

# OpenTheo

## **Conversations in a Crisis: Part VII: Models for Resistance (with Rev Benjamin Miller)**

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Faced with our challenge of remaining faithful within and addressing our various contemporary societal crises with wisdom, Christians and churches are fracturing over our differing approaches and postures. My friend Ben Miller suggested that we have a series of conversations, to help us to pursue greater clarity on the principles, virtues, duties, and practices that can equip Christians to meet such difficult times with prudence, insight, and courage.

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### **Transcript**

The following is one of a series of conversations that I'm having with my friend, the Reverend Ben Miller. Ben is a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on Long Island, and he suggested in the context of current divisions within the church over political and other issues that we have a wide-ranging series of conversations about issues of Christian ethical reflection, epistemology, charity, obedience, trust, community, and conscience in this context. While our conversations are occasioned by issues such as COVID, on which Ben and I have different opinions, our conversations will not be narrowly about it, but will be a broader exploration of issues of Christian faithfulness in any sort of crisis, some of the principles that should guide us, and some of the practices and virtues that we need to pursue.

Through our conversations, we're hoping to arrive at more accurate and charitable understandings of each other, a better grasp of responsible processes of Christian

reasoning and deliberation, and a clearer apprehension of principles that we hold in common. We invite you to join us for these conversations, to listen to our discussions, and then to share your own thoughts in the comments and elsewhere. Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Well, Alistair, you and I have been talking about the subject of resistance to things that authorities and powers might do, and how we should think about that as a Christian. Is there a time and place for resistance at all? What form does that take? How could it be justified? Who should do it? Why would we resist, and to what end? There's been a lot to think about with that. One of the things that we were chatting about after our conversation last time was just maybe whether we could go back to the Bible and think about some of what we might consider test cases in Scripture of a kind of resistance.

I was just reflecting a bit, if you'll permit me just to ramble briefly, about maybe how we could map even the theological territory in which we place resistance. I was just thinking about the basic concepts of nature, what God created, sin, the corruption of what God created, grace, restoring what God created, and then glory, the perfection of what God created. That's a well-known theological framework.

I was just thinking about how that relates to resistance. We've spent quite a bit of time in our conversations trying to establish that life together and authority within that life together is a created thing. It's a good thing.

It's part of nature. Even authority is part of nature. Then there's various ways that gets corrupted.

I think that's where resistance focuses. I think from that perspective, we could even say that the whole Bible is a manual of resistance in the sense that God has a plan for, by his grace, overcoming evil, crushing the serpent's head. We're going to find ourselves as God's people, and you see this all through the biblical narratives, find ourselves in positions where we're needing to take a posture of opposition to evil, but we do that under the authority of grace.

It's not just meeting power with power, overcoming evil with evil. It's always under the lordship of God for the purpose of restoring nature. Grace restores nature.

It's not against nature. It's against sin. Then the glory piece is important too, because it reminds us that no quest for justice, no opposition to injustice in this world will ever be perfect.

It keeps us out of utopian fantasies that drive so much revolution. I just wonder if thinking within that framework a bit, we could just talk about some of the biblical characters and also relate the biblical storyline to some of the narratives in our time about what forces are at work in the world and how should we respond to them. It might

be interesting to, first of all, think about some of the examples of Christ as a figure of resistance.

A few chapters and verses come to mind. I think, for instance, of Jesus teaching in Matthew chapter 23 about how to relate to the oppressive authority of the scribes and the Pharisees. They sit in Moses' seat.

There's a sense, okay, they have authority. They have some official role relative to the people. Christ doesn't say to just ignore them altogether.

He teaches his disciples that they have to show some sort of honor to these people as they do hold some of Moses' authority is represented by them. So do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do, for they preach but do not practice. So there's a sense, okay, these are people who genuinely hold spiritual authority.

They are corrupt authorities. They do not practice what they preach. They are people who are described throughout Jesus' teaching as corrupt.

Jesus is not afraid to or reluctant to directly confront them and verbally. But yet, at the same time, it's interesting that we'd have this sort of emphasis upon observing their authority, even alongside those places where this very passage where he goes on to talk about the woes upon them. So elsewhere, we'll have statements about, for instance, Herod that fox.

Jesus is not holding back certain of his criticisms. But yet, at the same time, there is an element of submission alongside that, that he's teaching his disciples. But also think alongside this an example of the paying of the tax, that the children of the king are free, but yet, Peter, and Jesus pay the tax, nonetheless, recognizing that although they are free as the sons, they will still pay the temple tax as a recognition of the authority.

And that, I think, provides us with some interesting examples that give us both sides, both resistance, but also submission alongside that. I was going to ask you too, in relation to Jesus' ministry, is it, and I think this can be seen earlier in the work of the prophets as well, is there an important distinction between the posture of, let's say, the prophetic voice culminating in Christ, the posture toward what we might call apostate authorities, by which I mean those that actually began under the word of God and have departed from it, versus the posture toward maybe what we could call pagan powers that are the lords by virtue of creation, but they're not necessarily, obviously, part of the Israelite covenant, for example. Because it does seem to me that Jesus has this interesting sort of dual focus in his ministry of the scribes and Pharisees and the Sanhedrin and that whole Herodian temple complex, but that's also tied in with Herod, let's say, and Pilate, and behind that, Rome.

And of course, Rome, moving back to Daniel's prophecies, Rome is the culmination of a

series of giant beasts, as it were, Gentile world powers that are not necessarily part of the covenantal story, and yet they are under the sovereignty of God and the prophets speak to them and relate to them. Is that at all an important distinction? I ask this, I guess, because I think that a lot of times in our 21st century, at least for me in North America, there's a sense that we once had something kind of Christian, and there's been this long decline of secularization, which seems to create a certain urgency and it just seems to freight resistance with a particular character, because there's a sense of things collapsing and degenerating, and it does in some ways kind of mirror what you hear in the prophets as they speak to Israel, let's say, about how has the gold become dim, that kind of thing. I don't know if you think that's a valuable distinction to point out.

I think it's certainly worth reflecting upon. You could maybe consider the way that we have a figure like Jehu as the overturning of a corrupt apostate dynasty of the Umayyads, and in that example, it's a quite sanguinary story. He's shedding the blood of Jezebel and all these other priests of Baal, and it's seen as a sort of purging of the land of its wickedness.

But yet, at the same time, he's not a good king. His zeal is not an entirely positive thing. And so we have examples of that where, I mean, we have a whole series of overthrows of kings in the story of the later kings, particularly in Israel, one coup after another, and the instability of the kingdom is very much on account of its wickedness.

There's always another wicked king rising up to overthrow the previous wicked king. And this is not seen as a good thing. It's seen as a negative situation where you do not have a stable kingdom because there's constantly one coup after another, provoked by the wickedness of the kings, but also perpetuated by the rebellion of their successors against them.

So we have that on the one side. We also have, I think, the teaching that we have in the New Testament about the scribes and the Pharisees, the practice of the church. And then the distinction between the way that the church, particularly characters like Paul, relate to the Jewish authorities, and then to the Roman authorities.

And that appeal to Rome that Paul makes that really takes up a lot of the end of the book of Acts is an important part of his story. And in many cases, you see the Roman authorities being played over against the Jewish authorities, which are supposed to be subordinate to them. And also negative portrayal of the Jewish authorities that are, although they play upon being submissive to Rome, that they want to present anyone who will not kill Christ is seen as an enemy of Caesar.

Deep down, they are fostering the spirit of rebellion, and eventually it comes upon their own head. And so there's a sort of treacherous alliance between the woman and the dragon or the woman and the beast, where the woman and the beast kind of are against each other, but also seemingly in cahoots. And so that that conflict, I think, is an

important one to consider where there is treachery at the heart of that relationship.

And the way that the early church challenges the rebellion that's at the heart of Israel, and yet has this complex relationship with the empire, recognizing that God is over it. And also the empire itself is becoming this very bestial thing. So I think in Revelation, we have this description of the development of the bestial empires that is really picking up on the themes of Daniel that you mentioned earlier.

And Daniel, we have a succession of beasts, and they become progressively more monstrous. And the final beast is the most monstrous final form, which I think is related to the beast that we see in Revelation. And that exploration, I think, will also give us an understanding of how the pagan nations fit into the picture.

But we should maybe leave that until we've discussed the earlier part. Yeah, agreed. It's just interesting to me in light of what you were saying there.

It doesn't seem to me that in the New Testament, there is nearly the denunciatory language toward those gentile beast images as there is toward, say, the corrupt Jewish establishment. You know, you don't get woes pronounced on Rome. And I'm not, again, it's, there's clearly a bestial, as you said, there's clearly a bestial characterization of Rome and the gentile power.

But it's interesting that the greatest, those most strident calls, prophetic calls for accountability really do go to those who know the word, who should be representing Yahweh. So. And that challenge, I think, is expressed in a number of forms.

We have the verbal challenge, but also there is this expectation of actual judgment falling upon these people. They are the wicked vine dressers, and the vineyard is going to be taken away from them. There's going to be the destruction of the temple.

It's been built through the oppression of widows, for instance, the widow's house that has been despoiled. She's putting all her money into this temple building that is like a den of robbers. They think that they can take refuge within this building, because they have this sort of what's essentially become a sort of civil religion of the Lord that they're using the Lord to shelter behind when actually they are perverting his worship.

They are oppressing his flock, and they are like the wicked shepherds and sheep in places like Ezekiel chapter 34, and they will suffer the consequences. Do you think it's okay? So we're kind of seeking to establish biblical models for a prophetic voice and resistance more generally. How do you think we should draw those examples into our own time? For example, if you have the prophets denouncing, let's say, the rich oppressors in either the southern or northern kingdom of Israel, versus how the prophets speak, let's say, to Babylon or Assyria or, you know, like in Nahum, you know, the prophecy against Nineveh, for example, the way Daniel views the various beasts, you

know, it's very easy to draw biblical denunciatory biblical language into our own time and say, just as Jeremiah spoke to the kings of Judah in his day, we should be speaking to, you know, presidents or whatever the political figure is that we've got in our crosshairs, the way that, you know, Obadiah speaks to Edom, we should bring that over and connect that to something in our own time.

And I know this is a very deep question that could be talked about for a very long time, and I'm just interested in what you would say about kind of keeping some guardrails on how we draw analogies between the way that the prophets spoke to apostate Israel versus the way the prophets spoke to Gentile powers versus the way that we speak to nations post-Christ. And I think it's important to reflect on the significant redemptive historical difference now that Christ rules, all authority has been given to him, and so we can make the case perhaps in the new covenant post-Christ that all nations are accountable to Jesus Christ now in a way that has sort of changed the picture, it's changed the context within which we are framing resistance. Do you think that's a fair thing to say? I think the context certainly has changed.

I think the other question is what is more analogous to something like apostate Israel in the time of Elijah? Is it America and the UK, or is it the apostate church? And that is one of the questions that I think we need to work with, and I'm not sure that either apostate America or apostate church are directly analogous with apostate Israel. There's a way in which both of those things have some connection with apostate Israel. All the nations have come under the authority of Christ after the ascension in a new sort of way, and so we are calling all nations to repentance, and that I think requires a different sort of pronouncement to places like Nineveh than Jonah would have given in his time.

And so there is something of that relationship that Elijah would have with Israel that I think carries into our relationship with these pagan authorities. You can see that in places like the Areopagus speech of Paul in Acts chapter 17. The Lord calls all men everywhere to repent, and these times of ignorance have passed, and now the nations are going to be subject to the judge the Lord has set up, that one man.

Now that is on the one hand. I think we also have the way in which the church has a specific covenant relationship with the Lord that the nation does not have in the same way. Now we can talk about notions of national covenant.

I think there's a place for that, and it's certainly been an part of American political theology early on, and it's important to preserve something of that, but at the same time, what we're thinking about in that case is very different from the sort of relationship that exists between Christ and his church, even in its apostate form. And so when we're addressing the church, I think that we're addressing it in a way that's maybe more analogous to the way for instance, Moses would address unfaithful Israel in the wilderness. That's not quite the way that we're going to be addressing the nation, but I

don't think that the nation is in this sort of neutral position, nor is it left in its ignorance in the same way as the nations would have been prior to Christ.

And so there is definitely a delicate balancing act to take place here. And here I think it's helpful also to recognize some degree of a continuum, that there are nations, all the nations come under the authority of Christ, but some have been exposed to the grace of Christ for a sustained period of time. His goodness has been shown to them over their history.

The word of the gospel has been preached for centuries, and there has been a wide swathe of the population that has committed themselves, at least nominally to him. The nation itself may have been committed to Christ can think about how many nations have crosses in their flags, how many nations have references to God in their constitutions or in other parts of their national life and symbols such as their coins or in coats of arms, whatever it is, Christ can be a central part of that society historically. And as a result, there is, they are acting against knowledge in a way as a nation that has not yet heard the word of the gospel is not.

And so in that sort of situation, I think we are working with two different sorts of things, the church and the world, but we're also dealing with things on a degree of a continuum. And in that sense, we can have more of the strident prophetic voice in some cases, than we would in others. Yeah, I just think that's worth it.

That's really helpful what you just laid out there. And I think it's worth reflecting upon because I, I think that Christian resistance has always turned to scripture. Right.

And, and it's very, you can very easily see why so many minority movements, look at the prophets and look at Jesus, just look at the faithful throughout scripture, more generally, these kinds of marginalized people who are on, who are on God's side, you know, as it were, and, and are up against all these varied powers. And I think it's just very easy to kind of cherry pick our way through biblical stories and, and, and through prophetic oracles and, and kind of pull things into their own time. And I think that's actually a perfectly appropriate impulse as far as it goes, but I do think carefulness is needed because things can be disanalogous.

I don't think that. Yeah. I think in addition to this, it's also important to determine what is our resistance to, because much of the time our resistance is not to apostasy, but it's a resistance to government overreach, which is a different sort of thing.

Yes. And so when we're dealing with, for instance, excessive taxation, it's a different sort of thing from dealing with government requirements that call us to go directly against the word of God. So we can think about situations like in the origin of your country, the resistance to excessive or what is seen to be unjust taxation.

That is a situation where we might think about appropriate resistance without necessarily putting it into the category of resistance to apostasy or to some turning against the knowledge of God that the nation has previously enjoyed. Yeah. So for example, maybe I'm just thinking out loud here, but maybe then some of the prophetic denunciations of economic oppression in Israel can't just be carelessly slapped onto, let's say government overreach, say in my United States, I'm not saying there aren't principles that carry through, but I just, that's the kind of thing that you will often hear.

And it sort of has this deep biblical prophetic ring to it of, you know, pulling something from the prophets to, you know, from Micah to denounce taxation policies in the U S but it just seems to me that a certain, the point here is not to neuter our prophetic witness, but just to make sure that we're carefully grounded. How should a Christian now we're in the post, like after Christ, we're in the, we're in his reign. So our, the nation that we're a part of is in a very real and important sense under his authority.

But how do we respond, let's say to government overreach? Like what, what, what is the appropriate, what's the appropriate prophetic posture? And then what do you do? One of the things that strikes me, and I'm not intending here to just start blurring over these distinctions we've been trying to make, but one of the things that strikes me in many different contexts throughout scripture, when it comes to active resistance, not just prophetically speaking, but forms of more active kind of maneuvering is just how, I guess I would say subtle the working of God's people often is. It's not, it's not, and you can make the case, this is because they just don't have the, the, the resources and the, and the, let's say military power to do it, but it's so very often there's this kind of just continuing to do the work of the Lord and pursue good things in the shadows. And often just kind of doing that in a way that is under the radar of, you know, various authorities.

I mean, it begins right there in Egypt where you've got, you know, a pagan king who is Yahweh, right? Pharaoh doesn't acknowledge Yahweh's authority and you have the midwives and they're, they're not going to sin by murdering babies, but there's a kind of, a kind of just, we know what God wants us to do, and we're going to find a way to do that, but we're not, we're not looking as we said in our, I think it was our last episode, we're not looking for these open, they didn't, they weren't marching around with picket signs, you know, against Pharaoh's policies. I'm not saying, I doubt that would have done much good. No, certainly not.

What about a brief protest, but, but they're, they're doing what God wants them to do. And there's a kind of, I'm tempted to call it a kind of sneakiness or subtlety about, about this. And I think a lot of what you see with, with Obadiah and the school of the prophets is he's feeding them in caves in secret and other things that, you know, Jesus, he's just kind of off the grid so often and what he's doing.

And he's, he's not looking for these huge momentous encounters with the powers. He's



pursuing his father's will. And I've just been reflecting on that in my own time, because one of the things that I've noticed here in the United States in the COVID context has been, I think we've had a lot of situations that could be characterized as government overreach.

But one of the things, maybe this is something I can enjoy because I live in a basically still democratic nation, is over time, a lot of that overreach has kind of receded. There's been a political backlash in some cases or policies have changed. And it seems to me that in this context, we would have done much better to just stay focused on the things that God has given us to do by way of good works and just give time.

Because the thing that you see so often throughout the life of God's people in scripture is just this total confidence. God will assert his rule. He will assert his justice.

It may take a long time, but we don't need to be particularly reactionary to the powers, even when we need to speak against them prophetically, because God is using this. Even the worst powers are but hammers in the hands of the Almighty. He is totally speaking to us through our sufferings under this.

And there's just a kind of patience to let things play out. And it just seems to me that you and I keep coming back again and again to just a kind of basic non-reactivity. Not that we don't act, not that we don't diagnose political problems and there is a place for profound prophetic denunciation.

I mean, but there's never panic. Yes, and I think that concern is an important one because our prophetic denunciation can often be something quite different. We can easily mistake panic.

We can mistake merely human anger. We can mistake our irritation with government's incompetence in many cases, not even overreach. It's just the inability to do things well.

We can mistake that with a prophetic word. And those things really need to be distinguished. But yet, I think there are ways in which there are complex situations for which we need a variety of responses alongside each other.

So you mentioned the situation of Obadiah feeding the prophets in the cave. We need an Obadiah in that situation. The prophets are going to die otherwise.

But there is also a place for an Elijah who goes and speaks directly to King Ahab and Jezebel and directly confronts the prophets at Mount Carmel. There's a showdown. And in the end, his zeal actually doesn't seem to achieve its desired effects.

But the Lord is preserving 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal. There's something of those two ministries alongside each other that needs to be in place for the Lord's purpose to be achieved. We need the Obadiahs and we need the Elijahs.

But the Elijahs need to recognize the presence of the Obadiah's that they are not being unfaithful in what they're doing. And the Obadiah's also maybe need to recognize there's a place for the Elijah here. There needs to be some sort of direct confrontation.

And that confrontation, as we've been discussing, needs to be understood in terms of prophetic categories. So is this actually a resistance to apostasy? Is this clearly a case where the government is rejecting the word of the Lord and is seeking to oppress his people that that is their intent? If that's the case, then speak to that point directly. And there can be that direct verbal prophetic confrontation and denunciation.

But on the other hand, if it's just government overreach, if it's just government incompetence, then speak to that in a way that is not confusing it with that prophetic denunciation. As very often the case that I think Christians can confuse a struggle for our political and civil rights with conflict with the powers on as a direct conflict between Christ and apostasy or evil. And that confusion, I think, is a very dangerous one to make.

We can sacralize certain struggles that should not be. They are nonetheless worthwhile struggles to have in some cases. In some of these cases, we need to resist.

We need to stand up to an incompetent or an unjust or whatever it is, power, but not confusing that with something that we're doing in the name of Christ, I think, is important. Can I ask you a question about that? Do you think it's important to distinguish between fighting for justice and fighting for political well-being? By which I mean, because I think it relates to what you were just saying, just if you're speaking against something that is actually morally evil, that's one thing. And I do think there's a stronger, I think the scriptures provide quite a bit more prophetic, shall I say, artillery on that front.

But sometimes I wonder if what we're actually fighting for is political well-being as it is conceived in our context. There are things about the American political structure that I think they're a real blessing. They allow quite a bit of freedom to do as you please.

And that allows you to invest your resources the way you want to, grow your life. We speak about America as the land of opportunity and without getting into the question of for whom has it been a land of opportunity, but for many people, there's been a lot about the American life that has opened a lot of doors and we'd like to see that continue. And that's all fine and well.

But to say that things that change that are injustices, right? That now this is evil. I don't know. I've just heard, again, I'm thinking about the last couple of years.

I've just heard at times people speaking about loss of certain liberties, loss of certain privileges, I think I would call them, as if this is oppression, this is injustice. This is actually, as you were just saying, this is something that Christ himself would oppose this. And the people that are doing this are agents of evil.

That's an enormously strong claim. And I just wonder if sometimes we've confused political well-being, things that are genuinely good ideas politically. You could make the case they're objectively preferable.

Are they really matters of justice and injustice? I mean, do you think that's just too fine grained a distinction? Well, I'd often think about this in terms of the wisdom literature and the sort of categories that it gives us where there is some association between simplicity and folly and evil. But those things are not simply conflated. There's such a thing as a foolish king, who's not necessarily wicked.

Yes, but he's a king that just is not wise. And as a result, he leads to the ruin of his kingdom. And we can think about the way that that principle is extended more broadly.

There's the person who just is not provident in the way that he manages his affairs. And as a result, he comes to a pauper's end. Now, is he wicked? Not straightforwardly, but he can cause the ruin of everyone around him within his family.

And so the question of how to deal with that sort of case, without as an issue of folly, without treating it as a matter of wickedness as such, I think is an important one. And I think in that sort of case, we do need to be careful of that. Beware against presenting the well being of the polity as something that is a matter of indifference.

It's not. There are a lot of things that are very important. They're invested in this.

And the well being of people is not just an incidental matter. It has moral concern as well. A person who is starving on the street is not able to pursue, pursue virtue in the way that they should be able to.

And there's something about the state of impoverishment, impoverishment that pushes people towards certain vices. Now, for that and many other reasons, we will want to deal with issues of falling in leadership. And ideally, we have ways to prevent it before it causes its most deleterious effects.

Now, on the other hand, we have these situations where there is clear, apparent, clear wickedness taking place, we can think about the persecution of the prophets of the Lord in the time of Elijah, where this is a king who's killing people, who are the servants of Yahweh. Think about the same sort of situation in the period of King Saul, where Saul massacres the priests of God at Nob. Now, David still acts in a way that shows some sort of deference to his authority after that.

But Saul for the good of the nation needs to be out of his office. And so the time there is one where David is praying and singing and composing in precarious sums. Yes.

And you can presume that he's using those against Saul and his regime, recognizing that this is a regime that's bringing destruction through his evil upon the land. Now, I think

there are many ways in which we should be actually praying and singing in practice against authorities who are practicing things and legalizing things such as abortion. Or we can think about the ways in which other forms of violence and injustice are practiced within our lands.

And there are ways that we should pray against and speak against those evils that do not pull rhetorical punches. We're calling for the Lord, nothing less than the Lord's judgment and curse upon them in some cases. But yet at the same time, that exercising of a prophetic voice, if it's to be done responsibly, needs to be done with a consciousness of the dangers of zeal, the dangers of acting merely out of our impatience with something that is not in fact apostasy or evil, and the dangers of acting in a way that set ourselves up as judges when we in fact are being unfaithful in some regard ourselves.

So I think for instance of the case in John chapter eight, where the woman caught in adultery, however we think about that passage within its, whether it's canonical or not, that passage presents the problem of people who are not in a fit position to judge, judging the case of someone who is in fact guilty. And I think often we find ourselves in that position where people will establish themselves as judges and as prophets in order to distract attention from their own complicity and their own sin. And so when we are speaking, particularly when we're engaging in something like the imprecatory Psalms, one of the things that they involve is an attention to our own selves as we are approaching God and a confession of our own sins, a humble recognition of the weightiness of what we're doing and holding of ourselves up to judgment before the Lord, before and in the process of bringing other parties into calling for him to remember other parties and to act against them.

And in the case of something like the judgment upon Egypt in the Exodus, there is judgment upon the oppressed as well as the oppressors for an initial period of time. They are not immediately divided into the land of Goshen, which is relieved from the plagues and then the land of Egypt that suffers them for a period of time. They're both suffering the plagues because they are not in fact faithful.

And later on, we find in scripture that they had been engaging in forms of idolatry within Egypt. They have to be separated. And so I think that sort of self-examination is important.

And the examination of the nature of our cause, the sort of question of taxes to Caesar will often want to sacralize that. Well, it's because he has his image upon this. This is an adulterous image.

And in fact, it may be. But what is really motivating this? Right. And that sort of question is one that we really need to wrestle with.

And I think Christ's answer to that particular question is one that reveals some of the searching character of his ministry and the way that it reveals certain of the motives that are impure within people's hearts, even in the quest to even in challenging things that are in fact compromised or affected by evil. Yeah. Yeah.

So much to say about that. I wonder if through what you've just laid out, we've arrived at some possible categories then of resistance, depending on the object at which the resistance is aimed. So, for example, one of the things that's emerged is there are times when a nation, a body politic is in rebellion against God himself.

And it seems to me that really the prophetic voice of God's people there is really just preaching the gospel. Our God reigns. Let the nations tremble.

It's sort of what Daniel speaks to the kings of Babylon. There is a higher, there's a higher throne. And so that seems to me is one place where prophetic work and quote unquote resistance is really just preaching the gospel that kings and people should bow to God, to his authority.

And I do think, I do think, for example, in our time, the, say what you will, the secularization, the long secularization narrative of, you know, we've just gradually becoming more and more godless as a civilization, whatever you make of that. I think there's something to it. And I think, I do think it's important for Christians in our time to continue to speak in our private context and publicly calling, calling authorities to understand that they have moral accountability to a higher law and a higher, and to God himself.

That, I think, I think we're on pretty solid territory there. Then there's another category of powers and authorities that are acting against human life. You know, the obvious example of massacres and genocides.

I would say a great deal of, you know, what goes on with abortion, say in the United States, you know, I feel very comfortable saying that's a place for a prophetic voice. And it's interesting to reflect upon, is there a place there for more than just a prophetic voice? The sheltering of the prophets in the cave, the preserving of the babies in Egypt. There are many other places where there's a kind of serpentine cunning in preserving life.

And we could talk in another conversation, maybe even about the uses of deception, appropriate or inappropriate in that context. And I know, you know, I've, there's a lot to say about that, you know, to what extent is that appropriate. But I do think that there is a prioritizing of human life and the life of God's people uniquely in the Israelite context, where if powers are trying to destroy the lives of people, there is a place to do all kinds of things that are illegal, that are just preserving life.

That doesn't mean you're fomenting civil war, but it does mean we're going to, we are going to protect people. We will shelter and cover and provide. And I think you can make the same case in a more economic context.

And here, I think now we are in territory where you move away from obvious attacks on human life to attacks on people's economic well-being. I do think some of what we've been discussing about the distinction between what is actual injustice and what is just a matter of making people's lives politically and economically harder. I do think there's a distinction there, but regardless, I think that just caring for people, I mean, meet, clothe the naked, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, right? Like just... It's interesting how often things like sheltering the homeless can become a political act just by virtue of the fact that the authorities are not really friendly towards people sheltering the homeless.

It's so interesting. Say a bit more about that. So the degree to which many societies can be actively hostile to the homeless and those who are involved in helping them are seen as aiding and abetting a population that they do not want to be hospitable to.

And I mean, you get the same things, I think, with questions of immigration in some contexts. And so the question of how you treat certain persons can become a political question, even if you're not intending to be political, simply because some parties, they do not want to be hospitable to them. You might think about the way in which the sorts of people that are blessed in Matthew chapter 25, what they did for the brethren of Christ, which I think are the disciples and messengers of Christ, many of those would have been acting against their societies, characters like Rahab, the way in which they welcome ministers of the people of God in situations where there are rulers and authorities that would directly oppose them.

Now, that is clearly a situation where you're facing is good versus evil. It's someone who's directly resisting the rule of Christ in his messengers. Why are you persecuting me, Christ says when he's talking to Paul, the recognition that those who are directly attacking the ministers of Christ for bearing his message are attacking Christ himself.

And I think in those sorts of situations, we see something of the ways in which resistance can. I mean, there's this that constant test of hospitality that Christ gives within the gospels who welcomes him and his messengers. And that I think is something continued within our societies.

And so the way that the church welcomes those who are oppressed, welcomes those who are the ministers of Christ, particularly. I think that's an important political act that will often veer in the direction of resistance and having political flavor, even if it's not intended as such. Originally, I was just thinking of Abigail as another illustration of that.

She's an interesting figure of resistance in feeding David. Now, she doesn't rise up against her husband. She's very clear that he's a fool.

But she actually stops David, who arguably might have been within his rights. I mean, he actually is a kind of magistrate. He had some real political authority, even though he was running for his life as an outlaw.

And yet, she stops the violence. And yet, she does it with an act of hospitality. And I was actually thinking as you were talking, I have an interesting illustration of this, how hospitality, I think, can be an act of political resistance.

So I was talking with a very dear friend recently about the issues surrounding racial reconciliation. And the sister is just so wise. And that's just such a politically freighted issue.

And we were just talking about the problem of, let's say, welcoming into your church life people who are politically minoritized. And there's a lot of pressure on Christians to make sure that our churches are integrated, which is right and good, and that we're welcoming those who have been minoritized. And yet, one of the things we were discussing together was how that can so easily make people in these minoritized communities feel tokenized.

Rather than we're welcoming you just because we're welcoming you, we're welcoming you because you represent this group. Your welcome is premised on what is different about you. And so in a strange kind of way, you're actually emphasizing the otherness of the other, as it were.

And so the very act of trying so hard to be reconciled can end up exasperating, kind of aggravating a sense of what is different between us. And she offered this observation, which just struck me, and I've been thinking about ever since, that a church that is just generally hospitable can avoid a lot of this because you're just welcoming. You're just welcoming.

You welcome everybody. You're not like singling out people that we will welcome you because you are, you know, X, whatever the label is. We just are welcoming.

We're a place where you come in and we're not even really noticing what's distinctive, quote-unquote, about you. We're just welcoming you in Jesus' name. And I've just been thinking a lot since that conversation about how politically effectual that kind of hospitality is, how that could begin to, honestly, Alistair, I believe in my North American context, that I think has, that kind of hospitality has the potential to get at the heart of a political problem here in our context that almost seems beyond remedy so often by any other means.

Because the very things that you try to do to make sure that, quote-unquote, those people feel recognized is sort of underscoring that they are those people. And this is just a constant tension. And I just feel like that's, we don't think of this as resistance, but this

is, I think it's profoundly subversive of the political order as we see it now.

And the degree to which our political orders, social orders, even if it's not formally within our political structures or legal structures, are premised upon a sort of antagonism between parties and the different demographics that they represent. The more that we actually oppose that and represent and manifest a society in which we are welcoming to people of different demographics who would otherwise be at odds with each other, that is a politically revolutionary action, revolutionary in the lower sense of the term. But I think we are genuinely doing something that is transformative.

And I think that test of hospitality is also one worth reflecting upon more generally about how it tends to come back to people as well. So we can think about characters like Obadiah. It's very easy for someone in Elijah's position to look at someone in Obadiah's position and think, this is obviously someone who's unfaithful.

How could he serve for this regime without being compromised? And yet Obadiah is someone who is very faithful and courageous within that situation, and perhaps even more courageous than Elijah who's running. Obadiah is in the very den of the lion himself. And he's actually within that context doing something truly heroic, rescuing hundreds of priests, of prophets of the Lord.

And we can also think about the way in which some of these characters, by being in a situation where they are showing loyalty, they're actually shown hospitality back. And that's one of the things that we can often show hospitality to other people. I don't think we think enough about the significance of asking for people's hospitality for us.

And one of the things about the church that we see, I think in Christ and elsewhere is it often appeals to other people's hospitality. Jesus is constantly a guest at other people's tables. And we think about the way that Paul goes to different figures and seeks their help and their aid, he appeals to them.

And we can think about also the way in which the church in the context of the different towns and villages that the disciples are sent into, they are testing each one for their hospitality. And as these places are receptive, they become transformed. And I often think about the character of Daniel here.

Daniel is put in a situation where it would seem compromise is inevitable. He has to eat the king's food, but yet he asks for a favor. And that favor is actually granted to him.

And as a result, through that, all sorts of possibilities get opened up. And he ends up through his loyalty, becoming someone who's in a position to exercise a prophetic voice. Yes.

And so he's the loyal servant who can interpret the king's dream. He's the loyal servant who can interpret the second dream as well. He's the loyal servant who's invited to



interpret the writing on the wall.

In each of these cases, he has the opportunity to give that prophetic challenge without it merely being a sort of antagonistic denunciation. There's a sense in which he's somewhere between a chaplain and a prophet. And that is all premised upon the receipt of the king's hospitality.

And all of that is an acknowledgement that true political life at its root is love, not power. And I think that just really needs to be kept in view in Christian resistance, because I think it's so easy, even the word resistance immediately brings up sort of this armed conflict model, I think, for many of us. And look, I mean, there's a time for war.

But it seems to me that one of the most basic Christian political principles is that God made human beings to live together in love, welcoming one another and being welcomed by one another. And that the more we enact and practice that way of being toward one another within whatever regime or order we find ourselves, the more we are actually bringing the salt, light and leaven of Christ into that order. And it will transform.

I mean, that's what salt, light and leaven do. They change things. And that's the way the kingdom of God is described among the nations.

And I just wonder, you know, I really, really appreciated the things you've been bringing out, because it's a creative, constructive model of resistance. It's seeking transformation. It's absolutely seeking change.

It is resisting evil. But getting back to the beginning, in the name of grace, restoring nature, grace, restoring what God designed, as opposed to, I mean, look, how hard is it to start blowing things up? Now, maybe if you're literally, you know, have an occupation force and you're in the middle of World War Two, and you're part of the resistance movement in France, you know, I don't know, I get it. But I think it's just too easy to have that be the paradigm case.

And what you're describing from these various biblical models is something very different. And I think we can say much more subversive. I think the case of Abigail that you raised earlier is another good example.

And it's interesting to see how the text really draws our attention to a parallel. So Nabil is Laban backwards. We have the fact that it's at the time of sheep sharing, which is the time when Jacob leaves the house of Laban.

And there is this statement about breaking out, breaking away from their masters at that point. And that's another term that's used on key occasions in association with the time of sheep sharing, and in association with the history of Jacob, Judah, and David. Now, another thing that's noticeable there is the way that Abigail plays the part of Jacob pacifying Esau.

Whereas David is coming with 400 men, just as Esau came with 400 men. And so David has to be brought to his senses and brought back to his true self as a man more like Jacob. In order to do that, Abigail exercises this act, which is really a complex one.

On the one hand, she's going without the knowledge of her husband. In another aspect, we can think she's trying to save the life of her husband. She recognizes that her husband is a fool, and she says as much.

But yet, the whole aim of her action is to protect his life. And so we have a complex form of submission. I think more generally, these things call for the wisdom of serpents, it calls for the imagination of people who are not driven by fear, and paranoia, but have minds that are free enough in their knowledge of the work of God over all of these things.

Yes, to be able to act faithfully. And this is another thing that strikes me in some cases of people who have suffered in extreme injustice and how they've responded to it in the right way. Think about the story of Joseph, for instance, he presumably thinks that he's been forgotten, then can think about the way that his father, for all he knows, his father sent him to his brothers, in order that they might send him away and do away with him.

Yeah. And he feels rejected and forgotten by everyone. And yet, after all of that, there's no sense of bitterness.

And you think, if you spent the best part of 20 years, right in prison and in slavery, how would that affect your soul? And you presumably if you'd suffered the sorts of injustices that Joseph had suffered, you would be a very bitter, antagonistic, vengeful person. And yes, that is exactly the opposite of what we see in the case of Joseph. And so the formation of these virtues are very much what will enable us to enact that sort of faithful resistance and resistance, not being merely to the other party, but resistance to the evil that will tend to grasp hold of us in that situation.

Yes. Vengefulness, the desire for and just to destroy the other party, the sense of bitterness that we're harboring this grudge within us. And in all of these ways, the resistance is not primarily to the other party, but to the evil so that we can actually overcome it.

And like Joseph can present an alternative to the sort of actions of vengefulness and wickedness that would seem to be aroused by the situation that can actually provide a way beyond its impasses. That's profound. And it might be interesting in our future conversations to just talk about some ways in which local Christian communities could cultivate together understanding and virtue with regard to these things, because it seems to me we need formative context to get ourselves as it were into that headspace.