



## **How God Works in You – Part 7**

### **The Callings and Purposes of God**

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Well, now that football season is over the champions will bask in the glory of their win. They get a big golden ring. They get a really nice fat bonus check. They get a big parade. They get the admiration of young pop stars. They get, you know, free meals all over Kansas City. They really are getting to enjoy the fruits of their labor. And their labor is a lot if you think about it. Take these guys all the way back to Pop Warner football or whatever they were involved in early on. And just all the years, all the years of training, all the years of being in the gym, all the, you know, the workouts, all the injuries, the bruises, the broken bones, the knee injuries, the surgeries, not to mention the busses and the planes and the hotels and just all they go through. People who criticize them online because they become more and more popular and in the public eye, the boos of the crowd. I mean, they go through so much, and then they now have all that in the rearview mirror as they enjoy the victory that they have earned.

The pathway is really painful, but the payoff is really nice. And that's a good way to not only summarize people who achieve really well in their field, but it certainly is a good summary of the Christian life. Matter of fact, that's how Jesus depicts it for us. It's a hard road that leads to life, and life is good, and it's a nice payoff when we get there. But between here and there it's going to be a challenge. It is a race that is set before us according to Hebrews Chapter 12 that you're supposed to run with endurance and you're supposed to follow our quarterback who was, for the joy set before him on the other side of the cross, he was going to look at the crown on the other side and despise the pain, the shame and the trouble and all that it took to get to where he was going. And in that verse in Hebrews Chapter 12 verse 2, it means he's going to end up seated at the right hand of the throne of God. I mean, this is like the ultimate exaltation. This pattern is everywhere in Scripture that the road is hard and yet the payoff is great. And I know just like football players who at some point in the arduous journey think what am I doing? Why am I doing this? They feel like quitting. And knowing as a pastor many Christians who think I don't know why I'm doing this, so much deprivation, so much sacrifice and giving and serving and just saying no to sin and temptation. I could just give it all up, live like my non-Christian next-door neighbors and it would be so much easier. And yet, there's a payoff that God would have us keep firmly in view in our minds.

As we have been studying the book of Acts, we've gotten to this section of Paul's life in Acts 22 and 23 where he is going through a lot in the difficult path that God has laid out for him. It's arduous. It's painful, there's a lot of persecution, a lot of difficulty. And he says something in the middle of this speech that he's giving to the Sanhedrin here in Acts 23 that summarizes the whole of the Christian life really in six words in our English text. And I want you to look at this. I'd like us to fixate on this today and be able to come out of this, not just seeing and admiring Paul's strategy in getting out of another jam, but as he summarizes what I think is rightly how we should think about all of our Christian life. We can come away, I hope, motivated to do what he did, and that is to traverse whatever challenges God has laid before us.



So take your Bibles and turn to Acts 23, if you haven't already, and let's look at verses 6 through 10 as we continue this scene where Paul is right here on the Temple Mount. First, it's the mob on the Temple Mount, then he's dragged into Antonia's Fortress where they're about to whip him and get information out of him, because they can't understand why Paul's such a polarizing figure. Paul pulled out his Roman citizenship card you might remember a couple of weeks ago and he says, hey, wait a minute, I'm a Roman citizen, I haven't had a trial here. He gets out of that jam. The leader of the Romans there ends up sending him over to the Sanhedrin, which is a top Jewish class of leaders and lawmakers and law enforcers, at least to the extent that they were able to do that in the first century. And he's standing there and as we saw last time he corrects himself from saying something about the chief priest. He didn't know he was the high priest. And in all of that we took a few observations last time we were together looking at this passage, and we learned about how God is at work in us in our sanctification.

Well, I would like to see God at work in us as it relates to the goal of the Christian life that he lays out in these few words in the middle of his response. Now, there's a lot going on here in the passage. Let's read it with a little comment and see if we can't come away encouraged and strengthened here this morning. Follow along as I read it for you from the English Standard Version, beginning in verse 6, Acts 23 verse 6. "Now when Paul perceived that one part," of the Sanhedrin now, "were Sadducees and the other Pharisees," the 70 ruling leaders of Israel, and in that there's a polarization of two parties, two groups, the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

And what Paul is perceiving here is that he can do something with the distinction among them that might get him out of the jam that he's in. And so he raises his voice, "he cries out in this council," and he says, "Brothers, I'm a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee." So he starts to align himself with one group. Now, of course, he's not aligned with that group completely. The Pharisees were all about wanting to kill him and certainly they had just crucified Christ not many years ago. And they didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah and they're mad at Paul because he's promoting Christ, this Jewish itinerant rabbi from Nazareth, as the King of kings and Lord of lords. So he's not in alignment with them, but he knows there's something about his theology that does match the Pharisees' theology. And he's about to pit them against the Sadducees when he says, "It is with respect to," now here are the words, "the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I'm on trial." And when you think about that, that's a good summation of the whole Christian life, right? It is the hope and the resurrection of the dead.

It is also really the key and most prominent topic in the preaching of the apostles in the book of Acts regarding the life of Christ, and that is that he was raised from the dead. This dead Messiah is now alive. And that's huge. It's all over the book of Acts. It's an important preaching feature and it's important for us to recognize that, of course, historically we look at the resurrection of Christ and that's key. As Paul summarizes the gospel in First Corinthians 15, he says, this is it. I mean, it's about Christ coming, dying for our sins and rising from the dead according to the Scriptures. I mean, this is essential. It's central. It's the central tenant of the gospel. But as he goes on to say in First Corinthians 15, it's not just because we worship



a resurrected Messiah. It's because that resurrection is the template and the prototype for our own resurrection which is the whole point. It is the whole point.

Now, if you've been around my preaching very long at all, I hope that you are used to me saying something that maybe is a bit of a counterbalance to the culture that we're in, the Christian culture that we're in. But I'm trying to shift our thinking as much as possible to the next life. It's about the "then and there," as I often say, it's not about the "here and now." And if we don't really recognize that salvation is all about us looking forward to the coming of a kingdom then we will miss the whole point of why we were saved. To be saved from the penalty of our sin is for us to rightly relate to the God who made us, to have our sins forgiven. But that's not the end. It's not a period. It's a comma. And now I say, ah, I am now ready and qualified "to share in the inheritance in the saints in light." I am ready now for the coming Kingdom. I can pray every day, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." That's what I want. I want the coming kingdom. I want to cry out with the early Church, Maranatha! I want this thing to be realized. I want, to use the words from the book of Acts and the preaching of the book of Acts, I want the "times of refreshing to come" from heaven. I want God to bring his Son back. I want Acts Chapter 1, as he left, I want him to return. I want Christ to set up his Kingdom. I want, as Matthew 25 says, him to return in the clouds in glory with the angels, and come and establish his kingdom, and say to those on his right, "enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

It goes back to Genesis Chapter 3, when everything went wrong in Genesis 3. The promise was there, and that is that one day from the seed of the woman there would be one who would bloody the head of the tempter and all that went wrong here in the Garden will be made right. And God isn't going to just pick up where we left off in the Garden. He's going to bring in a city where the architect and the builder is the God of the universe who said this is the way humanity should have worked out. And he's going to bring us a kingdom and the kingdom's going to be led by the king, and it's going to be his incarnate Son. Everything about Christianity is forward-looking, and anything that is not forward-looking in our Christianity is the error of the prosperity gospel in one iteration or another. We're always looking to how can we make everything "here and now" seem to reflect the values of the Christian life that I want. I want all these things now. We call it in theology an over-realized eschatology. We want the end things that God promised for the next life we want them now.

Now, is there some transference? Is there some sense in which we can have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness here in the present existence of our Christian life? Well, sure. But all of it is "seeing through a glass dimly." All of it is with an aching heart for the coming of Christ. And when Paul says, really, "I'm on trial here because of the hope and the resurrection of the dead." Well that's true not only historically in the life of Christ, which was just a few years prior, but also in our future. We are all about the hope of eternal life. The only reason I'm sharing the gospel with people is so that they will get ready for the return of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Kingdom. That's the whole focus of the Christian life, and it should be our focus. And Paul summarizes it well.



Now, all of that is laden here in the context of him, again, wisely trying to say, how can I get out of this jam? How can I live on to live out another day of doing what I'm called to do, and that is to bring the gospel to the Gentiles? And so when he says that what happened is exactly what I think he anticipated would happen. He aligns himself with the Pharisees and their view of the afterlife. Verse 7, "And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided." Now Luke, the writer of Acts, adds here in verse 8 some understanding for those who may have not known in the first century what we have going on in a Jewish context in Jerusalem are two parties, one that's liberal, if you will. They no longer believe in the supernatural. They're religious. They try to hold to a cultural Judaism but they don't believe that God, the God who created us, is stepping into time and space to do anything in his creation. They're much like the deists of the early founding of this country that God kind of worked things out, wound it up, and then stepped away and walked away from it all. That's not what the Pharisees believed. And as he says here in verse 8, it's the "Sadducees who say there is no resurrection, there's no angel, there's no spirit," there's nothing beyond what you can see. They're materialists. They believe in what's right in front of them.

"But the Pharisees they acknowledge them all." We know there's an afterlife. We know there are things beyond what we can see. We know there's spirit within man, and we know that there is even a whole class of individuals called angels and demons who are spirit beings who exist outside of our domain. All of that, they affirm. Verse 9, "There was a great clamor that arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up, and they contended sharply, 'We find nothing wrong with this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?'" You see the genius of this, right? You got this conservative and you got this liberal group. You have those who believe in the supernatural and those who don't believe in the supernatural. And Paul aligns with the supernatural believers. Right?

And he says this is really about my belief in the afterlife and the resurrection. And then they start fighting with each other, and now they're starting to stand up for Paul even though they wanted to kill him just verses earlier and so he gets out of this jam. "A great clamor arose," verse 9, "and some of the scribes of the Pharisee' party, they contended sharply and said, 'We find nothing wrong with this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?' When the dissension became violent," they were fighting now each other, "the tribune," who had eyes on the ground, they were going to watch what happened here in this trial of Paul, "they were afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them. So they commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks." So Paul lives on, and Paul continues, and he gets through this very contentious situation and saves his own skin. And that's great. Very wise, very smart. But at the core of it is a statement about the afterlife, one that should really have a controlled sway in our own minds and something that should make a difference in our lives.

So let's think this through for just a minute this morning and think through what the implications of this might be, and I hope to change your perspective so you never become a Sadducee. The hope of the afterlife. I hope I wouldn't even need to go into the Old Testament teaching about the afterlife. It's not as rich, prominent, or on every page of the Old Testament



like it is in the New Testament. But clearly Isaiah 66, the person who believes the truth of the Scriptures believed that there was a new world coming. Here was the promise of Isaiah 66 which sounds a lot like Revelation 21 and 22. There's a "new heaven and a new earth that is going to be created by God." There is an afterlife and to speak of our existence after life, Daniel Chapter 12 said, there are going to be people raised from the "dust of the earth," they're going to be brought to life, "some to glory and some to shame." The resurrection of both the just and the unjust as we'll see later in the book of Acts. We have a resurrection and a life after death. Plenty of passages in Isaiah, the book of Job, plenty of things that speak to the reality that you are not just material stuff that when your material body stops working you're done and you cease to exist. You exist beyond this life. And the Bible has asserted that from the beginning.

We're saying the same thing about the Christian life and let me show you really the apex of how it's stated in the New Testament, Romans Chapter 8. Let's turn to Romans Chapter 8 in the middle of this chapter which is really about Christians who are suffering and struggling under the persecution of all that's going on in the early Church for the Christians in Rome. Romans Chapter 8 verse 18, one of my favorite verses in all of the Bible. Verse 18, "I consider that the sufferings of this present age." By the way, does anybody have any of that going on? Any sufferings in the present age? This epic that you're in? Anything? Maybe a hacking cough when you're trying to preach, I don't know. Are there things going on in your life that you wish weren't going on? You got some pains. You got some financial trouble. You got some relation troubles, legal troubles. That the things happening you think I wish the world weren't this way. Okay. All of us have them. And to one extent or another, and I don't know where you're at if I were to graph everybody in the room. But some people are really under the crush of the sufferings of this present age. Okay?

And this passage would say, "They're not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Now the problem with the word "glory" as I often say, it's a Bible word, it's a church word. It's a word that we struggle to define, it's a big word. It's one of those words where so much is trying to be stuffed into this one word that we translate glory, the Old Testament word "Kabob." The focus of that word is the weightiness or the gravity or the importance. It's so important. It's so weighty. It translates glory in the Old Testament. In the New Testament the word that is translated from New Testament Greek is the word "Doxa," which is the word that often in extra-biblical language takes on the idea of something brilliant or bright or something, you know, shiny. And so you have something when you put those concepts together something with so much gravitas, so much weight, so much greatness, so much importance that it's just like shining. It's like, ahhh, that's the idea of glory. And when you talk about glory in the Bible it usually is talking either about the present reality of God being glorious while this earth is being dark and sin-laden, OR what we're all going to experience one day when the glory of God comes and dwells among men on a new earth. That reality is the glory of what we hope for. And here it is in this particular context giving us that sense.

We have suffering in the present epic, we have another epic to come, the new heaven and the new earth, where glory will be there, the shining greatness of all that God designed for us





to experience. It's all going to be there. It's going to be revealed to us, and it's going to be like in Matthew 25, "enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." This will be a great day as Christ comes in glory, a great word, "for the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." Now that's a weird statement because, you know, if you're going to put your ear against a tree and say how are you feeling today? Do you hear anything? Do you need help? The tree's not going to say anything to you. But if you're a botanist or, you know, you study creation and you study even, you know, maybe you're a physician or a biologist, you study the created order, I can tell you this: it's going to say something to you and that is it's messed up. Things don't work the way they're supposed to. It works well enough, relatively, to make things happen, like the oxygenate, you know, the planet so that we can breathe oxygen in our lungs, but our lungs don't work right. We've got pulmonary doctors here, we got people that study all kinds of things that remind us that the creation itself is not perfect.

And according to this passage, what creation, in its personified state, is longing for something. "It's longing," for the children of God, "the sons of God to be glorified." That's why the resurrection really is the hinge of everything from the Garden forward. The idea is we need to get out of this life and we need to put on immortality in the next life, right? "The mortal has to put on immortality. The perishable has to put on the imperishable." So everything in the perishable order is broken and God is going to fix it and the brokenness of the created order is waiting for God to say, now my children are going to enter into glory. When they enter into glory, into the greatness of all that I design things to be, we go from a Garden to a city where God says, all of this is going to work out the way it's supposed to, then all creation is going to be finely everything works right. Everything at an atomic level, everything at a cellular level. Everything's going to work the way it's supposed to work. And it can't wait, so to speak. "It eagerly longs for the revealing of the sons of God." Why? "Because creation itself," verse 20, "was subjected to futility." All it takes is studying creation at some level, whatever it might be, any material aspect of creation, you'll see it's futile at some level. "Not willingly," it didn't want to as though it had a want, "but because of him," God, "who subjected it." But he subjected it, two words, "in hope." In hope.

The whole point wasn't just you guys are sinners in Genesis 3 so you get a messed-up world. God didn't walk back, stuck his hands in his pockets and said, that's what you get for being morally rebellious. God said, I'm going to mess up the world that you're going to live in. I'm going to mess up your bodies that you're living in. I'm going to mess up the Garden that you're living in. I'm going to kick you out of the Garden into the desert of this world, so to speak. Right? But I'm doing it all in hope. Because one day from the seed of a woman will come one who will redeem and reverse all of this, crush the tempter's head, bloody his head, and we will move forward into a new creation. This is the whole concept of the Bible. It's all looking forward. And the Bible says here that it's waiting in hope for that, verse 21, "that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption, and obtain the freedom of," there's our word again, "the glory of the children of God." I love that because at the apex of this whole thing, the cherry on the top of the cake, is the people. That's you and me, right? That we will be glorified.



That takes the resurrection of the body. We need to be glorified. God is going to do that and when that happens we've reached the apex of all history. It's all linear heading toward this. "For we know," verse 22, "that the whole creation has been groaning together in pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of the body." And my concern today is do we really do that? I mean, if I said, let's measure your life against that right there. That we like the creation that wants everything to be made right, that you groan inwardly waiting for your adoption as sons. Some say, "I thought I was adopted." You're only legally adopted. You're still in the orphanage, right? You're still living here in the orphanage. Are you a child of God? Yes, child of God. But he's going to take you out of this world, out of the fallenness of this world and he's going to put you in a new world, in a new body, in a new place. And he's going to bring the greatness of the glory of his Son and he's going to come and he's going to lead this place. That is the hope of the Christian life. And you ought to set your hope there.

And I know that's an old phrase, but that's why I added the word "truly" to the first point. You need to write this down and make sure it's true of you. Number one. You need to "Truly Set Your Hope on the Next Life." And you ought to, as this passage says, you ought to groan and you ought to longingly, eagerly await. Think about that. There are a lot of people waiting eagerly for things in this room right now. You're waiting for a wedding, or you're waiting for a baby, or you're waiting for a date, I don't know. You're waiting for a house. You're waiting for a retirement. You're waiting for a graduation. You're waiting for whatever you're waiting for. And you groan because you're not there yet. You want to be there. And I'm saying whatever you're groaning and waiting for, you better have at the top of that list, the very, very apex of that list ought to be that you're waiting for the next life. That changes everything because that's really the essence of the Christian life that you were saved in hope for that.

Let's just keep reading. It goes on to say that. Verse 24, "It is in this hope," what? That you will be redeemed, your bodies will be redeemed, that the world will be redeemed when your bodies are redeemed, "in hope you were saved. Now the hope that is seen is not hope." It wouldn't be called hope if you already have it. "For who hopes for what he sees?" Every prosperity gospel or every evangelical who kind of puts a foot in the prosperity gospel world who tries to convince people in churches all across America today, and it's easy to do in the first world in economically peaceful times, right? People can kind of convince people that this is the Christian life. Become a Christian, everything will get better. You have peace and love and joy, and we'll all get along together and sing songs and people think well that's Christian. That's not Christianity. And of course, those things will be true but it will not be all that God has designed for us or promised to us. He's promised a new world, a new life, and we ought to set our hope firmly on that, because we're saved in hope.

If we had it, it wouldn't be hope. It says, "For who hopes for what he sees?" Verse 25, "But if we hope for what we do not see," and that's the challenge. It is easy for you to hope for a baby because you've seen babies be born and make families happy. You've seen people get jobs and it makes people happy. You've seen people get raises. You've seen people buy houses. You've seen people get new cars. Whatever it is that you're hoping for you think,



well, that's what I want, but you got to hope for what you cannot see. And what you cannot see is what's explained and laid out in Scripture about the coming kingdom, the thing you ought to be praying for every single day. God, your kingdom come. I want your kingdom to come. If you don't have that perspective you're not thinking Christianly. If we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Patience. Patience that groans and longs. If you're not groaning in the present state of this life I would say, number one, you not only don't have your hopes set where it needs to be hope set, but you probably aren't thinking very clearly about every past victory that you had hoped for and attained.

If you get enough of those you start to sound like Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes. None of it satisfies. None of it will ultimately provide you with what you want. You think the new car will make you happy. You think the new house will make you satisfied. You think the new marriage will make you happy. You think the new whatever is going to make you what you want, but it never provides. As C.S. Lewis rightly said, "If I find desires in my own life that cannot be met and satisfied in this world, the only logical conclusion is God must have made me for another world." And that's absolutely the case. He's not made you for this fallen, decrepit, futile world. He hasn't made you for that. He's made you for the next world. So why is your hope keep being set on this world? You got to set your hope on the next world. And I get a lot of heat when I preach this kind of thing or write it in articles or whatever. I have people that... I have pastors write me nasty letters. How terrible your theology is. It's all this doom and gloom. And all I got to say is, man, just follow me around for a week. It is a lot of doom and gloom. People are sick and they're dying and marriages are falling apart. And people have all kinds of terrible things happen to them. It is. I'm not going to whistle through the graveyard and pretend the pain doesn't happen. I'm not Mary Baker Eddy. I'm not a Christian Scientist. I believe the problem is real. It's a bad world that we live in. And God says, "Take heart. I've overcome the world." So I'm supposed to patiently wait for the next life and long for it.

Jot this down. Colossians Chapter 3 verses 1 through 5, actually 1 through 4. Let's go to verse 4 because verse 5 gets into some practicalities I'm not ready for this morning. You're not ready for it actually, I'm sparing you. So I'm sick today. When I preach when I'm sick I can get really heavy. But you know what it says in that passage, "If you've been raised up with Christ," this is verse 1, Colossians 3:1. And that means that my life right now is seen as righteous before God because God has taken Christ's righteous behavior and imputed it to me. All the holiness of Christ is now mine. Therefore, it's as though I'm fully acceptable. Like in the Old Testament I could march right into the Holy of Holies, which, according to the book of Hebrews, I can't. I can go to the throne room of God and boldly enter in and to find grace from God. I'm right with God because I have trusted in Christ. So I've been raised up with Christ. "If I've been raised up with Christ, seek the things that are above." There's the verb. Seek it. Put it in your brain. So a lot like Jesus said in Matthew 6, right? "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." That's my goal.

All the other things that everyone else is chasing after, all the Gentiles chasing after bigger houses and better lives and better health and everything else. Right? I don't chase after those things. If I get them that's fine. That's nice. But what I chase after the Bible says is the next





life, the coming kingdom. I want to invest in that, in my evangelism and my prayer life and my worship and my hopes. I pray for that. I want that to come. I want to cry out, Maranatha! Come quickly, Lord Jesus. That's what I pray for. That's the goal of the Christian life. "So seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." He's my intercessor before God. My mind should be there all the time. And then it says this in the next verse, "Set your minds on things above, not on things on the earth." Do I have to think about things of the earth? Yes. Absolutely. Right? Especially this time of the year you're going to start thinking about doing taxes or I'm going to go to jail, right? I've got to think about work. I got stuff to do for work. I got all kinds of issues going on domestically. I got to take care of all that. I got to think about things of the earth but I'm not supposed to set my mind on those things. And that's big, because my mind is supposed to be set somewhere else.

And you've got to start asking yourself honest questions, right? Do I really have my hopes set there? I have no problem with you celebrating someone's birthday. I have no problem with you going to a graduation party. I have no problem with you saying I got a new baby, let's have a baby shower. All that's great, right? But it's not real life. Ultimate real life is "there," it's not "here." And I got to say my real hope, my real joy, my mind, my thoughts, my desires are set in the next life, not in this one. We could say so much from Matthew Chapter 6. Jesus taught on this constantly, but I want you to realize how critical this is.

Go to Philippians 3 with me real quick. Two quick passages from Philippians before I leave this point. Philippians Chapter 3. Look at verse 20. Do you remember this verse from Sunday school days? "Our citizenship is in heaven." A great line, right? That certainly typifies what I'm trying to say. My hope is ultimately there. I'm an expat down here. This is not my home. I'm not going to get super comfortable down here. My hope is somewhere else. "Our citizenship is in heaven," and here's the best part, "and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Think about that. He left and he said, "I'm coming back." Right? He left and said, "I'm coming back." So every day I should be praying. And I'm praying, "Your kingdom come." The kingdom is going to come when Christ comes back. Right? All our little feeble attempts as Christians to try and somehow make my, you know, my realization of all the promises of God, all the eschatological promises of God coming true, that's not how this is going to work. Christ is going to have to come back to set up his kingdom in glory, in the clouds, with the holy angels with him. This is the reality of the coming kingdom.

And according to this passage I'm supposed to be waiting from that place called heaven for Christ to be dispatched, which could happen at any minute. He's "standing at the door," verse 21. What's going to happen when it happens? Well, when he gets dispatched, "He will transform our lowly bodies," for sure, "to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." The creation itself, Romans Chapter 8, is going to be transformed when the people whom God has sent his Son to die for get transformed. That's just a great text. That's everything that Paul's talking about. I'm on trial here "for the hope of the resurrection of the dead." It's not only what happened historically with our leader, it's what's going to happen to us. This is the whole point of the Christian life. And the Pharisees say, well, we believe in the afterlife, but they have no means by which to be accepted in the afterlife. Paul's got the answer to that and we have the answer to that. And



we're praying every day, I hope, that Christ would be sent and dispatched for us, because when it happens "our lowly bodies will be transformed to be like his resurrected body, "his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject," not just our bodies and every cell in them but "all things to himself." That's great news. Really good news.

We'll go back to Chapter 1. Chapter 1 verse 19, Paul is in jail and you know he's in prison here. This is called the prison epistle. And he's not sure, at least on the surface of the text, he's not sure whether he's going to be released or he's going to be killed. But he talks himself into the fact in Chapter 1 here that he's probably going to be released, verse 19, "For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance." I think you guys are going to pray and I think I'll get released, but I don't know. "It is my eager expectation and my hope that I will not be ashamed, and that with full courage now, as always, Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death." Why? Because death is not death-death, right? It's not the second death. It's I'm believing in the resurrection and the life. And if I die, I'm going to live. So I'm not afraid of that. Verse 21, "For to me to live is Christ," keep being fruitful for Christ, "to die though is gain. If I'm to live on in the flesh," and I stay here, and you pray for me and I get out of this jail, "it'll mean fruitful labor for me." I can keep preaching, keep evangelizing, keep bringing people to Christ.

"Yet which shall I choose I cannot tell. I'm hard-pressed between the two. My desire is to depart to be with Christ." Do you want another diagnostic of how you're doing with the first point this morning? Do you truly set your hope on this life? Do you desire to depart to be with Christ? And that really should be the indicator. You and I should be ready. Now again, even that people can't handle it because our Dayspring Christian world of bumper sticker theology where it all will be great. We'll sing Kumbaya. Our Christian life will be awesome. We'll just be great. We'll hold hands forever. If we can only stay young for the rest of eternity here, it'd be great. It won't be great here. Right? I desire to depart as depressing as you might think that is, I desire to depart just like the Apostle Paul did. I desire to depart to be with Christ, right? Which is how much better? What's the word used in our English text? "Far better." Look at that. "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account." I've got more work to do. That's probably what's going to happen.

I need you and me to set our hopes on the next life. If you're not thinking in those terms you've bought into some form of the prosperity gospel, some form of an earthbound theology, some sense that somehow Christianity is about the "here and now" and not the "then and there." It is not about the "here and now." It's about the "then and there." And we just need to think that way.

Back to our text. Acts Chapter 23. Acts Chapter 23, look at verse 7. "A dissension arose between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided." Why? Because Luke says, hey guys, you need to know. "The Sadducees say there is no resurrection," no afterlife, "nor angel, nor spirit." Whatever you see in the material world that's all there is. Pharisees acknowledge them all. Now, does that mean they're Christians? No, it just means their theology is better than the Sadducees. And when I was a kid to learn the difference between



the two they taught me in Sunday school the Pharisees believed in the afterlife and the Sadducees didn't. That's why they were "Sad You See." So you can remember that now. It served me well for 50 years. So they're Sadducees. They don't believe in the afterlife. And all I have to say is history repeats itself. Just like in the first century you had two groups, right? The liberals and conservatives, if you will, trying to conserve the teaching of the Old Testament, which is there is a new world coming. That when we die it's not over. And then you had those who say, "nah, about this life."

About 100 years ago in American history we had this same thing going on in our day. We had all this pressure on the churches to conform, to get with the program. Stop being so, you know, pie in the sky, nose in the cloud, hoping on some fairy tale return of Christ, stop it all. And some of the people, soft-minded people in churches who were leading churches started to believe them. They started to say, "Well, I want to be respectable so we're just going to stop believing all this stuff about a virgin birth of Christ, about Christ rising from the dead, about miracles, about, you know, him ascending and his promise to return. We're not going to believe all that." And then you had a group of people who said, "Stop. You better believe all that. Our whole Christian faith is based on that." And they started to draw up a series of things that they said you cannot depart from these, these supernatural truths. And they were called the fundamentals of the faith. And those who adhered to them were then called the fundamentalists. Have you ever heard of that? And the fundamentalists said, we're not going to be like this crowd over here in church that still wants to hold to some kind of religious facade, but they don't believe in the guts of the gospel, which is the fact that God has spoken in his Word, that Jesus came and he was really God, that he was born of a virgin 2,000 years ago, that he suffered on a cross and he physically, bodily rose from the dead, that he ascended bodily and that he said he would return bodily. And the whole hope of the Christian life is the coming of Christ.

The fundamentalists said we're not going to be like them. And you know what you saw between those two groups? Out of the fundamentalist movement you saw people doing nothing other than saying what the Bible said the whole time. You saw them begin to prosper all through the 20th century. Right? They began to see people won to Christ, the hope of the next life. And we saw a lot of good come out of that.

And those mainline denominational churches that said we don't believe in that supernatural stuff anymore. We just believe about this life. Their churches are basically museums with a lot of ancient people in them, with nothing but a rainbow flag out in front of them because they have nothing to live for but this life. And it's all about rearranging the chairs down here making sure everybody's happy. It's about social justice. It's about the "here and now." All they care about is here. But in fact, they are "Sad You See" because they do not believe that there's anything beyond this life. And these people listening to NPR and waving their flags and sitting around half-empty mausoleums in churches, these people do not have the hope of eternal life. They do not pray like I do, saying, God, I can't wait for the coming life. They do not say to depart is far better to be with Christ. They don't think about the fact that there's a new world coming, that there's a time of refreshing coming from heaven when Christ is dispatched to fix



this whole thing, that all the promises starting in Genesis 3 of the crushing of all that's wrong and a restoration of all that's right. They don't believe any of that, and it just guts Christianity.

There would be no reason for me preaching to you. Certainly when I'm sick, I would not be here on a Sunday morning. I would not be in ministry. I wouldn't give a rip about any of the stuff we're doing right here if it only meant "here and now." And I'll just quote the Apostle Paul speaking in the passage about the resurrection from the dead. He said, "If we are to hope in Christ in this life only, we are to be pitied more than all men." You ought to look at us and say, "You guys are dumb. This is stupid. What are you doing? This is about here and now?" And that's exactly what the Sadducees got into. It's exactly what the mainline denominations of the early 20th century did. And I'm just saying, don't you dare become a Sadducee. Do you know how you become a Sadducee? Do you know how you become someone who doesn't believe in the afterlife, doesn't think about the afterlife? You get obsessed with this life. Exactly what these religious people do. Number two, "Don't Get Obsessed with This Life." You do not want to be a Sadducee. You have to not be obsessed with this life. Do you have to live in this world? Yes. But you do not have to be obsessed with this world. You cannot be anchored in this world. You cannot be tethered in this world. You cannot have your roots down in this world.

Turn with me to First Corinthians Chapter 7. This will be the hardest thing you'll hear all morning probably. We'll see how the sermon goes. But in this passage, and I preach it in suburban Southern California. I preach it in the 21st century, I preach it where if I were to take a microphone down at Dana Point Harbor or anywhere else and say, "Hey, are you a Christian? Do you believe in God? Are you going to heaven?" I know a bunch of people would say, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." And then I'd say, "What's the most important thing in your life?" And you know what they'd say? Do you know what they'd say? The number one thing people would say and I've done it over and over again. I've asked them, what's the most important thing in your life? They will say family.

Now, Christians of my generation didn't help because they started to equate all of Christianity with family. Have you ever noticed that? Sometimes Christian radio will be called family radio. Right? Family, all about family. Family, family, family, family, family. It's about family. And I was going to let you know it didn't come from First Corinthians 7, this mindset, okay? Because family is not what Christianity is all about. It's not about family. Is family a good thing? Sure. Cutting your grass is a good thing. Cleaning your closets is a good thing. Having a wall outside, and I'll quote Scripture now, having a wall outside your house that is not torn down, right? Making sure it's fixed when it's broken. That's a good thing, right? But we don't call our Christianity like wall care maintenance, home repair. Right? We don't say that. Is it a virtue? Yes, it's a virtue. Is it a good thing? It's a good thing. It's not equated with Christianity here.

Matter of fact, Jesus, I'm trying to think of his family right now. Oh, yeah, that's right. He didn't have a family. But I'm glad the Apostle Paul had a family. Did he have a family Sunday school grads? No. Quiet crowd today. He didn't have a family. I just want you to think this through. First Corinthians Chapter 7. Look at this text. I mean, this should put everything in perspective for us. Verse 28, let's jump in the middle of it. Paul was single. Jesus was single. "But if you're



married, you haven't sinned," but you got to think this through, "and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have," now, here's the concern, "worldly troubles," worldly troubles, "and I would spare you that." Now, this is not about arguing with your wife or your wife nagging you. This is not what this passage is about. This is about something much more basic. It's about you being tethered and rooted to the world. And the problem is when you start to add certain things to your life, it's easier for you to get increasingly rooted to this world, it's easier to get obsessed with this world.

Ask the rich young ruler from Matthew 19. The more you have the easier it is for you to get tethered to this world. And when you're looking in the eyes of the Messiah and he says, hey, "follow me," he's got eternal life staring you in the eyes. The rich young ruler says, "No." Why? Because he owned much wealth. And I'm just telling you the concern is the world, worldly, this world, this present world, "worldly troubles. I want to spare you that. This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none." Now, that's not a banner, you know, verse they put up at marriage conferences, right? You don't see that when you come into the Christian Family Life Marriage Conference, have a great Christian marriage conference. You don't see that. And yet this is the teaching of God, right? If you've got a wife live as if you had none. "And if you mourn as though you weren't mourning, and if you rejoice as though you weren't rejoicing." More on that in a minute. "Those who buy as if they had no goods." Wouldn't that have been good for the rich young ruler to take this verse to heart?

Hey, you could have been a follower of Christ with Peter, James and John. You turned it down, right? Because of your goods. It was all about you managing those goods. You couldn't give it up. You couldn't let go of it. It had its tentacles in you. Verse 31, "And those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with the world. For the present form of this world is passing away." The whole crux of all that I'm trying to say this morning's right here. "The present form of this world is passing away." It is about the hope, future, and the resurrection of the dead. The Sadducees are anchored in this world. They concern themselves with everything in this world just like a lot of Christians today. They think they're good, godly, evangelical, Bible-believing Christians, but they're anchored and tethered in this world. I want you to think, go back to verse 29. "If you have wives as if you had none." If you're in Ephesus and Paul said, "Hey, we're going to go to, you know, Philippi and, hey, you got gifts and skills and God has put and entrusted things to you, you have a knowledge of the Word. You could be a great traveling assistant. Come with me and come and do this," and you had a wife, right? All of a sudden, now that becomes a little more difficult.

It's one thing if you're a single traveling companion but a lot of the disciples weren't single. They were married. And according to the beginning of this, the first paragraph in First Corinthians 7, if you have a romantic proclivity, if you have an interest in romance and all that, then you should get married. You got to get married, right? You're going to burn with desire your whole life. So get married, go find a spouse, figure that out and get married. But if you can live without it, as Jesus said, you should live without it. Why? Because of the worldly anchors that come with domestic life. And he says now. But there is this managing of the Christian life. If you were married where you could still say, well, my wife may not like all that's





going to come with me being a traveling missionary with the Apostle Paul. Right? But it can be done. But it's harder, it's more difficult. And so it is if you owned a lot of property in Ephesus. So it would be if you're running a lot of businesses in Ephesus. It was good for Paul to be a deft, able-to-move tent maker who was single. That made it easier for him. And if he was gifted to do that, fantastic. Some of us are not gifted to do that. Can you be in ministry and be married? Of course. Can you be a missionary and have six kids? Of course. But it's going to be harder, much harder when they're thinking about can I go to all my kid's games if I go on this missionary trip with Paul? It's going to be much harder. You're going to let people down.

Verse 32, this is the whole point. I want you to be free from anxieties. "The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord." He can be so singularly focused, how to please the Lord. Now, completely? No. He's got to worry about sleep. He's got to worry about eating. He's got to worry about how to make some money. There are still concerns, but it's not like the married person. "The married man," verse 33, "is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and," here's the key, "to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord." If I'm devoted to the Lord do you know what I'm waiting for? The next life. I can't wait for the next life. I need to be obsessed with the next life. I don't want to be obsessed with this life. And it means that if I have stuff in this life, like kids and a wife and a job and I own property or own stuff, I still have to deal with this stuff but I better deal with it in a way that's probably not going to make me, really, let's just think about this, have the best marriage on the block. I just want you to think about that.

I could have a neighbor who has no interest in Christ, no interest in the next life, no interest in evangelism, no interest in ministry. He doesn't go to church. He's got free time. He's got more money because he didn't give any money to the church. I just want you to think about that guy. I mean, he could do way more in his marriage than I can do, right? It's my goal not to have the best marriage. Right? Love? Sure. Absolutely. My job in whatever it is, say I work in the secular world, it is not to be the best businessman in the world. It's to be the best Christian that I can be as a businessman in the world. Which means I won't always do what will lay down more roots and tentacles and anchors in my life. I cannot be obsessed. Everything is seen through the lens of my Christianity and where I'm going. And all of this is a help. I have the challenge of divided interests. Everyone in this room has the challenge of divided interests. And the more you have I'm just saying it becomes a greater challenge. And the goal is for you not to say, well, I got to take a vow of poverty. The goal is when God says something to you about what you own, to be able to hold it open-handedly. That's the goal. We have to know how I'm supposed to deal with the world I'm living in and that means I never get into the area of being obsessed with it. I just can't.

Two things it's going to affect. Let's go further in this. It's going to affect the blessings you receive from God and it's going to affect the difficulties or the troubles you encounter that come from God. Two things. Let's look at the first one. First Timothy Chapter 6, the blessings



that you get from God. Look at how this is put. It's everywhere in the Scriptures. All of us have money to varying degrees, different amounts of money. Let's say you get a lot of money, more than the average person in the room. Great. You're a rich person compared to us, relatively speaking. Here's what it says in verse 17 of First Timothy Chapter 6. "As for the rich in this present world, charge them not to be haughty." Guess what happens when the non-Christian you live next door to gets a lot of money. They get haughty, right? They think they're better. They set their hopes on it. "Well, I got a lot of money now so I can take ease in my life. I can retire, I can do it." "They set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches. But we should be setting it on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy."

Let's just think about this thing. Let's say today you get a million dollars. Someone gives you a million dollars. And your next-door neighbor who's a non-Christian he's given a million dollars. Okay. I just want you to see the difference between the two of you. I just want to say your neighbor is going to be way happier than you should be as a Christian because the blessing is everything. Everything about the money in this life, that's what matters. Those things are good. This is it. This is all he has. His hope is not in God. His hope is not in the next life. His hope is in this life. His hope is in his resources. So he's going to rejoice in all of that. But the Christian has a different perspective. Verse 18, "You're to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future." What future? Next year? Next month when I retire? We're not talking about your retirement from your job. We're talking about your retirement from this temporal life. We're talking about crossing the threshold and horizon of this life. You'll set a good foundation for the future, "so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."

Guess where real life is for your neighbor? Here. Guess where real life is for you. The next life. Therefore, when the blessings come your way, you get money, you get riches, you get land, you get stuff, it's going to make your non-Christian counterpart happier than it's going to make you, because you don't have your hope set on this world. You have your hope set on the next. You're going to see it as a stewardship. How can I be generous? How can I bless? How can I steward this in a way that pleases the Lord? Because in the end my hope is in God not in my riches. This is a different perspective about the blessings of life. As it said, "Those are rejoicing as though they didn't rejoice, and those who mourn as though they didn't mourn." Let's talk about the trials of life.

Turn with me, if you would, to Second Corinthians Chapter 4. Second Corinthians Chapter 4. So okay, let's stop with the million dollars. Let's say Monday afternoon you get a call from your doctor that you have terminal cancer. Okay? That's the new scenario. And your non-Christian neighbor gets a call that your non-Christian neighbor he gets terminal cancer. Okay? Are you both going to mourn? Well, yeah. Sad. And you should mourn. That's bad. I'd rather be healthy than sick. I'd rather be rich than poor. All that. Obviously. Duh. Okay? I enjoy good health. That's something I give thanks to God for. Not today but generally. Riches. Right? I give thanks to God for it. He gives those things for us to enjoy. That's great. God, I appreciate all that. But your neighbor is going to mourn more than you're going to mourn if your hope is on the next life. Why? Because they have nothing else to obsess on but this life.



Do you understand that? A measure of my heart and where it is, is how I deal with not only the blessings of life but the trials of life and the troubles of life.

Look at verse 16 in this passage. Second Corinthians 4:16. Well, "we don't lose heart," right? The interior of our lives doesn't collapse. "Though the outer self is wasting away." Now, in a few chapters Paul's going to talk about his thorn in the flesh. Paul's outer man is wasting away. But maybe yours is. Let's just go back to our scenario. Monday you find out you have terminal cancer. You got eight months to live. Okay, now you get that diagnosis. Your neighbor gets the same diagnosis and you think now that my outer man is decaying quickly, I only got a few months left to live. Here's what he says. Right? "The inner self is being renewed day by day." Real Christians can have their inner person, their spirit, their sense of confidence and excitement and anticipation, it gets bigger every day. Why? Because verse 17, "For this light momentary affliction." Now I think terminal cancer seems pretty serious. I think your thorn in the flesh seems pretty serious. But all of that is "light and momentary." Why? Because it's compared to this "eternal weight of glory which is really beyond all comparison."

This is Romans 8:18 right here. Right? The light affliction, which is heavy for us now and for your neighbor it's crushingly heavy, but for us it's nothing compared to the eternal weight of glory. Why? Because we're looking to the things that aren't seen, right? We're looking at things that you can't see, "as we look not to the things that are seen but the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient," including cancer, including riches, including good things and bad things on this earth. "But the things that are unseen are eternal." I know you know this stuff. No one walks into the church not knowing what I'm talking about. It's just do we live it? Is our hope there? Or do you obsess about the things of this earth? You really get crushed like your neighbor, even when you're sitting there at the casket of your loved one, the person you love the most. The question really is how do you grieve? Paul said, we don't grieve like the rest of the world. We're Christians, right? They don't have any hope. The whole Christian life is hope. The whole Christian life is we're going to the next life, not this one. This is the whole difference between Christianity and non-Christianity. And the problem is we have been much like the Sadducees obsessing with this life. And it seems like the joys of this world make us as happy as non-Christians. And the pains of this world make us as sad as non-Christians. And something's wrong with that.

"Those who mourn as though they were not mourning, those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing." They're not that big of a deal in light of eternity. And if I had time I'd take you to Psalm 73, which I think I do in the discussion questions on the back anyway. But Psalm 73, even the injustices you read about on your news feed just you cannot freak out, you cannot despair, you cannot throw up your hands and say everything is awful. It's awful. Look what's going on in the world. The Bible says there are going to be "wars and rumors of wars," and "there will be all kinds of pestilence and earthquakes." Do not be troubled as these things were appointed to take place. The whole point is, "in this world you can have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." You cannot freak out and be overcome by the injustices of this life. All of that. If you are too happy with the blessings and too devastated by the pains and just too freaked out by the problems on your news feed, then you're obsessed



with this life. And Christians are never supposed to be obsessed. We're not supposed to chase after everything else the non-Christians are. We're to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

Back to our passage. Acts 23. Acts 23, "The clamor ramps up," verse 9. Acts 23:9, "The scribes in the party of the Pharisees, they stood up and contended sharply, 'We find nothing wrong with this man.'" This is great. God is getting him out of a jam. Exactly what I assume Paul thought would happen happened here. Turn the crowd against each other instead of him. And then when the dissension got so heated between these two groups, the tribune, the leader of the Romans, comes and says, let's take him out of there. We got to get him out, send in the soldiers, bring him out, and they go and take him into the barracks. And again, it's like, you know, the cat has nine lives. He's out of a jam again. Good job Paul, you did it. You live on to see another day.

Now, we studied this briefly earlier when Paul pulls out the Roman citizenship card. We talked about the strategy. We should strategize in that regard. But ultimately it comes down to us not taking the truth of Point 1 and Point 2 and saying, well, if this world is not my home and I'm supposed to really obsess about the next life, hoping it, I don't obsess in this life, well then I guess there's nothing left but the punch that Jim Jones would serve. Let's just get done with this whole thing and move on to the next life. Right? Pastor Mike's really well deserving of all the criticism of all the happy preachers, because he's really dour and down and he's Eeyore. It's just awful. It's terrible. And so he doesn't even want to live anymore. Paul is showing me how I'm supposed to deal with everyday challenges. I do want to live. I want to continue on. We've even read it in Philippians Chapter 1, "If I live on it'll mean fruitful labor." Right? "To live is Christ." I'm all about that even though I'd much rather "depart and be with Christ." I can't wait for the kingdom to come. I got to get through the next challenge. I got to live and fulfill every day. Psalm 139.

Every day of Mike Fabarez's life is planned out and I know that I have a limited finite amount of days. When's my last day? I don't know. Maybe today, I don't know. Feels a little bit like it. Maybe today. Maybe next week. Maybe a month from now. Maybe a year from now. Maybe five years from. I don't know when my time is going to be over, but one day it will be over. But as I said in that series, when we're talking about Paul getting out of that jam and strategizing if I'm still breathing and still alive I'm assuming God's not done with me yet. So I need to keep on moving forward trusting God that I got more to do today.

Put it down this way. Number three, you need to "Trust God and Fulfill Your Days Here." I know this is not the ideal place. This world is corrupt. This world is futile. This world is full of trouble. This world has pains and blessings and sorrows and none of them I experience fully because my heart isn't even here. I'm a transient, I'm an alien, I'm a citizen of another place. But I'm going to fulfill every day I got here. I got to live every day out. I got to tackle every challenge God has and I got to move through each and every day. As Paul said, let me just read that from Acts 20. We covered this not too long ago. Verses 22 through 24 said, "I'm going to Jerusalem," I get it, it's going to be hard. "The Holy Spirit says there are all kinds of imprisonment and afflictions that are awaiting me." But verse 24, "I do not account my life as



of any value or precious to myself if only I may finish the course." Yeah, I don't care so much about how I die or what my diseases are or what my pains are, what the disappointments are. It doesn't really matter. But in the end what I really care about is finishing the course.

What is the course? Paul had a course as a missionary to the Gentiles. He's going to fulfill it. You've got a course. I've got a course. I want to fulfill the course. I'd like to run through the tape. Remember, were you in the junior high track team with me? They always used to say run through the tape, which the tape was never there by the time I got to the finish line. But the line was there and I knew what they meant. Keep running all the way through the finish. Keep going. That's how you need to see your life. It doesn't matter even if you're watching me on the Internet and you're on your deathbed, if you still have breath you're not done yet. Fulfill your course. Every day is another day on the course. Fulfill it. I mean, you try to get out of every jam you can get out of. Why? Because we're assuming you got more work to do. Fruitful labor. There's more that God has for you to do, in your job, in your family, in your marketplace, wherever you do your life. But you got to do it with a kind of courage and hope.

Turn with me to one passage in Second Timothy where Paul is facing his own demise. Now he says in the prison epistle of Philippians, he says, I think I'm going to get out. As I said, he kind of talks himself into it as he writes in Philippians 1 that he's probably going to get delivered. And in fact, he does. He gets out of prison in Rome and he gets reimprisoned later. And in Second Timothy in the second, as far as we can assemble it, the second Roman imprisonment, and in this case he thinks it's over. He says, "I finished the race, kept the faith, fought the good fight." But it's over for me. "I know my time of departure has come." He knows he's about to be killed and historically we assume that based on the knowledge of what we have that he got beheaded in Rome. So he's going to lose his life in Rome, he's going to be executed there. And as he puts it, and I've read this many times to you, but let's look at it afresh, Second Timothy Chapter 4 starting in verse 16. He says, you know, "At my first defense no one came to stand by me." Oh, man, that's awful. It's terrible. And people like that should mourn, really mourn. No, he doesn't mourn. "All deserted me but may it not be charged against them!" But, you know, here's what I focus on. Right? Yeah, that's a bummer. I don't feel good about it, but whatever. It's not going to devastate me. "The Lord stood by me and he strengthened me," right? He walked me through every part of this, I trusted in him. He got me through every day. "So that through me the message might be fully proclaimed to all the Gentiles."

Now, was it fully proclaimed to all the Gentiles? Well, no. Right? All the Gentiles didn't get the gospel. Paul only went where he went. He couldn't cover the whole planet. Right? But God's course for him, he fulfilled the course. Every Gentile that should get ministered to through Paul he finished his course. He fully proclaimed to the Gentiles all that he was assigned to proclaim. "So that I was rescued from the lion's mouth." When I thought it was over, it wasn't over either at the stump where he was going to get ripped by the Romans, he pulls out his Roman citizenship card. Or when he's about to get killed by the Sanhedrin, he gets saved by the tribune taking him out. I mean, God keeps rescuing him from the lion's mouth so to speak. Verse 18, "And the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed." I think he's thinking about how he's going to be killed. He knows it's coming, he's confident it's going to happen. But he goes





even in that act, as Jesus said, "they can kill the body, but they cannot consign the soul to hell." And God had already consigned his soul to heaven. And he says, I'm going to be delivered "from every evil deed and I will be brought safely into his heavenly kingdom." That is the goal of the Apostle Paul, finish well, finish strong with courage. "So as now, as always in my body, either by life or by death, that Christ is going to be glorified." Finish the course.

Your course is hard? Welcome to the club. The whole course is hard. But one day there's a ring, there's a parade, there are better singers who are going to hail us that day. There's going to be a great reward for us coming. And God said that's what it's all about. It's about the kingdom. It's about you praying for the King, about Christ being dispatched to take us into the kingdom.

One last passage with this. I'll leave you to Psalm 16, Psalm 16. God is our shepherd. "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." Everything I need he's going to get me through this life as my shepherd. John 10, my good shepherd. Still waters, green pastures, sometimes the craggy rocks of a valley that is like the shadow of death. There are good times and there are bad times. But I love when the analogy in Psalm 23, I know we're in Psalm 16, but Psalm 23, a very familiar psalm, the image shifts. Have you ever noticed this in the psalm? We go from sheep that have their nose in the grass and they eat grass and drink out of the water, the still waters. But now we have a table prepared, right? Sheep don't eat at a table, but "a table is prepared before me." Do you know the passage? "In the presence of my enemies." Now it's a picture of me as a person following a king, God. And I'm saying, God, I'm going to sit here. I going to allow you to overflow my life with whatever I need sustaining me. "My cup overflows." Right? Think about it. I'm having all that I want here. I've got the table set. I got a chalice. I got all that I need. But it's "in the presence of my enemies." Right?

Here is the world we live in. In this world are all kinds of hostility. In this world you're going to have trouble. But take heart, right? God is going to supply all that we need, thorns in the flesh, relational problems, troubles, all the things that can go wrong, we are going to be sustained in the midst of it all. And then we should look over our shoulder because it says, and "surely goodness and mercy," these are great words. "Tov!" The word "goodness," the greatness and goodness of all that God plans, "and mercy," which is the word "Hesed." All the loving kindness and promises of God they're chasing me down. Every time I read this to you I try to make it clear the word "follow" is such a weak English verb for the Hebrew word "Rāḏaḇ," which is "to chase", "to hunt." It's hunting me down. The goodness and greatness and love of God are chasing me down, and they will overcome me in that great Psalm when it says, and I will cross this threshold from this life, "and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

With that picture of the great Psalm 23 in your mind, read with me the end of Psalm 16. Start in verse 7 in the midst of all that we have here in this life. Right? "I bless the Lord." I'm grateful to the Lord, I kneel before the Lord. Literally is what it means. "Who gives me counsel; in the night," right? The scariest part of a 24-hour period. "my heart instructs me," all the truth that's in my mind it's going. "I've set the Lord always before me." I know where my hope is. It's in Christ, it's in the Lord. "Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken." The power through this, I'm going to finish my course. "Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being



rejoices; and my flesh dwells secure," even though I'm surrounded by my enemies. Why? Because I know you're not going to "send my soul to Sheol," to death. You're not going to "let your holy one see corruption," right?

I know that's a passage that is utilized for the promise of Christ not decaying in the grave, but it's HIS life after death that is the promise and guarantee of MY life after death. It's so well applicable on both realms, so I know this will not end badly for me. I know in the end I'm going to be embraced by God. I'm going to have the resurrection that Christ secured for me. Verse 11, "You make known to me the path of life." Stay on it. Keep going. But what I'm heading toward is when goodness and mercy overcome me, when I get to the place where the dwelling place of God is among men, there in your presence. I'm not in it yet. I see through a glass dimly. This is a long-distance relationship in so many ways between you and God. "In your presence there is fullness of joy." It's coming. I get scant little pieces of joy now, but there fullness of joy. And "at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." That's the truth of the gospel. Where we're headed is great. The road is hard, right? The payoff is really nice. It is so nice that we can use words like the "fullness of joy and pleasures," always ongoing without end, "forevermore." That's a promise of the Christian life. I want your hope to be set there. I want you never to get obsessed with this world. It's a mess-d up place. It will never satisfy. Just finish the course, do all you can, keep your focus on Christ and he will get you through this to the end.

Let's pray. God, help us in the midst of our very difficult world that we live in, help us to be the kinds of Christians who aren't afraid to stand up for you in a world that we know is ultimately going to bow to you. We want to be comforted by your presence and your counsel in our lives, which I hope this sermon has been to many this morning, that we might wait with eager anticipation and even some groaning on days like today, for the coming of the glory, the revealing of the sons of God entering into a place where everything is made right. God, until then let us work hard. Do our jobs. Effect our families, our coworkers, our bosses, our employees, to be the kinds of people in our neighborhoods and every sphere of influence that we have to represent you well until we see you face to face.

In Jesus name, Amen.