

# Lessons for a time of Peace

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Tonight's reading is from Joshua chapter 23, and you can read along with me in the church Bibles on page 239, beginning at verse 1.

After a long time had passed, and the Lord had given Israel rest from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, summoned all Israel, their elders, leaders, judges, and officials, and said to them, I am very old.

You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake. It was the Lord your God who fought for you. Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain, the nations I conquered, between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea in the west.

The Lord your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land as the Lord your God promised you.

Be very strong. Be careful to obey all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left.

[ 1 : 2 6 ]     Do not associate with these nations that remain among you. Do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them, but you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now.

The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations. To this day, no one has been able to withstand you. One of you routes a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised.

So be very careful to love the Lord your God. But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you, and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you.

Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the Lord your God has given you.

Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed.

[ 2 : 4 5 ]     Every promise has been fulfilled. Not one has failed. But just as all the good things the Lord your God has promised you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the Lord your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given you.

If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land he has given you.

Good evening. As Alan said, my name's Robbie. It's a pleasure to be here tonight getting to look at Joshua. I'm sure we've all heard the famous phrase, if we don't learn from history, we're doomed to repeat it.

It does still hold true, to be fair. I've been learning about the Roman Republic. I've been listening to a podcast. One of the biggest things I've learned about the Roman Republic is that the thing that really messed with Rome was not the many wars they fought, but the peacetime that they lived through.

You see, when Rome was at war, they were brilliant at rallying together to defeat the enemy. Whoever it was, Gaul or in Africa or in the East, whoever it was, Rome united together and won the battles.

[ 4 : 06 ] They won the war. And all of a sudden, they found themselves with absolutely no enemies left. There was peace. But peace is where Rome fell apart. You see, when there was nobody to fight on the outside, all of a sudden, the internal pressures were too much.

And it led to civil war and power-hungry men destroying the Republic for their own sake. You might be sitting there wondering, what on earth does this have to do with us tonight in Joshua? That's maybe fair enough. But I think what we find ourselves today in as Christians is we're in a bit of a peacetime in Scotland, specifically, I suppose, in our culture.

There's no major external pressures. There's no threat to life. We're free to meet. There's minimum persecution. We can live comfortably. We can own houses. We can come here every Sunday, maybe twice if you're keen.

We are in peacetime with Christianity. But that doesn't mean we're safe, and it doesn't mean we're in the easy runnings. You see, Joshua and the passage in chapter 23 and 22, which we're also looking at, show what happened to Israel when war was over.

The last week, we looked at like a massive chunk of Joshua. Simon led us through it really well. I'd go listen to it if you missed it. But we saw God's faithfulness. We saw God's power as he took the land for Israel.

[ 5 : 24 ] All of his promises were fulfilled. This is what it says in the end of chapter 21, verse 44. The Lord gave them rest on every side, just as he had sworn to their ancestors.

Not one of their enemies withstood them. The Lord gave all their enemies into their hands. Not one of all the Lord's good promises to Israel failed. Everyone was fulfilled. These fulfillments marked the end of wartime, and it signaled the start of an era of peace for Israel.

But as we saw, if you look at Rome and history, and as we're probably going to see, just because there's peace does not mean life is easy. In fact, when we look through chapter 22, we're going to see two major threats that came upon Israel.

And in 23, we're going to see two major reminders and encouragements towards living God's way. If you've got your notice sheet, the structure in there is mostly right, but it's slightly changed.

So, Joanne's hopefully, I think, going to put them on the screen so you can follow along with what I'm saying. So, let's start with chapter 22. We haven't had it read, so let me just tell the story. Have that chapter open, kind of be skimming through.

[ 6 : 28 ] I'll point some verses, but we'll just do this quickly. Joshua chapter 22 specifically tells the story of three tribes of Israel that are the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

Manasseh. And in chapter 1, and in the end of Deuteronomy as well in Numbers, they were promised a certain part of land to the east of the River Jordan, right? So, that's the far side of the promised land.

And in chapter 22, Joshua thanks this triplet of tribes for leaving their families alone to fight the war on behalf of all of Israel with the rest of the tribes. They didn't get to stay in their land as the army moved in, but they went with them.

And so, Joshua sends them home. He sends them east to cross the Jordan and take what the Lord had given them. But just before they crossed the river, they do something a bit unusual. They build a giant altar.

If you look at verse 10, it's an altar of imposing size. And what we're going to see is that actually, or what we see in this chapter is that that is a major problem for the rest of Israel.

[ 7 : 26 ] Because building an altar generally only means one thing. False worship and sacrifices to a fake God. The one thing they were commanded not to do in Deuteronomy 17. So, verse 12, the rest of Israel, in response, they raise up an army and they send a delegation to this altar to find out what on earth is going on.

Verse 16, they say, how could you break faith with the God of Israel like this? How could you turn away from the Lord and build yourselves an altar in rebellion against him now? After all God has done, why would you do this?

The rest of Israel reminds the triplet of tribes of the previous failures in Israel to worship the Lord properly. We see the sin of Peor is mentioned. That's Numbers 25, where 24,000 people were killed from a plague that was caused by idolatry and sinful rejection of God.

We also get the mention of Achan. That was in Joshua 7, where Achan's unfaithfulness and desire for things he shouldn't have led to his whole family being destroyed as punishments. Israel are saying, if you do this, if you sacrifice a false altar and reject God for your sinful idolatry, all of Israel will suffer.

So, we're here to make sure you don't do that. By force, if need be, we've raised a whole army. But the weird thing about this story is that actually the army of Israel got the wrong end of the stick with what the altar was.

[ 8 : 51 ] So, the triplet of tribes, well, they didn't build it for sacrifices. They mentioned that five times in seven verses, in 22 to 30. You skip through and see that phrase five times. No, what they've done is built an altar so that the future of their three tribes, the future generations, will be able to worship the Lord at the true altar by the tabernacle in a place called Shiloh.

So, verse 24 says, we did it for fear that someday your descendants might say to ours, what did you have to do with the God of Israel? Building the altars, it's a bit of a strange thing to do, but they're doing it so that anytime anyone in Israel looks to the Jordan in the east, they'll see this altar and remember, oh, my brothers and sisters are on the other side.

And that altar is there to remind me that they worship the same God we do. So, this is good news. So, the army of Israel stand down, they praise God, and they all go back to their homes. It's quite an unusual narrative, right?

Let's just be flown through it. Go home and read it yourself and dig back into it. It's a great chapter. But it's an unusual narrative because actually both sides are kind of in the right. They both are a bit wrong as well.

Like, building the altar is weird, but actually there's something we can learn from both the trio of, the triplet of tribes and the rest, the nine tribes, the ten tribes. So, we're going to learn two lessons. The first lesson we're going to learn is from the triplet of tribes, and we're going to see the importance of unity.

[ 10 : 11 ] Because the triplet knew that worshiping the Lord, their gods, the one true God, is the most important thing they can do now there is time of peace. And what is important is that all Israel do it in unity together because that brings glory to God.

They know that the unity of all of God's people is key to the thriving of Israel. Because the conquest needed all 12 tribes to fight. That's why those men were there in the first place.

They left their families for the entirety of the book of Joshua. They know how important unity was to win the lands. So, they see how important it's going to be for the future of the lands.

And they also realize something. The land they've asked for is physically divided from the rest of Israel. There's a giant river running through it. And this is a long time ago. And bridges weren't as common as they are now. Rivers caused a problem.

And these three tribes realized that the river that separates them physically in the future generations is likely to separate them socially and religiously. You see, humans love to create groups and then divide ourselves.

[ 11 : 16 ] Race, nationality, your sports team, your political party. If you're around in the late 2000s, whether you're a team Edward or a team Jacob. I'm pretty sure those are the right names. That was a Twilight reference in 2023.

But you can tell that this physical boundary was likely to cause a real divide. And a divide that would separate them from worshipping God. They're on that side of the river. They are not with us anymore.

You see, in wartime, Israel were able to unite together to clear out the land as God gave it to them. But the second we enter peace, unity is often, like people strive against it.

They want their own thing and division comes in. That's what happened with the Roman Republic. To get history nerd on you. But the downfall started because the powerful men didn't have anyone to fight apart from themselves.

And it would be likely to go the same way for Israel if they allowed that river to separate them completely. So we have to, the triplet did the right thing in encouraging the unity of the entire nation. In peacetime, we're so tempted to see our differences more than our similarities because there's nothing else going on.

[ 12 : 21 ] Whether that for us today is minor theological differences or we live in a different place. We are from a different country. We have a different color of skin. There are so many different possible reasons to divide.

And if you look back to the entire history of the Scottish church history, you're going to see that. There are so many divides over small things. Division comes naturally and quickly from all manner of things.

But no matter the distance between our tribes and Israel, no matter the river that was there, they were united in true worship of the Lord. Because that is what brought them together in the first place. They worshiped the one true God.

And it's true for us today. If we are worshipping and sticking to the true gospel, we will remain united no matter where we meet or where we live. We need to take this lesson seriously.

Because as we live in a peace time in Scotland, we are far more likely to divide over small things than unite. As we are one with Christ, so too we are one with one another, no matter the distance or differences.

[ 13 : 22 ] So that's lesson one, the importance of unity. And lesson two from this chapter is the awfulness of idolatry. So the tribes of Israel, right, so on the other side now, thinking about the ten leftover tribes, they saw this giant altar and immediately prepared for war.

No questions asked. Now that may seem really extreme. But actually we should really laud the response. They made the right call here. Because by the time we've gotten to the end of Joshua, in the past 50, 60, 70 years, Israel have seen a host of different mass instances of idolatry where they've suffered and died.

And it was never just the individual offenders who died. It was always the whole of Israel who suffered. The tribes of Israel know that idolatry is a complete rejection of God's. And God holds the whole nation to account for any part of it.

Because God called the whole nation to worship him. So it's a serious affair. Idolatry is not something to just be laughed off or ignored or downplayed. It could have been really easy for Israel to just not raise an army and to let it go.

They've just finished a war to win an entire country. Finally they've got peace. And yeah, okay, those tribes over there are doing something weird. But we'll just leave and see what happens. It's such a, would have been a very worldly reasonable response.

[ 14 : 40 ] But no, they've just finished this conquest. And they know what is at stake. Idolatry is no simple thing. It's like gangrene. It will rot and kill you unless you chop it off.

Israel have learned the hard way with Peor and Achan. And we need to learn this lesson too. It cannot be allowed to linger. Despite the easy life we live and the small apparent nature of it to begin with.

Idolatry cannot fester. Otherwise it will kill. Now for Israel, disobedience in peacetime and idolatry in peacetime looked like a ginormous altar. Where they would potentially sacrifice things they're not meant to in a place they're not meant to.

It would be quite easy to look at that altar and go, wait a minute. Giant altar equals probable idolatry. And yes, in this case it was slightly different. But for us in Scotland today, idolatry doesn't look like that.

I think it's very unlikely that I'm going to catch any of you sacrificing some bull on a wrong altar. But that doesn't mean that idolatry is gone.

[ 15 : 40 ] It doesn't mean we're free from it because we don't sacrifice things. Instead, because we're a church in peacetime, we need to take heed this warning even more so. Because it is hidden and secret.

And we can often fall into it without realizing. Our Western culture is rampant with idolatries that we might not even realize are affecting our hearts and taking us from the Lord. If only it was easy as avoiding the pagan temple down the road.

Instead, idols are everywhere. They're on your phone, on your TV, on your laptop. Literally as you walk down the street, you're going to see them. They're in the air we breathe. We need to learn to identify what idols we are facing.

What idols are working at your heart even now as you listen to me? This takes real self-reflection. This is hard and something we need to work at. But thankfully, the people at the Gospel Coalition website have written some questions.

So if you're the note taker, right? Try and write these down and go home tonight and just dwell on these things. What is actually, what idols do we have in our hearts? So firstly, what do you daydream about? How often are you contemplating what you'd spend on the lottery if you won it?

[ 16 : 47 ] Where your first house would be, your third house would be. And how much you'd have to actually give to the church to kind of balance out the money you've earned. So what are you daydream about?

What is the thing that distracts you from your spiritual habits? As you read the Bible in the morning and the afternoon, as you sit in your favorite chair with your Bible open, what are the thoughts that take you away from it?

Does your mind drift off to that girl or guy you fancy? And you're thinking more about how you could maybe ask them out on a date than what the Lord is saying to you in Scripture? Would you rather sit and play video games all night than pray?

Or are you just really, really, really, really constantly stressed and worried and thinking about what you need to do at work that day? Or next, what's the first thing you put in your calendars, your plan, your week, your month, your year?

Or in your kids' calendars if you're parents? Is the first thing you put in roots every week? Do you want to make sure there are growth groups, whatever small group you're in. Is that the first thing you put in?

[ 17 : 47 ] Is it, well, roots plus is on, so I won't make any plans for Sunday evenings. Times I can spend with the Lord's people learning about the Lord's. Or are the first things that go in your calendar, your work nights out, sports club training, any extra work you can do to earn some extra cash.

If you just think about those three questions, right, there are many more and many other ways to identify. But if we think about those three questions, we're going to see what it is that actually is driving our hearts. What idols are taking us away from the Lord and towards the things of the world.

It is vital to identify what these idols are. Knowing what we are drawn towards makes it easier to turn back to Jesus. So those are our two great lessons from this first episode of Peacetime Israel, right?

It's a huge truth. Our hearts are always going to be bent towards the wrong things. We're naturally inclined that way. The greatest threat for Israel was not Canaanite armies, but Canaanite idols.

It was the propensity of their heart towards idolatry and division that was their danger. And it's just as true for us today. So these are two major threats we face and Israel face in peacetime.

[ 19 : 03 ] Now we're going to look at chapter 23, and we're going to see Joshua's final farewell, his last speech to the nation before he dies. And he's going to give them two important reminders about what it looks to follow as God's people in peacetime.

So the first thing we're going to see is the wonder of obedience. A long time has passed. Joshua is now an old man. He's reiterated that like three times in the past two chapters, right?

We get it. Joshua's old now, and he's nearing the end of his life. He summons all of Israel to come to hear him speak because he wants to remind them of the things they're going to need when he dies.

And the foundation of absolutely all of it, maybe you notice as Andy read chapter 23 for us, the foundation of it all is God's faithfulness. Look with me to verse three.

You yourselves have seen everything the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake. It was the Lord who fought for you. The book of Joshua really reinforces that it was God who did these things.

[ 20 : 06 ] God is the one who won the land. God gave it to him. God fulfilled his promises. As Israel go into a time of peace, they need to remember who they are serving, the gods who knocked down the walls of Jericho, the God who defeated Ai and killed all of the kings.

Because remembering what God has done is key to living well for him. It's necessary so that they trust that he will remove all the Canaanites who are left because they aren't in a world that's perfectly driven out.

We saw last week that there are still little pockets of the Canaanites who have remained. But they need to see that God will drive them out as he has said he would. Now Joshua's logic in the next few verses, right, verses six to eight, is that because they have seen what God has done, they must be careful to obey all his commands.

God's way has gotten you this far. He's done this much up until this point. So stay strong and he will keep you forever.

He will drive everybody else out. Because God has saved you from Jericho and Ai and all the people of the land, do not associate with their gods. Do not bow down.

[ 21 : 19 ] Do not say their names. Do not worship to them. Stick to the God who has rescued you. Do not worship to them. Verse eight sums up the encouraging part of this message. You are to hold fast to the Lord your God as you have until now.

The Lord has done it for them. He's driven out these great and powerful nations. To this day, no one has been able to withstand Israel. They've been loving God, following him, and God has been moving amongst them.

Joshua is encouraging them to grateful obedience. To follow God's way because of what he's done for you. This isn't legalism. This isn't saying you have to follow the commands so that you'll be saved.

This is God has saved you, so follow his commands. God has already brought you to the place he promised, so stick with him. And this isn't just obedience to the laws.

This is a relational obedience. Verse 11 is the key verse in this whole chapter. Turn with me. This is a really important one. Verse 11. So be very careful to love the Lord your God.

[ 22 : 26 ] The obedience Joshua is talking about is a part of loving God. There is a lovely linking word there. We've got a big so at the beginning of that sentence so that we'll never isolate that phrase, be careful to love the Lord your God, from what has come before it.

We receive from God and so we love him. So often we think loving God is just having the right attitude towards him and just feeling the things towards him. But what Joshua is telling us is that if we truly love the Lord, we must be obedient to his commands.

I've been speaking of peacetime faithfulness, but the reality is that we will not always feel like we are in peacetime. Being a Christian can and does feel like a constant battle, whether struggles with sin or family persecution pressure.

But if you feel like you are in a wartime, and if I talk about peace, you're like, Robbie, that's so far away from where I'm at. But this is still a lesson we need to hear. When you are struggling to look to God, to feel that peace, you are still to be very careful to love him because he will keep his promises.

Wherever you're at, you can look back to the cross. The Israelites had piles of rocks throughout their country that were a symbol of God's faithfulness. We don't have a pile of rocks on stage, but we do have the cross because that is where we look to trust in his faithfulness.

[ 23 : 51 ] And as much as they needed that in wartime with the enemies in Canaan standing against them, they need it in peacetime just as much because as the triplet of tribes realized, but in three generations' time, people will forget what the Lord has done.

When we live in peacetime and we have plenty, our bellies go soft and our memories grow short. The pleasures of life overtake our needs and the dependence on God flitters away because we don't need him in the day-to-day of our lives.

Whether it's the land of milk and honey or the land of happy relationships and a big savings account, our eyes are just drawn to the world around us, away from the cross and what God has done.

We need to be obedient to him, to love him, to return our gaze to the goodness of God. Because when we look at the cross, what we see is his faithfulness, his kindness, his grace, his love, his mercy, and we see the fact that when he says he will do something, he does it.

As Jesus died and rose again, we can be confident in all those things and be certain that he has defeated death. So he will do everything else he's promised, which includes take us with him.

[ 25 : 04 ] He has done much for us already and he will do what he says. So live God's way. In grateful obedience, with a relational view of what you're doing, follow God's law.

That's what Joshua wants us to hear. And if in the first half of this speech, Joshua is encouraging us from the goodness that God has done, we do also get the flip sides.

I don't know if you notice as you're reading through, but the second half, it's a bit scarier. And in the second half, he warns us not to disobey. To use this point, like Joshua uses the same attributes of God's to base both sides of the speech.

God's faithfulness and the absolute certainty of his words are the foundations of this whole speech. But the second half is not that it will bring peace and concentration, but instead we will realize that we need to be rightfully fearful of God's.

Let me just read verses 12 to 13. Please do look with me. But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you, and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you.

[ 26 : 18 ] Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the Lord your God has given you. Israel cannot peacefully coast along in peacetime.

They need to remain faithful to their faithful gods. And again, this isn't a works-based thing. This isn't about doing what's right or avoiding doing what's wrong so that God will do things for them.

This is a relational thing. God wants his people with him. He wants to be with them. He wants to be known and he wants to know. Notice that most of the disobedience language in this chapter is about the ways they react to the surrounding nations.

It's about following their false gods, doing things they're not meant to do. The reason these things are bad is not just because there's a command that says, do not worship false idols. The reason these are bad is that when you worship false idols, you are turning your back on God.

Relationship is broken. When we worship false idols, it is our back that is turned on a complete rejection of God. So the call to Israel is to remain in faithful relationship with their gods.

[ 27 : 31 ] And if they don't, then they will face the same fate that every other nation will face. If they choose to not be a part of God's people, well, then they'll be driven out of the land just like everybody else who is not God's people have been.

God lets us make a choice when it comes to relationship with him, but we face the consequence for what we choose. If Israel choose to reject God and go for the idols and false sacrifices, well, then they'll be cast out of the land.

For a peacetime generation, the greatest threat was not Canaanite armies but Canaanite idols. Because they had not fully removed the Canaanites from the land, that danger remains.

And Joshua has reminded them that starting to slip towards false idols isn't just a slightly naughty thing to do. It's not just a slap on the wrist. It's a mistake with lethal consequences.

The land they've just been given will go up in smoke when they turn away from God. What Israel need is the zeal they've shown in chapter 22. That kind of zeal that immediately, as soon as they saw an altar, ran towards it with an army saying, no, no, no, this is not okay.

[ 28 : 45 ] Now we live today in light of the cross. Things are different in the age we're in. We rightfully read the promise that faithful Christians will never be cast off. We believe that grace abounds for repentant sinners.

These things are all true. But when we read John chapter 15, we do see a similar statement to Joshua in John chapter 15.



So let me read that. This is verse 5. I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing.

If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. As believers today, if we remain in Christ, if we remain joined to the true vine, then we will bear fruit.

But, and there is a but, if we do not remain in Christ, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

[ 29 : 49 ] We live in the age of grace, but Joshua's warning is still true for us. We can't continue turning our backs on God and bowing down to the idols of this world without consequence.

Joshua needed Israel to see this so that they could enjoy God's land forever and Christ wants us to see this so that we might bear fruit in him. Disobedience is dangerous.

Idolatry cannot be left to rot away. But, in both Joshua and John, we are given lifelines. Remain with Christ.

Choose to be on God's side. Verse 8 in our chapter 23 says, Hold fast to the Lord, your God, as you have until now. When we talk about obedience, many of us balk at the idea.

Either we think we don't need to follow God's law perfectly because grace abounds and it's okay when we do things we're not meant to. Or the other side is we worry that we talk too much about God's law and that we're trying to be earning salvation.

[ 30 : 51 ] That's legalism. But Joshua, in chapter 23, toes the line perfectly and he summarizes obedience in a way that's really helpful for all of us to remember. And we're going back to our old friend, verse 11.

Obedience is not something we can will to happen. No, no. Obedience is being very careful to love the Lord your God. Avoiding idolatry becomes easy when we love the Lord our God.

Obedying his commands becomes easy when we see how great and wonderful and kind he is. We are not just turning away from things.

We are turning to him. We are turning towards Christ. And if we truly believe that Christ has died for us, that he loves us and wants us to be with him, then we need to love him above all else because he has done that for us.

Loving God is not a feeling. So when you read that and think, I just never feel like I love God's. Well, that's okay because love is not something we stumble into. It's not a mistake. It's not accidental.

[ 31 : 57 ] Joshua tells us that loving God is something we need to be very careful to do. Verse eight describes it as holding fast. We need to cling to God's. It's actually the same sort of language that the Bible uses to talk about marriage.

And if you think about marriage, loving your spouse is not solely based on feelings, but it's truth-based. You are married, so you're very careful to love your spouse.

You're deliberate. You take time and set aside time in your day to be with them. You plan days out. You have your date night. You listen to what they have to say. You help listen to them as they vent about their time at work.

And you give them all that's yours. That is what it looks like to cling in marriage. And that is a great example of what it looks like to love the Lord, our God. We must be careful to love him.

We must set aside time to love him, to listen to what he has to say to us, even if we don't like it. Because we trust that he loves us as much as we love him, if not a million times more. If we aren't careful to love God, then we never will.

[ 33 : 05 ] If you wait until you feel ready to read your Bible in the morning, you will never read your Bible in the morning. Or if you wait until you feel close enough to God to pray to him, you will never feel close enough to pray to him.

Being careful to love the Lord means being careful to turn away from idols, to deliberately choose Christ. Sin never just happens. It happens because we've been looking at an idol for far too long.

And the more we're careful to love the Lord instead of our idols and the desires of the world, the easier the battle will become. Idolatry is dangerous and deadly and only becomes more so when we live in a time of peace.

But we are united to Christ, the true vine. If we remain in him first and foremost, if we're being very careful to love and hold fast to him, we can be utterly certain his good promises will come true.

Brothers and sisters, remain in Christ even when the world tempts us, even when being in peace time makes things look just slightly easier to push your Bible to the side for a morning.

[ 34 : 11 ] We need to pursue true gospel unity and hate the idols around us. We need to follow the God who saved us and reject the snares that will trap us. And the more we strive towards that end, the more we will have true peace for all time.

And when all of that sounds just too much for a Tuesday morning when you're going to work, remember that it all boils down to one simple phrase.

Be very careful to love the Lord your God. Let me pray. Lord God, we thank you that you are gracious and faithful and kind, that you sent your son to die on the cross for us.

Lord, we pray that we would constantly be looking back with gratefulness to what you've done for us. And Lord, we pray that when the idols of this world tempt us to turn, we would cling to you.

We would hold fast to your truths and your promises. And we would look forward to the time when true peace will reign. Lord, help us to endure, help us to just trust in your son and remain in him so that he might remain in us and we might bear fruit with you.

[ 35 : 19 ] Lord, we pray that you would just pour us, fill us with your love, that we might love you back. We pray these things in your holy name. Amen.