



The Defeat of Death-Part 5

The Anticipation of Our Resurrection

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, the news this week is my 16-year-old daughter, Stephanie, got her driver's license on Thursday. Yikes. Yeah. Yikes. Parents, remember when your kids were little and that old adage ran through your mind when you're disciplining them in some discipline session, "This hurts me more than it's hurting you?" I had a variation of that float through my mind as I'm sitting there anxiously awaiting her driving test at the DMV. I thought this makes me way more nervous than it's making you. And she was nervous. I don't know as a dad sitting there with my daughter, I was so stinking nervous about this test. It just was so anxiety producing that my wife has delegated this task to me for all three of our kids. Right? She didn't even want to be in the building. I'm there working through... all these other anxious parents and just feeling the height of like, I just so wanted to take the test for her. But feeling that sense of this is really rough. And if ever Romans 13 comes into clear view, it's there feeling the power of the government over your life. Right? I know they don't look like Cesar behind the desk at the DMV, but I saw them in a toga with like the laurel wreath on their head, like ready to give her a thumbs up or thumbs down and feed her to the lions of bike riding or whatever was going to happen. I thought this is rough.

Now can you feel that feeling with me, the anxiety, the stress? All of that was a very poor introduction here this morning to tell you this: I'd like you, as we studied the last four verses of Luke 24, to feel the exact opposite of all of that (smile). I'd like you to feel like the complete opposite of that. I'd like to feel, instead of stress, I'd like you to feel a sense of like complete just tranquility. A sense of, instead of anxiety, like complete like security. Instead of being uncertain about the future, I want you to have a sense of complete assurance about the future. That's really where this book ends. I say that because if you look carefully at it, really put yourself in the sandals of the 11 apostles who are there, this is a very unusual response to what's happening. The last four verses of Luke 24 and the last chapter of Luke in the last series that we're preaching here, is all about the Ascension of Christ, the Ascension. He physically, bodily, in his bodily resurrection, goes back to be with the Father in another dimension, it's a weird thing, clearly. But these 11 apostles, having Jesus leave them, you would think they would be like tearful and mourning, and it's so sad. We were losing Christ. We just thought we had him back. He was raised from the dead, now he's gone. And instead of that they're joyful, instead of that they feel a sense of confidence, instead of being torn up over the fact that the one they love the most is gone from them, they're feeling victorious. It's a strange counterintuitive response to the Ascension where we think a goodbye should be tear-filled and sad. It's just the opposite.

Take a look at this with me. If you haven't already opened to it turn there, Luke Chapter 24, the last four verses beginning in verse 50. I want to read from verses 50 through 53. I'll read it in English Standard Version, follow along with your eyeballs as I read this to you. It says, "And he," that's Christ, of course, "lead them," that's the 11, "out as far as Bethany." That's the village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. If you go to Israel, which we have another 100 people or so from our church leaving to our next Compass Israel trip, here coming up in a couple of weeks. You know who you are, you have an organizational meeting after the service today. You are going to surely take pictures from the Mount of Olives. You'll be looking across the Kidron valley to the Temple Mount, which now has the Shrine of the Dome of the Rock, the third most holy site in Islam there. But you can picture in your mind's eye the temple there and you can see Herod's Temple in your imagination as Christ leaves Jerusalem and he goes across the Kidron valley, up to the Mount of Olives, and on the eastern slope is the city of Bethany, a village of Bethany. That's where Mary and

Martha and Lazarus are all from.

And as he's going out that direction, up over the crest of the hill, you have him now in this passage do something that we haven't seen much of. Matter of fact, the word itself is not used this way very often. But it says, "He lifts up his hands and he blessed them."

We talked last week about the word "euangelion," the compound word "eu" and "angelion," eu, the Greek particle for "good" and "angelion," we get the word Angel from that. The "good message" the euangelion is transliterated evangelism or evangelical. There's another similar word. "Eu" it starts with eu, but it uses the word "logia." It's the "good word." To speak a good word, it translates "blessing" in this passage. And usually when you see the word blessing in the Bible you see blessings, certainly in the New Testament, as people saying "good words" to God. We bless God. We don't bless the food, by the way, just so when you go to lunch today just remember that. The food's dead. There's not much hope for your food. Right? I'm sorry (smile). We're blessing God for the food, that's the picture. Christ, when he feeds the 5,000, he lifts up his eyes to heaven and he blesses God for the provision, and that's what we should do. We give thanks to God for what he gives and we say good things to God for the good he's provided.

Well, this is weird because the 11 now are the object. Christ goes out to the Mount of Olives and he says to his 11 like he's blessing them, he's giving them a good word, which is more than what the priests do in the Old Testament, which we read in our Daily Bible Reading in Leviticus. If you read that carefully this week you saw this verbiage that was supposed to be used by the Levitical priest to bless the people, which is a similar concept here. They stand there as representatives of God, these priests do in the Old Testament, which we don't have a priesthood anymore. Right? We are all priests of God. But those priests would stand there and they would say a good word on the people. They would say the eulogia to the people.

That good word to the people was only really a prayer. That's all a blessing can be when one human tries to say some good to another. There's no power in my words. I'm only asking God to do good to them and I'm trying to articulate the content of what I want God to do good in their lives. That's a blessing. Right? Well, here we got Christ, the glorified Christ, the God-man, God giving good, saying good. The God-man, Jesus Christ, looking at his 11 and saying good things to them, not just about other realities, but the blessing or favor that God can actually grant, he's granting them that and saying that. These are powerful, potent words. We don't know the content of them all, but he raises his hands and he says something that certainly bestows and shows the favor of God on them.

Now while he's doing it, verse 51, while Christ is blessing those 11, "He parted from them." Even a strong word there, just off he goes, he's leaving them now, which seems to be a sad affair but it's not, as he "was carried into heaven." So here is a physically, resurrected body that is now glorified, that word. Right? We always talk about that word being such a Bible, church word that we need to define. Right? The perfected, powerful, perfected body that should be that God now makes impervious to death and it's eternal, that body now, in some weird fashion, it goes away, it's carried up into the sky. And that picture of Christ leaving them, you'd think would, in verse 52, make them really sad and bummed and maybe even shaking their fist at God, saying, "God why would you take away Christ, our teacher, our Lord, our God?"

But instead, it says in verse 52, as he was carried up into heaven, "they worshiped him." They gave him the thing that would be blasphemous if he weren't God. They worshipped Christ as he goes and gets smaller and smaller until they can't see him anymore and then they "return to Jerusalem with

great tears." Underline the word "tears" there, do you see that? No, just the opposite. "They return with great joy." But that didn't last but for an afternoon. Right." No, no. Verse 53. And they "were continually in the temple," doing exactly what you saw in verse 52, "blessing God," being filled with joy. That's a very counter-intuitive response.

If you're a real Sunday School grad you might think back to statements that Christ made that even seem contradictory to this. Remember when John the Baptist's disciples were fasting and they came to Jesus and say, "Why don't your disciples fast?" You remember Jesus' response to that? He said, "Well, they're not going to fast now because it's like a wedding party with the groom, the bridegroom's here and they're not going to fast now. That's such a sour, dour grievous thing. Well, I'm going to leave and then they're going to fast." Well, you think OK, well that makes sense. When the one who you love leaves that should be a sad time. And in fact there will be plenty of sad times as we'll see in the book of Acts for the Apostles and there will be some very difficult times. But what we see here in light of what's happening in this passage is that when they see him go there's so much more to this story that Luke is going to unpack in the first chapter of Acts 1. They have a response that makes theological sense. They say this, "Yeah, there are hard times ahead. There will be difficulties, there will be times we have to fast and plead with God about things. But you know what? It's a joyful thing." A joyful thing on two levels.

Let me start with one that I don't want to emphasize here. It is not a part really of the point, the first point that we're going to fill in here in a second. But it is something that Jesus said in John 14. Maybe you've never noticed this little verse. In John Chapter 14 Jesus said something about his departure. Verse 28. He said this: "If you love me," he said you wouldn't be sorrowful when I leave because he was talking about leaving them. He's going to go and leave them. The Upper Room Discourse. You would be happy. You would be joyful, that's the word that's used. Why? "You would have rejoiced, because I'm going to the Father."

Let's just say we lived in a horrible place, which of course we don't if we live around here, we live in a wonderful place, but we live in a horrible place, and I can think of a few, I can think of a few cities that are pretty horrible but I wouldn't mention them here from the platform, but you know which city I'm thinking of at the moment. I tell you every time I mention that I'm in big trouble because were broadcast in that city every day. So I won't say it. And they can think I'm thinking of another city, but I'm thinking of that city. In that city, if we lived there and wanted to come to a beautiful place like here in Orange County we would think, listen, even if I couldn't go to that great place, I would be glad if someone I love got to go to that place. Right? And Jesus says, "You would rejoice when I get to go to the Father," even as he prayed in John 17, "I want to be glorified with the glory I had when I was with you. I can't wait...".

And I don't want to throw the world under the bus, but Jesus did several times, but let me just fill in the blank here, "Get out of this sin-laden, horrible, wicked world." Right? He calls it a perverse world. He even says, "How long are we going to put up with this place? How am I going to put up with you?" He leaves the horrible place to go to a great place. And in that sense, the disciples should have rejoiced. But I think it's much deeper than that. And I'd hate to say it's more selfish than that but it's a biblical motivation to be happy, it's a biblical reason to rejoice and it is a good thing. The disciples, I believe, and we've got a guess here at their motives for all this joy, but I do think it's something that's clearly in view in all of the references of Christ going to be with the Father.

The promise is this, "If I go there," quoting a very familiar verse from John 14, "if I go there, you're going to go there. If I go there to a place where the unmitigated joy and blessing of God without any

barrier, without any reference to sin, if I get to go there, know this: I'm going to come back and get you and you're going to go there." And that was something that brought great joy to the disciples. I know it's what fueled them in the book of Acts and I can interpret this and prove this as we move through the book of Acts to show that they had heaven in view. They had God's unmitigated, unfiltered presence in view. And as Psalm 16:11 says, "In the presence of the Lord there is fullness of joy; there are pleasures at his right hand forevermore." That's a great thing. They look forward to a fantastic future and it would fuel even their pain of being apart from Christ.

Jot this down if you're taking notes, number one, you and I need to do the same. We need to "Rejoice in a Fantastic Future." And I've got to argue and I would make the case they have their future in view. Almost every time you see the resurrection of Christ clearly articulated with more than just a passing reference, you see the connection to our future. Christ is the prototype, the first fruits of those who are raised from the dead. What I see with Christ - without reference to sin, with no longer any liabilities to death, without any disease, without any suffering - that is my future. What Christ is is what I will be.

First John 3 verses 1 and 2, when I see him I'll be like him. I can't wait to have the reality that Christ now experiences. He is seated at the right hand of the Father. I'm going to be in perfect fellowship with the Father. And right now it's not all that great. "You didn't say that, Pastor." I did say that. It's not all that great. "Christian life is good though, right?" Well, it's good but it's not all that great. "Why? That doesn't sound biblical." It is biblical. I can have joy in the Christian life, not because I've arrived at any kind of great level of "this is fantastic" but because I'm going to a place that's fantastic, because I'm going to be in a relationship that's fantastic. "Well, your relationship with God isn't good now?" I'm not saying it's not good but it ain't great. "How is that?"

I'll quote a verse for you. In First Corinthians Chapter 13 the Apostle Paul said this. You want to talk about a relationship with God? "Right now we see," here's how the English Standard Version translates it, "we see in a mirror dimly." And you think, "Well then turn on the lights." It wasn't about lights in the first-century. It was about the quality of mirrors. Right? The quality of mirrors wasn't very good. Today, I can look in a mirror if there's enough light, I can see more than I want to see, I don't want to see everything in the mirror. But there are times when I'm traveling through that city that I'm now thinking about when I stop at an old broken-down gas station, instead of a mirror there, because everyone breaks the mirrors when they go into the gas station bathroom, they put up like a, you know, like they got them out of the prisons or something, like a piece of stainless steel on the wall. And if I got something in my teeth there's no way I'm going to see what's going on in my teeth looking in that gas station Texaco mirror, because it's not a mirror.

Well that's first century mirror technology. They didn't have the nice polished mirrors that we have. I guess if you lived in the Roman Palace you might have something polished very, you know, it would be great technology, but today we're not use to a mirror being like that. So that passage in First Corinthians 13 doesn't really help us. But I know there is a technology that hasn't advanced to see things clearly the way we want to. We love Christ, we want to see him clearly without any of that kind of fog between us.

Well, it's much like parents who want to get acquainted with their preborn children so they go for that checkup and they have an ultrasound. I try to be as excited as I can when another person comes to me to show me their ultrasound pictures. I try to lean forward like this is great but it ain't all that great, the picture you're showing me. Matter of fact, it looks like what comes on the TV when I was a kid after it went off the air, you know, it's just a screen full of just noise. I mean, I guess if I really



stare at it like one of those stereogram things, if I just focus and cross my eyes I can see some outline of something. But you know, technology for the ultrasound hasn't gotten where it's going to be. I get that.

And I'll tell you this: the difference between someone who just wants desperately to meet their preborn child, they'll take that and put it on their refrigerator, which is so strange because it's just a glob of black and white fuzz. But they see the outline, they see, "here's the head. I can see the little body. I can even make a little bit of the hands there." But you know it's nothing. I hope they replace that picture when the baby shows up. Take a good picture. Right? They come out, now you've got it. There's no way you can compare the fuzzy, prenatal, ultrasound picture to holding that baby in your arms. Right? To having, you know, your grandchild in your lap and loving on that child and think, "This is the real thing."

The distinction between a fuzzy little thin piece of curled paper on which the ultrasound gets handed to you when the tech takes the wand off your belly is nothing compared to the baby you're going to be holding. The Bible says right now that's what it's like. You love Christ, I'm not saying you don't. But I'm saying whatever it is that you have as an experience with God right now is nothing compared to what it will be. You see through that mirror, that glass, dimly. But one day you'll see him face to face. When you see him you will be like him because you'll see him as he is. Everything your human heart has ever desired, it will be fulfilled. I'm not talking about the fallen desires of your heart.

But even as C.S. Lewis rightly said talking about desires. Even the most simple desire, even the most common desire of your heart, it is a reflection of the connection between desire and fulfillment that is, I'm paraphrasing now, desire and fulfillment that is going to be realized when we get there. When we have the experience of Christ saying to us "enter into the kingdom, the joy of your Father, prepared for you from the foundation of the world," that's going to be the fullness of joy, that will be everything you've ever desired. I know it seems based sometimes, particularly as, you know, the erudition of modern theologians talking about heaven, you don't want to think in terms of words like pleasure and happiness and satisfaction, but that is the concept in Scripture.

Your desires, the ultimate fulfillment of your desires... I know a lot of your desires are going to change when you get there. But do not think that that connection of being satisfied and having my thirst satisfied, having my desires satisfied, having the pleasures of this life, they're going to be experienced in a perfect and complete way there. Matter of fact, it wouldn't hurt us to think about the joy that the disciples had when they saw Christ leave, knowing that the whole point was that he's the forerunner and we're coming with him, to go to the end of the book and spend a little bit of time together thinking this through.

So turned to Revelation Chapter 21. It is a great thing for us to periodically do to get our focus on eternity. I was reading J.C. Ryle this week. 120 years ago he was preaching about the topic of heaven and, you know, he talks about the dull mind in the Christian that never really gives any thought to tracing out the realities of where we're headed. If you're going there you ought to spend more time thinking about it, you ought to spend more time researching it. You've got to trace out the contours of our eternal home from the biblical data and get your heart wrapped in it.

Colossians 3, that's what it says, "Set your hearts and your minds on things above." Revelation 21. I'll give you plenty of time to find it. Are you there? End of the book, right before the maps and the concordance. Verse 1. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first

earth had passed away." I don't know much about heaven but I know a little bit about earth. I like a lot of things in this earth. There's a lot of things that bring me pleasure and joy and happiness in this earth. But there's going to be a new one that corresponds to the old one in many ways and I recognize, as I've seen in the resurrection of Christ, it is a physical reality.

If you want to take any subpoints here I would put that down. When it comes to what I'm looking forward to, Christ leaves physically with eyelashes and fingernails and ear lobes and off he goes. He's going to prepare a place for us that when he comes again he'll receive me unto himself. That where he is I'll be. And that place is going to come down to earth in a 1500-mile square, cubed, city called the New Jerusalem. I'm going to be a part of that in a physical place, much like the earth is physical, tactile, sentient beings experience it in their senses. This is going to be a place where you will sense things in a physical reality. And it's going to be perfect.

Verse 2, "I saw the holy city," not like this one, it's perfect, "the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." I always got to stop and I read this because we're so used to quoting the Apostle Paul with the bride and groom analogy and you see yourself as the bride and Christ as the groom and I would say if you're reading Ephesians that's exactly how you ought to see it. That's not what's going on in this passage. In this passage we are not the bride prepared for the groom knowing that he's going to have to iron out the wrinkles and take the blemishes off of us so that we can be a presentable bride to him, that's not the picture here. The picture is a perfect bride that from the beginning is perfect because God himself has made this bride and the bride is a place, the bride is a city of 1500-miles high, 1500-miles long, 1500-miles wide city called the New Jerusalem and it's coming down the aisle, so to speak, as you sit there in your rented tux and God is bringing to you the fullness of your desires, a perfect place.

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying," here's why it's perfect, "behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God." You want to summarize the joy that Jesus said, in John 14, they should have felt for him when he went to the Father, it's right there. Because there's nothing, nothing separating the Son from the Father. The ultimate separation came on the cross as he quotes Psalm 22. "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" He echoes the picture of alienation from God as he takes on our alienation in an intensified, concentrated payment for our sins.

And then he says I'm going back to the Father. Well, you'd be really happy for... if you loved me, if you really looked out for my good, you couldn't wait for me to get back there. You love me? You'd be happy that I'm going there. And now, here's the point, one day I'm also going there, one day I'll be there. Actually he'll come and be here with us. "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men. He will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God." No more long-distance relationship. Yes, I have the Spirit. Yes, he convicts me. Yes, there's comfort. Yes, there's the prompting of the Spirit. I get that, I get his word, I see it. But all of this is not what it will be.

Don't get settled into this over-realized eschatology that somehow you think that everything in the Bible that talks about fulfillment and joy and happiness and riches and wealth and all that stuff is supposed to be for the here and now. You'll experience some of it here and now, I get that. But the ultimate fulfillment of everything the Bible is setting us up for is here, when the dwelling place of God is with men and, he dwells with them and we're his people and God himself is with us as our God.

It's physical reality. It's a perfect reality. Look at verse 4. Thirdly, everything that's painful is gone. "He's going to wipe away every tear from their eyes." Here's a personal, tender picture of a God saying, "That hurt? Now it's over. Death? No more of that. Mourning? Not going to have mourning. Crying? Nothing to make you cry. Pain? Pain is gone." Every level, physical pain, emotional pain, every kind of pain, gone. All that former stuff that characterized that sin-laden world is gone. "The former things have passed away." If you want to take some sub-notes here, it's a physical reality, which gets me excited to know I'm on a cotton ball cloud floating around like Casper the Friendly Ghost. That's good. And it's a perfect reality. It's everything my heart could possibly desire. And it's a painless reality. Everything I hate about this world extracted and gone.

Oh, and I love this, verse 5, fourthly it says, "He who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also, he said 'write it down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' And he said, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.'" That's trying to get us to look at the bookends. I've often said this from this platform, you got the first two chapters of the Bible and the last two chapters of the Bible and things are really, really good in both places. Everything in between is kind of a mess. But God is working out redemption to get us from the beginning, where it was all good, to the end where it's even better because sin is behind us. Redemption is accomplished. He was the beginning, the end - the Alpha, the Omega. And what was about that characterized garden back in Genesis? Well, they had all that they needed. "To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment." When you look down in this passage you'll see that we have now the Tree of Life, which we referenced earlier in this series, we have God fulfilling us in every way, it is completely 100% satisfying. Not only is it pleasurable and joyful and perfect, it's satisfying. It's a physical reality, it's a perfect reality, it's a painless reality, it's a satisfying reality.

And it's a secure reality as well, verse 7. "The one who conquers will have this heritage, I will be his God and he will be my friend." No. He'll be my neighbor. No. "He'll be my son," in the family, never to be alienated, never to be extracted, never to be cast out. I will be in a secure reality.

I wrote a chapter of my last book on the End Times and I talked about, and I'd never really researched it the way it did or be able to articulate the way I did in this book, I'd never done that before but the idea of this being a permanent place where all the things you might think of theoretically or theologically, maybe there will be a problem, maybe I fall, maybe I'll somehow sin my way out of heaven, the Bible's very clear on this. God has got for us a place where there's complete and total security for all of eternity. It's physical, it's perfect, it's painless, it's satisfying, it's relational.

I don't have time for this but it's never stopped me before. I just want to review real quickly if you've never heard me walk through some of the realities of eternity. Let me give you five quick "Rs" here, things that we get to experience. I know one thing we're all looking forward to I trust is better "Relationships." Right? Are you not? The relationships we have in eternity are perfect, they're fulfilling. They're great, they're better than anything you've ever experienced here. They're better than any relationship with a brother or sister or a father or a mother or a wife or a husband or a child. And Jesus said as much in Matthew 19:29 when he said, even if our relationship, me and Christ's relationship, affect negatively our earthly relationships, he says, "You will receive a hundredfold and eternal life."

I'm going to have the kinds of relationships I've always longed for in eternity. Every desire, every interest, every hope of a copacetic, peaceful, tranquil, loving, harmonious, relationship - that will be



in abundance in the eternal state. We're going to have "Riches." That's hard to define. What does that mean? You know I got the gold card or whatever. But Luke 16 says in this world we got riches but it's unrighteous, it's temporal, it's not going to last. But if we're faithful in the use of our resources here God will then entrust to us, I love the way it's put there, "true riches." God's going to give us something that will be a means for enjoyment in the eternal state. Feels good doesn't it? I mean, get a bonus at Christmas or something big happens, you get a windfall, it's like this is great to have everything that comes with the buying power of money. And there's something there that relates to the riches that we're going to have. I know some things are given to us without cost it says Revelation 20:21. I understand that. But apparently there's some kind of monetary exchange that relates to a varied state of blessedness and reward in the kingdom and we get riches, we get relationships, we get riches.

I know this doesn't sound good when I say it in a fallen world but you all have a "Responsibility" and you'll love your responsibility there. Relationships. Riches Responsibility. Matthew 25:21. It speaks of faithfulness in this life and the extent that we're faithful he's going to put us, set us over much. And the context of Jesus' parables is often, "Listen, if you do good here I'll put you in positions of responsibility there." And if you think, "Well, I don't want those," it's because you're only thinking of responsibility and oversight and management in this fallen world. The next sentence in that very verse is, "Enter into the joy of your master." You will have joy in your leadership there. We going to have great relationships, we're going to have great riches, we're going to have great responsibilities that will bring us great joy.

We'll also have a place for ourselves. Luke Chapter 16 verses 9 through 12, I think it's right to say, it's not an overstatement to say, you're going to have "Real Estate." You're going to have a place to hang your hat that will be yours. It won't be government-issued housing, there will be varied places and lots, there will be all kinds of great experiences with stuff that I think reflects what we have in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy as they speak of the private property rights of people on this earth. God will give us stewardship over parts of his new creation, and it will bring us great joy. We'll be welcoming people into our eternal dwellings. We will have a place and I will say to you, "Hey, you want to come over to my place?" Now we're all stewards of God's creation and we will be there of his new creation. But how good it will be to fulfill that subset in our being made in the image and likeness of God to be able to have that sense of domain over something.

Relationships. Responsibility. Riches. Real estate. And the last one that I think is very hard for us in our world, our fallen world, to appreciate the way we should, the final "R" is "Reputation." There will be varying levels of reputation in the kingdom, from the lowest, most common person in the kingdom to a place where you're going to have names inscribed on the walls of the New Jerusalem, the Twelve Apostles, and at the gates you'll have the twelve names of the sons of Israel. You got 24 names on the walls of this 1500-mile city with walls that are hundreds of feet thick. The Bible says that people will be there with a great sense of fame, a great sense of popularity, and we won't have any envy or strife or any kind of jealousy in that place or whatever that is we'll fully enjoy it.

Just like when you see your kid honored at some baseball little league game and he gets a trophy, you feel so good for him, you will feel the same for every single person who gets honored by Christ, even up to the person who sits at his right hand and his left hand. And I'm speaking of Christ sitting at the banquet tables, as he says in Mark Chapter 10, there are people who are going to be sitting on my right and my left. They have positions of honor and prestige and reputation that excel other people and you will sit there with a great sense of joy for them. And to some extent you're going to experience that in the pecking order, if you will, of the reputations in the kingdom.

Relationships. Responsibility. Riches. Real estate. Reputation. These are things that I think we should get much more excited about. And if you do, you can sense that when Christ goes away from his disciples they can get excited about the fact that means they get to go there too. You got a fantastic future if you're a Christian. You ought to get excited about experiencing that because one day we'll all be there, maybe sooner rather than later.

Go back to our passage. It's printed on your worksheet there, verse 51. Kind of moving backwards through this text just observing first of all that they're happy instead of sad. And I want to zero in on what's going on here in verse 51. "While he blessed them," we'll get to that in a minute, "he parted from them and was carried up into heaven." Now I told you this is a parallel passage, so I would like you to go to the parallel passage in Acts Chapter 1. It's the second volume of Luke's writings. The first volume is about Christ when he was here, the second volume is about Christians when Christ is not here. His Spirit is here but Christ is not here. And so he begins this by recapitulating, re-telling the story of the Ascension. Same setting, more information.

So turn with me to Acts Chapter 1. Start in verse 6. They've got a question. They come together, they ask Jesus this: "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" You talked about us sitting on the 12 thrones, judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel, Matthew 19. Is now the time? Is everything going to be right? Are going to take the bad guys and slay the bad and promote the good? Are we going to have everything that we are supposed to, the lion laying down with the lamb, is it going to be, is it now?" And he said to them. "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority." He didn't say it's not coming he just said it's not for you to know when it's coming.

"But you will receive power." Now this is back to what we saw in Luke Chapter 24 verse 49, the verse we ended on last time, which says they're going to be "clothed with power" and "they will go be witnesses." And here's the explanation of all that. Right? You're going to be empowered, your message is going to have teeth and it's going to change people's lives because the Holy Spirit is going to be behind it and working through it and you are going to be my witnesses, in Jerusalem right here we're talking, in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. "And when he said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'" He's coming back. That should have been like, "Of course."

And it's a big part of why I think they're joyful when they leave this scene. They're joyful because they know Jesus has promised that he's coming back. He made this promise repeatedly. I quoted it, I at least referenced or alluded to earlier in John 14. He said, "If I go and prepare a place," for you, know this, "I'm coming again to receive you to myself that where I am you may be also." If I leave and I'm going to leave, I'm going to come back. That's a promise. And it's a promise that I think is so believed and trusted in the hearts of these 11 disciples, these apostles, that they were willing to allow that truth to transform their disposition, their behavior, their attitude. They were joyful because they believed in a promise not in their present circumstances. And that's really the trick for you and I as Christians living now 2,000 years later when we think where in the world is the promise of his coming to quote second Peter 3. Where is it? It's been 2,000 years. Haven't we done enough evangelism now? Can't you come back? And we're sitting here saying this: "Did he really mean what he said?"

You've got to be someone who's ready to rely on a faithful promise. Number two on your outline, put it down that way. "Rely on a Faithful Promise." And the faithful promise is: yes indeed, he will come back and when he does he'll establish a kingdom, he'll eventually bring down a new heaven and a new earth, a new city and he will set up everything exactly as he said. You've just got to be willing between here in the kingdom, as Paul and Barnabas said, you've got to be willing to enter the kingdom through many tribulations, that the tribulations you experience, like Paul in a jail cell in stocks in Philippi can sing hymns with joy in his heart even though he had just been beaten and he's locked in a prison, because he knows where he's headed, because he believes the promise. I just want to get very specific about believing the promise. You have to sit here today and say, the only way I'm going to really let this fantastic future that was promised to me affect my disposition is if I believe the promise.

I've got to be more trusting in what Christ said he would do. It's very important for us to think that through to allow our faith to be stretched because we have a faithful Father who is willing to do what he says and sometimes we've never experienced that kind of faithfulness. I understand that. Even the best fathers among us aren't always faithful to their word. I thought of that when I picked up my daughter from school on Thursday, decided to take some time off, take her to the DMV for this driver's test. Of course, I'm going to be the reliable dad, the faithful dad, do what I'm supposed to do and take care of everything, my daughter trusts in my leadership. It was awesome, it was going to be great.

So I pick her up from school, we go down to the DMV, I'm asking her 25 times on the way down do you have all your paperwork, do you have all you need, do you have your driver's permit, do you have your identification, do you have everything you need, all the forms filled out, your driving school paper? "I got it all Dad, I got it all, I got it all." That's good. So I get to the DMV, find a parking space, get inside, and they're asking now for my driver's license as the dad, because the dad needs to have a driver's license, so I go to my pockets to say "Yeah. Hold on. Let me check my car." "Oh dad, you forgot your driver's license." Yeah. And she came from school so she didn't have her money with her and, guess what, they charged for this stuff too. So, they wanted money and I'm like, "Hmmm, money. You want some money." So I turned around looking at the crowd of people waiting in the DMV. I tried to scope out like the wealthiest looking people I could find. I was trying to think, you know, could I bum a few bucks off of someone here? My daughter, she's gracious and forgiving but she looked at me like, "Dad! Really?" Right?

And she jabbed back at the very end of the day just by looking at me when she finally passed her test, got her license and I said, "Now you keep that license on you every time you drive in a car." She said, "OK Dad. I'll do that." I think I'm a good dad, but even good dads can't be perfectly faithful because we have so many foibles as human beings. The good news is no matter what you've experienced in this life you've got a faithful Father when he makes a promise, when he says I'll make provision, I'll take you through this, he'll get it done.

I figured out since I was at the DMV if there was ever a place I could get a temporary license I think I just go to another window get a temporary license which is what I did, as a matter of fact. I proved that I was a California driver and I did borrow some money. I had to repay it and I did. But we made it through that. But Jesus didn't have to go into triage or go through some secondary plan. Christ has got a plan and everything is right on schedule. And he says to us, "When I make a promise about coming back and taking you to myself that where I am you'll be also, I 100% mean it." The Father makes a set of promises regarding where he's taking us and every single promise he's

made is absolutely 100% true. His batting average is perfect.

Let's read in one passage real quick, Hebrews Chapter 6. One of my favorite texts to remind me that the Christian life is so much like what we see laid out in so many narratives in Scripture and that is that God makes that promise and he expects us to believe it even when there's no evidence that he's going to do what he says. Now he's got a lot of evidence for us as we really look back through all the narratives of biblical history. But if you think about Abraham, who did not have a Bible in his hand to see any record of God's faithfulness, he had some oral tradition, I'm sure, of people talking about God's faithfulness. But here God shows up and says, "Hey, Abraham, I'm going to make you a great nation, the father of a great nation," which right now, if you think about the millions of people right now who trace their heritage back to Abraham, the Jewish people around the world, millions of them in Israel and many millions of them scattered abroad all over the world, they all trace their lineage back to Abraham. But Abraham when he was told, "You're going to have a great nation. You're going to have descendants like the sand of the seashore." God then gave him the promise and stood back and it's as though he crossed his arms and made Abraham prove that he believed him when Sarah wasn't pregnant. And the years rolled on. And Sarah was way too old to have any kids at this point. And yet God kept saying, "Do you believe me? Do you believe me? I'm making a promise."

And he made the promise in such a dramatic way, if you know the story, starting in Genesis 12 going through Chapter 16, he keeps making that promise in very dramatic ways. And the writer of Hebrews says there are two very clear things that he did. Number one, he came and didn't just say in passing, "Yeah, I think he might be a parent." He said, "You're going to be the father of a great nation." And then he swears an oath and he goes through a ceremony. The ceremony of the ancient Near East, the covenant, and he makes this covenant a one-sided covenant. "I'm going to do this. You can trust me to do this. If you do nothing I'm going to do everything."

Pick it up in verse 17. God wanted to show us something by that. "When God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise," and ultimately we are the heirs of the promise. It's not about a physical promise land in Canaan over there on the other side of the world. It's about the ultimate promise land where you and I are headed. He wanted us to be convinced of that and to show that "the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath." Now he made a promise and then an oath. Those are two unchangeable things. If it's a man of integrity those are two unchangeable things. "So that by two unchangeable things," and by the way, I can throw in this overarching all of this, it is a man of integrity, this is God "in which it is impossible for God to lie, then we," what's the upshot, "who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope that is set before us."

What's the hope? That this world is not all there is, that everything you're trusting in the Christian life isn't all going to be seen in this life, that you're going to have perfect fulfillment, perfect joy, all pleasure, everything God has ever designed for you with God unmitigated in the center of this place called the New Jerusalem, you're going to have all of that. No more pain, no more crying, no more mourning, no more death. You can, because the extraction of sin in your life, you can flee and grab onto Christ. "You can have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hopes set before us. We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul." Those kinds of maritime analogies worked then and they work now. There were anchors back then, there are anchors now.

An anchor goes in and it grabs hold of the rock, and you have a rope and it keeps your ship from going anywhere. Right? The anchor. It was the earliest logo of the Christian people, before crosses

and fishes you had anchors. That picture of Christ being that stabilizing force of my life. I hang onto the rope. He's gone in and look where he goes, it says in this passage. "He's a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain." Oh... the double entendre here for what we've just studied is so good. The second meaning is... think about this. The New Jerusalem is a 1500-mile cube. The cube is a picture of the dwelling place of God in the temple and the tabernacle. The perfect dwelling place of God in a cube-shaped place, a city called the New Jerusalem, Christ has gone there.

He says, "I'm going there and I'm going to have you hold onto me and I'm going to bring you there. I promise that." It's like he is the anchor that's gone in behind the curtain where Christ has gone as the forerunner on our behalf. And he goes into that place as a high priest. And that high priest represents the people who are not in there. We can't get in there because of our own sin. But God is going to forgive that sin based on the work of Christ and pull us into that place and one day Christ comes back, receives us into himself, brings us to where he is and the unmitigated joy of eternity we begin to experience for all time. That's the picture of the Christian hope.

And it's all because Christ has gone before us and it's all based on a promise. In this passage it says you ought to take his promises at their face value and it ought to be like an anchor for your heart so that no matter what kind of tempest may sway the circumstances and emotions of your life, you get back to the fact that God has made a promise and he's going to keep it. He's a faithful Father. Rely on that promise.

The priestly statement here in Hebrews 6 is helpful to have us end our study of Luke together in verse 50. He went up to heaven with a promise of returning from heaven because, in verse 50, he's acting, even as he gives a blessing, which was always associated with a priesthood of the Old Testament, he is being that high priest. "He lifts up his hands and he blesses them." He gives them the "good" that he has. He gives them the favor. He has the right and the authority to do that and he blesses them. He speaks the good word to them which is more than just a hope or a prayer. It's the effectual statement that we are his kids, that we are adopted into his family.

He serves as that intermediary, which I always think of whenever I go to God in forgiveness, I think of that great passage in First John. 2, "That if we sin we have an advocate with the Father." He goes in behind the veil, he's in the presence of God, a place that I don't deserve to be but I'm going to be one day. And if I sin and I do and you sin and you do he stands as my representative and the advocate and he says you're OK. You're qualified for an inheritance that you didn't earn. "I am your protector." This promise is a promise and it's a promise to the people who are the heirs. We're the heirs because Christ has taken us unto himself and he says I will keep you. "No one," John 10, "can snatch you out of my hand." You're mine. You're a gift, as it says in the great high priestly picture of the prayer in John 17, the Father gives a lot of people to the Son and he grabs them and he says they're not going anywhere. And I know it feels like we're hanging onto the rope and he's the anchor and he's gone there and he's going to come back and get us and pull us in there. But the reality is he's hanging on to us. It's not about your grip. Ultimately it's about the grip of the sovereign savior, which is, "I grant you this favor."

Just to wrap this whole thing up, in verse 50, I'd like you to put it down this way in your notes. Number three, we need a rest, really rest in our hearts that this is true and a powerful protector. We have someone that's going to bring us safely into the eternal kingdom. It's one of the last things Paul said in the last extant letter we have from the Apostle Paul in Second Timothy, he says, "I know I'm going to be safely brought into the kingdom." God is going to get me there. Do I hang on? Yes. Do I have the experience of hanging on? Yes. Do I feel sometimes like my hands are fatigued hanging

on? Yes, I get that. You have the effort and the strength of hanging and clinging to Christ and abiding in him. But Christ has got his hands on you to bring you there. You should never doubt that. You should never doubt it when things get hard. It was going to get really hard for the Apostles and they were going to fast and they were going to mourn and it was going to be tough. But the overarching joy of their lives was because they had a fantastic future based on a faithful promise and here it was Christ saying to them in a blessing format, by a high priestly function, "I'll get you there. You're riding on my coattails. You're on my authority, on my righteousness. You have me as the means of your salvation.

What a great passage for us to end on in light of persecution because it was going on heavily in the early church in Rome. I'd like you to turn to Romans Chapter 8. With this we will be done. Romans 8. The picture of Christ protecting his people couldn't be on display in more vivid terms than it is in Romans Chapter 8. But the context is often missed when we quote these verses in our salutations and signatures on our cards to other Christians. The context was a suffering church, it was a persecuted church, where people who were in a lot of pain. And yet here was the picture of the Apostle Paul saying to those young Roman Christians, you guys need to know that nothing, nothing's going to keep you from where you're going to be.

That is if you're a child of God and that's the thing I just want to make sure before I leave this series in Luke that you make sure, that you make sure, that you make sure that your heart is right before God, that you have this living hope, you've been born again, that you know what it is to have a faith that, even through trials, is tested. On the other side you come out of it knowing that Christ has gotten you there and you believe and trust that Christ is your savior, is the savior no matter if things are good or bad. Now, people when they fall away when the trials and temptations come or persecution arises because of the Word, I get that. That shows the phony faith that's among us always in the Church throughout the centuries.

But the real Christians among us, I'm speaking to you now, when I say that's the God that is for you. Look at verse 31. You have a God who says you're my child, your faith in me is genuine, and if I am for you, look at the middle verse 31, "If God is for us then who can be against us?" Now that's a rhetorical statement that I'm thinking has plenty of answers. Certainly the Roman officials, the Roman government, the soldiers, the angry Judaizers who hated the young Church that believed in the Gospel of grace. There were lots of opponents, but really, what are they in comparison to God? And God was the one who sent his own Son. "He did not spare his own Son," verse 32, "but he gave him up" as this payment, this suffering human payment for our sins. "How will he not," if he did that, "how will he not with him graciously give us all things?".

Now that's a verse that's quoted by the prosperity preachers, but it's quoted out of context. What's the context? Suffering. I'll prove it to you, we're going to keep reading. This is not about graciously giving us all things here and now, it's about graciously giving us all things in the promise of a fantastic future based on a faithful promise about eternity. That's the promise. He will graciously "bring us safely into his eternal kingdom," to quote the Apostle Paul again. It's going to happen. He will give us that. He gave us his Son in the past, he will graciously give us those things in the future. In the meantime, you think maybe this isn't going to last. Maybe I'm not going to hang on tight enough. "Who can bring a charge against God's elect?" I'm thinking a lot of people have. Legally they have. They were suing them, they were imprisoning them, they were confiscating their property. Well really it's no big deal. That may be temporary discomfort and hassle but really it's God ultimately who justifies.

"Who's going to condemn?" Well, a lot of people with a gavel and a robe in the early Church but no one really to condemn with any kind of teeth that's going to last beyond the horizon of this life. Christ Jesus is the one. He's the one who has been given all authority to judge. And he died for us. He's for us. More than that, he proved that he solved the problem by being raised from the dead. More than that, he was raised and is now at the right hand of God, not sitting here twiddling his thumbs wondering whether or not we're going to make it. He's interceding actively for us. "Indeed he is interceding for us," verse 34, and that kind of commitment, that kind of loyalty, that kind of covenant love, "who can separate us from the love of Christ?".

How about if it gets really, really bad, really turbulent, lots of tribulation? No. Distress? What if you have really distressing circumstances? No. Persecution? What if the entire Roman government comes down on you. What if the United States starts to throw your pastors and church leaders in jail? It doesn't matter. It won't matter a bit. It doesn't mean God doesn't love you. Famine? What if you had no food? What if you're starving? What if you had no clothes, you were naked? What if you had danger and real threat from the sword, whether it's from criminals or a government that's oppressing you? Well, would that mean maybe God doesn't love me and I'm not going to get all the things he promised? No.

Matter of fact, that's historically how it's been for God's people. He quotes now Psalm 44, he says for your sake, for God's sake, because of our alliance with God, it's like "we're being killed all day long; we're regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." We are often the victim of people's oppression. But no, in all these things, we may not look like it, it may not feel like it, but "we're more than conquerors." How are we conquerors? Because we're good people? No. Because we hang on tight? Not even that. "Through him who loved us." His covenant love on us. "For I'm sure that neither death," of you or anyone around you, "life," any kind of life whether it's good or malicious, "an angel," whether there's a good angel or a bad angel, "a ruler," whether it's a good leader or a bad ruler, "things present" now in your life or maybe the things you're worried about that might happen to you in the future or about, "the powers," the cosmic powers of this earthly, fallen darkness. No not that. How about things that are super big, super deep, "height nor depth?" No. How about any other thing you could possibly think of in all of the vastness of creation. "Anything else in creation?" No. "Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

If you're a Christian, that's the best news you can hear regardless of whether you're being sued, whether or not you are sick, whether or not your marriage is on the rocks, no matter what problem you're facing, the Bible promises to his kids, if you're born again, if you're really a Christian, you've got a fantastic future that's based on faithful promises and God says I will powerfully sustain you and the love that I've placed upon you will never be taken away. That's great news.

You know I sat in the DMV for longer than I thought I'd have to. I know that's dumb because I should have thought it was going to take a long time, but we had an appointment. You know, it's a new thing. When I was a kid trying to get my license at the DMV here in Southern California there were no appointments. But now there are appointments, so I'm thinking it's great, it's an appointment. I'll be able to take you, you know, "What your appointment, honey?" Well, Steff says, "My appointment is, you know, whatever it is, 11:40." I said, "Great. When should we be there?" "Well let's be there at 11. I said, "Of course, that's great. Let's get there early." So we get there at 11 o'clock, 40 minutes to spare. We don't even get up to the window until after that.

But we get there and we're in the line for the appointments. The poor guys are aging and starving in

the line that doesn't have an appointment. But we get up to the front and then we're told to sit down. Right? I turned to my daughter at one point, I mean, I had a whole captive audience. I almost stood up and started preaching. It was set up like a church in there. And so we're sitting there, sitting there and I tell you it's delightful to spend time with my daughter. I don't know if you know my daughter but I didn't bring a book, I didn't bring a magazine. It was so fun just to kill time, kind of burn off our nervous energy chatting and talking and we'd like to, you know, find the twins of people in our church. We play this doppelganger game, you know, we see people, we see you at various places and I even snapped a few covert pictures of people and sent them off and, you know, seeing various staff members that are at our DMV. And so we were having a blast, a fun time, just trying to get through the nervousness, about to take this test. Well an hour turned into two hours and then three hours. We were there forever. We're growing old. I got to get a shave, it was a long day. It was a long day. And I've come to expect that, of course, at the DMV. They're very slow over there.

But you know there's an appointment that you have and as I quoted from Acts 1, God isn't telling you when it is. And the return of Christ is going to be unleashed and Christ is going to come back and all the opportunities to get saved are going to be done. And you and I, I think as Christians, if we know we're saved, we just anxiously anticipate that. And that's terrific. But God is not slow in keeping his promises. Right? He's going to keep his promise and one day it's going to happen.

And he doesn't want you nervously sitting around just waiting for it, and killing time like Steff and I, just chit-chatting with each other. He wants you up and around and starting that church service (smile). He wants you to get out there and make a difference. Because in that passage I'm alluding to in Second Peter Chapter 3 he says he's not slow in keeping his promises. No, his slowness should be understood as patience for you because he's not willing for any should perish, but that everyone should come to repentance. That's what he wants.

Later in that passage it says you ought to hasten the coming of the Lord. How do I do that? Anything I can do to speed this process up of waiting I would have done it. He says you can. At least from your perspective, you can speed this up by doing what? By lifting up your eyes, to mishmash a couple of great passages here, and seeing the fields that are white for harvest. Right? John 4. To have, as it says in Matthew 9, a heart for the lost. They're like sheep without a shepherd. We're going to get into the book of Acts. We're going to spend 15 weeks dealing with the Psalms. And then we're going to get into the book of Acts and we're going to look at the Church without Christ physically there, joyfully incurring the difficulties of growing a church. We're a strange church in that we're planting churches from our own organic group of congregants. And what we do is we take a great group of motivated, evangelistic, let's take this mountain-kind of Christians from our church and we put them in various places, 100, 200 at a time. We can't keep doing that if we don't in our congregation right here keep raising up people who are excited about the Great Commission.

I don't know how long it's going to take to get through Acts. Hopefully not as long as it took to get through Luke. But I hope that every week, every month, every year that we spend studying that great book, that we will reflect the passion of those people in that book, that we'll care about lost people, that we won't sit around just wasting time. Number one, we'll never be nervous, we'll never be anxious, we'll be secure, we'll be at peace, we'll be absolutely assured that we know where we're going. Then we get busy about the work. We have a lot of good days, I trust, ahead until the Lord comes back. It's going to be a good season for Compass. Get excited about where we're going. Let's take the message of Christ in the Gospel of Luke, bring it into the book of Acts. Let's live that out and reflect it as we anticipate our own resurrection.



Let's pray. God, help us please as Christians in a day when desperately we need to hear that the Church of Christ is doing its job. We're not falling down on the job, we're doing what we're called to do. It starts with being sure about who we are as Christians, relying on your faithfulness. You're a faithful God who always keeps your promises. And we want to see that in our own past, that your good hand has been upon us. Many people have been saved and we want to move into the future, believing your promise that we can be an effective church that makes a difference in this world for Christ. So God, do that for us as we know that you are our great shepherd, our great protector, our advocate who stands before the Father and pleads our case. That no one can snatch us out of your hand. God, we just love to operate from that sense of security, that sense of assurance. So grant us that peace, God, and allow us to experience the next season of our church, the next chapter of our church life and our history with a great sense of ambition about the harvest here in South Orange County and beyond. So God, be pleased as we take the principles and the teaching of the Gospel of Luke and put it into practice for months and years ahead.

In Jesus name. Amen.