



Useful to the Lord – Part 12

Aiming for “Well Done”

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Well, there are admittedly some sections of God's word that are puzzling. They certainly leave some room for debate. But when it comes to clarity, when it comes to certainty, when it comes to relevance for you and for me, at the top of the list would have to be this: that you are going to meet your maker. You're going to meet your maker, you're going to stand before your Creator. It is just a matter of time, just a matter of time. And it's often that interval of time, by the way, that ends up being what our sermons get down to. The interval of time between today, the day you hear a sermon, and the day you stand before God. That is of interest to us because we want to make sure that we're ready for that day.

Now you can say, "Well, I am ready for that day. I know the gospel, I have responded to the gospel." Now, I understand that. The primary fundamental, categorical, determinative preparation is that you realize what we've been singing about, that you are a sinner before a holy God, that you need to grasp with all of your heart, with faith and confidence that Christ is supplying for you what you can't supply for yourself. That's the only way you're going to be making it on the day of standing before your Creator without him saying, "Depart from me. I never knew you." I understand that you say, "Well, I'm here. Pastor Mike, you're preaching to Christians here. I'm there." Good, that's great.

But you do understand that when we stand before Christ, there will be what is called in Scripture the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ, that Christ will come and evaluate us as we stand before him, and there will be an account, an account of our lives. What Christians, if we're really regenerate, are praying for, hoping for and, I hope striving for, is hearing from him what Matthew 25 says in that parable Jesus tells for viewing and previewing that day. We'd like to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Well done. You did it well. That is what I hope you recognize so much of what happens in eternity hinges on. I'm not talking about your qualification and inclusion in the kingdom. I'm talking about your experience in that kingdom. It rides on so much of what you did between this sermon and the day you meet your maker. And that's why so often we're talking about that, maximizing that.

We've been studying the book of Acts and looking at people who have provided for us a good template of what it means to be the kinds of people who are useful to the Lord, who end up hearing from Christ, "Well done, good and faithful servant." We can read the stories and see that they've been really useful to the Lord, to his cause. And so we learn from that as the Bible says we ought to. We ought to take notice of people who have this pattern of life and we ought to follow them. We ought to imitate their pattern. We want to do that because we would like to have the commendation of Christ. And that's what we hope for. That's what we aim for.

Well, as we get to the end of our study of Paul's first missionary journey, which takes place over Chapter 13 and Chapter 14 of the book of Acts. We've been going through it carefully. This is the 12th week that we've been in it. We've reached the last and final section, verses 24 through 28 of Chapter 14. And if you haven't turned there yet, I need you to turn there to

look at this text of Scripture and to see that here we have Paul and Barnabas completing this big journey that they've been on and they come back to the church they were sent from. It happens to be a bit confusing. There are two Antiochs in the story, but this is the Antioch in Syria, north of Israel. This was the church that sent them out, and now they're coming back. That's where the passage ends.

We see the very last leg of their missionary journey, and as always, not always every time, but whenever we have these geographical references, I try to show you the map and there is a map there digitally for you on your worksheet if you downloaded it or it's printed there for you on the bottom right-hand corner. You'll see that this completes their missionary journey, their first missionary journey. Now they don't know how many missionary journeys they are going to take. They thought, for all intents and purposes, this could be the last missionary journey they take. Nevertheless, it becomes a good paradigm and a template for us to think about our missionary journey, which really begins the day we become a Christian and ends the day we meet our maker when we come home and God evaluates our journey. How did you do?

So it's important for us to learn, particularly when we see great examples of someone doing it right to say, that's what we're aiming for. We want to purpose to be like that. So take a look at this as you get familiar, re-familiar with some of the areas that we've been through. And this goes all the way back to the beginning of our series in Chapter 13, when they came through the first time. Look at the map again, you'll see the solid line which is their ingress into what is now modern-day Turkey. In those days it was called Asia Minor. All these different regions within that. Galatia becomes very important because Paul writes a letter back to the Galatians churches in the southern region of this area and then Pamphylia and Lyconia, all these different regions of this area become important for us to at least make some distinguishing comments on in our own mind. That's where the map can be helpful. Certainly, if we read verse 24 and get into this text.

Let me read it for you with minimal comment if I can, verses 24 through 28. I know that's a challenge. "Then they passed through Pisidia and Pamphylia." Those are regions, those are not cities. Take a look at your map. You exit out of Southern Galatia, you get into an area called Pamphylia, right? "And when they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia." Now those are cities. Attalia was just the port city where they got on a boat and they were going to go home. Now you see on the line of the map coming in, they went through the island of Cyprus, you might remember and they came up the 200 miles from Paphos to Attalia and then on to Perga.

But on the way back there, they're going to skip Cyprus because things were well-established there. Matter of fact, they were really aware of Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of the city of Paphos. Not only that, the whole island of Cyprus and the Roman imperial leader came to Christ, and so things were good there. They were going to get on the boat and they were going to then go 400 miles back to the port city of Seleucia and on to Antioch, where they were sent out from. And from Attalia it says in verse 26, "they sailed to Antioch." Again, look at your map. The most northerly part of Galatia that they dealt with in Asia Minor was Antioch



also, but we call it Antioch of Pisidia or Pisidian Antioch because they happened to share the same name as opposed to Syrian Antioch, where the church was thriving. Matter of fact here was Christianity was ensconced and things were, I mean, it was the capital of first-century Christianity, having moved north from Jerusalem because of persecution.

And we make that distinction in the middle of verse 26, "where." that is in the Antioch of Syria, "they had been commended to the grace of God for the work they had fulfilled." Now that's a simple sentence. But just think about how much of a relief that is. You've been with us on this study the last 12 weeks? I mean, we were looking at them in the midst of such persecution that mobs were chasing them from city to city. Remember, they went from Antioch to Iconium to Lystra, and they were leaving him for dead under a pile of rocks, the Apostle Paul. And it was a horrific kind of scene, and now they're going to make their way back where they had started. And it's through this simple statement, it rolls off the tongue, they were finishing this work, they were fulfilling this work. They did it. It was like, that's great, but it didn't come without great cost. That word "work," clearly, it was a lot of work and great sacrifice.

Verse 27, "When they arrive they've gathered the church together," which has probably been about a year that they've been on this journey. "They declared that all that God had done with them." That's the title of our 12-part series, right? We want to be useful to God. They're instruments of God. God had done work with them and through them to all these places, in particular, how he had opened, bottom of verse 27, "how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles," which was the most noteworthy and surprising thing. They went from synagogue to synagogue in all of these cities and they got run out of the synagogues and then the Gentiles were really receptive and you saw them purposely turn their missionary focus to the non-Jewish people in these cities, and they responded in large numbers.

"And they remain no little time with the disciples." Now, did Luke know how long they stayed there? Sure he did. And I don't want to make too much of the fact that there's this kind of indiscriminate reference to the chronology here, but it did, that little phrase there "No little time," as antiquated as that may sound in English. It made me think about this as a paradigm. I mean, I couldn't help but think as you went into Antioch of Syria, the Orantes River runs through this ancient city, and the church was large and growing and big, and we left it with five pastors in that church, right? It had a staff and they were teaching and Barnabas was there and Saul had been brought in from Tarsus. So many great things were going on in that church. And to get back to that place where no mobs were chasing you and no one's picking up rocks to stone you and I can see Paul there with all the pains and scars and still aching I'm sure from all he'd been through being beaten up and left for dead, just how good it must have been to be home.

I mean, the fellowship dinners and people wanting to know more details about who got saved in Derbe, what was that like? And you can see him kind of floating in the river and maybe even the fruit trees that lined the Orantes River in ancient Antioch in Syria, just how refreshing and nourishing and therapeutic it must have been for him to be there. And because Luke leaves us this kind of open-ended, "He spent a little time there." It's like, ahhh, he didn't even care about that. He's just going to rest and recoup and enjoy the fellowship. It's like they're



home. And that just felt so good. I thought that really becomes kind of a measure, a template, a paradigm for the kind of thing that I can't wait for in my life, and that is I want to finish the missionary journey that I'm on.

Well, it only took about a year for them, but really, it's a good example of the kind of Christian life I'd like to lead where it may be hard and through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God as he encouraged those saints in places like Lystra and Derbe. I want to make sure that I have that sense of completion. I'd like to hear from Christ, "Well done. You did it. You finished. You fulfilled the work that God commended you to do." That's a good thing, and it's a hopeful thing. And it reflects, I hope, the values that the Scripture continually puts in our minds that we ought to be looking to the end.

But before we go too far in enjoying that scene of Paul enjoying his church that sent him, I just want to look at verses 24 and 25 again and see if you didn't kind of rush too quickly past the word Perga, particularly if you're thinking back to where we were at the entrance of Paul and Barnabas to Perga, we didn't have any preaching recorded there at all. After you see them coming through Pisidia and Pamphylia, verse 25, they'd spoken the word in Perga. "And when they had spoken the word in Perga, then they went down to Attalia" and they got on the ship and they went 400 miles back to Antioch.

"And they went and spoke the word to Perga?" Yeah. Why is that interesting? Because you remember when they came through Perga the first time, when it was mentioned in Chapter 13, Paul and Barnabas didn't spend any time preaching there. There was no missionary work that took place there. And commentators and scholars and historians try to figure out why would that be? Well, I kind of anticipated that, and we asked the question when we got here the first time in Chapter 13, and we started thinking about some reasons Paul might have rushed on to Antioch of Pisidia. Why did he do that?

And we had some hints. One was from secular history about Sergius Paulus, the proconsul of Cyprus. And do you remember that I said he had families and tracts of land in Antioch of Pisidia and Paul maybe with the urgency to get to do what Sergius Paulus wanted him to do. He was a big wheel down there, a big Roman imperial official. And we can see well, of course, he became a Christian. He wants his family to become Christian. He's got family, he's got friends, he has a homestead there in Antioch. Maybe Paul, just out of urgency, kind of just rushed through Perga to get up to where he wanted to go.

Maybe it was because you remember when Perga was mentioned John Mark split. We tried to feel what that was like when we looked ahead to what Paul later says when they're about to take another missionary journey, saying, "I'm not taking John Mark, John Mark deserted us." He used a very strong word. "He deserted us when we were there. And I'm not going to bring him." And you can imagine, as we saw the conflict reach a real big point of splitting different directions that Barnabas, think about this now, and Paul go separate ways. Maybe that friction was already brewing here when John Mark left and maybe some things that Paul said in the middle of all that and Barnabas, it was not a good time. I mean, the time I don't want to preach is when I'm having personnel issues. I don't want to deal with trying to minister to



people. We got our own internal, we've got staffing problems here. I can understand that. And maybe so, we're just going on to the big city of Antioch.

Or maybe, and I mentioned when Paul writes back to the cities of Galatia, remember I talked about this? We looked at the reference in Galatia where he says, "When I came to you, I came to you with an ailment and you ministered to me and you served me." So we know he was sick when he got into Antioch there in southern Galatia. And some people have said, well, because of the elevation. Do you remember back when we talked about the difference between the port city there in Attalia and Perga that they went up in that pretty treacherous trek to get all the way up to the highlands of Antioch in Pisidia? And we think and some people at least surmise he was sick, he needed to get to the higher elevations for the sake of his health. Now we don't know exactly what his health problem was, but many people surmise that's why he just kind of blew through Perga and he didn't stop there.

I think it may have to do even with the report that they gave here, which gives us a clue. At the end of our passage they're saying, "Look at how God opened a door for the Gentiles." If you look up the archeological digs that have taken place in Perga, Perga is a place where we have not uncovered a single Jewish synagogue in all the work that they've done in trying to dig up the places that were important. So lots of Hellenistic and Roman pagan temples, but no Jewish synagogue. Now there are other cities that report Jewish people who lived in Perga, but apparently it did not have a big Jewish presence, and we know that Paul's pattern was to go from synagogue to synagogue, both on the island of Cyprus and then when he went on to places like Antioch, he was going in the synagogue and opening up the scrolls, saying, "Hey, Jewish people, listen, you need to embrace your Jewish messiah." And after all, Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees trained at the foot of Gamaliel. He was a guy that you think, well, yeah, of course he's going to find the Jewish synagogues and the Jewish communities and share the Jewish messiah.

Well, maybe he blew through Perga because, well, you know, this is not a big Jewish group here. We don't even have a synagogue in this town. So let's just get on to a place I can do the ministry I was commissioned to do. Well, he finds out in the process, "You know what? The ministry I am commissioned to do, I missed it the first time, but it's to share with the Gentiles. I'm going to go back through this town now. I've got an opportunity. I don't need a synagogue. I'm going to go and share the gospel. I want to share the gospel with Gentiles and Greeks, the Hellenistic culture in this place.

It could be that. I don't want to be definitive about why it was. All I can tell you is if I'm leaving the big city of Antioch in Pisidia and I can't wait to get back to kind of bathe in the Orantes River and eat the fruit on the banks of the trees and fellowship with the people in the church at Antioch in Syria, I don't have time to start a new project. I've already gone through all of the cities that I've gone through. I've come back to those cities at great personal cost to myself. I'm encouraging the disciples, I'm building up the churches, I'm appointing elders. I don't want to start in a new city. I'm thinking I'm tempted just to get home," but he doesn't. He stops and says, "And when they had spoken the word in Perga," that's a huge statement.



It reminds me of this: the Apostle Paul wasn't going to get back to Antioch in Syria and say, "Yeah, we skipped that city." He was going to finish. And he wanted to finish strong. Matter of fact, if you're taking notes and you want it to become a template and a lesson for our lives, let's start with those two words on your worksheet. Number one, you and I need to "Finish Strong." I want us to think the way that the Apostle Paul might have been thinking in this particular section of his life. "I don't want to miss out on doing the things that I know I'm supposed to do. I missed it earlier in this journey, but I'm going to get it now." I just think that's a good way to think, and it's not that I'm pulling that out of thin air. If you know your Bible, how often does Jesus get us to think this way? You're missing something. Go back and fix it. You got something that's outstanding. You better finish it and tie it up.

He says in Matthew Chapter 5 on the Sermon on the Mount, he talks about the Old Testament worship and he says, "If you're going there and you're about to bring your offering, your sacrifice to the altar in Jerusalem and you remember you and your brother, you've got some issue going on. It needs to be solved. Leave your offering and go fix this with your brother." Jesus is always getting us to think, is there anything left undone? Right? Stop what you're doing and finish what you're supposed to be doing. So often even the pattern of participating in the Lord's Supper, which we'll be doing this Friday together, we're supposed to, as it says in First Corinthians 11, "examine ourselves." Think, judge yourself, is there anything left outstanding that needs to be dealt with? Is there a sin that needs to be forsaken? And is there something in my Christian life I haven't dealt with? I need to go back and I need to fix that. I need to repent. I need to forsake it. I need to change this.

How about Hebrews Chapter 5, which is a sermon, by the way, a recorded homily. The author is unknown, but the writer of Hebrews says, "You know, I would like to go on to teach you about things like the Melchizedekian priesthood. How in that scene in the Old Testament it attaches to Christ and how that's just an enriching doctrine. But I can't teach you these things because you've become dull in your hearing." Dull. That word translates to the Greek word in the Greek New Testament "Nothros." It means "lazy." You've just become slothful, you've let off the gas, you're not finishing strong, you're not moving forward like you ought to. And then he adds this line, "For by this time you ought to be teachers, but now you need someone to teach you the elementary principles of the word." You're not moving forward the way you ought to. You're not growing on schedule.

All these babies go to their well-check to see what percentile they're in. And here is the writer of Hebrews saying, "You guys, you should be a lot further. Now go back and get these things settled and knot these truths in your own mind so that you can move on. It's the immature who keep drinking the doctrinal milk. You need to move on to eat the meat of the word. All that's in the end of Hebrews Chapter 5. And I'm just saying that's the pattern. Stop and think. Right? If I'm going to walk through the portal from this life to the next, is there anything left undone? If I walk into the kingdom is Christ going to say, "What about this? Why didn't you deal with that? What were you thinking? You were wasting time on all these things and you had a task and you didn't fulfill it. Paul wants to fulfill his missionary journey. And he does. And I'd like to hear "Well done," but it starts with me saying, is there anything left undone that needs to be done?"



It seems that every time I preach a sermon that deals with these kinds of eternal matters, God providentially puts it on a weekend I've had to preach a funeral. And yesterday I stood on this platform right here and preached to a grieving crowd about the loss of their loved one, someone cut down early in their life. And we talked about those eternal matters. Of course, everybody's dabbing their eyes with the Kleenex, and we're thinking about all the issues of, man, we're losing so much, the loss, it's painful, the grief of separation of death. And then of course, we think of the principle of parlaying the reality of our grief, thinking about our own mortality. And every time we have a funeral, we should think of our own mortality and all the principles I tried to preach yesterday. And they dovetail so well with a sermon like this.

I mean, it's a good sermon to preach when we're not grieving the loss of a loved one and we're not sitting here as a widow or a brother or a sister who's lost a loved one. But to think, now wait a minute, all of us, let's just get that truth, are here today and gone tomorrow. We ought to think this is the end of every man living and take it to heart. To quote Ecclesiastes where Solomon says when you go to a funeral you ought to be thinking about the fact that you should number your days. You should know you're not going to live forever. You should know this is coming to an end. You should know there's a finish line and you got to run through it. Don't let off the gas.

It's good for us to think about that. If I told you, I know your life would be over on December 31st, it's done. Let's just say this because I know one thing that's going to equalize all of us, regardless of how old you are or how much longer you have. If Christ returns, the Father dispatches the Son to get his Church. Well, at that moment, all of us, I don't care if you're 18 or 88, you're done, you're going to enter the presence of God. You will meet your maker. Let me just say this, if I knew that on December 31st, everything is done. It's done. Your life and your opportunities to share the gospel are done. Your opportunities to grow in the Christian life, done. Your opportunity to be salt and light, it's finished, it's done, it'll be done by the 31st. Do you think that might change the way you live between now and then? Do you think you might say, OK, yeah, what is it that I should have been doing that I should know as a Christian that I should do as a Christian that I should give as a Christian, I should sacrifice as a Christian? What should I be doing? What is left undone?

And there's a Perga in your life probably that you're thinking, "Yeah, I haven't done that. It was a conversation I needed to have there, there's a defense I need to make here. There's an advancement I need to make. There's a mission I need to be involved in. There's some kind of project I need to invest in. There's some kind of body of knowledge that I ought to walk into the presence of Christ having this understood and I've never understood that. I always thought I should read a book about that. I should take a class at Compass Bible Institute one day. I should really serve in some ministry and I have been gifted for this, but I haven't really employed this gift." There ought to be something clearly that I say if I said this is the last year you have to live, you'd say, "Well, there's stuff I got to do. I don't want to walk into the presence of God and not finish strong."



Believe it or not and you probably won't believe it, I was on the track team at one time. Junior high. I never could have made the high school team. But I remember the coach saying you got to run through the tape. Which I always thought was frustrating because I never got the tape, the feeling of the tape, across my body, but I knew what he meant. I translated it "run across the line, chase the guy with the tape around his chest." It was like, OK, I will run hard. There is a point where you say, "don't let off the gas." It's like all those YouTube videos of people who are celebrating too early. Have you seen those? Don't slow down, right? Run through the end. Run through the end.

Yesterday's Daily Bible Reading. Did you read it? Jesus tells a story about a man who wanted to take his foot off the gas. Remember that? Matter of fact, he says, "I just can't wait just to slow down and to build these silos and put all this investment up. I'm going to be able now to put my feet up to say, 'Eat, drink be merry.' Just take a chill from here on out. I'm on a cruise from this point." Some of you think that way. And I want to tell you, don't save yourself for some time of relaxation on this earth. Finish strong. Be like the Apostle Paul at the end of his life, when he said, "Listen, I'm poured out like a drink offering." "I'm leaving it all here. I'm going to go through the tape. There's stuff to learn. I'm going to learn it. There's stuff to say. I'm going to say it. If there's evangelism to be had, I'm going to do it. If there's some kind of defense to be done, if there's a book to write, if there's an article, if there's an email to write, if it's a text to be sent then I'm going to do it because I got to finish strong, I'm going to run through the tape."

We can't let off the gas. What are you saving yourself for anyway, really, seriously? "Well, I don't want to burn out, man." Paul said, and it was quoted yesterday on this platform and I love that. A friend of the deceased said, and he quoted the passage from Second Corinthians as Paul spoke of himself, he said, "I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls." Well, you can listen to the words of a guy running through the tape and you can say, "well, I'm not going to do that." I think the whole point of thinking about that day meeting your maker, ought to keep you running hard to the end. What are you saving yourself for? Some say, "I mean, I don't want to burn out." Well, I think that's the whole point of the Christian life, to run all the way through to the end.

Paul could have nursed his wounds. He may have still had his arm in a sling as he came into Perga, but he says, "I got an opportunity here and before I get home, I'm going to do what I'm commissioned to do." And he ran hard, even though he didn't feel like it. Finish strong. Many Christians in our day are not finishing strong. By the way, if you've ever pondered that statement of God to the man in Luke 12 that we read yesterday, it's the only time I can think of that God looks down and says this in this story, "You fool. Tonight, your soul is required of you." I mean, you're saving yourself for something. For what?

Life is like a vapor, James 4:14. Tomorrow's not guaranteed. You should preach like it's your last sermon, you should text like it's your last text. You ought to care as though it's your last opportunity to care. You ought to share the gospel like it's your last chance to share the gospel. Run through the tape. Finish strong.



Do you still have our passage open? Acts Chapter 14 verse 26. Once they got on that ship after sharing in Perga, they went to the port city, "they sailed on to Antioch, where they'd been commended." Great word, "Paradidomi." They were given to the task. They were commissioned to the task. They were handed over for this work. They were "commended to the grace of God," by God's grace, you can accomplish this, "for the work which they had fulfilled," which they had fulfilled. What a great line. They did it. "And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them," look what God did, "and how he opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." And you can imagine them sitting around talking about all that they went through thinking of all the people that rightly responded. The surprising converts they never thought would come to faith. The things that happen when doors closed, other doors opened and they sat there and shared victoriously and celebratorily. They celebrated the reality that God had done good things through them. They were useful to the Lord and they fulfilled their mission.

What kind of reception would that be like? Seriously, what about the potlucks they were having as they just wanted to hear more from Barnabas and Paul? "Tell us more, what was that like?" That's great. You can just hear the people, hmmm, verbally responding to the good news and the good reports of a job well done. The reception that Paul and Barnabas received.

We need to run hard and then I need you to think not just about today through the day you'll meet your maker, but I want you to think specifically about the day you meet your maker. Number two on your outline, would you "Envision the Reception?" Envision the reception, envision the day that you meet Christ face-to-face. Now again, you can default back to, "Well, I know if I'm a Christian, it'll be great. I heard the Christian songs, man, I'm going to high-five Jesus, he's going to hug me. It'll be cool. Everyone's going to think it's great. He's going to whisper in my ear, 'Well done good and faithful servant.'"

And I'm saying, whoa, whoa, whoa. Wait, wait, wait, wait. You understand that that commendation from the Lord is contingent. I didn't say your salvation if you're trusting in Christ is contingent. I'm saying how Christ receives you and what you go through in that reception is contingent. Let me give you the two options. Can I give you two verses that will reflect those two options? And I think they're so well worded, obviously, it's the Bible, but listen carefully to these two passages, jot them down if you're taking notes. Second Peter Chapter 1 verse 11 Second Peter Chapter 1 verse 11.

Now, do you remember when I went through this on the videos? Maybe they're out there if you haven't seen them and you're new to the church. It was a fun little COVID project we did. Every day I did one verse of Second Peter, went through every verse of the book. I don't know how many we had, a bunch. And we got to verse 11 of Chapter 1. And it seems like it's really early in the book, but really it's the culmination of all that the apostle is telling us about how to invest and make sure that our life is doing all that it ought to do. And here's how verse 11 starts, "For in this way," for in this way, the demonstrative pronoun pointing back to the antecedent and the antecedent is all these things that are good, useful servant of the Lord is going to be doing. "For in this way you will be richly provided an entrance into the eternal



kingdom of our Lord and Savior." That's a great picture to have the entrance "richly provided." I love the way some translations translate this, "a rich welcome into the kingdom."

That's one category, that's Category "A." That's one way, but it is contingent on the context of that particular passage, and you could look at all of the New Testament. Do you want to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant?" There's always something preceding it. The Christian life is lived in a particular way. The mission of Christians is to do their job, salt and light and ambassadors, all that has to be a governing principle of their lives. And then maybe you have this Category "A" reception.

There's one verse to head up one category. Here's another verse to head up of the other category. First John Chapter 2 verse 28, First John Chapter 2 verse 28. "And now, little children," John writes, "abide in him," that's Christ, "so that when he appears we may have confidence." OK, that's just reminiscent of the first category. Confidence, rich welcome. "And not," OK, so here's the contrast, here's Category "B," "shrink from him in shame at his coming." Shrink from him in shame at his coming. Abide in him, right? And if you do, by the way, you become fruitful. John 15, "Abide in him." "You'll bear much fruit if you abide in him," right? You're in this way with all these things, right? Seeking first the kingdom and his righteousness. Well, then you'll have confidence when he comes. That's Category "A."

Here's Category "B:" to shrink and shame at his coming. "Well, that must be non-Christians." Let me read the passage again. "And now little children." He's speaking to Christians. That's his diminutive and affectionate way to speak of the Christians he's writing to. Hey, Christians, you got one of two options here. The reception can be rich welcome in confidence. "It's great to have you." And then you can have shrinking away in shame. "Like, wow, I didn't know you'd be back so soon. I didn't think I would die so early. I didn't really expect that I wouldn't have any more time to do the things you asked me to do."

I've talked many times of being a latchkey kid, growing up as a latchkey kid in Long Beach. Latchkey, right? Having a key to the house, the outdoor lock. I remember it, I can picture the key that opened the door. The Sleight key to the lock in my door. Of course, me and my brother had a key, and that meant we were then in the house by ourselves, self-governed from three o'clock to six o'clock every weekday. That's a lot of time for two boys to get in trouble, I mean, between three and six. And some days we did. Playing ball in the house, breaking the lamp, breaking a window, all of that. My parents were good about putting down a list quite often on the kitchen table of things they expected us to do before they got home. And always homework, top of the list and there are other things, you got the chores, right? You take the trash out, mow the lawn, whatever it might be. Here is the list of things on the table.

Every day at six o'clock we'd hear my parents, one of the two, come home first. And when the car was coming down the driveway and we heard the car, the distinctive sound of our car, all of a sudden now, the day of reckoning. We were now going to find out whether we were in Category "A," a rich welcome, or whether we're going to shrink back in shame. Now, here's the thing, and I've told this story before, my dad was a police officer in Long Beach, right? We



didn't live in the worst part of town. Don't get me wrong. But I do remember I have visions of my dad arresting people on the front lawn, believe it or not. I know weird. We had some weird drug-induced thing going on next door and I remember him laying it out, handcuffing people, and I remember that. And here's the thing, if my dad came home and I didn't do a single thing on the list and I broke a window, I did not expect to get handcuffed and hauled off to juvie. I did not ever think I was going to get kicked out of the family.

I am not talking about you sitting here and thinking that my performance as a Christian and my fruitfulness, you must be saying I'm going to hell. I'm not talking about condemnation. "There is no conDEMNation for those in Christ." I'm talking about whether or not there's comMENDation from Christ, and you're either going to have a lot of it and then have a rich welcome where you're going to be confident it is coming or you're going to shrink back in shame because as you hear the car in the driveway, you're going to go, "Wow, I didn't do a single minute of homework. I didn't take out... All I did was watch three Brady Bunch episodes. That's all I did. And I broke a window, right?" You're going to shrink back. You're going to run into your room, close the door and hope they don't find you for an hour.

Listen, I'm telling you, the reality is not am I going to get cast out of the kingdom? This is not a works-based salvation. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about the fact that Christ is going to look at your life, the foundation is Christ, you are his. But then you're going to build on that from the commissioning until you meet your maker, you will every day build on that foundation of Christ to quote First Corinthians Chapter 3. And you're going to do it with a different set of building materials, either gold, silver, precious stones or wood, hay and straw. That would be a good passage to spend some time in this week. First Corinthians Chapter 3.

And I know it's a composite of both. Right? I'm just saying I want more gold, silver, precious stones. There's a lot of stuff like, you know, another episode of F Troop or whatever, to date me, anyone remember that show? Another episode. That's wood, hay and straw. What are you doing wasting your time, you haven't got to your math homework yet? Or you can do your homework, and then when they come in, when mom and dad walk through the door, I'm like leaning on the table next to the note, like, "Hey, mom and dad." I'm confident at they're coming. And all I'm telling you is the gold, silver, precious stones are going to make a difference as it relates to your reception.

Don't envision your reception as something already settled because you have put your trust in Christ and you have repented and you know that you're a Christian. Because here's how that passage goes, "The Day," capital "D," which is just a convention of English to show you, I mean, "THE DAY will reveal each man's work." That's called the Bema Seat Judgment of Christ, to quote Second Corinthians Chapter 5. Some of you, maybe you're new to this, you've been taught all you do is put your trust in Christ and then, hey, no evaluation. All God's going to see when he looks at me is Christ's righteousness. Now, I understand you are adopted in the beloved. You are clothed in Christ. I understand there's no condemnation for those in Christ," but I'm talking about the reality of him looking at your life going, "All I see is a bunch of TV here. I don't see you completing the work I've called you to do."



And I'm telling you, the day will reveal the quality of each man's work. Then here's our response in the passage. If all you did was spend most of your time working on the convenience and the comforts of your life, which results in nothing more than wood, hay and straw, the Bible says "that man will suffer loss," suffer loss. I know you don't think once you die, if you're a Christian, there's any suffering. I'm not talking about purgatory here, I'm not talking about the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory. That's not true. It's not biblical. I'm talking about you saying I could have done so much.

It's you walking into the Antiochian church and they're saying, "How did it go?" And you said, "Well, I guess I talked about God at a couple of cities, but I had some great falafel in the Jewish section of Lystra. It was awesome." They'd say, "No, no, no, no, no. We sent you with our money and our prayers for you to be an ambassador of Christ and a messenger of the gospel. How did you do?" How embarrassing would it be for Paul and Barnabas to walk in and have a reception that's like, "What? You have nothing to share as to what you did? You didn't share the gospel? No one was won to Christ? You don't have any exploits of the heroic evangelism you did? What are you talking about?" How embarrassing.

That is a suffering of a type, right? There's going to be some tears on that day. Now, I know Christ will wipe away every tear. But Christ is not a Marxist, you know that, he's not a Communist. It's not as though everyone gets the same experience in eternity. You are going to be allotted a place of priority and blessing based on how you live your life, how the missionary journey went for you. In fact, I can't help but quote the passage that I subtitled this message after. So turn quickly with me to Matthew 25. Here is the passage where the famous line comes in, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And I want to show you why the Christian life is a challenge. The challenge is because of the context of this parable.

Matthew Chapter 25. Look at this with me, if you would. It's so important starting in verse 14, Jesus tells a parable that, by the way, we learn in Luke, he tells parables like this for people who think that the kingdom is going to happen right away. That's how he says the people were saying, "Well, hey, if Christ is here, the kingdom now?" He said, No, no, no. There's going to be an interval of time and that interval of time you're going to be like a latchkey kid and you're going to be self-governed here. I know I'm going to send my Spirit. He'll convict you from inside, but I know you're pretty good at suppressing and quenching and grieving the Spirit. So you just need to know I'm going away on a journey, but I've entrusted you with stuff. Now, you've got to sit down and do it. The note is on the kitchen table. You've got to get the stuff done.

Verse 14, "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property." Servants? Everything you have, every ability that you have, every opportunity you have, every relationship you have, every platform you have, every sphere of influence you have, it comes from God. And to one, he gives all kinds of opportunities, all kinds of resources, all kinds of abilities. "He gave one five talents," which, by the way, I know it works in English as abilities and aptitudes, but we're talking about a measure of money, which is like 6,000 or 8,000 denarii which was one day's wage of a laborer. So this is a lot of money. This guy gets five of those gigantic certificates of deposit given him. "And to another



one he gave two, and to another one he gave one, each according to his abilities." Because this guy can handle five, this guy can handle two, this guy can handle one.

"Then he went away." And that's the problem. If I weren't a latchkey kid and my mom was coming in every 15 minutes with milk and cookies, and "how's the homework coming along? Did you get that first section? Did you get all that? How are you coming? Did you get to spelling yet?" Right? If I had that, it would be different than having to be self-governed as we are as Christians. Although the Spirit of God, I get that, is in us convicting and prompting and prompting us to do what is right. I get that. But Christ is not walking into your bedroom every night going, "OK, how did you do with everything I wanted you to do today? Let's go through it, you know, at lunch I expected this and you didn't do that." We don't have that. He goes away, then he went away. Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father. He's not with us right now.

Now, verse 16, "He who had received five talents went at once, traded with them, investing, he parlayed it into five more talents." Right? He made five talents more. Verse 17. "So also he who had two talents, made two more talents. But he who had received the one talent, he went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money." I'm not going to do anything with that. And that sounds like, as he's going to give excuses later, "well, you know, I know you expected a lot and I was just afraid of losing it and I didn't want to risk it." But really, what are you doing? The other two guys are out there working. The other two guys out there are slaving away, right?

In this case, at least, again, I don't make too much of this one missionary journey, but it's Paul and Barnabas, and it's John Mark. Right? Like, I'm going home. What are you doing at home? John Mark, what was it like when you went back home? What were you watching? Were you watching Happy Days? What were you doing? You weren't doing what these two guys were doing. Now, here's what happened. You went out there and Paul realized he had five talents and Barnabas had two talents. Paul became the chief speaker, the chief preacher. But they were faithful and one was not.

"Now after a long time the master," verse 19, "of those servants came and he settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing the five talents more. Now he's got 10, and he says master, "You delivered me five talents here. I have made five talents more." And "his master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' You've been faithful over a little," and I'm going, what are you talking about? That's a lot. Well it seemed like a lot in this dispensation, in this economy, but "I'm going to set you over much." You ain't seen nothing yet. "Enter into the joy of your master."

"And he also who had two talents came forward." Master, you deliver to me two talents." Now I wasn't the five-talent guy, I get that. "But here I've made two talents more." I invested. I worked. I sacrificed. I took my lumps. I did it. I did it. Look at my investment. And his master said, "Well, it's not quite as good. I guess it's fair, C+." No, it's the same exact commendation. "Well done good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." I just want to tell you, just because you don't have



the aptitude, the ability, the insight, the smarts, the opportunities, the platform, the sphere of influence that some other Christian has. And if you're thinking, "Well, you know, I'm not on stadium platforms sharing the gospel to everyone in Southern California. So, you know, I guess I don't have to open my mouth in the workroom."

Don't think that way. Because it could be the guy who has the big platform that does a lot didn't do as much as he could have done because he didn't run through the tape. But you run through the tape. And you get the commendation, and it may be that someone with more giftedness does not get the commendation, not the commendation he wanted. It's all in degrees. I get that. I mean, it's a composite wood, hay and straw - gold, silver, precious stones. But you want to hear "Well done." You want to aim at well done. It doesn't matter how little giftedness you have. Be faithful, run through the tape. I don't even want to read the rest. I really want to encourage you by that, "Well done, enter into the joy." But you know what happens. The guy comes in and goes, "I was afraid."

Let me at least camp on that, "enter into the joy of your master," enter into the joy... But again, I've tried to elevate and I'm sure it was good and I've tried to almost idealize it because one day it will be ideal that Paul is sitting there enjoying the refreshing river, enjoying his church, enjoying good food, enjoying the security of not being hunted down by a mob. And the joy of his reception, that was good. And I'm sure when he was on that boat getting seasick, who knows what, for that 400-mile journey across the Mediterranean back home, I'm sure he was just imagining how good it's going to be to be at home. I just can't wait to be home. That doesn't mean I'm not going to stop in Perga and share the gospel, but I can't wait to be home. Such a biblical perspective, by the way.

And in our passage, go back to our text, you'll see in verse 28, "And they remained no little time with the disciples." If you crunch the chronology, it's probably about a year they stayed there before they went on the next journey. But that's a big deal. This sense of at least it opens my mind that that's a good picture of the eternal state. Our homeland will be there one day. That, by the way, has such purifying effect if you can just keep your focus on going home.

Number three, let's just "Long for Home." Make that your ambition, long for home, long for home. And I know you think, "Well, I'll be so heavenly-minded, I'm no earthly good. That's what they're going to say of me." No, no. Here's my point. You will not be, as others have rightly said, you're not going to be an earthly good until you start to become heavenly minded. You've got to think about it. You've got Colossians 3, "Set your mind on things above." You've got to keep walking with a faith of what's coming. You have to do that or you're never going to be able to endure the embattlement of what it takes to get from here to there. You have to be focused on eternity. You've got to see it, you've got to, here's a good line from Titus Chapter 2. You have to wait for, this is a great line, verse 13, "waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ." The blessed hope. Blessed. It says "happy hope." That's what the word means, right? The joyful hope, the invigorating hope.



What's the hope that keeps you going? It's the hope of going "Christ is going to appear." I don't know when it's going to be. It could be tomorrow, could be next week, could be next month. I'm going to see him, I'm going to meet my maker. I got to keep that in view, I got to keep that in mind. Nothing will keep us on track better than keeping that in mind. You're almost home. You're a heartbeat away. You know that. Right? At any time you could step into the presence of your maker and your commissioner, he's commissioned you to do a job and you'd like to hear him say, "Well done." But you have to keep that in view.

Let me turn you to one more passage, Hebrews Chapter 11, turn there with me, please. The blessed hope. The hope that makes us happy. The hope that gives us endurance. The hope that helps us weather the difficulties. Paul could dig himself out from underneath a pile of rocks and even just temporally thinking of just to get home, I just want to get home. And of course, he thought bigger than that, because he said, "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain." He knew thinking like we're thinking now, eternally, it's so much better when I'm dead. It doesn't give us a death wish in the sense that, well, I'm just going to be done, because what did he say? I think I'm going to be released from this prison, he told the Philippians in Philippians Chapter 1. And it'll mean fruitful ministry, fruitful service. I'm going to keep on going, I'm going to run through the tape.

But when he knew he wasn't getting out in Second Timothy, he said, "I'm ready. Ran the race, kept the faith, being poured out like a drink offering." He knew that it would be better for him to be in the presence of God, but in the meantime, every day I've got, every breath I breathe, every opportunity I have, I'm going to keep serving and trying to be salt and light and be an ambassador for Christ. That's hard for us to do, but in verse 24 of Hebrews Chapter 11, Moses is a good example of how this works. I mean, the way we pushed through the mistreatment, we pushed through the mobs, the rejection, the isolation, the ostracizing of this world.

Look at this, Hebrews 11:24, "By faith Moses, when he'd grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." How great would it be, think about this now, in the 15th century B.C. to be the son of Pharaoh's daughter? That would be awesome. Every door would open, every opportunity, every privilege, you'd be invited to every great thing, you'd have everything you wanted. You want to drive a Lamborghini, you want a McLaren, you get everything you want if you were just the son of Pharaoh's daughter. But he refused. "Choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God." He said I'm going to stand with them because I know they're right. I know they're right and this culture is wrong. I'm going to stand with them and I'm willing to speak up about it. And he did. "I would rather be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin."

You know, everything about wood, hay and straw is fleeting. It may get you the promotion. It may make you employee of the month. It may make the people in your neighborhood think you're awesome and cool. But it's all going to go away. What matters is being allied with what is true and what is right and representing that right. Matter of fact, he considered the reproaches of Christ, which I know is an anachronism. Think about this, it's anachronistic to think about Christ 1,500 years later, Christ would show up. But you want to talk about the



embodiment of the one who's right and does right. It's Christ, he's the embodiment of righteousness. I mean that, he says. I want to be with what's right. I want to do what's right. I want to represent what's right. I'm going to speak for God. And even the angel of the Lord who appeared at that burning bush for Moses might have been, in fact, the pre-incarnate Christ.

But the point was, I want to stand with him. I'm going to do what he says. I'm going to speak for him. "He considered the reproaches of Christ as greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt and he was looking to the reward." Again, some of your upbringing in Sunday school has led you to the wrong conclusion. You think, "I can't even think about the rewards. I don't want to think about going home because of the rewards, that's so crass to be motivated by rewards." God expects you to be motivated by rewards. I want to be motivated by walking into the presence of God and if I get God, that's the main thing. I get that. But the rewards are there to motivate us to be faithful, to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful with a little; I'm going to entrust you with much." I'm going to entrust you with much. I'm going to entrust you with much. That is a motivation. "Now, enter into the joy." Right?

Enter into the joy of this kingdom, enter into the joy of this Father who you've been serving this whole time. "He was looking to the reward. By faith," verse 27, "he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king." How afraid are you at the anger of our culture, of the god of this world? Second Corinthians 4:4. That you are willing to say I'm not going to be faithful as a representative of Christ to my culture. No, "He wasn't afraid of the anger of the king, he endured as seeing him who is invisible." When Christ goes away. Right? And we're living in that time now on a journey, quote unquote, right after the Ascension in Acts 2, I'm now having to see what's invisible. He's not here, he's not walking into my bedroom every night. He's not at the end of the week going, "Let's see how the week went. How faithfully did you serve me? Let's go through it." I don't have that, but I have to see what's invisible, I have to see the end zone. I got to run through the tape.

I can't be this close to one of my favorite passages and not read it. Look back up at verse 13. Speaking of Abraham and the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all "These died not having received the things promised," at least not temporally, not in their lifetime, "but having seen them and greeted them from afar," just like Moses seeing what's invisible, "and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles." No big deal, I can be that. "For people who speak thus," and of course, the writer of Hebrews here, the preacher in Hebrew trying to get us to think this way. And to speak like this, "People who speak thus make it clear they're seeking a homeland." Can't wait to get home. If "They have been thinking of the land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return." You can fit in. Do you want to fit in down here? Great. There are all kinds of wood, hay and straw you can build your Christmas life on. But that's not advisable.

Verse 16. "But as it is..." Do you want to be God, do you want to be like Abraham, do you want to be like Moses? "As it is, they desire a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God." Oh, that's such an interesting phrase, right? We're told not to be ashamed of Jesus in this perverse generation. Don't be ashamed of me. If you're



ashamed of me, he says I'll be ashamed of you before my Father. I don't want to be ashamed before the Father. And if I'm not, then guess what? God's not ashamed of me. God is not ashamed to say, "There's my boy." It's not like, "Oh man, what are they doing?" "God is not ashamed to be called their God" for he has, talk about the reward, "he has prepared for them a city," a place to live. He provided a kingdom.

Are you longing for home? I hope you are. Is there something that happened last week, last month, last year, last night that's bugging you? I just would advise you to do what Paul did and what he told us he was doing. He kept focused on the finish line. And here's what he said in Philippians 3, "Forgetting what lies behind and pressing on to what lies ahead. I press on to the upward call of Christ." I want to see this thing, which he characterized at the beginning of that passage as the resurrection. I can't wait for that next life. I long for it. It started in Chapter 1, I just... "to die is gain." It doesn't mean we check out. It means we're motivated by the end zone. We're there, we're going to go, go hard, run through the tape.

By the way, you know there's even a reward just for keeping the finish line in view. Second Timothy Chapter 4 verse 8. Second Timothy Chapter 4 verse 8. "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me," Paul said, "but to all who have loved his appearing." Did you follow it? He said, I'm going to get a crown because I can't wait to see Christ. And I'm going to get some reward just for wanting to see Christ and he's going to reward me that when I see him, and not only to me, but "everyone who longed for his appearance."

Perhaps you've heard the story before, but Florence Chadwick was a native of San Diego, she was the first woman to ever swim from our shores here in Southern California to Catalina. Now, that's a long swim, 26 miles. And when she did it the reporter stuck the microphone in her face in the 1950s and they said, "Tell us about this," and she said, "I just had to keep envisioning the Catalina shore. I just had to keep envisioning the Catalina shore." Why did she say that? Because on her first attempt months earlier, she tried it. And like what often happens here in Southern California, the fog bank moved in while she was swimming. She was 15 hours into swimming and she had this cadre of boats around and everyone was there trying to see if she'd break the record to be the first woman to ever swim to Catalina. And they were all cheering her on. Her mother was her trainer and her mother was leaning over the boat, the closest to her, saying, "Come on, Florence, come on Florence. You can do it, you can do it, you can do it."

And even with all that motivation, after 15 hours and 55 minutes, she said, "I got to go, I can't do it, I can't do it anymore, I'm done." And she begged to be pulled up into the boat. And she was. Of course, in the middle of all that fog they kept moving because they knew they weren't far. They were less than a half a mile from the shores of Catalina. And so months later, when she rested up and trained and got ready and did it a second time, she said when she succeeded, "I just kept the shoreline in view." The problem was, guess what happened? Same thing. The fog bank had set in and it was just as foggy the second time as it was the first time. And she looked past just the verbal encouragement of her parent, "You can do it,



keep going, you can do it." She had to envision the shoreline. "I got to see it. I got to see it. I got to keep it in view."

It's interesting I couldn't help but study some of the geography of Antioch of Syria because I kept thinking, what was it like for the pained and embattled Apostle Paul and Barnabas to walk into that city, thinking there was a big, healthy, thriving megachurch in that city? And there was that river, the Orantes River that ran through it and the trees and I read about the fruit trees that grow there. And I couldn't help but in my mind then, after I did all that reading and study, I recalled the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation Chapter 22, which talks about a big river running through the New Jerusalem.

I pictured Paul in the river, and I pictured him kind of basking in the sun and enjoying that and eating the fruit. It says on each side of the Tree of Life there are going to be fruit trees bearing fruit. They're going to be, it's the word we get transliterated from Greek "Therapeia," that's therapy, to become therapeutic. The fruit's going to be for the healing of the nations. It's going to sustain them and fix them and do all that just in terms of this symbolic picture of our eternal home where they're just revived by this, they're home, they're finally home, the river flowing water, living water, the trees, the sustenance, the nourishment, the therapy. And speaking of the sun, it says, "In that place they'll be no need for the sun." Because the Son, S-O-N, will be its light and will give light to everyone in that place.

If you're not often being motivated by the way the New Testament ends. The Bible ends with a picture of our home. No crying, no tears, no dying, no death, no disease. I'd like to have a good experience there. I'd like it to start with a reception. I would love to aim at hearing from Christ, which everyone doesn't get to hear, but I hope you can hear it and I hope I get to hear it, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And if that's the case, maybe I can keep my foot on the gas and I can run through the tape, I can finish strong. That's the goal. I don't know how much longer I have. This could be the last sermon I ever preach. This could be the last sermon you ever hear. It could be the last week you have to live. Whether you have 1,000 more or 100,000 more, I want to live every day like to meet my maker today. There's something that's sure and certain and absolutely relevant. Every individual who hears my voice right now will meet their maker. Prepare. Get ready. And live completely engaged.

Let's pray. God, we want to be faithful and we want to expend ourselves for your priorities. You put us in an office or in a neighborhood or in a family or in a place where we're supposed to shine brightly as lights so that people can see our good works and one day glorify our Father in heaven. We have words, of course, attached to that. We are ambassadors as though your Spirit were working through us and saying to them be reconciled to God, as though God himself were making that appeal through us. So God, help us to double down. One day we'll stand in your presence. Maybe it'll be all of us at the same time. Maybe Christ will come back this week and we'll be done. We'll have lived this last week well. Or maybe it'll be 100 years from now and we'll drop off the scene one funeral at a time. Either way, God, let us all finish strong. For those who have no hope, they're sitting here today, they're not right with you. God, for them, of course, they need to see their need and put their trust in the only mechanism to solve their problem, the finished work of Christ. Thank you that because of that



finished work, that the sin that we had is forgiven, that we can look forward to eternity. But God, we want to make that reception a good one. May this sermon help in that regard.

I pray in Jesus name. Amen.