



How God Works in You – Part 5

The Endurance of the Saints

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Well, I reasonably expect that on some days even the most godly Christians in this room feel like they are just living in a funk as they say. They feel listless, they feel lethargic. They feel like they're just languishing through day after day. That's how everyone feels. I mean, all of us at times feel like Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes, or maybe Tom Hanks in Joe Versus the Volcano if you've seen that movie. And we feel like that. Like life is vexing. Like it's vain. Like it's all useless. These are words from Ecclesiastes. It's like chasing after the wind. We can all feel like that at times. And we can understand it because it's that repetitive grind, that daily thing that we have to go through that makes us say that it feels like it's all vanity. One of the reasons it feels that way is the cyclical nature of our lives. Our lives feel like a treadmill, just going through the same things over and over again. And treadmill is a good analogy of this because on a treadmill you, of course, are exerting all this energy but you're really not going anywhere. And that's how our lives sometimes just by the nature of being alive, it just feels that way.

I just want to remind you here that you may feel that way but that is not how things are. As a matter of fact, we're not Buddhists. We're not Hindu. We're not people who think that somehow life is just one big cycle that goes over and over again. We're Christians I hope, you're a Christian here today, and we look to God's definitive source of truth, his inerrant Word which says time is not cyclical, time is linear. It has a starting point and it has a finish. It has creation. It has the fall. It has this redemptive work that God brings ultimately in Christ. And then there's restoration. There's the finish line. There is, as we see in theology an eschaton, there's an end. That sequence, that linear sequence is not only true in God's whole picture of what he's done in time. Not only is God sovereignly moving all of human history toward a "Télos," toward an end, but he is with each individual life putting a life on the timeline. Which again, is the microcosm of the big picture, which has a start and a finish. And if you're here as a Christian, you need to know that your life is linear. I just use the words from Romans Chapter 8 verse 30. It all starts in eternity past with God predestining you, and then calling you and then justifying you. And if you know the rest of that verse, "those he's justified, he's also glorified."

Now, it hasn't happened yet on the timeline. You're living between justification and glorification. The glorification is coming. That's the end. And all of our lives are moving toward that through all the checkpoints. You have a purpose. We started to look at that last week as we use Paul's testimony as an example of a linear life, but I want to really focus in on that today as we think about the fact that God has a purpose. He has, as we quoted last time in Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 10, he has made you as his "workmanship in Christ," so that you would be given to these "good works that God has created beforehand, that you should walk in them." And that's helpful to know as a Christian that we should be keeping our mind on the finish line, on the goal. I think a passage like Colossians Chapter 3 that we're supposed to be "seeking the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father." The idea of this transcendent reality of Christ being enthroned and glorified, and one day coming



back and then bringing this renewal to all things, where he is going to glorify you. This is when Christ who is your life appears, you also will appear with him in glory. The reality about seeing Christ at the end of our lives, it begins this whole threshold into glorification. It's linear. We're moving toward that. And I can't deny the fact that there are cycles, right? Every day, every week, every year. I mean, I understand that. The decades roll by and it can feel like you're just on a treadmill but you're not. That you are moving through your life toward an end and that end, if you are a Christian, ends in glorification. And that glorification is what we are all made for, predestined, called, justified, glorified.

What we're going to need in any linear race, the course set before us, as it's called in Hebrews 12, is we're going to need endurance. I mean, if it's not a short race, if it's a long race where there's 39 years or 69 years or 109 years, we're going to need to endure through all of the checkpoints of life. And we're going to need to have that endurance that God calls us to have and to exercise by laying down some foundational truths that we need to grasp so we don't feel like Solomon in Ecclesiastes. We don't feel like this is just an endless cycle. I'm just lethargic. I'm in a funk. I don't know if I can go another week, another day. Just all of this listlessness it needs to be remedied by a biblical perspective which I'd like to give you this morning by looking afresh at Paul's testimony. Actually, he's done with his testimony by the time we reach verse 22. Now, I left you off in verse 21. Look at that in Acts Chapter 22 verse 21 is where we ended. Look at the last word in that story the Apostle Paul is telling about his conversion, the word "Gentile." And that's where the crowd gets lit up in verse 22.

All of this because as you remember the setting is he's been dragged here to the corner of the Temple Mount, to the steps that lead up to the Roman, you know, place of the barracks that the Romans have. It's called Antonia Fortress in the first century. And the Romans, of course, have set up shop overseeing everything in Jerusalem. And Paul, as he's there on the Temple Mount, is accused of bringing a Gentile into the place that only Jews were supposed to go to and that wasn't true. And yet that was cause for them to say, well, we know about you, the Apostle Paul, quote unquote. You are out there trying to tell these Gentiles that they're just like us, that they're all in the favor of God, that somehow they're grafted into God's plan. And we know you're speaking ultimately against the law of Moses and you're speaking against the people of Israel. And Paul is able to, now that he's arrested, to mount a defense. And he speaks to them in Hebrew, which, of course, these Roman soldiers may know a little bit but they can't probably track what he's saying. But he gets to this place where he speaks about the fact that he's sent by Christ, the Messiah himself, to go reach the Gentiles in a faraway place.

And when that word came out of his mouth, pick it up in verse 22 and let's look at what happens and see if we can't see Paul as he moves through some of the challenges of his life as he moves toward the finish line, which he will say in Second Timothy Chapter 4 verse 7, he'll say, I've reached the end, I've come to the end, "I've finished the race." He's going to get to the end. He's not there yet. But in the challenges of this particular situation he uses that word Gentile. Up to this word they listen to him. Then they raise their voices, this crowd. Now the Romans have him in custody. He's in chains, but he's standing up on an elevated part, looking over the crowd and the Jews were listening to him in their own language. And then



when he said that, "they raised their voices, they said, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth!'" Right? And unless there's any confusion at all they make it clear, "For he should not be allowed to live." You should die.

Verse 23, "And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks." Now remember how Paul even talked about holding the cloaks of those who picked up rocks to throw at Stephen the Martyr? Stephen, who was joining himself with the Way, with the Messiah, with this Jesus of Nazareth, and Paul was there giving hearty approval to Stephen's death. Now all of a sudden, they're not handing their cloaks to anybody. They're just throwing them off. I mean, talk about rolling up your sleeves to throw rocks at Paul, "and they're flinging dust in the air" as they reach for the rocks on the ground. "And the tribune," the leader of the Romans here on the temple court, he "ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying we should examine him by flogging, to find out why they're shouting against him like this." Now you can imagine they're speaking in the language of the Jews. The Romans are there with him in custody. He's speaking and whatever amount of this they can understand, all of a sudden now the crowd erupts and they start throwing their cloaks off so that they can get their arms free to throw rocks at him and kill him. And the Romans say, we got to get this guy, we got to figure out what kind of insurrectionists do we have on our hands. Who is this guy? Well, we're going to pull out the whips and we're going to flog him and find out. Verse 25, "But when they had stretched them out for the whips, Paul said," verse 25, "to the centurion," that's one of the people under the tribune and yet he's leading 100 Roman soldiers over several of those in Jerusalem at this time storing and say maybe ten of them in the Temple Mount area.

So you got a centurion who's a leader of the Romans standing by, and he's watching his men do this flogging. They're about to start the flogging. "And Paul says to the centurion ... 'Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?'" I haven't even been on trial yet. "When the centurion heard this, he said to the tribune," who is his boss, "he said to him, 'What are you about to do? This man is a Roman citizen.'" So the tribune came and said to Paul, 'Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?' And he said, 'Yes.' And the tribune answered," now wait a minute. Here he is in all of his pomp and all of his regalia of being a leader of all these Romans, "I bought my citizenship," the citizenship of mine, "for a large sum," a little bit of a slam there. Like, you know, how much money do you even have to buy a citizenship? "Paul said," no, no, no, no, I didn't buy my citizenship, "I'm a citizen by birth."

Now biblical commentators are trying to figure out how did that happen. However it happened in God's providence here he was born of someone in Tarsus. His dad apparently somehow ingratiated himself. Maybe he was given some kind of Roman citizenship. Nevertheless, Paul is born and he's born a citizen of Rome, even though he's a Jew, even though he's a strict, legalistic, pharisaical Jew. And so he says, no, "I was born a citizen." Verse 29, "So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately." Of course they did. Hands off this guy. "And the tribune was also afraid," the leader of all these people, "for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen, and that he had bound him." Not only that, I put him in custody. I mean, wow, it's bad enough that I was about to flog him. But verse 30, "On the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews." But it can't be all of this. Why are they so whipped into a furious, violent, you know, mob to attack him?



There's got to be more to this. So we're going to find out. And I can't flog him. We're not going to beat it out of him.

So "He unbound him and commands the chief priests and the council meet," that's the supreme court of Israel, "and he brought Paul, down," to them, "and he set him before them." And then you can see in the passage. Right? Starting in Chapter 23 now he starts his speech. Why in this text here that we're studying this series of nine parts, we're taking all of 22 and 23 together because this narrative runs into two chapters. And so we'll leave his speech for next time. But let's look at what's going on in this particular text. We're seeing Paul through some very difficult checkpoints of his life continue to live on another day to preach to the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of Israel. We know if you've read the book of Acts before where he's going to end up, right? He's going to move on to Caesarea, the Roman port there. And he's going to speak to Felix and then to Agrippa, and he's going to eventually get sent off to Rome, he appeals to Caesar. But right now, he's moving through these very tumultuous times through his travail of being incarcerated here he is having to deal with all that is lying before him.

I want to understand how he gets through all of this, and I want to think about the fact that he gets to the end of his life in Second Timothy Chapter 4 verse 7 and he says, "I've fought the good fight, I've finished the course, I've kept the faith... laid up for me a crown." So when he finishes we know that this is not the finish but he's getting through some really hard times. How does that happen? If you see on your worksheet there, you'll see verses 22 through 24 and 28 and 29, I have put next to this first point that I want to think through, because there are two things that happen here that Paul really had no control over. One is he got arrested by the Romans. That was not what he wanted to do. He had had some forecast by God's prophetic word that this would happen. He didn't know all the details but he knew he would be bound in Jerusalem. So he's going through all of this and just at the right time, basically, he's under the custody of these armed Roman soldiers who when a crowd starts to pick up rocks to throw at him and charge him as they take off their cloaks to kill him just like they did Steven, the Romans whisk Paul away into the barracks. So there is an act that Paul had really nothing to do with. It just happened to be circumstantial. But he gets taken out of this and his life is saved. And then he's about to be flogged. And I can only imagine he's thinking, well, this is what they did to Jesus. They flogged him and then they put him on a cross and executed him. Maybe I'm about to get executed here and perhaps that's going to happen in his own mind. But he goes, wait a minute, I know something here that can maybe get me out of this. I haven't had a trial and I'm a Roman citizen. And the answer here in verses 28 and 29 is he was born a Roman citizen.

Now, how did Paul orchestrate the fact that he would be born in Tarsus under a father who was Jewish and yet a Roman citizen and inherit this Roman status as a citizen of Rome? He didn't plan it. That was God's plan. This is what we call the providence of God. The providence of God that he would be in the custody of the Romans and his life would be spared from the mob, right? That he would actually be born a Roman citizen and have that card to pull out at just the right time to exempt him from what he thought could be his own execution. Those are providential acts of God. Why? Because Second Timothy Chapter 4 verse 7, he would finish the course and this is not the end of the course. God had more to do



with Paul. So God and his providence here, you can see, protected him to get him into the next leg of what God had planned for him, which we learn in Chapter 23 is to speak to the Sanhedrin and give a speech to them.

I want you to identify with the Apostle Paul to know that whether your course is going to end at 50 or 70 or 100, your course is going to come to an end some day, Psalm 139, that God has planned for you. And here's how the word is put in the English text of your English Standard Version. "Every day he's formed for you was recorded in his book before there was yet one of them." So God has a full plan for your life and it's going to end on a particular day and that particular day until you get there God is going to providentially make sure you get to the finish line. This is what we know just by understanding what the Bible says about God's sovereign providence over your life. And I want to say you are, as some preacher had said to me once, immortal. Really! You're immortal until that day. That day is going to come but it's going to come on God's timetable and before you get to that day you are going to get through every challenge there might be to survive to that final day of your life. We'll call that God's providential care. And it would be good for you as a Christian to start to notice that in some way, as best you can.

Number one, to "Notice God's Providential Protection." That would be good for you to do because then you'll start to see God is at work. We try to get this last week brewing in your mind. God is at work. God is always at work. He's at work in you. And one of the things he's at work to do is to get you to the end of your life. Right? This is not haphazard. He doesn't lose one of you in death and go, "Oops, I had plans for him into his 70s and he's gone now." That's not how God works, right? God is a God, Psalm 139, with every day planned before it happens. He's got a course and Paul's course was not going to end here. It was going to end ultimately by his head being chopped off in Rome just after he writes Second Timothy. That's how it's going to end. Not here. And yet it looks like it's going to end. But no, God's providential care. You're going to be in the custody of the Romans, to get you out of that jam. You're going to have a Roman citizenship card that you pull out of your cloak. Oh, I'm a Roman citizen. Yep. He is. His papers check out. He's a Roman citizen. He's not going to be flogged, beaten or killed perhaps by overzealous Roman soldiers. That's not going to happen. God's going to protect.

Now, was it fun to have the crowd rush you and want to kill you? No. Was it great that you were about to be flogged and be arrested? I mean, surely your ankles and your wrists hurt from being incarcerated in chains. I get all that. Turn with me to John Chapter 16 just to remind you that none of the providential care of God is some kind of ticket to the words "faith movement" or the "prosperity gospel," or, you know, if you just name it you can claim it, and all the comforts of life are going to be yours if you just trust Jesus. This is not an exemption from pain. God's protection does not mean painlessness. That's a good way for you to think about it. God's providential care of your life does not mean you will not be in pain. There will be plenty of pain. Look at the bottom of Chapter 16, the last two verses, verses 32 and 33 of John 16. Jesus speaking here, and he says, "Behold, the hour is coming, and indeed it has come." Just like everything on the timeline. God has all mapped this out. And now for them, the disciples, as they're there with Christ, that the hour is coming and actually says, it's come.



And "You will be scattered, each to his own home." I mean, we've been a band of traveling people who've been following your rabbi around. It's been great. But you know what? Everyone's going to go to their own house now and go back to Galilee. And you're going to "leave me alone. Yet," by the way, "I'm not alone, for the Father is with me."

Now, if you know anything about the structure of the book of John, the Upper Room Discourse, starting in Chapter 14, we got all this discussion about the fact that they are not going to be orphaned even as he goes. God is going to be with them. He's going to send the "Paráklētos," the helper, the Spirit of God is going to come alongside. They will never be orphaned. He's given them this promise that they're never going to be alone. Oh, you're going to be scattered. You're going to leave me alone. But I'm not alone. And you, of course, have been taught in the last three chapters you're not going to be alone. Verse 33, "I've said these things to you, that in me you may have peace." Everything I've said to you, all my teaching should bring you peace. I've talked to you about the Spirit is not going to abandon you. You're not going to be orphaned. I'm not going to be alone even though I'm going. We're going to go to our own homes and it's going to be hard, right? I'm going to be arrested. You're going to scatter. "I've said these things, you may have peace." Now in the world, not just this week, he says, but "In this world," as long as you're in it, "you're going to have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Now get verse 33 in its context and you start to understand we get this: the end, the eschaton, the finality of our lives marching into the kingdom, "Enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." That's the finish line, right? There's creation, there's fall, there's redemption, and then there's renewal. There is the kingdom that's coming. And the kingdom that is coming does not preclude the time between justification and glorification where there's going to be tribulation, you're going to live on this planet until your last day and even that last day, depending on how you die, it doesn't matter how you die, it won't be a pleasant day. That's how this works that life is going to be hard. But we're supposed to take heart because the world as we know it is going to be tossed aside, Second Peter 3, and he's going to establish a new world "in which righteousness dwells." So we know where we're going. As I often say, it's not about the "here" and "now." It's really ultimately all about the "then" and "there," we're getting there. And he says, "Take heart."

Now what about the process? He's going to pray now in Chapter 17, pick it up in verse 8. Here are some of the things he prays. Just look at this. There's rich theology here. Start in verse 8 of the High Priestly prayer in Chapter 17, Jesus praying to the Father. He says, "I," Jesus, "have given them the words that you," the Father, "gave me." All the truth you wanted me to give them I gave them, "And they have received them," the words, the truth, "and they have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me." So big. The preexistent second person of the Godhead, the Daniel 7 Son of Man, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Isaiah 8 son of David, who is going to rule and reign all peoples. They believed it. They know I'm the Messiah. They've received it, they've heard it, they've embraced it. Now I hope you can find yourself in verse 8 and say, "Well that's me. I believe that too. I'm all about it. I'm in. I'm a follower of Christ. My loyalty is to him." Verse 9. Then you can see yourself in verse 9. "I'm praying for them. I'm not praying for the world but for those

whom you have given me, for they are yours." So a group of people who believe the truth have been God's people now, right? And they're given to Christ everyone who loves and trusts Christ. That's how Chapter 14 starts with, "Believe in God," trust in God, "trust also in me," he says, right? You have to trust in me as he goes on to say, "No one's going to come to the Father except through me." So we are now Christians. All the saints of the Old Testament worshiping Yahweh we're now going to say the way to get to Yahweh, to be right with God, is to trust in Christ. Those are God's people who do that. They're now given to Christ. They're God's people. And it says, John Chapter 17 verse 10, "All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them." Two stages of that. We glorify Christ the minute we confess him as Lord, right? We say he's our Savior, we glorify Christ. We're glorifying Christ this morning, we sang to Christ this morning, we're reading Scriptures that are about Christ. We're glorifying Christ.

But the real glorification is when we get glorified, right? It's when we see him face to face, First John Chapter 3. Right? That's when we realize everything that God has planned for us. That's when we step into the glorified state of being in the kingdom. And ultimately, that's where we're headed. Verse 11, "I'm no longer in the world." He is about to leave, he's about to be crucified, he's about to be buried, about to be resurrected, 40 days later he's going to ascend, he's going to leave them. He says, verse 11, "I'm no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I'm coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name." Now, I'm going to leave. He's going to now say, Father, keep them. Keep them in your truth. "Keep them in your name," keep them in your family, "which you have given me," the name you've given me. This whole authority of the Godhead, keep these people in that "that they may be one," one people, the body of Christ, "even as we are one." A great line. We are together, right? We're one in essence. I want these people to be all together. My people. I'm the head. They're the body. These are my people. Your people given to me. And what are mine are yours? This is the group of people that I trust you are a part of.

Verse 12, "While I was with them, I kept them in your name." I was their teacher. I was their rabbi. "Which you have given me. I have, love this word, "guarded them, and not one of them has been lost." Right? They're mine. Oh, there is a prophetic exception. Oh, "Except the son of destruction," the old translation says the son of perdition, the one who was destined to be because the "Scripture had to be fulfilled." Judas was going to be lost. But the people who are mine, who have embraced my truth, they're mine. I've guarded them. I've kept them. They've been your people. They've been given to me. Father, I'm leaving, keep them. Verse 13, "But now I'm coming to you, and these things I speak in the world," while I'm still here, "that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves." "Take heart, I've overcome the world." They're trusting in me. They know the kingdom is coming. They're "waiting for the blessed hope, the appearing of the great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." They anticipate the kingdom. My joy will be fulfilled in them. Verse 14, "I have given them your word, and the world has hated them." There's the tribulation in verse 33 of the previous chapter. "The world hated them because they're not of the world, just as I'm not of the world." They didn't like me much either. "I don't ask that you take them out of the world, but..." here's the prayer of the Son to the Father, and the Spirit is going to accomplish it according to the previous chapters here in the book of John, "that you keep them from the evil one," keep them from the evil one.

Now what does the evil one want to do? Starting in John 10, the evil one wants "to kill and steal and destroy." That's the image and those are the words used. And I think about the destruction of the enemy. And I ask the question, if I'm supposed to be guarded from the evil one, First John 5, John 17, I want to ask, am I kept from the evil one? Let's just ask it this way. Was Job kept from the evil one? It's a trick question but think about it. Was Job kept from the evil one? The answer is, "Well? Kind of?" Well, he wasn't kept from the evil one completely. The evil one was led out on a leash. Round number one was you can touch everything he has but you can't touch him. And guess what? Satan had to obey. The evil one had to obey. And then it was, oh, round two. Well, you can touch him. Just don't kill him. And then his body was buffeted by Satan, to use a phrase from the New Testament in Second Corinthians Chapter 12, I can ask the same question of Paul. Was Paul kept from the evil one? Well, I mean, not totally, because he said, I have a "messenger of Satan to buffet me." Satan was touching Paul. And guess what? If you got a disease. Satan is touching you, right? I'm not saying it's some direct demonic attack, but I'm saying all of this is the work of the enemy. He comes to "steal and kill and destroy" any humanity. And all of this is the effect of the evil one. And so the evil one touches all of us. But we're not overcome by the evil one in the sense that he does not accomplish his will, which is to destroy us, to take us out of the flock. Which is exactly how this discussion starts in Chapter 10. "My sheep they hear my voice, ... and they follow me, ... and no one can snatch them out of my hand. The Father, ... who is greater than all, no one can snatch them out of his hand." They're his people given to me and they're in my flock. No one can take them out. There's one exception, the son of perdition, Judas Iscariot. But God is a God who's going to keep these people and he's going to keep them in my people, in my flock, in the truth.

And he goes on to say in this great text, he says in verse 15, "I don't ask you to take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one." Verse 16, "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." So here's what I want you to do. Set them apart. That's what sanctify means. "Set them apart in the truth." I gave them the truth. This truth now has been written in the old covenant. It's going to be written by the apostles in the New Testament. "Your word is truth." Set them apart in that. It's why we are hated by the world. Because I'm going to define marriage by what the Bible says. I'm going to define gender by what the Bible says. I'm going to define right by what the Bible says. I'm going to define wrong by what the Bible says, because God has given me his truth and I'm supposed to be different than my neighbor and his opinion about the whole world because of the truth. It sets me apart because I'm one of God's people. I'm set apart in the truth. I'm part of the people of God. I see everything through the lens of Scripture. I have a Christian worldview. That's the picture that God says I'm setting them apart. They didn't like me. I gave them the truth. They don't like them, but keep setting them apart. "Sanctify them in truth; your word is truth." As you sent me into the world, I had a mission. I had a beginning and an end. So I've sent them into the world. I have a beginning. I have a mission here in the 21st century and for their sake I consecrate myself. I continue to set myself apart, same concept, that they may also be sanctified in the truth. I want them to stay here. They're going to stay in this truth, in my name, in the authority of all the things that I've said. They're my people, my flock, and they're not going to be able to be extracted from this flock. They're my people. A gift from Father to Son, my people,

guarded. And they're going to be guarded because the Spirit's going to be sent to come alongside of them. The paraclete called in alongside "Para" is "next to," "clete" is "to call." He's going to be called in to keep this flock, to keep them together, to have these people walk in the truth, to be sanctified and to love the truth, to long for it like little babies long for milk. They're going to feed on it. They're going to want it. They're going to have an appetite for it. They're going to be kept in it.

That's a lot of words to get to that. Let me put it in some succinct passages for you. Go with me to First Corinthians Chapter 1. I'm going to choose two churches in the New Testament that, if you know anything about the Bible, you know about these churches. Let me just ask you this: is Corinth the church you want to go and join? Is that the church you want to be in? Right? If you're looking for a really good church to raise your kids in, is the first Christian church of Corinth the place you want to go? Probably not, because you've read about it. I mean, you've read 16 chapters about it in First Corinthians. Before we ever get to Second Corinthians. There's more trouble there. You're going to go, wow, this church is not good. Matter of fact, he's going to start in verse 10 talking about unity. And in Chapter 1 verse 11, he's going to talk about how you guys aren't unified at all. So they got a lot of problems.

So I want to make sure you know that being kept by the Father, being providentially kept all the way to the end of your Christian life, confessing this confidence you had at first, being part of his family, fulfilling your purpose on the planet till the very last day of your life. I just want to make sure you don't think this is based on your own perfection, right? Protection is not based on perfection. And protection doesn't mean painlessness. There is lots of pain. And you're not always going to respond well to that pain. But I want to look at the beginning of this chapter here. And I'm going to say how did Paul see these people? What does the Bible say about these people? Verse 4, "I give thanks," this First Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 4, "to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus." Does that sound like a description of Christians? Oh, were their non-Christians there? Of course, there were non-Christians in the church. But by and large, this church teaching the truth of the gospel, these people were in the grace of God given to them in Christ. They're trusting in Christ. So the average rank-and-file person in Corinth was a Christian, "that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge." You had knowledgeable New Testament prophets teaching, without a written New Testament, the truth and you got the preaching, the speech of the truth. And you responded to it. You're in Christ. You've been given grace, "even as the testimony about Christ," that you heard, "was confirmed among you." How is it confirmed? Well, just like at least the way it's described in James Chapter 2, that you can't have a saving faith without works. The confirmation is the fruit that you bear. "You'll know them by their fruit."

So these are real Christians who had enough fruit in their Christian life to say these are real Christians. By and large, the rank and file in Corinth were Christians. Now a good part, "So that you're not lacking in any gift," you have what you need, "as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here's the good thing about the church at Corinth. Everyone today who was in the church of Corinth, right now they're doing really well. All the problems they had on earth are gone. They're glorified. They've crossed the finish line, and they are now in



the presence of God, glorified, awaiting the resurrection so that they might come and inhabit the new earth where righteousness dwells. They've crossed their own finish line, the path they've waited for, to whatever extent they had an ardent desire for it. They waited for Christ, meeting Christ's presence, to be in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 8, "Who will sustain you till the end." There's this sense in which every Christian in Corinth was told, God's going to sustain you. God is going to "sustain to the end." And when you stand before God the day you meet him guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you stand before God, are you going to be cast out and condemned? Romans 8 verse 1. "No condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." So you're a real Christian in Corinth. Do you have problems? Problems. Is the church perfect? Not perfect. But they're guiltless in the day of the Lord. Why? Because they have the grace of verse 4 given to them in Christ, because they were enriched through the preaching and the knowledge, it was accurate and the confirmation that they had fruit. They were real Christians. They waited for Christ, and Christ was going to "sustain them till the end." Why? Because you, look at verse 9, because you are good enough Christians to have these promises applicable to your life. Highlight that part. Is that there? No. Why? Because "God is faithful," this is a God thing, God is faithful, "by whom you were called." He's the one who called you, and he justified you, and he's going to glorify you. You will be guiltless at the end. "Into his fellowship, the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our King."

These Christians calling Christ their King, wrongly doing a lot of things in the church like "I'm of Paul," and "I'm of Apollos." They had problems, but they were Christians in the faith who were kept until the end. I love the word "sustain," verse eight, "until the end." This is a work of God. God is doing this work. If I were to say, I don't want to join the church at Corinth. Here's a church I would want to join, the church at Thessalonica. And they had a few problems too. Paul talks about those. But turn to First Thessalonians Chapter 5, after saying all these wonderful things about the church at Thessalonica. They're loving each other. They're listening to the Word. They're responding well. We don't have a book of critique like we had in First Corinthians. We got some critique but not much. A good church. I'm going to join that church. I know no church is perfect. This is a great church. Here's what he says as he's starting to wrap up this book. Look at verse 23 of First Thessalonians 5. Whether it's the good Christian in the room doing so great or the struggling Christian in the room who's listening to me, just like the struggling church and the good church that's doing really well, look at these words that apply equally to both sets of Christians. Verse 23, "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus." Now when...? Is that going to happen? I mean, let's just want to think about is my body fully sanctified. Is it fully set apart? Is it fully just imbibing in all that God wants for it? No it's not. I can tell you that. All I got to do is take a physical to tell you all the things that are wrong with me. Right? My body is not fully sanctified. Neither is my spirit or my soul. You look at my brain throughout the week. Nope, Pastor Mike is not as perfect as we thought it was. Sin. Your sin, my sin. But one day I will be fully in spirit and body and soul. I will be kept blameless. I'm going to be kept in this thing, "blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Because, look at verse 24, because you're doing well enough to have these promises applied. No. Because "He who calls you is," there it is again, "is faithful," God's faithful, "he



will surely do it." You see in the concept of me understanding, am I going to get to the finish line of my Christian life? How am I going to fulfill all the good works he has for me? The one side of the coin that we have to focus on that gives us any assurance of this is God is faithful. "He who began a good work in us will continue that on." He will let me walk in the good works planned for me. He will get me to the finish line, even if I get to the finish line with some resume that looks like Corinth, or whether my resume looks like Thessalonica. God's going to get me across the finish line and I will be blameless. I will be fully sanctified, completely, soul, body, spirit, blameless at the coming of our Lord, because God is faithful and he will surely do it. That's big. It's super big and it's important for us to catch. We dare not forget it. That God is a God who said, I going to get you to the end. Paul is providentially cared for, and I know we've gone from being spared from an incarceration or a death by the mob, but God is going to get us there one way or another through every checkpoint along the way in our lives.

Back to our text. Now, if we really start to look at that side of the coin, God is a God who will get us to the end. There are so many passages we could look at, so many sermons I've preached on this. God is a God who is faithful to get me to the end of my Christian life. That's a God thing. If I focus on that and that's all I focus on then all of a sudden I say, oh, that's fantastic. God's going to get me to the end. Awesome. I'll put my feet up on the dashboard, and I'm going to sit here in the passenger seat and I am going to just coast on through, baby. I'm going to eat a lot of bubble gum, sunflower seeds. I'm just going to coast across the finish line. Okay. That's not what the Bible says. Matter of fact, there's so much about what the Bible says regarding our behavior, our activity. I want you to look at a few of these passages with me. Let's start with our text, verse 25. "When they stretched him out for the whips." Here it says, Paul whispered a prayer to God, "God, your will be done. Whatever happens, happens. Que Sera, Sara, I like Que Sera, Sara. Do you see that there? You got to be an old person. Was it Doris Day who sang that song? I don't know. I wouldn't know that. I didn't listen to that stuff. But I'm right.

But Paul didn't say that. "He said to the centurion who was standing by, 'Is it lawful for you to flog a man as a Roman citizen?'" Paul comes up with a way to get out of this mess, right? I'm thinking a little too late. I'm thinking they're ready to whip your back. I don't know why it took so long but maybe he's thinking about everything he had just done. Everything he just preached, the response. I don't know, what he's thinking about, "Oh, I can't believe I've been spared my life and all of a sudden now I find myself around a pillar and I'm about to be whipped and like, whoa, whoa, wait a minute, wait wait wait wait. I don't want to get whipped, flogged, and crucified here. I'm just going to tell you something that may stop this. I'm a Roman citizen." And we know, we've already read it, it worked, right? The centurion goes, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, we can't do this. Is this guy really a Roman citizen?" The tribune comes down and asks, "Are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am." And they backed off. Nope, can't. Hands off. Paul does that. Paul does that.

Now, I said that he had the Roman citizenship, a God thing, right? That he was in custody and was taken away from the violent mob, a God thing. If I look at this and I read this just from a human perspective this is a Paul thing now. Paul, I'm like, good job, I'm watching the movie. Great. So glad you thought of that. You got out of that whipping right there. It's a Paul



thing. Well, we know it's a God thing ultimately that he had it. But Paul is not passively just riding down the highway of life saying, well, God's going to do what he's going to do. Paul's going to figure out what to do, he's going to think. You know, think, man. Think. Get out of this mess. I'm a Roman citizen, this shouldn't be happening. I'm going to tell him and he tells him. Maybe a small thing in the text, but it's a huge thing. A huge thing that he's thinking. He is, as the first word of the second point says, strategizing. Why? Because he's thinking in his own mind, I don't think it should end here. I don't think God's done with me yet. I think there's more to come. I think there's another day to live on here, and I don't want it to stop now.

Let's put it this way. Number two, "Strategize to Finish the Course." You want to finish the course. Here's the problem. You don't know when it is. And Paul didn't know exactly when it is. But here's what he saw in his own mind's eye when there was something that might snuff his life out. How can I get out of this? And if you get diagnosed with cancer this week, if you have some bad thing happen that may just destroy your life, you ought to say, how can I get out of this? Here's the mindset I want you to have. I don't think God's finished with me yet. That should be the default thinking in your mind. I don't think God's finished with me yet. Now, there will be a day when you get to Second Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 7 and you'll say, I think God is finished at this point and I have finished the race. But I don't think that that should be the default thinking of your life. Even Paul, when he started to toy with that concept in Philippians Chapter 1, I think maybe this is the end. He's in prison. He's been threatened with execution and he says, wow, to die, hmmm, gain, that would be gain, that would be gain. It would be far better to die. Then he stops himself. What does he say Sunday school grads? Yeah. To live on in the flesh that would mean fruitful labor for me. I don't know which one to choose, because it'd be a lot better to see Christ, get to the end. I will move from justification to glorification. It'd be great to be done. But to live on in the flesh it will mean fruitful labor. And then he turns, you see it turn in the middle of Chapter 1 of Philippians. You know what? I'm confident I'm going to get out of here. I don't think God's done with me yet. I think your prayers and all the things that are going on, I'm going to be delivered. I'm going to move forward in this. That is a positive attitude about I think God has more for me to do.

And even if you're watching, you're sitting here watching on the stream and you're in your bed and they say you're going to die in that bed, you're on your deathbed, I just want you to know if the synapses of your brain are still firing to decode my speedy words from the pulpit this morning, I think you can know this, God's not done with you quite yet, right? Not quite yet. And maybe you'll die tomorrow. But I think you need to be thinking, I don't think God's done with me yet. And therefore, what are the good works God would have me walk in today. I need to walk in those. You know I can't do much, right? I can't go to the Fix-It ministry this Saturday. But you know what I can do? I can pray, I can intercede, I can worship God, I can glorify God, I can say a good word of encouragement to people who come to see me. There's so much we can do to continue on to say I don't think God is done with me yet. Strategize how to get there. How do I get through this jam? We don't give up. We don't lay down. We don't fall apart like, oh, it's over, it's over. It may not be over. We shouldn't think that way. Even when Paul was tempted because of his theology about how good it would be to be done, he said no, putting that aside, I think tomorrow should come. I'm going to keep on strategizing to get out. And he does that here.

Turn with me to Matthew Chapter 10. A very jarring illustration Jesus uses which he's not afraid to do, very bold in his illustrations, and here's one that he enlists that is shocker. The first part I get, the first phrase of Chapter 10 verse 16 I get. It's the second part that makes people's heads spin. If you were listening to it for the first time, it should. Let's start this, verse 16. Jesus says, "Behold, I'm sending you," all of his disciples, "out as sheep in the midst of wolves." Now there's a comma there, but let's just consider a period there for a second. That would be like totally like Amen. There it is, all these guys, we're like sheep, they're going to slaughter us. They're mean. They don't like us. They hated you. They're going to hate us. And we even think about Jesus. He was the sheep led before his shearers is silent. So Jesus, he was silent before his shearers. It's like he didn't open his mouth. I mean, that's the picture of like the sheep going to the slaughter. And you can start to think like that.

Now Jesus had to do that because all he had to do was say something and 10,000 angels would come and slaughter the whole pretorian guard, would slaughter all the Romans who wanted to execute him and slaughter all of the Sanhedrin. But he doesn't. He sacrifices his life. That's not how I'm supposed to live, right? I know that because of the next line. I know I'm not passive just saying, "Well, looks like it's the end. The mob wants to kill me. Well, throw the rocks here." That's not what he does, right? He's just whisked away, which was God's providential protection. But next, it's like, I guess I'm going to get flogged. I may get crucified, but instead he goes, no, no, no, no no, no, no, wait a minute. Let's think about my Roman citizenship. He's going to strategize to get out of it. And that's what comes next in this. He says "Be as wise," which is the word also translated elsewhere, even in the English Standard Version, it's translated "shrewd." "Be as shrewd as serpents." You do know what a serpent is, right? He's comparing us to a snake. I want you to be like snakes. Be shrewd like snakes. That's not on any Dayspring card, I don't think. Right? It's just like that just doesn't work for me. Because I know what Genesis 3 says that Satan himself was cursed to in this human form, however he was depicting himself in the garden. It was beautiful. It was great. It was something that Eve wanted to have a conversation with. But when it was done, he was turned into a snake and the snake slithered away. And that was the picture of cursing. And God has put an enmity, certainly between all of us and snakes. You don't like snakes. You shouldn't like snakes. If you like snakes you're weird, right? Snakes should gross you out like a black widow spider should gross you out, and they're slithering.

Satan is compared to a snake and all of a sudden now I'm supposed to be like a snake. Be wise like a snake. Now he's going to extract all the bad from it. Which is not, by the way, just Hebrew literature. This is also in the Greco-Roman world in which these words were given. I mean, you know, in Greco and Roman mythology, the snake, Medusa with the snake hair and Python and Typhon and all of the gods who were snakes were all monsters. In this culture this was a monstrous kind of analogy. And he's saying, be like those snakes right there. They're striking out, like so quick and they're so accurate, and they are just so cunning and crafty and all that. Be like a snake, be a shrewd like a snake. But he extracts all the bad, and he says, and as "innocent as doves." So he is wanting me to be like a snake but how? Well, all the stuff except the bad stuff, the morally bad stuff. Which means you need to think, you need to be strategic, you need to be shrewd, you need to be wise, you need to think about



every situation. And we know the context, verse 17, "You're going to be delivered over to courts, you're going to be flogged in synagogues, you're going to be dragged away before governors and kings." All this. Beware, be careful, be smart, be like a snake.

You know when Jesus was going to be flogged long before the Romans got him, when he was going to be stoned and thrown off a cliff. Think of the beginning of his ministry in Nazareth. He reads the scroll in the synagogue, and he gets taken out to the edge of town, and they're going to throw him over the cliff and kill him. Do you remember what happens there early in his ministry? It says he slipped away. He slithered away. He got through the crowds and he found his way out, it happens in Luke 4, it happens in John 10, it happens in the gospel of Luke. I can think of three times right now where Jesus just slips away. He escapes. They want to kill him and he gets out of it. He doesn't say, well, I guess my time has come. Now he's the Son of God, he knows all the time stuff, right? He knows about his earthly ministry. I don't know, but I should have the default. I'm going to strategize to get through this, whatever it is. Why? Because my default thinking should be God's not done with me yet. Illness, sickness, lawsuit, you know, threatening something that's going to shut me down. I'm going to see all of this opposition as God, is there a way I can get out of this? Is there a way for me to strategize through this? That's being shrewd. It's being wise. It's being cunning. It's having strategy. It's striking at the right minute. It's responding in the right way. It's doing all I can to get through this. This is a godly mindset, even though it seems so weird, right?

Hebrews Chapter 12. Jesus was that way. We're to be that way. All of it's going to mean that we're going to have to work through some hard things and work our way through it. We can't always just slither out of it. Sometimes we're going to have to fight. Sometimes the fangs are going to have to come out. Sometimes we're going to have to power through stuff that we don't like. And I just want you to know everybody listed in Chapter 11 of Hebrews, even though they're imperfect, they were all set up as models of people who trusted God and got through some really hard times. From infertility to people wanting to kill them, to the martyrs of the Old Testament who were actually sawn in half. All these pictures of the people of the Old Testament are now called a great cloud of witnesses in verse 1 of Chapter 12. And he says, we're surrounded by people shrewdly working through their situations, doing the best they could, trusting God and getting through their lives the on course that was set for them. He says, "Since we're surrounded," verse 1 Chapter 12, "by so great a cloud of witnesses," testifying to God's faithfulness, "let us lay aside every weight," whatever it is that's holding us back, "let us lay aside every sin that clings so closely, and let us run with endurance." It's going to be hard. Feels like an obstacle course. "Run with endurance the race that is set before us."

There's the keyword "us." Before us. They had their course. We got our course. And now, 2,000 years later, we in the 21st century have our own course in wacky Southern California. We have a course set before us. Now, as we do this, as we power through it, endurance, "Hypomonēs," as we struggle, and to remain under the pressure of all this and get through it with a constant optimism that we want to push through this, we got to look to Jesus as the example, as the template. He's "the founder and perfecter of our faith," he's the reason I can trust God, he's the reason I do trust God, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the



cross." Now what was the joy set before him? It certainly wasn't the cross. It was the final phrase in verse 2 that one day he knew as he prayed in John 17, he would be glorified and "He would be seated at the right hand of the throne of God." And I know that's true for me the book of Revelation says. I will be the one who sits on HIS throne and rules with him. I will be glorified one day. I will be exalted one day in God's kingdom, and you will too. If you've been justified, you'll be glorified. And the Bible says, we ought to have that joy set before us so that we can go through everything between now and the day that our last day is designed for us. We're supposed to endure our own cross.

He endured his cross and here's a great phrase "despising the shame." How shameful was it to die on a Roman cross outside the city walls of Jerusalem where people rode by, drove by on their donkeys, brought their carts? They went walking out of the streets of Jerusalem into the outside of the gates looking at people hoisted up on crosses being executed. And how shameful was it to be naked, completely naked? It was not like the Renaissance paintings where they were just carefully covered. They were completely naked. The only thing covering Christ's naked body was the blood that was flowing from his head and his brow and the things that were coming out of his side. That was all he was dressed in as he was shamefully crucified. Now Jesus knew that was coming but he looked beyond it to the finish line. This is how the sermon started. We have to look to the finish line and endure this. We have to despise, "Kataphroneō." We have to "Kato" is "down," "Phroneō" is "to think," we need to think "down" on the shame. Because the other thing at the end is so much better.

This is the Romans 8:18 reality, right? That the glory that is to be revealed to us is so much greater than the shame in the course. I'm going to endure it no matter what it is, financial problems, legal problems, relational problems, physical problems, whatever, I'm going to endure, I'm going to think less of that than I think of the goal. Because I'm going to get to the end of this and I want to be able to say, "I fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith," and now the crown of glory, it's right there. I want to finish this race well by strategizing every step of the way to power through this. And to do that, I've got to, verse 3, "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility." Don't lose heart, guys. Look at him. Don't grow weary, and don't be faint-hearted. That's the listlessness. That's the lethargy. That's languishing day by day. Stop it. You're not on a treadmill. You're not. Right? We are on a road and we're working through every checkpoint and we're moving from our own justification to our glorification. And it'll be a day at a time. It'll be a month at a time. It'll be a year at a time. I don't know when it's done for you. I don't know when it's done for me. But I'm going to keep plugging away because I have to. I have to strategize to finish the course and I want to get there. I want to do the best I can to get to the finish line to be able to say I finished my course. Paul's doing it by pulling out his Roman citizenship at just the right time. So much more I wanted to say on this at least jot it down, Ephesians Chapter 6. Great passage about how I stand firm against the schemes of the devil. He'd like to make me be dead. He'd like to stop me from bearing fruit. He'd like to somehow finish me instead of me finishing the course. And the way to do it in that passage is all the daily disciplines of the Christian life. Go through the armor of God afresh, and know that all of that is so that you will do everything you can to stand firm. That's the key. Power through this.



Back to our passage. Verse 30th may seem like a throwaway text. It's just a transition to Chapter 23. But I just love the first words here. "But on the next day." Now it's the leader of the Romans saying, "Desiring to know the real reason why he is being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet." So he's calling the Jews which he has ultimate authority over because he bears the sword. You guys are going to have a Supreme Court meeting. You guys all meet, right? And then we're going to have this Paul guy who's causing such a mess, he's going to come and testify before you because he's a Roman citizen. I can't beat it out of him. You guys, you go hear him out. We're going to send ears on the ground. We're going to hear what's going on. We're going to find out what's happening. But you guys convene and you listen to him. And so Chapter 23, "Looking intently at the council. Paul says, 'Brothers, I've lived my life before God,'" and here we get another day for him to preach. He's going to speak and testify to who he is "on the next day." I just love that.

I'm thinking about the day before. You were almost killed. You were almost whipped. Who knows? You thought you might be crucified. Who knows what you thought was going to happen? But now you wake up and they say, we've called a Supreme Court meeting and you're the speaker. Your turn. It's like, wow, okay. Right? I got through all of those checkpoints. Now I got a new day. I got to face this day. I just love that. That's so key. We got to think about if you're here, you're here because God has let you be here. You got another day. Yesterday was not the last day on your calendar, right? God has a calendar. You have a day set for you that wasn't yesterday. And it's not today, at least up to this point. So you got to worry about what's going on now, today. What is the thing God has you do today? Whatever it is you need to know this. You need to trust God to provide for today. And that should be your assignment and your focus. Number three, "Trust God for Today's Challenges," whatever they are. You got a set of things you got to do today? Get to it today.

Now, when I say today I don't mean 24 hours. I mean like what's right in front of you. Let me prove that to you by turning you to Matthew Chapter 6. And it's important that we get this short view of the things that I should be concerned about. Matthew Chapter 6. Now, remember Jesus teaches us to pray and here's how he teaches us to pray. He says you should pray this. "Give us this day," this day, "our daily bread." That's like you couldn't miss it, right? It's not give us this week our basket full of Costco supplies for the next two weeks. Right? No. "Give us this day our daily bread." Which is illustrated by the manna. You got just enough food for today. Now, that was a 24-hour period. But he's wanting us to get focused on, like, deal with today. And then he gets to the end of this passage. So many people are worried about so many things. And the word anxiety. I always like to mention the word it comes from the Greek word "to divide" or "to cut in half," "Merizomai." And to say your mind is cut in half I like to say is your scatterbrained. Your brain is scattered everywhere. Because I don't want you to be scatterbrained. I want you to be focused. Right? And you need to be focused, like the prayer would lead us to believe, on each day. Focus on each day. "Give us this day our daily bread." All right? Focus on what you got right in front of you. Tackle today's challenges. Paul's got a new challenge, waking up, unbound, going now to speak and he's going to go tackle that challenge. We got to tackle the challenge of today. And he says don't worry.

Take a look at the bottom of this chapter. Let's start in verse 30, Matthew 6:30. He's talking about all the people worried about what they're going to wear. He says, "If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven." Now, how long does grass in the field last? 24 hours? No. This is like right now. It doesn't last long. Tomorrow, though it's thrown in the fire. "Will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? You worried about, you know, you're a prepper. You got to get everything ready for, you know, you surviving for the next 20 years after the bomb is dropped or whatever. He says, don't. These people, he could have told them the Romans are going to come in and destroy everything and it's going to be bad. You got to start prepping and preparing, right? No, no, no, today, worry about today. Focus on now. You need to trust God for now. "Therefore do not be anxious." There's our word. Don't be a scatterbrain. Right? "What you're going to eat?' or 'What you're going to drink?' or 'What you're going to wear?'" The Gentiles, man, talk about savings plans and retirement. They're all about that. "Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows" you're going to need food a month from now. If you're still alive, he knows you're going to need that. He knows you're going to need a place to live in ten years, if you're even here in ten years. He knows all of that. "He knows you need it all" but what he wants, here's a contrasted conjunction, verse 33, "But," here's what he wants, "Seek first," first and foremost, right now on your agenda, "the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Right?

He has a series of "Good works," Ephesians 2:10, that are laid out for me, "prepared beforehand, he wants me to walk in those." These are Kingdom priorities. How can I in my job this week make a difference? "Today" is not one 24-hour day. It's like right now, right in the forefield of my life. What can I do now? How am I going to glorify God in my relationships, in my home, in my parenting like right now, today? I've got to trust God for that. He says, I want you to seek the kingdom of God. All the other stuff if you're even alive then, he'll take care of that. He wants his kids focused on the now-priorities of what's next. Now verse 34, "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow," down the road, "for tomorrow will be anxious for itself." Great play on words, like what? Tomorrow is not anxious. Right? But what he's saying? Well, here's what he's saying. Next line, "Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." You can't even imagine and manage the stuff that's coming next week. Just focus on right now, what's right in front of you. You've got to deal with the challenges of today. And where do we go? We go to the one who's got the answers. It's like Nehemiah. Nehemiah gets asked the question by the king. You're face looks down. What's bothering you? And it says Nehemiah prayed to the Lord. He knows where his daily bread is coming from. Right? And then he answers. He looks to the place where he knows what matters most is what God is going to provide. And so he said, I want to fulfill the good works God has prepared for me. And for Nehemiah it was to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. And he prays and God opens the door. He provides the words to say.

I had you there in Matthew 10. One last passage. Turn to Matthew 10 one more time. We stopped in verse 18, right? Verse 16, you got to be like snakes. You got to think strategically. You got to beware of people, because all these bad things like John 16:33 says, "In this world you will have all kinds of trouble." "You will be dragged before governors," verse 18. But we



didn't get to verse 19 but here it is now. "When they deliver you over," here it is again, "do not be anxious about how you are to speak." You can't think now because for them it was years away when he said this. Don't think now about how you're going to speak. Don't start preparing a book of notes to use when you're dragged before the proconsul. Don't think that way. "Don't be anxious about what you are to say." You know what? "For what you are to say is going to be given to you in that hour." When you get to it that day, that hour, that week, that time. "For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." I know that what I need is for God to provide me the wisdom to tackle the challenges that are right in front of me. We look to God and we say, God, what's next? And for Paul, it was standing before the Sanhedrin.

We're going to study as we move through this passage now, what he says and the wisdom God gave him. But he wasn't sitting here prepping this week in advance. And it's not that God's not into planning. God's into planning. Jesus told parables about the virgins having oil. They need a plan. And of course we need some plans. You should have some insurance. You should have some savings. Fine. But it's about your mind, merizomai, not being scatterbrained because you're so anxious about the future. God has a timetable for you. It starts and it finishes. In the big scheme of things, it's very short. I want you to consider that. On the timeline your life started and it's going to end. It's like those drag strips, right? You're going to move down this pathway. You're going to move from one starting line to the finish line. And I know there are cycles. It's like the wheels on the dragster. It just spins and spins and spins, day after day, week after week, month after month. But you're going to get to the finish line. When you get to the finish line you're going to be into all that we got saved for, the whole point of it all, to "enter into his kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world." I just want you not to lose heart. I want you to endure.

The doctrine that we see, think about this, of God saying, I'm going to keep you to the end is then complemented in the second point that YOU had better endure. YOU better work hard. YOU better strategize to hang on to the end. And so it is in this third point. We have this concept of today's challenges. I don't know what they are. God says he's going to give me what's needed, but I'm going to look to him and say God tell me what is needed. Give me what is needed. Provide what I need to get through this. My prayer is that when we finish this life whenever it's done, if it's done for you in a week, a month, two years, ten years, some of you live, who knows how long you'll live from this sermon forward. I just want you to get to that Second Timothy Chapter 4 verse 7 reality. I'm going to say "I finished the race," the race that was set before me. And to get from here to there you'll need the word that we saw in Hebrews Chapter 12 verse 2. You'll need to endure. Endurance. You got to be able to endure. God promises he will get you there. You hang on. You lean into this. You pray. You trust him for what's next, what's next for you. I pray God will provide.

Let's pray. God, I pray for these people the truth of Colossians Chapter 1. That they would walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord, they would please you. In Christ that they would bear fruit in every good work, that they would increase all the while in the knowledge of God, that they would be strengthened with all power according to your glorious might, with all the endurance and patience and joy that you say we can have as we work our way from today to



the finish line. Let us constantly be thinking, you're not done with me yet. I'm going to continue to work and push forward. I want to glorify you, I want to do what's right. I want to do the things that you call me to do to make this world different. To represent you to the lost. To stand up for what you would have me stand up for God. Just get us through it all despite the opposition as you get us across the finish line one day, whenever that is for us. God, thanks just for this reminder that you are a God who is good and faithful to take us to the end, that we might stand before you blameless one day because of the work of Christ.

In whose name we pray. Amen.