

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**SERMON THEME: "Faithful to the End"**

**SERMON TEXT: Revelation 2:10 (Read first)**

**Dear Fellow Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,**

**In just a few generations we have seen the world change at a mind-boggling pace! We live in a completely different world than the one in which most of us were born and raised.**

**We should not be overly surprised for a couple of reasons. First, it has happened before. David's kingdom, after Solomon, was divided into the Northern and Southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Each, over a period of only a few hundred years, turned from the one, true God to false gods and immorality. Many who still claimed to follow the God of Abraham engaged in worship that was not from the heart—ritual worship. Secondly, Jesus Himself prophesied that as the end of time approached, people would once again turn away from God—even against Him—and devote themselves to works of evil. Believers would be persecuted: "You will be delivered up to tribulation, and some killed. You will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. Many will fall away and betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:9-12).**

**All of this is happening before our very eyes! Christians are being persecuted both abroad and here at home. In the Middle East and Africa they're being rounded up and tortured or killed. Here at home we see the general public changing from passive to actively anti-Christian. Our legalistic society is more and more finding ways to set aside or render unlawful the Christian way of life, and punish those who live it!**

**To illustrate the rapid change and many of the ways it affects our lives, and especially the lives of our children, I'll use the mid-50's as a reference point—a time when life in our Country was pretty good. People were happy. Eisenhower was President, an armistice had brought active fighting in Korea to an end, the**

economy was growing, and Wednesday evening was still church night in America. Family life was not affected by technology, crime was not rampant, and our streets weren't blocked by protesters. Today, by comparison, Christ-centered love and God-given common sense have given way to a mindset devoid of spirituality, disrespecting of authority, and bearing all the marks of paganism. Here are a variety of situations—not all directly involving religion—but still demonstrating the scope and nature of change:

**Situation 1:**

Bill had been duck hunting before school and then pulls into the school parking lot with his shotgun in his pickup's gun rack.

**1955:** The football coach comes over to Bill's pickup, looks at Bill's shotgun, then goes to his car and gets his shotgun to show Bill. They compare guns.

**2018:** The school goes into lockdown. The FBI is called. Bill is hauled off to jail and never sees his pickup or gun again. Counselors are called in for traumatized students and teachers. The coach is fired.

**Situation 2:**

Johnny and Joe get into a fight after school.

**1955:** A crowd gathers, Johnny wins. Both get up, Joe says he's sorry, they shake hands, and end up buddies.

**2018:** The police are called and the SWAT team arrives. They arrest both boys. Both are charged with assault and both are expelled from school--even though Joe started the fight. Johnny's parents file a civil suit.

**Situation 3:**

Clyde is cutting up in class, disrupting the teacher and his fellow students.

**1955:** Clyde is sent to the principal's office and is given a good paddling by the principal. He is allowed to return to class, sits quietly, and does not disrupt the class again.

**2018:** Clyde is given a huge dose of Ritalin. He becomes like a zombie. He is then tested for Attention Deficit Disorder. His parents apply for, and get money from Social Security

(SSI) because Clyde now has a disability. The principal is fired for using excessive and unreasonable punishment.

**Situation 4:**

Harold carelessly breaks a window in his neighbor's car. His dad gives him a good whipping.

**1955:** Harold is more careful next time, grows up normal, goes to college and becomes a successful businessman.

**2018:** Harold's dad is arrested for child abuse. Harold is removed from his home and placed in foster care. The State psychologist is told by Harold's sister that she remembers being spanked also, and their dad is charged with child abuse and goes to prison. Harold's mom has an affair with the psychologist.

**Situation 5:**

Jerry has been getting headaches, so he takes some aspirin along to school.

**1955:** Between classes the principal happened to mention he had a headache too. Jerry shares his aspirin with him.

**2018:** The police are called and Jerry is suspended from school for drug violations. His car is also searched for drugs and weapons. Jerry is placed on a police watch list for possible drug distribution.

**Situation 6:**

Pedro fails high school English.

**1955:** Pedro goes to summer school, passes English, and later is able to enroll in college.

**2018:** Pedro's cause is taken up by a radical minority rights group. Newspaper articles appear nationally suggesting that teaching English as a requirement for graduation is racist. The ACLU files a class action lawsuit against the State school system and Pedro's English teacher. The court rules that the State's schools may no longer require that English be the only language taught.

**Situation 7:**

Freddie gathers some leftover firecrackers from the Fourth of

**July, puts them in a soda can, and blows up a red ant hill.**

**1955: The ants die.**

**2018: The ATF, Homeland Security and FBI are called. Freddie is charged with domestic terrorism. The FBI investigates his parents, and all siblings are removed from their home. All computers and cell `phones are confiscated. Freddie's dad is placed on a terror watch list and is never allowed to own a gun or fly again.**

**Situation 8:**

**Elaine falls while running during recess and scrapes her knee. She is found crying by her teacher, Mr. Hutchins. He hugs the girl in an attempt to comfort and console her.**

**1955: In a short time, Elaine feels better and goes on playing.**

**2018: Mr. Hutchins is accused of being a sexual predator, and loses his job. He is sentenced to 3 years in State prison and must now undergo 5 years of therapy. He is also required to register as a sex offender for life.**

**Situation 9:**

**Central Elementary School observes Christmas by putting on a Christmas pageant. Most of the children are involved, some playing the roles of Joseph and Mary, angels, shepherds, and wise men. Others sing in a choir, joyfully proclaiming the birth of a Savior in the beloved carols of Christmas.**

**1955: The entire community turns out to relive the story of the Christchild's birth. Christmas greetings are exchanged by all.**

**2017: The media makes haste to report this unacceptable disregard for separation of church and State. The Freedom From Religion Foundation intervenes, and immediately files a lawsuit against the school district. Public outcry calls for the resignation of the principal and every teacher who took part in the pageant. Washington D.C. threatens to withhold any Federal funding from the State until everything related to Christian is removed from the system.**

**Situation 10:**

**Adrian confides in his best friend, Kevin, that he thinks he is a homosexual, and asks him not to tell anyone.**

**1955: Kevin is surprised and deeply troubled. He promises to keep this shameful secret to himself, and to pray for Adrian.**

**2018: Adrian openly and proudly admits he's "gay"! His friends praise him for "coming out", and encourage him to organize a pride parade. The city cordons off main street for the parade, and all the T.V. channels are there to film and comment on the festivities. A major retail corporation recruits Adrian to be a supervisor who will promote "diversity". The churches that speak out against this public display of shamelessness are accused of a "hate crime", and they are forbidden to demonstrate on a public street...**

**Add to these current thinking and trends concerning race relations, abortion, immigration, political corruption, the use of pot and other drugs, judgments by liberal courts, money supply and market abnormalities, schools taking over the sex education of children and even handing out condoms, laxity toward crime, municipalities defying Federal law, and much more.**

**Most of these signs of the times are pointed in the same direction—away from God! We are in the time of tribulation! We agonize because right has become wrong, and wrong has become right! We are surrounded by voices and powers that not only reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but claim that the Holy Scriptures are not from God at all, but simply human writings filled with biases and error, and certainly not in accord with science. Some claim the Bible is a source of division, the basis for discrimination and hatred, and is totally out of step with our modern times!**

**The good news of the resurrection from the dead to an everlasting glory in heaven for believers in Christ Jesus is dismissed as folklore or myth; there is no hell or heaven to the secular mind set. We are just animals, and like every other animal in the evolutionary chain the grave is the end. Love for Jesus, and a living faith in Him, living a sacrificial life, worshiping and serving the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are considered meaningless, foolish-**

**ness, unacceptable to the educated mind. Self comes first, not some unseen God!**

**But God knows. He looks into every heart. He sees unbelief and He sees love and faith. From the beginning of time and His work of creation He has been merciful and gracious to all men, compassionate and forgiving, and has blessed the faithful, and allowed the impenitent to suffer the consequences of their sins. He has always prepared the hearts of His faithful for things to come, and He's doing that now! When Jesus told John to write down the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor He knew of the apostasy and persecution to come, both to them and to us in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

**So He encourages us, assures us that what is happening is only for a short time: "Do not fear what you are about to suffer. the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested. For ten days (that is, a short time) you will have tribulation." Then comes that comforting and reassuring promise, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life." "Trust in Me," Jesus is saying, "no matter what is happening around you." And continue trusting, even if your very life is being threatened! God gives the power of the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32), so we're never without the help we need to deal with the godlessness around us! We do well to remember how Jesus comforted His disciples just before His death, "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33)!**

**Every one of us who has placed our trust 100% in Jesus, who gives all glory to our heavenly Father in word and deed, has no reason to worry, no cause to be afraid! Staying close to our Lord and Savior, remaining "Faithful to the End", we will be victorious! Evil was overcome already when the angel announced, "He is not here; He is risen!" Not only will God put an end to all evil, but to the devil and every impenitent sinner, especially the false prophets! No crown for them; only everlasting torment!**

**Our hope, our faithfulness, our sacrifices, will one day soon be rewarded as we are crowned with royal holiness and never-ending peace! So we wait patiently, we pray, we continue to fight the good fight of faith, all the while waiting to hear the**

**Master's voice signaling the end to this God-forsaken domain, and inviting us to enter indescribable glory! "Come, O blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).**

**The time is short. We CAN make it to the end with the Spirit's help! Just envision that crown of life, and believe His promise! In Jesus' name, Amen.**

**The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding will keep your hearts and minds through a living faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.**

**Rev. Donald P. Tonack**