



Useful to the Lord – Part 4

Imperfect Previews

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, I have preached a few sermons before. Period. That was not a comma. I was just letting you know this is not my first sermon. But it may be the first sermon I've ever started by having to draw your attention to the title and the subtitle. You should look at that on the worksheet there. It is on the digital worksheet, "Useful to the Lord Part 4 of 12. If you've been with us, you think, OK, I get that we're studying Acts 13 and 14, and Paul and Barnabas are being useful to the Lord, and we're examining that, we're taking a look at our lives. I mean, you've established that successfully. I hope you're saying that.

"Imperfect Previews." That seems a bit cryptic. And it may take a while to figure out like, how do those things fit together? Well, you would think in the passage that we're studying here then today, beginning in verse 17 in Acts 13, that there must be some imperfect previews in this passage. Well, this is the section where Paul starts preaching to the gathered synagogue here of mostly Jews and some God-fearing Greeks and Romans that he's going to begin by reviewing some biblical history, going back 2,000 years before Christ and thinking about the patriarchs. Useful to the Lord.

We'd like to be useful to the Lord. We'd like to have a mindset that is useful to the Lord and that subtitle there, imperfect previews, I want us to start to think the way that Paul is clearly thinking here, not just about the Bible, but really everything in history, including everything in your history. Your life, I want you to think about this, is filled with problems. "Okay," you say. And then you have solutions. I mean, some of them, I mean, you may not have solutions for every problem, but you get a lot of solutions to some of your problems and, think about it, you don't have a job, you get resumes out, you get a job. You get sick and you pray and you take medicine or just tough it out, you get better. You start to see a lot of your problems solved, and that's good.

But what I want to make sure we understand about our lives, which I think is going to be illustrated, by the way, with Paul's preaching here, that every win in your life, every win in your life is imperfect. It's actually an imperfect preview of something permanent and something eternal. Every victory, every attainment, every blessing, every triumph, everything that you've experienced, that you say, well, this is a good thing. Even the dramatic things that you've prayed for, you've said, "God, I've got a big problem here and I'm praying that you would solve it." And then when God solves it, I just want you to know that it's imperfect.

I mean, I can illustrate it in the most dramatic way. Mary and Martha are just distraught over the death of their brother. And after four days, literally rotting in the grave, Jesus shows up and pops him out of the grave. And you know the passage. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. And I'm thinking if there's a big win in your life, that's a big win right there. Your brother was dead and now he's alive. Big win. And I'm just trying to remind you that it's an imperfect



win. And that's becoming painfully clear when years later, Mary and Martha are planning Lazarus' second funeral, right? That was a big win, but not even perfect.

Now, I know that even thinking about life and saying every win, every triumph, every blessing, every answer to prayer, it's an imperfect preview, you're thinking, I don't want that perspective. Because you will then be at some, I mean, I don't know, you could have been at Lazarus' resurrection and as soon as he pops out of the grave and everyone's crying with tears of joy and rejoicing and dancing around, you say, "He's just going to die again." You know. It's not kind of how I want you to think. Your friend in a small group says, "I've been praying for a job, I haven't had a job," and they get a job, and you go, "Yeah, but you're not going to work there forever. You're going to lose a job. You'll probably get fired one day or you're going to retire. It won't provide you money forever." I mean, that's probably not the kind of Christian I want you to be. I do want you to celebrate the wins.

Jesus celebrated the wins, even the temporary wins, but there was something he could do to see through those wins, which is precisely what Paul is doing in this sermon in Acts Chapter 13. He's recounting literally 2,000 years of biblical history from Abraham to Christ, and all of these are reminders to us, and we can't get into all of it because it's really where we have to stop today for the sake of time. We'll continue on in the next section of his sermon and we'll look at that next time, Lord willing. But here I want us to realize all of it is being viewed in light of something permanent and something eternal. And that should be no surprise to you.

Now, how does that all work with the title, Useful to God Part 4 of 12? Well, here's how it works. I will posit that there is no one that is useful to God, I mean, really useful to God, who doesn't really have a mindset of remembering that all earthly blessings and all earthly wins and all earthly triumphs and all earthly attainments are not permanent. I mean, you cannot really be an ambassador of an eternal kingdom and not distinguish between the temporal present and the eternal future. You have to have that perspective. To the extent that you don't have that perspective, you become less and less useful to the Lord.

To be useful to the Lord, you have to know that the world and all of its desires are passing away. To be useful to the Lord you have to say while the Gentiles are chasing after all the necessities of life and all the things that they need and want, you are supposed to seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness. And then all those things they find the proper place in the priority of your life. That you need to be the person as Paul had said clearly to the people he was trying to make useful to God, the things that you see are transient. So everything you can see, including your job, your health and Lazarus popping out of a grave, all that, they're all transient, right? But the things you cannot see, those are eternal. And those things that you by faith [00:07:14] is, [0.0s] he says, you walk by faith, he says to the Corinthians, you need to remember one day there will be sight and they'll be here. But you've got to distinguish between those two.

You cannot be an ambassador of an eternal kingdom and think this is it. You just can't. You have to do what he says in Colossians Chapter 3, and that is, you've got to set your mind on things above where Christ is seated. Or as Jesus said, you need to "store up for yourself



treasure in heaven," where the things are permanent, "thieves can't break in and steal it, rust can't destroy it." It's never going to go away. It is, as Peter said, reserved in heaven, imperishable and incorruptible for you. And Jesus said, "I'm going to go and prepare that place for you." You need to know, as I often say in my vocabulary, it's not about the "here and now." Christianity is not about the "here and now." It is about the "then and there."

And to the extent that I can keep that perspective in my preaching and my counseling, in my administration and leadership, then guess what? I can be useful to God. But I will become absolutely unuseful to the Lord if I do what many people do and that is, I think that everything that we're going to do with our Christianity and Christ and religion is all about the "here and now." And there are plenty of people doing that in pulpits this morning. It's all about the "here and now." And they want to make sure that you parlay Christ like some kind of religious crowbar to get what you want "here and now."

Now, I'm not saying, hey, Mary and Martha, you shouldn't want your dead brother to be alive. Of course, Jesus shows he's in favor of those things. He sympathizes, he cries over the death of Lazarus as he's standing there four days after he died. And guess what he celebrated? He celebrated the wins. But I assure you of this, he never lost sight of eternity. And to the extent that he could say, Hey, you just saw, or you're about to see in the timing of the chronology of this passage, you're about to see Lazarus raised from the dead, but you do know, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me, even though he dies, yet shall he live." And I'm not talking about your brother popping out of the grave so that he can die again a couple of decades from now. I'm talking about something eternal because the things you can see are transient, they're here today gone tomorrow, flash in the pan.

As a matter of fact, you're going to look back on it and go that was a blink of an eye that whole time on earth. Did it matter? It mattered a TON, but it's gone now. And everything in this life is temporary. And every win in this life is an imperfect preview. And I'm all about previews. Previews are good because we're previewing something great. But they're going away.

So with that in view, let's look at Paul, take these seven verses starting in verse 17, and he starts to review these victories of the past. He starts to review the blessings and attainments and successes and triumphs of God's people, starting with the fathers or the patriarchs, Abraham. Let me read it for you. Verses 17 through 23 in Acts Chapter 13. Reading from the English Standard Version, it says, "The God of this people Israel chose our fathers," Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, "and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt." Made the people great. Now in Egypt they were slaves, "made them great?" What in the world are you talking about?

We had a 275-year gap between the book of Genesis and the book of Exodus. You're aware of that, I hope. Because we open up Exodus, which we've been reading in our Daily Bible Reading recently and we got a big old bunch of people, 2.5 million, if you read it closely. You got 2.5 million at the beginning of Exodus and we ended Genesis, if you remember, with 75 people. So you had God making them great. As matter of fact, the reason they were enslaved



is that the Egyptians thought they were a potential threat to our nation. Why? Because there are so many. They're so strong. Well, then let's subjugate them, let's enslave them, will make them our slaves. They'll build our pyramids for us.

That's why they were subjected from a human political perspective, from Pharaoh's and his court's perspective, because they were so great. And how did they become great? Because God had them grow and multiply from 75 people to 2.5 million people in 275 years. And that's not a miracle, by the way, but it's good. It's a good birth rate, let's say that. I mean 275 years is a long time. 275 years ago Benjamin Franklin was alive inventing the stove. Today a lot has happened. You can have a family reunion of 75 people celebrating the creation of the stove by Benjamin Franklin and if they really are good at having kids, you can definitely get them to the population of Houston, 2.5 million, in 275 years, and that's what God did. He made them great. They were great. They were strong. They were reproducing. They were a strong people.

Just as God had promised Abraham, "Your descendants are going to be like the sand of the seashore." So that was a victory. You could have been stamped out. You had to leave, as you remember, in our Daily Bible Reading, you had to leave Israel because of the famine. I mean, were you even going to survive? Well, it wasn't for Joseph. "They meant it for evil," the brothers putting him in that pit and selling him to the caravanning slave traders. But he becomes great, the second in command in Egypt. So "God meant it for good" and the good that God did, which took a little band of people in the midst of a land in which they were nomads and they may not survive, and made them 2.5 million people by the time we get to Exodus Chapter 1. That's a victory, man. That's a big victory.

So God chose Abraham and said your nation, your lineage, you going to have this great nation. I'm going to multiply you. You're going to be great during their stay in the land of Egypt. And then we know it wasn't so great in the sense that they were slaves. That's bad. And they were being abused as these slaves and yet "with an uplifted arm he led them out it." That's the book we're reading now, Exodus. It's the same word that we have over the doors: Exit, Exit, Exit. They got out. That was the point. Get out from Egypt. That's not your land. You're slaves here. You're big, 2.5 million, but we're going to get you now to the Promised Land. The land of Canaan where it flows with milk and honey. That's going to be your new land. So we got to get you out. We got a big problem because you're not in charge, Pharaoh's in charge. And so we need an exodus.

And how does God do it? He, with a strong arm, a little Hebrew idiom there in our Greek New Testament, he flexes his strong arm with the ten plagues and off they go. And then he miraculously lays out a path for them by dividing the Red Sea, they march across it and then God has Pharaoh in the hardness of his heart, chase after them with the Egyptian armies, and then God slams them shut and drowns them all. And with a strong arm, he led them out of it. Well, then it was all good, right? Well, we're going to read Numbers here soon again, in our Daily Bible Reading. It wasn't all good. Matter of fact, we're already reading in Exodus how things are starting to go bad because they're a bunch of whiners and complainers.

Verse 18, "And for about 40 years he put up with them in the wilderness." I guess it's not funny. But he leads them out. Talk about imperfect previews. You'd think, yay, happy ending, the credits roll, the end, they all lived happily ever after. No, they were sinful people and they had issues and God had to put up with them. He put up with him for 40 years wandering in the wilderness because when they came to Kadesh Barnea and sent in the 12 spies, 10 of them came back and said, "Ah, it's too scary." And so God says, "You're going to die in the wilderness now." Now, I got to feed 2.5 million people in the wilderness. They don't have farms, they don't have agriculture. They don't have, you know, ways to take this arid land and make food. So God gives them corn flakes on the grass, out on the dirt every morning. They scoop up manna every day.

Then they crave meat and he sends in the quail. They need water. He has water come out of a rock. It's too bitter. So God has Moses put a log in it and it becomes sweet and they drink it. God just keeps providing for them. So much so that he says "that your sandals didn't wear out in 40 years. Your feet didn't swell. I carried you along. I provided for you and I cared for you. And yet you were pretty sinful. You were complainers, you didn't trust me." Verse 19, "And after destroying seven nations in the land of Canaan," and if you're thinking biblically now, we've moved from Numbers to now, Joshua. They go in and they conquer the land of Canaan. And they had all of these inhabitants of Canaan, there were all of these nations there that they were going to drive out. And he gave them the, you know, Hittites, [00:16:21] parasites, [0.0s] Canaanites, all the "ites" and then "he gave them the land as their inheritance." They settle there.

That's big. "All this took about 450 years." If you think through your biblical timeline and I even just said you got 275 years between Genesis and Exodus, they get down into Egypt, the Bible says, and we read this recently, you'd have to pay really careful attention, I suppose. In Exodus 12, it spoke of the fact that they were in Egypt for 430 years. The prediction of the sin of Israel was that they would be enslaved for 400 years. Then they wander in the wilderness for 40 years. So all that adds up depending on where you start to about 450 years, either for 440 or more than that, 470. Because, you know, they were in Egypt, they weren't at home, but then they got enslaved about 30 years later.

So the point is, and it's helpful that he says "about." It doesn't matter the timing, but we're going through big swaths of time in what we just talked about. We're about 600 years from Abraham, by the way, speaking of God choosing the father. So 2000 B.C., 1445 B.C they go out, they go into the wilderness for 40 years. So in 1405, Joshua starts the conquest, which does take several years, and some people think that's part of his calculation here. It doesn't matter a whole lot. We're talking about a rough and dirty 450.

After that, he gave them judges. Right? Like Judge Judy and Judge Wapner, right? No. No. Judges were not adjudicating disputes between the peoples. Judges, as a matter of fact, if you took my Old Testament survey class, you said I don't even want to think in the word "judge" because it's been so, you know, redefined in our day, even though it's in our Bibles, you need to think this word "deliverer." They were deliverers. They were chosen by God. Often they were weak and scared and timid and hiding, like Gideon. But God pulls them out



and makes them strong, like Samson, even though he was a mess, and brings them before the people of Israel, after they had been enslaved by some of the bordering nations. And they go through a cycle 12 times, sinning, idolatry, they become subjected to oppressive forces and then they cry out to God, and God sends in judges, 12 of them. There were 13 total, but 12 for about 330 years during the book of Judges.

But think about that. You got a problem. I've got a problem with the Philistines. Well, guess what? I'll deliver you. You cried out to me. I'll solve the problem. We got a problem with the Midianites. Call out to me. I'll deliver you. So here are all of this series of victories. They have problems and God solved them. Then they said, we need a king. And you know why they said that, by the way? Think back, if you know your Bible, in Samuel, they were crying out for a king. And here's how they put it, the people said so he can "go before us and fight our battles." Now they knew he wasn't going to do it like one-on-one. He's not having a boxing match or something. He was going to be the military captain of the people. They didn't have that. Matter of fact, every time they got in trouble, they were just waiting to see who God was going to pick to lead to the front and be a deliverer. "Well, we need a king. All these other nations have kings. We need a king. Egypt's got a pharaoh. They've got a king in every nation around us. We need a king to fight our battles."

And so God says, "OK, I'll give you a king." You've got a problem. No, king, I'll give you a king. They were rejecting God as their king at this point, and God told Samuel, "Don't worry. They're not rejecting you, they're rejecting me." But he "gave them Saul, son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for 40 years," he served as their king. And by the way, Benjamin was predicted, you might remember at the end of our reading in the book of Genesis as the fighter tribe, right? Benjamin was a fighter. And it was perfect. You want a fighter? I'll give you a fighter. And I'll solve your problem. And again, if you know biblical history, how did that go? Not great. Did it end well? No, it didn't end well at all.

Matter of fact, God had to step in and go, OK, done with him. I'll give you another king. "And when he removed him," Saul, "God raised up David to be their king." By the way, that sounds so easy. Speaking of time indicators, do you know how long it took for David after he got anointed by Samuel before he ever ascended to the throne over Israel, the northern tribes and Judah? It took him 15 years. And yet God said, "OK, I'm going to solve your problem. I don't always solve your problem as fast as you want, but I'm going to give you another king and he's going to be better." Why? Because as God "testified and said, 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my own heart, who will do all my will.'" And when you read the word "all" you better put an asterisk by it because you've been to Sunday school or you've read your Bible and you know "all?" I don't think all of your will. Not all. I mean all, maybe in a general sense, right? All without distinction. He did it here, he did it there. He knew all your will, not all without exception.

I mean, think about it. His life was punctuated by things you will not find in other ancient near-eastern recounting and chronicles of their kings. I mean, not only is Saul thrown under the bus by the biblical record, David is thrown under the bus. Talk about imperfect previews, he was the best they had in the Old Testament, but imperfect. Right? He's a voyeur, he's an



adulterer, he's a murderer. At the end of his life, after writing psalms about how we don't trust in our armies or charities, he's out there saying, "please go out and count the armies and chariots." God has to punish this guy over and over and over again. Now he is a man after God's own heart, because just like you and I in our imperfect state in following Christ, the good thing is if we can see our sin and repent of our sin and be contrite over our sin then that's what David does. And so good guy. Good guy in an imperfect setting, administrator, leader, fighting battles for Israel, all of that power, imperfect. Even though we see the word "all" there, we are certainly comparing him in a relative sense to Saul, his predecessor.

But all this is going somewhere. By the way, David is in the 10th century, so we're just rough and dirty, 2000 B.C. Abraham, 1000 B.C. David, we had the Exodus in the 15th century B.C. You know, you got all this time, 40 years in the wilderness. We got 332 years of the judges. We get into the monarchy in the 11th century. We finally get to the 10th century and then Paul just basically blows over everything from David in just saying, "Well, really what I'm here to preach on..." Now, again, this is a summation of what he wrote. These are the high points. Who knows what he said between here? But God is recording for us that he's getting to Christ.

Verse 23. "Of this man's offspring," David's offspring, "God has brought to Israel a Savior." I love this in just the way we do it in our grammatical ways in English, we put a capital letter there. We finally got the "Savior Jesus, as he promised." In other words, all of these things leading up to Christ are all just imperfect previews. You got a problem. We need a solution. We got an army against us. We need a captain. We need a deliverer. We need a king, we need a fighter. We need someone to do the right things and God provides those. But they're always imperfect previews. Always, until you get to Christ. And in a sense you might think, well, that's nice.

But here we are 2,000 years later and we're still remembering that when Christ came, he said, this isn't it. I'm here, and I'm it because I'm him, but this isn't it. "If my kingdom were of this world," he said when he stood before Pilate, well, then it would go down differently right now. "But my kingdom is not of this world," but "I'm going to go and prepare a place for you, and when I come again, I'm going to receive you unto myself that where I am you'll be also." I've got a kingdom. And he says repeatedly, "you're going to see the Son of Man coming in his glory" in the mighty..., all the hosts of the angelic forces. And I'm going to come here and then "I'm going to separate the people the way a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."

So I'm bringing a kingdom and you ought to be praying for that. You ought to be anticipating that. You ought to be praying every day as he taught us, "Your kingdom come." So we know this is a forward-looking religion. And it's not about the here and now. Now, sadly, some people think, well, Old Testament was all leading us to Christ. Now we got Christ, everything's great. We do have Christ, and that's good for you, and it's good for me. But he is not, as I often quote, "he's not yet taken his great power and begun to reign." So like that gap of 15 years when David becomes the absolutely sanctioned in God's mind king, but had not yet ascended the throne. So we're living in that 15-year gap, which now has taken 2,000 years.



The early church is saying it and we ought to be saying it, "Maranatha" come quickly Lord Jesus. We ought to be praying for the coming of the kingdom.

So in a sense, we finally got to the right person, and now we need the person to establish the rule and reign that he promised he would. And the government is supposed to rest on his shoulders and the extent of his authority and his government, there's going to be no end. He's going to make all the rough places plain, all the other craggy places smooth, he's going to make the mountains low, he's going to raise the valleys up, he's going to make the crooked paths straight. All of these predicted promises are about a person and then what he's going to do. And the problem is we got the person, but he hasn't done it yet.

Now, right now, we're in the phase and Paul is preaching it to these Jewish people of making sure you get right with that person. Because that person is the victor and he is going to bring the ultimate victory. We just read about a bunch of victories, but the victory that's coming is the one that matters most. And if you don't keep that distinction in your mind and you're just one trying to hit your neighbor to come to church, so maybe they can have some more victories and wins in their lives because, you know, since I've been a Christian, I've had a few more, then you've missed the point. To be useful to the Lord you better see every victory in this life, every victory in the Bible, unless we're dealing with Christ and his coming kingdom, as an imperfect preview of what we all desire. And that is for all that's wrong to be made right. Now that doesn't happen until Revelation Chapter 20, 21 and 22. Because that's the fulfillment of the prayer, "Your kingdom come."

Number one, if you're taking notes just to kind of survey this whole passage here, you need to "Celebrate Victories. I'm all about that. "And victory." Because the victory that matters is not winning a battle or a skirmish here and there. It's about when we'll have peace. When the Prince of Peace ascends his throne, separates the peoples, and the rebels who will not submit to Christ are cast out into outer darkness, and Christ himself is enthroned as king. That's what we ought to see as the ultimate thing that we celebrate. Do we celebrate the victories? Yes, you ought to clap when Lazarus comes out of the grave, when your friend gets a job, when you go to small groups this week and someone says, I've been praying and this has been answered, you ought to celebrate that with an asterisk by it that that's just simply an imperfect preview.

Now you don't need to say that when they say, "Hey, it's great, isn't it what happened?" But you ought to think it, because every single win, every triumph, every victory, every attainment, every answer to prayer, if it's about this life and about this world, it is just transient. And I guess I want to guard some of you, just jot it down at least, Psalm 103. I'm all about the temporal victories being celebrated. And maybe some think I don't celebrate it as heartily as I should, because I'm trying my best to keep us focused on the "then in there." But we need this, right? "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all of his benefits." Now it starts with the "then and there," "who forgives your iniquity," and that gets you ready for the next life.

But then he says, you know, and he's gotten you through some diseases, healed your disease, he's redeemed your life from the pit. Now I can think about that eternally, or I can



think about hey, you've had some problems that God has solved. I want to celebrate those. I don't want to forget any of those. "He crowns you with steadfast love and mercy." Now that's "here and now"? I guess in part, but ultimately "then and there," when mercy and goodness is going to chase me down and then "I dwell in the house of the Lord forever." So it's always mixed here, but, you know, even now, verse 5, "he satisfies you with good things," that even now he says, "your youth is renewed like the eagle's." There are days where I think that's good, and you ought to celebrate that. You ought to be thankful for God's gifts, right? I mean, we preach that sometimes, but as a useful ambassador of Christ, you need to know I'm not just about the "here and now."

Two passages super quick. Turn with me to Exodus 15, as long as we're talking about God bringing some victories in one of the most dramatic we've just read about it in Exodus, Exodus 15. Smile at me if you grew up in church. Did you go to Sunday school as a kid? Some of you? I know you're not an interactive crowd, but a smile, or at least a raised eyebrow would be good. OK, I see that eyebrow. There's a song we sang as kids in Sunday school that was weird. Well, many were weird, but this one was weird that came from Exodus 15. And if you didn't grow up in church, you have to go and go on YouTube and just look up kids and the Song of Moses and you'll see this sung by children dancing around. Amazing. The Song of Moses.

You know, back in the day, they had a little different perspective about children's music. I'm not saying it's wrong. Matter of fact, I totally affirm your biblical foundational concern about singing Scriptural songs. I'm just thinking the dance moves and all that go with it, I just got to remember what it's about. The Song of Moses, maybe some of you will have a throwback right now to your childhood like I'm about to. Exodus 15 verse 1. This is right after the exodus. "Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, 'I will sing,'" as the old lyrics say unto, "'I will sing unto the Lord, for he has triumph gloriously; the horse and his rider he's thrown into the sea.'"

Now, do you know? I just explained and reminded you of the exodus. God divides the Red Sea. You remember the picture, you got Charlton Heston, you got his beard and his staff, and he gets everyone through. And then it closes in on the army that's coming after him. "The horse and rider" is the Egyptian chariot rider. And the horses, do you like horses? Hey, San Juan Capistrano resident, do you like horses, right? Nellie Gail people, you like horses, right? I don't know. It's bad enough thinking about human beings drowning. Well, let's think about drowning a horse. Oh, let's teach our kids to sing about that. "The horse and rider, he's thrown into the sea." "The Lord is my strength and my song, he's also become my salvation." Now that that seems to work, I get that. We've got a few dance moves on that one. "This is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God," and my father's father's God. For years they've been enslaved, they've been in Egypt, 400 years. And I will praise him. "And I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war."

Now, I don't think we got to that verse when I was a kid but this is the context. The Lord is a man of war. The Lord is a man of war. The Lord is a man... Now maybe some of the kid's ministry leaders are listening to this, and there's a song to teach your children, right? "The



Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name." Yahweh is his name. Think about this, right? "Pharaoh's chariots and his hosts," all of his armies, "were cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down to the depths like a stone." Corpses were just going to the bottom of the sea. It's a weird juxtaposition of cute little children singing about corpses drowning and horses snorting and then drowning. And yet, that's it. "Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy. In the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries; you send out your fury; it consumes them like stubble."

But the only reason that's odd for us is because we live in peacetime. But you don't have to even think historically much to imagine like we saw, remember the Coptic Christians lined up in their orange jumpsuits when the Muslims took their swords and cut their heads off. Did any of you actually watch that video? I know the Internet, at least in America, scrubs a lot of that stuff. But you know, it's interesting as I've watched people be beheaded, particularly Christians being beheaded, I almost feel an obligation to watch the gruesomeness of a head being chopped off because people hate Christians and want to stomp out Christianity.

And at some point when I think about those guys cutting heads off of people because they seem simply because they trust and affirm the lordship of Christ. I just want you to think about this now. If I see enough of that, I'd sure like them as they high-five each other after they've just cleaned the blood of Christian's heads and necks off of their knives, I wouldn't mind them being drowned in the sea. I might even teach my kids to sing about it.

And here's the thing. Most of you are so insulated you don't recognize how terrible it is to be living for 400 years in subjection to the Egyptians who regularly abused and injured and whipped and tortured and killed the Israelites, and now, after all that they had been through saying they were going to let them go several times, they finally get out. And do you know why the Egyptian army was following them? Because they were going to plunder them, kill them in the wilderness.

I don't know, if you've seen some of your relatives beheaded by people riding horses and cutting your relative's heads off, and now they're chasing you and you're thinking, "We have no army. I mean, I got a pocket knife, but we don't really have any hardware to fight with. God has certainly opened up a way for us to get out here into the Midian desert. I get all that. We're going to go and wander around for a while, hopefully we're going to go to the Promised Land. But I got right now the best army in the ancient world in the 15th century B.C. chasing me with gilded chariots and horses and all. They're coming to kill us and our children." I don't know, when they drown I think you'd be like singing songs about it, happy about it.

And you'd say, I'm glad "the Lord is a man of war." I'm glad he's a captain of an army. I'm glad he's taking the righteous, imperfect as we are, and protecting us. And he is taking the foes who hate us and he's destroying them. Those are hard realities, again, that make us think about something different than what you're thinking about when you say, become a Christian and then you'll pray, and if you've got problems, maybe God will solve some of those. The



real problem is this: there's an entire unseen realm that would love to destroy you. "Satan prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour," First Peter 5.

He has his demons that now take people, willing participants by the way, and he enlists those to do his will in our lives. And increasingly, because of God's sovereign decisions, the chains are being loosened and the protection is being withdrawn and God says it's only going to get worse. It's going to go from bad to worse. And the church is going to be isolated. It's going to be the hostile target of the world and eventually guess what they're going to be doing in the book of Revelation? Cutting off people's heads simply because they're followers of Christ.

OK, with that in view, I want you to go to the book of Revelation. Revelation Chapter 15. In Revelation Chapter 15, I mean, it started in Chapter 11, where we get all of this expression of the greatness of God, his Kingdom is coming, Christ is going to ascend the throne. We're almost done with this rebellious world and something interesting happens here in Revelation Chapter 15. Remember this, by the way, Exodus 15, Revelation 15. Exodus 15, Revelation 15, Exodus 15, Revelation 15. And remember, we had this deliverance of the people who then go out by the way and die in the wilderness. You're about to get the preview to what's going to happen in Revelation Chapter 20, 21 and 22, which is people living forever. No death, no mourning, no crying, no pain, no suffering. All of it's done. The first order of things is done now.

Now, the dwelling of God is among men, and here are the people who have been anticipating a relationship with their living God. They've entrusted themselves to him, and the world has been hostilely attacking them and killing them, persecuting them and killing them. And then Christ is coming on the scene. And it's going to happen in Chapter 19 of Revelation. All of this begins here in Chapter 15 with this statement, Revelation 15:1. "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished. And I saw what appeared..." I mean, we have all these plagues in the Old Testament that leads up to this, really, the ultimate destruction is the drowning of the armies of Pharaoh in this Red Sea.

Well, we're about to be done here at the end of time with the wrath of God. "And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire -- and also those who had conquered." If you don't have a bit of a militaristic sense of this whole point that we are soldiers of Christ, then you don't understand the whole point of this. That's why liberal Christianity and all the weak milquetoast Christianity of our day, it has no perspective theologically on where we're going, and it certainly doesn't know where we've been in the Old Testament. We're just living in a little bubble of American Westernized religion with a little shellac of Jesus on the top of it. But we don't understand the real issues.

The real issues are Satan wants to kill us. Demons want to destroy us. The people of this world would like to and will with increasing power and allowance by God's sovereignty, want to take the people of God and corner them. And yet, God is going to come and establish an eternal kingdom. That's the kingdom we live for because in this world I don't care how nice your house is, I don't care how good your job is, I don't care about any of that. It's all going to



come to an end, if not in your life because you die. Because in this world it's going to shift over to a completely satanic form of leadership that is going to pit its entire force against you because you're a follower of Christ.

But we're going to conquer. "Those who have conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, they're standing beside a sea of glass with harps in their hands. And they..." Interesting, verse 3, maybe the people who had our kids sing that song, they were smart. "They sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying..." So here's the song of the Lamb. We now have got a new verse on it that wasn't there in Exodus 15. But the same theme. "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!" The nations in rebellion, right?

We're about to learn that in Revelation 17 and 18. Those passages about Babylon, the world system. He is the King. But they've been rebelling. But like we said briefly last week in Psalm 2 they're rebelling against the Lord and his anointed, but one day he's going to solve this. He's going to fix this. Egypt won't rebel anymore, quote unquote. "The King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?" Liberal Christianity certainly doesn't. Right? Milquetoast evangelicalism doesn't. "For you alone are holy. All the nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

And then it all unloads. Right? Chapter 16, "I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the angels, 'Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.'" And then, I mean just keep on scrolling. On it goes. All of this condemnation of the world system and then of course, we have this amazing, go all the way Chapter 19, this amazing culmination of "I heard," verse 6, Revelation 19:6. "I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, and the roar of many waters," speaking of the Song of Moses, "like the sound of mighty peels of thunder crying out 'Hallelujah.'" That's a Hebrew word, compound word. It means you all should be praising the Lord. It's a command. Y'all praise the Lord. "For the Lord our God the Almighty, he reigns." Now he's going to take his power and begin to reign. "Let us rejoice and exult and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready." Finally.

Do you understand that's the whole point of this? If you're going to share your faith with a coworker this week, that's what it's all about. It's about the "then and there." It's about getting past this whole entire season of sin from Genesis Chapter 3 to Revelation Chapter 19. I mean, really, that's it. It's about the last two chapters, three chapters and the first two chapters and everything in between is this laden, sinful, messed-up world. That even when it happened in Genesis 3 from you, from your line Eve, the seed of the woman, quote unquote, you're going to crush the head of the enemy.

This is a battle, and it's going to end with a victory, and that victory is the one you ought to care about. It's the one you ought to care about more than you getting a job or getting a free cancer screening or you winning the lottery or whatever might have happened to you. You say, well, those are good, celebrate those. God answers prayer, good things happened, give



thanks. Don't forget any of his benefits. But know the benefit that matters most is that Christ is coming and the kingdom is coming. That's the gist of our passage.

Back to Acts 13, Acts 13 verse 18. I'll give you two more verses, actually a verse and a half, just to round this out. I shouldn't have spaced out the points obviously the way I did on the worksheet, but, just an addendum here for the whole passage. Verse 18, "And for about 40 years he put up with them in the wilderness." There's even a textural variance in here, it's the word distinction is actually one letter from a pea to a fee, which I know people today call it a pi and a phi. But in this long, I don't know 12, 13, 14-character word there is a textual variant. You'll see it as a footnote there next to the word "put up with." In the English Standard Version I think for sure it has a footnote "cared for" "carried" because that one little letter makes that difference. And all I'm saying is that the variance here, which is an interesting academic thing to explore, really makes no difference in the sense because that is certainly true of both. Did he care for them? Yes, he cared for them. How did he care for them? Well, as a God who was putting up with them because they were a mess. Just read the book of Numbers again to remind yourself of that.

So, God in the midst of them being sinful, he provides for them as he puts up with them, because he could have destroyed them like he did the armies of Egypt, but he didn't. So God in his grace and his mercy, gave them what they needed. And I've already pointed out some things like the manna and the quail and the water and leadership horeb rebellion. All these things were happening and still God keeps on providing while they're all complaining, saying, "Let's just pick a leader and go back to Egypt." God is a gracious God in giving provisions for the people.

When Jesus talked about the provisions of the people, he said, you know, God gave your father's back there in the wilderness manna from heaven. And by that, I mean heaven. There's one word both in Greek and in Hebrew, that speaks of three things. Heaven as the sky where the birds fly, heaven as where the celestial bodies like the moon and the stars hang out, and then God's throne room. Well, a great little usage of two different definitions of that in the passage where in John, he says, you know, "God gave your fathers manna" from the sky, "from heaven," but I'm going to tell you this: "I am the bread of life" that comes down from heaven. Right? The third heaven, the place where God lives. And I'm here and you need to imbibe in me. You've come just because you saw your bellies filled by the feeding of the 5,000. You're back now you want more. It's not about your bread.

Here's what he says in that passage, "Do not work for the food that perishes, but you ought to be working for the food that endures to eternal life," and I am that food. "I am the bread of life." And he says basically this: You want provisions for your daily life, and you know what, as Jesus said in Matthew 6, your Father knows you need that. But what you really ought to be doing, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." You need to look at the bread of life standing before you and know that I am the fulfillment of all the prophecies, I am your provision, what you need to get through life and what you need to get into the next life is me. "I'm the bread of life." That's so good. It's the shift from being grateful for provisions in your life



and saying, "Yeah, I should be, absolutely, to forget none of the benefits. But provision. And THE provision is Christ himself.

Number two on your outline, and let's put it that way, "Be Grateful for Provisions & Provision." And you should have some, right? You're well dressed, you got a nice car in the parking lot. All that's good. You don't have everything you want but you got a lot of what you need. That's good. But you know, the provision that really matters is the fact that you have Christ. Matter of fact, when you have Christ, all the other things and he may give you lots, great. But what matters is you value this, and that is the provision of you being fully qualified to meet your God. You have the bread of life, you have a relationship with him, and he says if you have me, never thirst, never hunger. Think about that. That means that if I have Christ and I know that I'm fully qualified to go to heaven when I die, if I know that, then even if I don't have all the things of this earth, it won't be a big deal.

To put it in terms of First Timothy Chapter 6, "If I have food and covering, with these I will be content." I know God provides us many things. Matter of fact, he says he provides us all things to enjoy. I'm quoting now First Timothy Chapter 6. All that's great. And I should be thankful for those. I ought to be grateful for the provisions God gives, and some of you have some really nice provisions. Praise God for that. But then you ought to say, but what really matters is that I got Christ.

Do you remember when Paul, and I'm going to make you remember this if you go to a small group because on the back of your worksheet, I'm going to take you to Philippians 4, where Paul says, "I'm glad you revived your concern for me." I was out on the mission field and didn't have a lot. You sent me money. That was great. "But it's not that I'm speaking out of need and necessity, because I know the secret of having a little and having a lot, going hungry and being full, having a big bank account or having nothing. I know the secret of contentment. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." The real provision of my life is a relationship with God.

To quote Hebrews 13, if I have God "who will never leave me or forsake me, then I don't have to have a love for money." Right? Do you want to give me money? Great. That'll be a good thing, and I can be grateful for money. But what really matters is that I got Christ. I got Christ which makes me right before God, and then I can be in his presence. Do you want to talk about redemption? How do we get out? God miraculously brings the ten plagues to get them out of slavery. Romans 6 says, and even Jesus says, you Israelites, you think you're free, you're not. You're enslaved because you're enslaved to sin, but you'll know the truth and "the truth will set you free." Who is the truth? I am the truth. "I am the way, the truth and the light." So I'm your provision.

I will get you out of your problem with sin. I will make you qualified for heaven. I'll live the life you should have lived so that you have perfect righteousness imputed to you. And I will die on a cross and take all the punishment you should have and I'll incur that. That is the provision you need. And if you got something now, if you don't have it tomorrow, it doesn't matter. Paul says, First Timothy 6, Philippians Chapter 4, "I know what it is to be content. I can be content.



I know the secret of contentment." That I'm worried about, focused on, and all about the provision. And that's the God-man, Jesus Christ, who you should be in right relationship with.

Now you can understand that you got preacher standing up all across the country in peace time in evangelical circles in heretical sermons, I might add, saying, it's all about you getting the provisions. I'm happy when you get provisions and it's a good thing, but it isn't about that. If you had nothing, and Paul puts it this way, "we can be poor and make many rich." And he isn't talking about the same things there. Right? "I can be possessing nothing but possess everything." He said that to the Corinthians, right? He says you guys are all concerned about what you got, what you don't have. Listen, you have all things whether it's Cephas, Apollos, I mean, you own it all. Why? Because you got a Christ. And one day "the kingdoms of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ," and you who follow me in this life, "you're going to sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel," he tells his apostles. And all I'm saying is we're going to, as it says in the book of Revelation, ascend his throne and be co-regents with Christ. And that's all that matters. I don't care how much you have in this life, that's what matters.

One more thing. Verse 19, the second half of the verse. Are you still there? "He gave them land as their inheritance." If you have a home, that's a great thing. Matter of fact, Psalm 68:6 says that God gives you that. "He settles you in your home. He settles even the solitary." Even the ones that have it, he gives him a place to live. So your house, I want you to think about it right now, apartment, condo, house, sprawling mansion, ranch, whatever you got. That's a gift from God. Think about that. Matter of fact, the Lord is happy to bless those places. Proverbs 3:33, "The Lord blesses the dwellings of the righteous." That's a good thing. And you should value it so much so that he goes on later in Proverbs Chapter 24, he says if your wall is broken down then get out and fix it. Right? If there's something messed up in your house, you go to... The "sluggard who has no sense" doesn't value his home. You ought to value your home, OK? If there are weeds in the yard, go pick the weeds. If the gate's broken, fix it. If the plumbing is backed up, get it fixed. That's a good thing. You ought to value your home.

But you know the inheritance that matters is the inheritance that is reserved in heaven for us based on the life of Christ. Number three, you need to "Value Homes & Home," and if you have some that's good, if you've had some in the past, great. If you got one now, fantastic. Praise God for it and care for it and value it. But that isn't the home you really value because you know you're going to leave that home. There's no one who has a home that they're not going to leave here on earth. And all of them are going to go away. But there's a home that Jesus said is reserved for us that he is making, and he's going to bring it down to this earth and he's going to give us, here's what he calls them, "eternal dwellings."

And that's good, because guess what? Go up in your attic and look around, it ain't an eternal dwelling where you live. It is corrupted by sin and it is deteriorating. Every single decade it gets worse and worse. And you have to constantly work and use energy to get it just to be livable, and that's great. Or you sell it and move into another one. Homes are great. Praise God if you have one and if you have a big one, that's fantastic. I think of the early church they



met in those big homes for ministry and praise God for those who got big homes. Let us host stuff in your house. But it's not your home.

And if you got no home and you want a home, well, here's the thing, it ain't your home anyway. And that's the deal. And that's why, again, it's just like provisions it doesn't matter how much you got, how much I don't have. Square footage, doesn't matter. View, really doesn't matter in the end. It's nice to have it. But you know what? 200 years from now, I don't know, you're going to have to go, "Where did I live? What did that look like? Did I have a view? I don't remember? Oh yeah, I guess I did. It ain't nothing like the view I got now, though." You understand it's going to be different.

God was trying to teach the Israelites that by saying, "Hey, the guys who are closest to me, the guys who are serving in the temple, they're not going to have any land." The Levites could not have any land. You cannot possess land. Why? Do you know how that went? He repeated it many times in the Bible. "Because I, the Lord, am your inheritance. I'm your portion." Oh, Joshua's passing out portions to all these people at 20 acres, 50 acres, 100 acres. Everyone got all this land. Hey, Levites, you're the special guys who know me and love me and serve me. Guess what you get? Nothing. Oh, that's no good. How are we going to eat? Well, all the other people are going to bring their stuff and give it to you. And so you'll have plenty to eat. Your kids will have plenty to eat. You'll be fine. Right? The Lord is going to add all..., you just worry about me.

Even people who did have lands like David, he understood that. The box of the covenant, the Ark of the Covenant, was an image, a symbol, a visible image of the presence of God. And he said even the sparrow finds a home in the temple. I just wish I could be near the Lord. It's just a picture of that close relationship. That's what matters. David would have clearly given all that up. Because he knew where he wanted to live. "I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever." Value your homes, good thing, be a good steward of your house. If it's broken then fix it. Do what you can. If it's ugly, put a coat of paint on it or whatever you got to do. But know that it's a ship that is sinking and we've got an eternal home, a permanent home that's waiting for us.

In Mark Chapter 14 we're given instructions about the Lord's Supper, and if you know the Lord's Supper instructions, many of them in Scripture tell us to look back and we should, "Do this in remembrance of me." The Church is going to be doing this for 2,000 years, do it in remembrance of me. But in the Mark 14 passage, there's a very interesting phrase that's appended to that word. Jesus' words at the Last Supper are added in that text. And the ushers are going to come down and they're going to pass out the elements of the Lord's Supper. If you're a Christian, I want you to take those and just hang on to them for a minute. I want you to do today what we're called to do about the Lord's Supper, which is not only to look back, but to look forward because here's what Jesus said. He said, I'm doing this with you. This, of course, is in the Upper Room, the disciples are there, he said. And I'm not going to do it again. "I will not drink the fruit of the vine again until I drink it with you new," afresh, again, "in the Kingdom."



I just love that, and I think we often miss that. I mean, there are usually two things we do during communion. We look back at the death of Christ and we confess our sins, and you ought to. You ought to examine yourself, make sure there's no unconfessed sin. So those two things you do, and almost every time you do that, I just want to add the third thing that Jesus said you should do, and that is to think about the fact that you get to do this again with him and he's not doing it. He is not drinking the fruit of the vine, as he puts it, until the victory is secured, until the provision has brought you into your new home. I just want you to make sure you think of all three of those things.

Christ died on a cross for your sins, are you sure your sins are confessed, and can you look forward that all of this religion is all, biblical Christianity, is all about forward-looking realities. It's about the "then and there" not about the "here and now." Here and now, it's nice. It's good. Valued. Be thankful. Appreciate it. Celebrate those things. But the real celebration, the real gratitude and the real value ought to be placed on eternity. You spend a little bit of time with God and two minutes, literally, I'll come back up and we will take these elements at the same time.

If you don't have a perspective that is pinned on eternity and all you're left with is what is here on earth, you can understand why people get stressed out, worried and anxious. I read several articles this week about the level of stress in our country right now. Depression, anxiety and worry. One article says that moms right now in the middle of this season, this second Omicron wave, are more stressed now than they were at the height of the COVID pandemic. More people are stressed and on some kind of anti-anxiety medicine than ever. I read a series of articles on the way that the generations are stressed out and anxious right now. The Baby Boomers, you know Gen Z, Generation X. Everyone is just freaked. They're worried. They're troubled. And I get that. Right?

This is where the gospel is such a good thing because it is not about this stupid world, right? All I'm trying to do is collect people. We're going to submit to a king who's already purchased the right to reign, but he hasn't started yet. Yeah, he'd like to reign in your heart if you want to put it that way, but the reign that matters is when he ascends the throne, and that's going to be after he breaks through the sky and comes for his Church. When Jesus talked about that in one of the clearest ways that he ever talked about that, in John Chapter 14 he prefaced it with this, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe, trust, trusting God. Trust also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms," many dwelling places. "If it weren't so, would I have told you that I went to prepare a place for you," that I'm going to prepare a place for you, well of course. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I'm going to come again to receive you unto myself, that where I am you may be." I mean, I quote that passage, you do. You know it. But remember how it starts. "Let not your heart be trouble."

Of course, the world's going to be messed up. "In this world," to quote John 16, "many tribulations. But take heart; I have overcome the world." It's not about this world. First John 2, "The world and all of its desires, everything passing away, but the one who does the will of God abides forever." Eternal. The things we see, transient. The things we don't see, eternal. If you don't catch that perspective how useful can we be as ambassadors of that kingdom? So



when Christ added that addendum there for us in the Upper Room, just remember I'm going to do this with you again, but not until everyone's assembled in their home in the eternal state in the Kingdom. That's exciting. It's us looking forward, and I want us with that kind of anticipation with I hope a fessed up heart and a remembrance of Christ's death that purchased this inheritance for us, which you can eat this bread with me and drink this cup.

Once you do that, would you stand with me, please? Let me dismiss you with a word of prayer. God, even with the taste of these elements in our mouth right now, we want to remember that if it were not for the bread of life, were it not for your blood being shed as the focal point in absorption of our penalty, we would have no way to say that we know that we're fully qualified to quote Colossians 1, "fully qualified to share in the inheritance with the saints in light." God, we trust in you as you told us to, to believe or trust in God and to believe or trust also in you. And so we do that knowing that you've got a place for us and it's not this world, we quoted it last week in Hebrews 11. It's such a great passage about the world is not where we're pinning all of our hopes. Are we grateful? Yes, God, we want to be grateful. We'd like to give thanks in all circumstances. We'd like to see that you provide us in this life all these things to enjoy. We'd like to enjoy them today, this afternoon, whatever you've given us, but also to realize that it's not ultimately about this. So that's freeing God, and it certainly helps us to not be troubled when things aren't going the way we want them to here and now, whether it's our health, our relationships, our finances, our living space, whatever it might be. So God, give us an eternal perspective today, I pray, that we might be good representatives, useful to you.

In Jesus name. Amen.