way I’m reacting is wrong.” And that’s repentance. It begins with the assumption, if I disagree with God, I’m the one who needs to change. And then it becomes less about changing the Word of God, and more about obeying the Word of God.

See, this is why the prophets always get killed. They come out preaching, “Repent, repent, repent.” And some people say, “Yes, we will. And thank you God, and we need grace and mercy, and we’re born again.” And others say, “If you won’t shut up, we will kill you.” And they do. And they do.

“And I will strike her children,” the followers, “dead. And all the churches will know—” You know what? Jesus cares about all the churches. And some churches serve as negative examples for other churches. And sometimes Jesus judges a church, and sometimes he shuts down a church because it’s not faithful to him, and it’s a bad witness to the world. Mars Hill, I pray we’re not that church, I pray we don’t become that church. And I know, apart from the grace of God, anything is possible. Anything is possible.

He goes on to say, “And all the churches will know that I am he who searches heart and mind,” Jesus knows it all, “and I will give to each of you according to your works. But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay any other burden on you. Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received from my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Jesus says, “If you’re hearing this, have an ear to hear, listen to this.”

Number one, you can repent, and if you do, you’ll be rewarded. It’s not too late. You can say, “Yeah, I’m wrong. I got to change. Jesus help me. Forgive my sin. Make me a Christian, or if I am a Christian, make me not a hypocrite.” And then there are rewards, because there are degrees of rewards for Christians in heaven, as there are degrees of punishment for non-Christians in hell. God’s justice and his reward is always perfect. He says here, “I’ll reward you.”

Friends, this life seems very long, until you get into the life to come. And in fifty thousand, or one hundred thousand, or two hundred thousand, or 200 million years from now, when you’re in the presence of Jesus, this life will seem like a very short while. And some of you will not receive much of a reward in this life, but you’re storing up for yourself, Jesus says, treasures in heaven. We don’t know what they are, we know they’re great. We’re not competing over scarce resources. Jesus has no limitation. He can faithfully bless all of his people and reward us all for the life we’ve lived in this body, on this earth.

So, option number one, you can repent right now. You could say, “I’m a sinner. I need Jesus. What I’m thinking is wrong. Who I’m listening to is wrong. The books I’m reading are wrong. The arguments I have are wrong. Because my heart is wrong. Because I want to do whatever I want to do. And Jesus loves me enough to tell me to stop.”

Or number two, there could be justice in judgment. He talks about this. He talks about sexual sin leads to sickness, a hospital bed. Spiritual adultery leads to death and war with God. That’s the language and imagery. In that day it was customary, when two nations would go to war, the king would assemble his people, he’d take a vase or a jar made out of, let’s say, clay. He would write the name of the opposing king and kingdom on it, and as an act, publicly, of a declaration of war, he would slam it on the ground and it would shatter into a million pieces. And that meant, we’re off to war. Sin is declaring war on God. And here Jesus is saying, “If you don’t repent, I’m writing your name, and we’re going to war.” This is very serious. It’s very serious.

And this is where immediately, I know some of you will say, “Yeah, but I’m not sure I believe in hell.” Wow. Satan is already whispering in your ear. “Well, I’m not, I’m not sure that I agree with all the theological interpretation.” Bottom line: people repent and are rewarded, or they receive justice in judgment. That’s it.

CLOSING THOUGHTS ON MISSION AND MARS HILL

Some final thoughts, maybe, on Mars Hill and our mission. So, closing thoughts on mission and Mars Hill. Two thousand years later, same issue, same pressure.

Number one, every culture must practice both tolerance and intolerance. So, when somebody asks you, "Are you tolerant?" Or they say, "That's not tolerant." You've got to unpack it. You've got to think about it. You've got to talk about it. Every culture must practice both tolerance and intolerance. Not just Christianity.

Let me prove it to you. How many of you have had a cigarette in a hospital? They're very intolerant of that. In fact, they discriminate. Because of a deeply held prejudice. They're impinging upon personal freedom of choice and public expression of that choice. You can't smoke in a hospital.

You can't get drunk and drive a school bus. You can't be a convicted pedophile and teach kindergarten. I feel like the National Organization for Women isn't really for me. I feel sort of left out. Discriminated against. There's a deeply held prejudice. It's true, right? You ever seen an illiterate college English prof? You may have, but, but as a general rule, they discriminate against illiterate people in professor roles.

Have you ever tried to buy groceries without bringing a bag? That's where the Pharisees are, they're at the grocery store. I had this experience. I go to the grocery store. I bought some things. It doesn't happen very often. And the lady looked at me, she said, "Where's your bag?" I said, "It's right there in that stack of bags behind your counter. You have a huge stack of bags, and I think mine's on top. That's where my bag is." And she says, "Well, you should bring your own bag." I said, "Why, you have so many bags?"

It's very confusing. Like, I don't bring sandwiches to the sandwich shop, because they have so many sandwiches, I feel like I should liberate one. So, I mean, she looks at me like I'm the antichrist, okay? I didn't even tell her, "I'm going to go put this bag in my SUV and drive home." I didn't even tell her that. You know?

So then a little while later I decide, "You know what? I'm trying to be a missionary to the bagites and I don't want to offend the bagites and their bagitanity, and so what I'm going to do, I'm going to bring a bag." So I brought a bag. I brought a bag. Okay, to get some stuff. And I heard, quote, "That bag's not biodegradable." "I brought the wrong bag?" I brought the wrong bag.

Because it's not just enough to bring a bag, you got to bring the right bag, and if you don't bring the right bag, then we need to talk about it, and convene a little meeting. And then everybody in line has to snicker, "Well, look at that. That is the wrong bag. That is not biodegradable." All of a sudden I'm feeling shamed, marginalized, ostracized, discriminated against. Deeply held prejudice by the bagites.

Number two, the new tolerance is hypocritically intolerant of Christianity. Christianity remains, and I know it sounds like I'm whining, but I am, so when you have minority groups you're not allowed to pick on them or make fun of them—unless they're Christians. And in most major cities Christians are a minority group. Yet, you can make fun of them in sitcoms, movies, say outlandish, atrocious things, broad-brush, all of that. See, that's been some of my experience, it's like, "Hey, you know, I believe the Bible." "Oh, you're intolerant." "Well, are you intolerant of those who us who are intolerant of you? It seems like we're both hypocrites. You may as well convert to Christianity. If you're going to be a hypocrite, at least be a hypocrite that's not kindling." You know?

Okay, point number three—before I have to fire myself—I, we will be maligned, misrepresented, and mistreated. Now let me say this, because I'm a pastor and because of social media and my place in it, people are going to talk about me, and say things, and misrepresent me because I represent Christianity, or anything that's done at Mars Hill, or sometimes things that I say.

And here's the truth, not everybody's going to understand what we believe as Christians. And even if they do, they're not going to articulate it most truthfully. "Oh, yeah, they hate women." How many women would say, "Um, we're here too"? You know, like, there are women here, you got to factor that in. You know, they're going to misrepresent what we believe. Or they're going to malign what we believe.

Let me say this, in the past I've said some things I regret. In the past, meaning like a couple of minutes ago. And I just, I'm going to get myself in trouble, and by the grace of God, I want to be sanctified. Pray for me, I want to do it better, especially when it's in the media and everybody's looking. I'm trying to thread the needle, and trying to get it right. And by the grace of God, I want to do a better job. But the truth is, we're not all going to get it right all the time, and even if we do, they may not say it the way we said it.

You just need to learn to assume that that's part of the Christian life. 'Cause like a soldier goes to war, and he gets off the boat, and bullets are flying, and he doesn't freak out. 'Cause he realizes, "Oh, we didn't come to the beach for vacation. That's why we're not wearing flip-flops. You know, we're in enemy territory, trying to set captives free, and there's going to be some bullets coming." That's us. Okay, we're not on vacation, we're at war. And our war isn't against people, it's against Satan and demons who have blinded people's eyes, and hardened people's hearts, and distorted their direction, and we want to introduce them to Jesus.

Just accept, though, that this is part of it. And I'm not saying it's fun, and I'll tell you the truth, sometimes I get really depressed, and I get into a deep funk, and I just, I wonder if I can make it for forty more years. And I have some hard, dark days. And I'm not saying it's any easier for you. But I'm saying, we just need to say, "Jesus, you said, 'Woe to you when all men speak well of you.'" So, if all we ever get is a thumbs-up, then Jesus gives us a thumbs-down. And that's part of the Christian's call, is to walk in the path of Jesus, who was also hated on occasion.

Number four, we want to love and serve well. You know what the best thing is? To love and serve well. To love is, you know, we're generous. We want to feed, we want to help, we want to love, we want to serve, we want to care. We love the whole city, not just our people. Jesus commends them. That's the best thing, is to say, "You may not agree with us, but we love you, we're trying to help, we're trying to serve, we're here to do good."

Number five, we should not be offensive, but we should offend. Meaning, the goal is not just to infuriate everybody. I'm learning that the hard way. But

it means, if you do tell the truth, somebody's going to be offended.

Like, I had a guy come up to me recently, he's like, "Do you think I'm going to hell?" Looks at me, I said, "Yes." He says, "Well, that's very offensive." "And true, because you just told me that you hate Jesus. So, you know, I'm trying to say this lovingly, nicely. I'll buy you a cup of coffee, we can sit down and talk about your feelings. You know, I'm fine with all of that. But at the end of the day I'm trying not to offend you, but the truth is, if I just tell you the truth, you're going to be offended."

How many of you were offended before you were converted? Okay. Be willing to have people offended, that they might be converted. So we shouldn't seek to be offensive, you know, mistreating and maligning people, but we should know that we will offend just by answering the questions, and telling the truth.

Number six, our faith is not solely a private matter, it's also public. If you say, "Jesus works for me, but I'm, I don't know about you. I like the Bible, but maybe that's not your thing." Or, "this is what I believe, but I'm not trying to get anybody else to sign up." Nobody gets offended because they don't think you really believe it. Our faith is private and public. It's for us, and for us to share with others.

And number seven, the gospel requires us to disagree with someone to evangelize them. "Are you tolerant? Are you tolerant? Are you tolerant?" "I disagree with people." "Well, you should accept them." "I love them and I disagree with them, and I want to talk to them so that they can meet Jesus. And before you ever become a Christian, you disagree with Christianity, so we start there. It doesn't mean it'll end there, it doesn't mean I don't love you. It doesn't mean I don't want good for you. It doesn't mean I'm done with you."

How many of you, truly, you started off with disagreement, and somebody loved you enough to say, "I love you. I know you disagree. Let's talk about. Let's keep working on it." And eventually, in the grace of God, your heart, your mind opened. Jesus says, "He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says." And the Holy Spirit opened your ears and you're like, "Ahh. That's it. Jesus is right, I'm wrong. I need to change, not him. He loves me and he's good. But sometimes I'm foolish and don't see that."

UPDATE ON MARS HILL CHURCH

That's the update on the church at Thyatira. Give me a few minutes, I'll give you the update at the church called Mars Hill. This is something we're doing as we go through the Scriptures and we see an update for the church. So here's how Mars Hill Church is doing.

Evidences of God's grace, April and May, the last few months, 202 babies and kids dedicated on Mother's Day. Good news, right? Amen. Over one thousand women attended our Women's Training Day, which was awesome.

We've got our first summer retreat coming up, where we've got a lot of students that are signing up to go, and donors that are willing to sponsor them. And what's really cool is, we're seeing a lot of the kids from our Rainier Valley campus, that have no dad, and are poor, and broke, and can't afford it, some of them even living at the mission, signing up to go on the retreat. And other families sponsoring them and paying for it, which is awesome and we rejoice in that.

We got a lot of bands and musicians, so we're starting a record label, Mars Hill Music. And we threw out an EP that we did for a couple hundred bucks, for the band Citizens, and it just shot right up, number three on iTunes. So things are going really good there. We praise God for that.

How to pray. Here are some things that I'd give you to pray for individually, in your family, and Community Group: Pray for Mars Hill Olympia, they're moving into a new building, which is awesome. You can also pray, I'll just throw a few more on there, Federal Way has outgrown their building, looking for a new one. Everett has outgrown theirs, looking for a new one. Downtown's outgrown theirs, looking for a new one. In addition, Mars Hill Orange County is going to be homeless, like Jesus, here very shortly. So, we have to find them a new building. So, you know, just for those of you with the gift of real estate, please do intercede.

Dr. Justin Holcomb is the new lead pastor at Mars Hill University District, and we're very glad to have him there. He is a former professor at the University of Virginia in the sociology and women's studies departments. And so he might even end up being a professor at the University of Washington, while a pastor at Mars Hill, which would be hilarious.

Additionally, we need leaders, especially volunteer elders, so if you're feeling called in that direction let us know.

And our fiscal year ends June 30, so pray that we end strong. Give you a little update on that. Here's March and April. March: 41 percent of adults gave. April: 42 percent gave anything. In March the average was almost \$33; in April it went down to under \$30. And I'm just asking you guys to be generous and faithful, we can do a little better than that, in the grace of God.

In March, there were 4,800 households who gave. In April it was up to about 5,500. And look at our weekly attendance. In March our average weekly attendance was 13,000; in April it was 14,000. We grew by 1,000 people in a month, in the middle of Revelation, during the spring. And so the church is growing, and a lot of these people, a lot of you are non-Christians, they're new Christians.

So, for those of you who are Christians, we're asking you to pray, to serve, to give, 'cause we got a ton of new Christians, and a ton of new people, and a ton of non-Christians. And so, all Christians need to do their part, 'cause truth is, we're bursting at the seams.

How to give. There's a give envelope in your seat. You can fill that out and send that in, or hand it in the offering basket today. Cash, check, you can also go online and give via credit card. You can set up a recurring payment, like you would for other bills. Tithing is not bill paying, but you can set it

up in that way, through recurring ACH online. You can give by mail. Take that envelope, put a check in there, don't put cash in there. You can give online at MarsHill.com/give. And if you have any other questions about stocks, real estate, whatever it might be, giving@MarsHill.com.

So, we're going to collect our offering, this is where we give to the cause of Jesus, for the well being of our church. And then we're going to partake of Communion. And as we take of our offering, it's an act of repentance, "Jesus, I want to give to you, and your cause, and your people." And Communion is for us an act of repentance: "Jesus died for my sin, and he rose as my Savior, and he's alive and well today. And my life and our church ultimately are under his jurisdiction and judgment."

Is there anything you need to repent of? Is there anybody you've been cowardly and not talking to? Are there ways that you have been ashamed of the gospel? This is our opportunity to come to a moment of reflection and repentance. For those of you who are not Christians, this is your moment of redemption, where you give your sin and your life to Jesus.

So, Lord Jesus, I thank you, as we collect our offering, that I have an opportunity to teach the Bible at Mars Hill. God, I pray for us as a people, that we would love and serve well, without compromising the truth of the Bible. That we would love people, but not tolerate all beliefs and behaviors from those who profess to be Christians. God, I pray for Mars Hill Ballard, as five weeks in a row, they have been tagged, vandalized, and windows broken out. I pray for Mars Hill Portland, as a group of those who are opposed to the gospel showed up to the roughly one-hundred-year-old church building, and threw rocks through the stained glass, declaring war on our facility. I pray, Lord God, for our enemies, and our critics, and our opponents. I pray that we would love and serve well. And I pray, Lord God, against the enemy, his servants, their works and effects. I pray that we'd be humble and courageous, that we would practice repentance of sin, and that we would proclaim repentance of sin to others. And Lord Jesus, I pray that you would help us to have ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, that we might live lives and believe truths that are pleasing to you so that when we see you, we could be rewarded. And Lord God, I pray for us as a church, as we face constant criticism, opposition, I pray, Lord God, that we would love well, that we would serve well, but that we would love and serve you well first. In Jesus' good name, amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.