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**Transcript**  
**Being a Christian Pilgrim**  
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The title today is *Being a Christian Pilgrim*.

On December 18, 1620, the pilgrims ended their sea voyage and landed at Plymouth Rock. After a harrowing Atlantic crossing, they arrived in the new world, hoping to live in freedom to worship God as they saw fit. Eventually, a new nation was formed of thirteen states – the United States of America.

It's interesting, at least to me, that the founding documents of this new nation were based on the Bible and the principles found in it, such as *all men are created equal*, and the concept of freedom. In fact, as of now, the United States is the oldest democracy on the planet and our founding documents the oldest of any democratic government.

At the time of our founding, democracy was a new thing. Other nations waited and watched to see what would happen to this experiment in government in the New World. It's also interesting to me that God's work with the people, from the beginning of humanity, has taken the form of a pilgrimage. Even His involvement with this nation, we see, began as a pilgrimage. Why did He do that? What is it about a pilgrimage that He uses to help us grow spiritually – into His Kingdom eventually? What does being a Christian pilgrim mean in today's world. On that last one, I think you may be shocked to see what we can learn about ourselves as God's pilgrims from the backdrop of current events in the United States.

First of all, what is a pilgrim? Here are a couple of definitions: One, a pilgrim is a person who travels, especially to foreign lands, for a place of great personal importance. And the second, a religious devotee who journeys to a shrine or a sacred place.

When God called Abram, He told him to get up and go to another land – a land He promised would be his forever. Now, to this this, Abram – who later was renamed Abraham by God – had to pack up all his servants, his family, his flocks and his herds, and travel a long distance. We learn from that that he was a wealthy man. Since a straight line from where he lived to the Promised Land was through one of the worst deserts in the world, they had to take the long way around. They had to go way north to higher, cooler elevations, and then west toward the Mediterranean, and then south to this Promised Land. It was an arduous journey. It was not smooth sailing any more than a winter Atlantic crossing was for the pilgrims. (Please forgive the pun.)

So, I think one of the lessons we're to learn there is that being a pilgrim is *not* easy. It's often a hassle and, sometimes, dangerous. At one point, it got so bad for Abraham's descendants that they had to migrate to Egypt to avoid a terrible drought. And we know the rest of the story. Once they were in Egypt, at some point, they were enslaved by the Egyptians. And then we know that God rescued them by sending them on another pilgrimage to take them back to the land God had given their forefather, Abraham. It was a forty-year trip through the desert. And it wasn't easy either. Many years after the Israelites arrived at the Promised Land, every year, when they went to the Feast of Tabernacles, they were reminded by God that they were pilgrims – travelers – seeking a better place.

In Psalms 42:4, we read:

**Psalms 42:4** – *When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me; for I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise, and with a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast.*

Did you know that? Ancient Israelites were reminded of their pilgrimage out of Egypt by traveling to the Feast of Tabernacles. And did you also know that when we travel to the Feast of Tabernacles, we're reminded the, as God's people – the Israelites of today – we are pilgrims too? Something useful there in observing the Feast of Tabernacles.

So, God has saved us from the world and ourselves and has set us on a journey toward God's Kingdom. Check this out: This is David praying publicly when they dedicated a great offering for the temple to God that Solomon was going to build. It's in 1 Chronicles 29:14. David said out loud in his prayer before all the people:

**1 Chronicles 29:14-15** – *But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able thus to offer so willingly as this? They took up a great offering. For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you. So, like giving it back. So, they knew where it came from. It came from God, not from themselves. And then he says, in verse 15: For we are aliens and pilgrims before you, as were all our fathers. Our days on the earth are like a shadow, and without hope.*

In other words, we're not to be a part of this world. Without God, we're in deep trouble. That's true for us today, too. Jesus told us in John that, if we take the kind of stand that He wants of us – to live in truth, rather than going along with the delusion we see offered to us today, we're going to be at odds with those around us. All progress toward our goal comes from Him. And, where He's taking us, we cannot go without Him. That's the point of the whole thing, isn't it – being pilgrims and aliens on the earth, we're vulnerable to the world. Our salvation won't come from ourselves, but from God. It's certainly not going to come from the people around us. Each one of us is a pilgrim with God.

So, Jesus said something that sheds light on it for us. It's in Matthew 8. This is an account of what occurred – Matthew took it down.

**Matthew 8:18-22** – *Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him – and He was at the Sea of Galilee, I believe – He gave orders to go over to the other side of the sea. And a scribe came up to him, as He was leaving, and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." So, he wasn't talking about just going around to the other side of the lake with Him, but wherever He would go. And I think that means that he knew, if he were to follow Jesus, he would have to become a pilgrim – go on a trip – a journey – through life toward salvation following Christ's lead. Here's what Jesus said to him: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Nowhere to lay His head, because He was on the move – on a mission. He didn't have a permanent dwelling. "So, are you sure you want to go?" is what He's asking the fellow. "Because if you are, you're in for a life of sacrifice." Another disciple said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." So, here's a guy that wants to go on the pilgrimage too. And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury the dead."*

So, does this sound in any way casual or relaxed? No! If we become a pilgrim with Christ, our priorities have to change. Our journey to the Kingdom will have to be the most important, and the most consuming effort of our lives – and probably, the most uncomfortable as well.

In our world today, in most of the Christianity we see around us, we see a soft version of it – a soft Christianity. The followers of that way think that all God wants for us is that we be a good person and be happy. But Jesus' statements show us that He's talking about an all-out commitment that takes incredible effort and willingness to suffer, if necessary. So, He's shown us the ultimate goal – the Kingdom of God – the new heaven and the new earth – and eternal life. Big, big rewards! A big reward requires a big effort – to be balanced, at least.

So, the Promised Land of old and the difficulty that those who were headed there experienced was just a shadow of things to come for us. Now, we've been buffered from a lot of that because our nation was founded by a group of pilgrims and our founding documents are based on the Bible. But our country is losing sight of that destination now. I think we all can feel it.

So, here's a third definition of a pilgrim: One of the English separatists who founded a colony in New England in 1620. So, our nation was founded by people who were seeking a place where

they could worship freely – unconstrained. And they had that hope in them, because they knew that they needed to be free to worship God. And because they were committed enough to take that incredibly dangerous risk of a winter crossing of the Atlantic for freedom in Christ, they were willing to go on a literal pilgrimage so they could be free to follow God.

So, we're fortunate today to have that legacy, but there are fewer and fewer of us that appreciate it. Our nation lost the culture wars of the 90s. Christianity has become a thing of the past for most of the people that live in this country. People in all kinds of power positions – government being the least of them – but like in the universities, and public schools, and big business, and big pharma, big data – people that sit in those seats of power don't believe in God most of the time. However, in this country, instead of imprisoning dissidents – as in China today and as in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany of old – instead of imprisoning them, they cancel them. They expel them from social media, ruin their careers, bully them with political correctness, mislabel efforts, such as diversity training – which sounds like a good thing, but really isn't – and social justice also sounds good, but isn't – those things are all just packs of lies.

So, does that bother you that I've said this? Do you think I'm talking about politics? Well, just hang in there for a minute. Jesus said, "The truth will set you free." And the truth is this: In no universe is it just to cancel the centers or bully others to stand up for what they believe. Those are God-given rights. And those are part of our founding documents. That's why this country has been so great. Those seeking social justice so long, however, commit social *in*justice and are utterly blind to the log in their own eye – as we shall see in a few minutes – because they have been blinded. Of course, I guess a long in your eye would do the trick, wouldn't it?

So, let's think about how our journey makes us different from all these people around us. A pilgrimage with God has gone out of style in this country. And they'd like us to believe that too.

I have heard a statement by Niche – and so have you – that God is dead. That was a big headline back in the 90s. In our Christian world, most of us have seen the movie, *God's Not Dead*. We know that He isn't. We know that *God is dead* is a lie! But until I read the book that I am going to be quoting from here in a minute, I did *not* know the *God is dead* thing got going in the USA – a nation that was founded by pilgrims so that they could worship God.

Why would it be important to understand what's going on – even if we have to say the words *Republican* and *Democrat* within this presentation? Well, look with me in 2 Corinthians 2:11. It says:

**2 Corinthians 2:11** – *...so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his devices.* I think not being *ignorant of his devices* may be wishful thinking on our part.

So, are supposed to be aware of what's going on in this world? And are we supposed to be able to discern what's good and what's evil? You might think, doesn't that mean we're supposed to

take sides politically? Well, if you think that, you still aren't thinking big enough. You're still not on the topic. This is *way* outside of politics. The devil could care less if you are a Republican, a Democrat, a Liberal or a Conservative – or, even an Independent. What we're talking about here, really, is something that's never happened before in the world. We're talking about a new civilization – not about winning an election in the United States, for example.

So, what are his designs – his plan, his strategy? Have you figured out yet how an educated woman was able to stand up and testify, in all sincerity, before a Senate sub-committee that it is possible for men to menstruate? Or, how diversity training, required in so many places, is teaching us to be bigots, and yet, supported by so many people? Or, how political correctness is really just a bullying tool for the new order?

I found some of the answers to these questions in a book titled, *Live Not by Lies – A Manual for Christian Dissidents*, by Rod Dreher. (A link will be in the transcript.) I used to think being a dissident was a bad thing. Back when I was young and in the church, that was true. Dissidents were people that were against the laws of God – free love, for example. But now, those people have the upper hand. There are more of them that believe that sex before marriage is just fine. So now, being a Christian means to be a dissident – and may be necessary for us.

Jesus Himself was a dissident, wasn't He? And isn't He the model for us? Now, I know we're not used to thinking that way, so are you just going to jettison that idea immediately? Or, are you going to listen some more. So, here's the book that I'm going to quote from. It's called *Live Not by Lies*, by Rod Dreher. He starts out talking about another author:

“In his landmark 1966 book, *Triumph of the Therapeutic*” – so, 1966, right? It was out there already – “Philip Rieff said, ‘The death of God in the West has given birth to a new civilization devoted to liberating the individual to seek his own pleasures and to managing emergent anxieties.’” A new civilization. Okay? What's new about it is, they're totally devoted to liberating the individual to seek his own pleasure and manage his own anxieties. “‘Religious man, by comparison, who lived according to belief in transcendent principles.’” What's he talking about? Well, like the Ten Commandments, and eternal life with God, and accepting the grace of Jesus Christ, and that man is made to please God, not to please himself. “‘Religious man, who lived according to belief in transcendent principles that ordered human life around communal purposes’” – family – “‘has given way to psychological man, who believed that there was no transcendent order and that life's purpose was to find one's own way experimentally. Man no longer understood himself to be a pilgrim on a meaningful journey with others, but as a tourist who travelled through life according to his own self-designed itinerary, with personal happiness his ultimate goal. This was a revolution even more radical than the 1917 Bolshevik revolution,’ said Rieff.” Do you know what that was? That was when the Communists took over Russia. “For the first time, humankind was seeking to create a civilization based on the negation of any binding transcendent order. Bolsheviks may have been godless, but even they believed that there was a metaphysical order – one that demanded the individual subordinate their

personal desires for a higher cause. Almost a quarter century before the fall of the Berlin wall, Rieff predicted that Communism would not be able to withstand the cultural revolution coming from the West – one that purported to set the individual free to pursue hedonism and individualism” – the quest for pleasure. “If there is no sacred order, then the original promise of the serpent in the Garden of Eden – ‘Ye shall be as gods’ – is the foundational principle of the new culture.” Everybody is god to himself. He gets to decide what’s right and what’s wrong, what’s good to do and what’s not.

Now, Rieff, I believe, was an atheist, and yet, it appears unwittingly that he tells us the source of this new civilization. It’s none other than the devil himself, who is expunging even familiarity with God from the world.

There’s something else to consider here: Another intellectual – Dostoyevsky – a Russian, interestingly enough – warns us of what happens when God is expunged from the mind. He said, “Without God, all things are permissible.” And all you have to do to understand that is to read Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s books, *The Gulag Archipelago*, about what happened in the Soviet Union when there were all these people – well-meaning, young, supposedly enlightened, liberal thinkers – who wanted to see a new world where everybody was equal and it was a better world to live in. And what that turned into – when you threw God out of the picture – the whole thing turned into a monster! Hideous tortures and consequences for people that didn’t agree with the state. So, without God, all things are permissible – such as, claiming to see justice for the marginalized society, but doing it by marginalizing others. It’s evil! It’s based on the lie that “it’s true because I believe it. I am as god.”

I watched a Ted Talk recently that hit me right between the eyes. It was given by a man who was explaining why he believed Christianity is on its last legs in the West. He asked his Western audience to imagine some of the pictures that we have all seen of Indian Hindu festivals – the bright colors, the idols – all the pomp and ceremony they have. And he asked us to imagine that we wanted to be Hindus. Where would we start? How could we possibly make entrance into that religion that is so alien to us? Then he explained that the young adults in our culture – most of whom have *no* Christian experience – feel the same way about Christianity. It’s completely foreign to them. They wouldn’t know what first step to even take to become a Christian. And this is a country that was founded by Christian pilgrims.

There’s another quote from this book we will look at right now. It shows a picture of what we are dealing with. I want you to pay attention to this: “Conservatives and old fashioned liberals and others who are outside the social justice movement” – that would be me and, I hope, you – “frequently fail to grasp” – when you frequently fail to grasp something, that means you don’t understand the truth of it, or maybe, that you’re being deluded by a lie – “fail to grasp how to respond to the aggressive claims of its proponents. This is because they assume social justice warriors, who are typically *not* religious, operate under the established standards of secular liberal discourse with its respect of discursive reasoning. A memorable example is in the 2015

Yale University clash between professors Nicholas and Erika Christakas and enraged students from the residential college, which was overseen by this faculty couple. Things went very badly for the Christakas – old school liberals, who erred by thinking that the students could be engaged with the tools and procedures of reason. Alas, the students were in the group of the religion of social justice, and as such, they considered their subjective beliefs to be a form of uncontestable knowledge and disagreement as an attack on their identity.”

Now, when somebody believes in uncontestable knowledge – and it’s not really knowledge at all – it’s just a pack of lies they’ve been told – there isn’t really any way to talk to them. You can see evidences of this in other areas too. Without even human reasoning, even *science* is discounted in favor of the agenda! Everything becomes political, rather than based on truth or evidence that can be demonstrated – even the weather! There are a number of scientists – you can see them on YouTube or TV or wherever – look them up on the Web – who can show evidence – *evidence!* – that global warming that we see today is *not* caused by carbon contamination in the atmosphere. And those people lose their jobs and are blacklisted. You know, evidence by hanged.

So, when the evidence – the truth – that you have doesn’t matter, how do you deal with it? Well, all the old rules don’t apply. There’s no way to talk them about it – no way to have an argument. And yet, this is where – every indication is – we’re going there. I believe, if you’re mind could be opened to the Bible, God has predicted all this in 2 Thessalonians 2:9. Let’s start in verse 10:

**2 Thessalonians 2:10** – *...and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

Now, I know that this scripture is about end time events. This is predicted for the future, just before Christ returns. And I’m not talking about the future today. I’m only talking about what’s going on right now in our country. And you might ask, “But isn’t that an immediate precursor to the end time?” Well, I might go for the statement, if you left *immediate* out. Only God knows when that’s going to happen. What we’re really talking about here is totalitarianism – the kind of government that wants to control your mind as well as your behavior.

Totalitarianism has been going on since the Tower of Babel – and probably even before that. So, just the fact that we see something like this in the US doesn’t mean that Christ’s return is right around the corner. It’s just an indicator that things are generally headed that way.

So, what we see in the US today could just be more of the same in history, only worse, because it’s a new way of doing it, but new to the US in its brief history. While we were over here in the United States, living in a free land of plenty, the Russians were suffering a totalitarian overthrow and the Germans did the same. And then there’s China – the worst totalitarian government in the history of mankind. So, even if it is only that, however – just something that’s happening in our

country – it still threatens our freedom to worship, and consequently, must be resisted by us. I don't mean overthrown by us, because you can't do that. But, if we're going to obey God, then we *are* going to resist it. That's what it means to worship God in that context.

We are *not* tourists choosing our own way, seeking only the reduction of our own anxiety and happiness, but pilgrims on a journey through time to eternal life with God. Do you realize that all these people that have thrown off God, they don't believe in the Ten Commandments. They don't believe in right or wrong, except what they decide it is. They don't have any respect for what we believe. They make fun of it and persecute us for it. Right now, they're tearing down statues and things to try to eradicate our society – our culture – so that we won't even be able to remember what things were like in the past. They change the meaning of words, like *justice* and *diversity*.

So, we need to think clearly through all of that to the truth and we must know how to protect our children from this enticing message filled with lies. As the scripture applies, God has been and is conducting a great sorting out – those who recognize and love truth on one hand – and stand up for it – and those who, because they have lost sight of God, succumb to delusion and do *not* recognize His truth when they see it or hear it. We're all free to choose which side we want. But for our part – Elaine and I – pray that God will give us all the strength we need to continue on His pilgrimage and recognize both truth and delusion when we see them.

Let's look at something Jesus told His disciples just before He was taken. It's in John 14:6.

**John 14:6** – *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Now those people I've been talking about, they don't care about Jesus. They don't even believe in Him. So, they're not interested in His way, or His truth, or His life. They believe that when they die, that's it for them. So, live for now, try to find as much happiness as you can and enjoy it.

But, if we hang on to what Jesus said – the way, the truth and the life – and go on our pilgrimage with Him, we don't need to be afraid. The truth of God is stronger than any totalitarian regime! And He promises that everything we need to believe, everything we need to do, and everything we need to know will be provided for us on our trip. And that is the final point about pilgrimage that I want to leave you with. Our pilgrimage with God – our life now – is *necessary*, even if it's hard, because that is where we learn everything we need to know to be successful in our eternal life in the family of God. And because He loves us, He's going to give us all those things. So, we *don't* need to be afraid. We just need to travel with Him with our eyes open.

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God. We are a youth advocacy ministry. One of the reasons we made this presentation is to strengthen you in your faith, not just for yourself, but so that you can help all your congregation's children, who are vital part of your spiritual family.