



## **Courageous Endurance – Part 4**

### **Clinging to God's Faithful Promises**

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Well as I'm out and about meeting people when I do, eventually it gets to the inevitable question. They lean over and they say, "So what do you do for a living?" I always think, oh, no, here it comes. It's over. Right? End of the conversation. That's what I'm thinking. Now, I've never done this, but I have been tempted on a few occasions to simply say, "Well, I'm a cardiologist. (audience laughing) I'm a cardiologist. That's right. And then when they respond, "Oh, you're a doctor." I can say with a clear conscience, "Yes, I am a doctor." And just pray then that they don't ask what medical school I went to. Well, I may not be the doctor that they're thinking of. I think there's some truth to the fact that I can say that I'm a cardiologist because it's one thing you learn right away in New Testament Greek, the word "Kardia" for "heart" is everywhere. And the Hebrew word "Lev" in the Old Testament is everywhere. And almost a thousand times in the Bible the equivalent in Hebrew and in Greek we have the word "heart" depicting all but six times to the interior of someone's life. What's going on inside, right? How people think. The nature, the state of their heart. It's very important as a pastor, as a preacher, that I care very much about that. And if you're a non-Christian I've got a real important task of letting you know what Jeremiah Chapter 17 verse 9 says. And that is, if you know that text, that "The heart is exceedingly deceitful." Right? It's wicked, it's sick above all else. Right? You can't even understand it. That problem in the heart I need to quickly try and help them to understand that so a non-Christian can get to Ezekiel 36 where they can learn they can get a new heart and I can maybe as a spiritual cardiologist get to the place of getting them that heart transplant that God says every person needs if they're going to be right with the living God.

So that's where I think they need to realize that my profession may be useful for them. Not that I'm alone in doing this. You can do this. We can all do this. We're all called to share the gospel. But one of the things I do as a spiritual cardiologist, if we want to carry on this analogy, is that I have to minister to Christians. And I hope that most of you this morning here are Christians. And as a Christian you need a regular checkup with a spiritual cardiologist because of the truth of Proverbs Chapter 13 verse 12. And, you may not realize it, you may not see it, and you may not sense it, but you need to put it together in your mind that there are a lot of things going on in your life that go back to the truth of Proverbs 13:12. And that passage, by the way, was in our Daily Bible Reading, if you follow the pattern of our Bible reading here at our church, it was in this morning's reading. Chapter 13 verse 12 of Proverbs simply says this: "Hope deferred makes the heart sick," hope deferred. Now here's the thing about the Christian life. If you look at Romans Chapter 8, for instance, the whole point of the Christian life is that you're going to be made to wait for the ultimate hope of the Christian life. Hope is certainly deferred. It's postponed. It's not "here and now." It's "then and there," as I like to remind everybody, this is something that's coming. So we have to wait. And the waiting process in one way or another, if I want to use the words of Romans 8 that make you groan, to use the words of Ezekiel, it's going to make you feel this sense of groaning over the sin in our world, even in your own life. If you want to use the term here in this passage, it makes your heart sick. Proverbs 13:12.



The second half of that Proverbs simply says this: "A desire fulfilled is a tree of life." Tree of life. It's no coincidence that both in the first two chapters of the Bible, in Genesis, and the last two chapters of the Bible, in Revelation, see as the centerpiece of both of those realities, the Garden and the New Jerusalem, as the tree of life. The tree of life is the centerpiece because the tree of life is the fulfillment, the gratification. It symbolizes that in both the Garden and in the new city. This is a centerpiece. And it is the thing that's only mentioned in three books of the Bible, Revelation and in Genesis and then also in Proverbs. Because Proverbs talks a few times about the fact that if you can really have everything you hope for, if you get the thing that you really want, it's like a tree of life. It brings enrichment to you. It does something inside. Now here's the challenge of the Christian life. How do we live in a season between now and the time we walk through the entrance of the kingdom, how do we live in a period that just by definition makes the heart sick? And yet we're not always walking around with a sick heart. I mean, how is it that we can learn from Christ, "In this world you'll have tribulation," and then he turns around and says, "But take heart." Take heart, right? For in the world we're going to have wars and rumors of wars. We're going to have earthquakes and pestilence and storms and all these bad things. But listen, don't be alarmed, you need to be strong on the inside. This is the challenge.

And it's one of the things that a good spiritual cardiologist ought to be able to do to you on a regular basis is to get the living word of God, the scalpel of God's Word in Romans Chapter 4 verse 12 and wield that to be able to get down to the thoughts and the intentions of your heart and start to infuse some things that will make this whole Christian life tolerable, more than tolerable, as we'll see this morning. So how do we do that? Well, I think we'll see a great paradigm here in our passage that we finally reached in the last few verses of Acts Chapter 27. In verses 39 through 44, we're going to see a text of Scripture here which reminds us with all human, you know, assessments made, there is a hopeless situation on a ship that is about to go down, this sinking ship in the middle of a storm. There's no hope here. And yet there are three guys, at least, with a vibrant heart. Right? You've got Paul, Luke and Aristarchus who are all on the ship who have a confidence in God. And if anyone believed what God had said about the promise for this ship, it was those three guys.

So they're not losing hope. And as you turn to that passage, I want to just at least build the context by rereading for you verse 20. So Acts Chapter 27 verse 20, I want to remind you that the circumstances of this passage would tell us that when it comes to the weather, when it comes to a safe voyage across the Mediterranean, they had pretty much lost all hope. Take a look at verse 20, "When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest," or storm, "lay on us all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned." This is going to be a bumpy ride. Matter of fact, people are going to die here. And yet God makes a promise and Paul relays that to them in verses 21 through 25. Now, we studied that earlier and we saw that God intervenes by saying, hey, Paul, you're not going to go down here. Matter of fact, God's given you all of these people on the ship. And we learned in last week's passage, you'll see it down there in verse 37, there were 276 people on this granary ship that had left from Alexandria, and they had picked up there in Crete, and they were on their way to Rome but they didn't make it because of this terrible storm. But God had said, hey, Paul,



you're going to make it. You're going to stand before Caesar. You're going to make it to Rome.

Now, right now we pick up the story when they're 60 miles south of Sicily. So they're not even in Italy yet, and their boat is about to run ashore. Take a look at the passage and let's see this seemingly hopeless situation with a battered ship. And let's see if we can learn something about a vibrant heart, a healthy Christian heart that existed certainly in Paul's mind. Verse 39. Acts 27:39. I'll read it from the English Standard Version through the end of the chapter. "Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land," they're on this little island, I put on a map there for you. I blew up a section of it. There's still some debate about where they were. You got to look at all the sandy beaches which is not hard because it's only a 17-mile long, about an eight-mile-high island there, about 58 miles specifically off the coast of Italy. And they now notice a beach on which they planned, if possible, to run the ship ashore. Verse 40, "They cast off the anchors and they left them in the sea, at the same time loosening all the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. But," verse 41, "striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf."

Now this is a well-made Alexandrian granary ship and this is a big storm. So the storm, you need to picture this in your mind, is still going on. This tempest, as it was called in verse 20, is battering the ship and breaking it into pieces as the bow got stuck and the stern is getting clobbered in this scene. It's so bad, the soldiers say, man, we got prisoners here and they're going to get away. So "The soldiers plan," verse 42, "was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape." Now, as I said this earlier as we started this voyage, I said they have soldiers on this ship for more than just the Apostle Paul. There were other prisoners, and many of them, we assume, have already been tried and they were sentenced to death, probably in the Colosseum in Rome. And so, some of them, you just think, well, okay, soldiers don't want to get in trouble for these prisoners getting away. So they said, well, we might as well kill them now. "But the centurion, wishing to save Paul," and we saw that from the earliest first port it seems just like Joseph in the Old Testament is ingratiated to the jailer in the book of Genesis, so it is that Paul seems to be doing really well with this centurion. He even let him go to the people at Antioch there in that port city as they came down from Antioch, and they were willing to let Paul spend some days in being ministered to by his friends, he's been given grace in the eyes of the centurion.

And remember, this centurion is outranking these soldiers. A centurion is someone who's in charge of 100 soldiers. It doesn't mean there were 100 soldiers on the ship, there certainly weren't. Yet all the merchant marines. You had prisoners. Then you had some soldiers. But nevertheless, his title Centurion means he outranked everybody there, all the soldiers on the ship. And he wanted to "keep them from carrying out their plan." So he heard this is their plan. He goes, no, we're not going to do that. So "He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard," both the prisoners and the soldiers and they were going to go, "first, go make it for land," start swimming. "And the rest," we can take, "planks that are getting torn off the ship." You can grab one of those and you can kick, kick, kick, kick, kick all the way to the



shore on some piece of floating debris. "And so it was that all were brought safely to the land."

Now, that last line, that's where I want to start. You notice your outline there the first point is just based on that very last line of verse 44. "And so it was that they were all brought safely to the land," all of them. No one died in this horrific storm in which all the cargo, all their luggage, all their stuff, all the tackle from the ship and all the ship now itself is being lost, but not a single person is lost. And my question is why is that the case? Well, because that's exactly what God promised. God promised that and the writer of Scripture, just like we see throughout the rest of the Bible, it's like, "And so it came to pass," "And so it happened." God promised it and that's what happened. He promised they would go into Canaan and occupy the land and so it was. At the end of the book of Joshua, look at what happened, exactly what God promised took place. Or into the wilderness, God said he would release them from the slavery and so it happened. And when they came back from Babylon in the Babylonian capture and so it happened exactly on the timetable of God, because God promised it and it took place.

The first thing you need to know about hope, and I'm going to show you the paradigm in just a minute, but let's just start with this. You need to, you can have a healthy heart in the midst of a period of time that by nature should make your heart sick. If you want a healthy heart when the circumstances make your heart sick, number one, you got to "Believe God's Promises." Very simple. Three words, believe God's promises because God makes a promise and he keeps every one of them. We've already touched on that in our series but let me drive this home because it is the paradigm that makes this work. But all these elements are important. Let me illustrate it for you in Psalm 119. Turn to Psalm 119 and I'll show you these component parts in this great psalm that is celebrating, I believe it's a Psalm of David, that's debatable, but that's my conclusion on this text. Regardless of who wrote it, the psalmist is talking now, drop all the way down to verse 49, in the poem. It's an acrostic poem. You remember what an acrostic is, right? Every section, all eight verses at a time, they all follow the Hebrew alphabet. Alef, Bet, Gimel, Dalet, Heh, Vav, Zayin, Khet all the way down to Tav. Well, here we are in verse 49 we're starting with the letter Zayin. So if you were reading this in Hebrew verses 49 through 56, every first word of this psalm in these eight verses would be a word that starts with the letter Zayin. Okay. That gave you time to get there. A little historical point. Most of you know that. But if you didn't know that then you're caught up with the others.

Look at this paradigm. Look at the first half of this, the first four verses. "Remember your word to your servant." And if this is David, and I think it is, here he is saying, I am your servant, I serve you. Right? You have spoken some words about me. I can think of several things that God said to David. I mean, the most important was the Davidic Covenant. He makes a promise to David about his offspring, his immediate son, Solomon, and then long in the distance, the ultimate son of David, who would come and reign and rule over all the earth. God makes a promise to him. And this promise is a word that Nathan probably recorded and wrote down. And here it was. And this is the promise God made. It was inscripturated, and David could say here's what God said to me. Here's what David is praying now and singing, "Remember your word to your servant," okay, "in which you have made me hope." Okay. You



made a promise. God, remember your promise because this is the promise you made me put my hope in. I'm hoping in the promise. Just like Romans Chapter 8, our hope is in a promise that God made about our future. And it's the thing that God directs us to. We got to remember the promise. Because just like in a microcosm of our passage in Acts 27, this shipwreck, the promise was all 276 of you were going to survive. You're going to have to run ashore on an island but here it is. And so it came to pass exactly as God promised. And so I got to remember that because the focus of my hope is the words that God spoke.

Verse 50, "This is my comfort in my affliction." How do I get a heart that is strong and courageous like this series title, Courageous Endurance? How do I endure with courage in this life when by nature everything about it should make my heart sick because I'm having to wait? The tree of life's coming but now, heart sickness. Well I take heart, I encourage my heart, I buoy my heart, I get to the place where I have strength, and I bolster the courage of my heart by looking at your promise. "This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life." I can in the midst of all this cling to your promise. Now, "The insolent utterly deride me." I got lots of enemies and David had plenty of them. "But I do not turn away from your law." I stay focused on that. I'm not going to let those opponents make me think that your promise isn't true. Because it's law, it's truth. And "When I think of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O Lord." Now David is living roughly in the 10th century B.C., all the way back to the 15th century B.C., about 450 years prior to that, Moses is coming out of Egypt into the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land and he pens by God's prophetic work through Moses the first five books of the Bible. So Genesis through Deuteronomy.

And in that, by the way, if I'm David 450 years later and I'm sitting on the throne of Israel, I'm even reading about myself in those books. He takes comfort from reading the applicable sections of the law regarding his own life, like there would be a king one day, and they went a long time without a king until there was a king who was chosen. God chose him as the person who they wanted to have on the throne, Saul. Saul wasn't God's pick. David was God's pick. And David was supposed to write a copy of the Law of Moses for himself to read while he was the king. All those things were written in the Old Testament in the first five books of the Bible. So these laws and "rules from of old, he takes comfort in them." I see myself in the writings of Scripture that at this point are almost 500 years old. And he says those things and what you said about me, by extension, in those passages, whether specific or general, as a follower of God, I take comfort in that, because whatever you said about me it's true. And the promises you make about me they're true. And so he says, I find comfort even in the midst of my affliction. See, the real challenge is for us to hold tightly to the promises of God.

Now, I want to expand this just a little. Let me show you what the New Testament says about this paradigm. Second Peter Chapter 1. Please turn to Second Peter Chapter 1. Now, these are some very superlative statements, they're very extreme statements and some of you don't believe this passage, but you need to because all the statements of God are true. And here's what he says in the New Testament regarding what he's given us, which we're going to see the specific core of what he's given us, he gets back to his promises. Verse 3, "His divine power," talking about God here, "has granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness." Now here's the deal. If I lose hope and my heart is sick, I start to do things that are not godly.



But God says, hey Christians, I've given you everything that you need. What does God give us? Well, he gives us life and breath and all the resources and all that. But he gives us most importantly as this text will highlight, is a book with promises in it. And so he's given us all that we need for life and to continue to be godly. I can be godly with what God has given me. I don't need anything other than that.

God is providing all that I need in temporal experience of life, but the book itself gives me what I need to continue to live a godly life and to not lose hope. Where do I get it? I get it in the book, "through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence." Well, here's the thing, there's not a lot of glory right now. There's a lot of junk right now. As Jesus said, there are wars and rumors of wars and pestilence and all these bad things that are taking place. There's a lot of trouble in this world, you'll have tribulation. "Through many tribulations," Acts 14, "you must enter the kingdom of God." So it's going to be hard. But he says this book with all of this promise about future "glory and excellence," it's coming "by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises." It's all based on his promises, "so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature." You're going to imbibe in the New Kingdom on the greatness of God. As I often like to say from this platform, the unmitigated goodness of God is going to saturate the kingdom and everything about your experience there is going to be a full partaking. It's not just that you're regenerate now and there's a sense in which this new man is created in the image and likeness of God. That's true. You have desires that come from God because you're a new creature in Christ. But there's something about the ultimate glory and excellence of our coming experience where you're going to be a full partaker in the greatness and glory of God. It's going to be awesome, "having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire."

And guess what is admitted throughout the New Testament, including Peter himself. You are constantly barraged with sinful desires from your own flesh but you'll escape all that. This has an eschatological future view. Do you see that here? We're heading toward the excellence and glory of God in a place where his divine nature saturates our whole experience. We don't have it yet. We have corruption in the world. We have all kinds of sinful desires still attacking us in the world. We have a culture that continues to give in to its sinful desires. And so it's going to be hard now. It's rough sledding in the present but one day it'll be great. So what do I need to cling to? His precious and very great promises.

Now, I hope in your small groups you might go beyond what I'm about to do now, but I can't help but step out of Acts 27 and say what are some of the great promises that God gives us? Let's start with the most broad and big ones. Go to Colossians Chapter 1. Let me give you three. Okay. Let me just give you a preview of three of the big promises that keep me going when I feel like this life stinks and I don't want to do it anymore. Here's what the Bible says about what he promises me and he promises you if you're a Christian and here are things you need to get excited about, you can hold on to these. Now you can go and list three more, six more or 33 more in your small groups but we need to look at the promises. We need to be careful when we look at promises because not every promise in the book is yours, contra the hymns you might have sung as a kid. Not every promise in the book is yours, but certain promises that are related to God's people and the Church of Jesus Christ in particular, those



are your promises and you can claim them. You can say, that's my promise. Okay, what are the promises for us? Because I constantly remind you it's not about the "here and now," it's about the "then and there." So we got to focus on that. And I got to think about the "then and there." And I'm always looking forward to the "then and there," but I need to know why I have any hope in going to the "then and there" that's good.

Colossians Chapter 1. Let's go there. Let's start in verse 11 because this is where I want to live right now and this is present tense, "Being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience." That's a really good start. I would like to endure. I would like to be patient. The present is hard. We don't preach this enough. I know we do a lot from this platform, but Christianity at large does not preach this enough, does not adjust your expectations for the fact that you're going to need a lot of patience and a lot of endurance because it's going to be really rough sledding in this life. But I love this next line, "with joy." You could do this even though the circumstances should by nature give you a sick heart. The infusion of God's truth, in particular his great, his precious and very great promises, should give you the ability to endure and be patient with joy. That's what I want. "Giving thanks to the Father," here it comes, "who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." Now that's steeped with symbolism there, "saints in light," the holy ones in light. But I am qualified. I can thank God now that I am qualified to share in that. When is it coming? In the future. Romans 8. It's all in the future. It's all coming. It's all deferred. It's all postponed but it's coming.

So, Christian, trust in the promise. Even though you're on the battered ship right now we're going to make it. And when we make it we're going "to share in an inheritance with the saints in light. For he has delivered us from the domain of darkness." You're not going to be cast into outer darkness. And he's transferred us, right now, "Transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son." He loves his Son because his Son did everything right. And I do a lot of things wrong and so do you. And instead, he looks at us as being in his beloved Son, so much so "in whom," verse 14, "we have redemption," I'm redeemed, I'm purchased, I'm bought, "and the forgiveness of sins," that release of sins. Here's one thing you have that is the most precious and the most very great promise. It is the greatest promise, I think, for any Christian in this age right now, that you can say I'm forgiven and I'm accepted. I am fully forgiven and I'm fully accepted. And the God of this universe accepts me as though I were his own son, because I am seen to be in his Son. I am right now as qualified to enter into the Kingdom as Jesus Christ himself is. That's what the Bible teaches. That's not what Roman Catholicism teaches, right? If you believe in this thing called purgatory, that doesn't work. If you believe in any other world religion, that's not what you believe. If you believe in the cults that's not what you believe, right? Islam talks about the big scales, about you got to weigh it and see whether or not you got enough good here.

There are a lot of theologies out there but we don't have theologies like this. This theology is that if you trust in Christ now, you can have full forgiveness. There's no reference to your sin. "There's no condemnation for those in Christ," to quote Romans 8 verse 1, and that you are fully accepted, as accepted as his beloved Son. That is the most important promise, the most important promise of all. Now go with me to Philippians Chapter 3, Philippians Chapter 3. Let



me give you a second one. These should at least be the biggest planks of all that you hold on to in the turbulent storms of this life. And the first one is I'm fully forgiven and fully accepted. That is, of course, if you're a Christian. Not everybody in this room is a Christian I realize that. It happens at a moment in time with real repentance, with a real appeal to God. "God, give me a clear conscience. Forgive me of my sins. I'm unworthy. I know I don't deserve it, but I repent of my sinful life, my life detached from you. I want your work from your Son living in my place and dying in my place to be applicable to me." However you say that, however you go about that in your words, your heart clings to the truth of the gospel, then you're fully accepted. You could be the thief on the cross, right? Talk about scales. Here are the scales. All the sin and immediately he's fully qualified to enter the inheritance of the saints in light.

Philippians Chapter 3. Here's something else that I hope you can all relate to because a lot of the pain in this room right now is either the sickness that you have, the diagnosis that you have, the physical suffering that you have, or the physical suffering or the disease or the death of people around you. This is what causes the biggest pains, right? Friday I was up in L.A. burying a 20-year-long member of this church. And every time I do a funeral, and I do a lot of them, and so do our church staff, our pastoral staff, and as we stand there, this is a frequent reminder of the fact that all of us have an appointment with death. "It's appointed unto man once to die." And as I sat there looking at this, and I remember just, some of you were there and I'm looking out at some of you who were there who drove all the way up there to Glendale Forest Lawn to do this and there we were in this church of the Forest Lawn there. It's called the Church of the Recessional, a beautiful facility. And I'm standing there preaching and I'm so grateful that the widow had an open casket, which is not very vogue these days. "I don't want an open casket, that's creepy." I even had people, as they invited them to come up and go by the casket, a lot of people say, "I don't want to do that. That's gross. Weird," right?

And that reminds me, by the way, that every time a preacher stands up and says this is a natural thing, death is just a natural part of life, I always want to bust out laughing, which I never would at a service, but I think to myself, that's the most ridiculous thing anyone could ever say. Natural. Do you know what natural means, right? Natural means it's the nature of a person, right? Here's the one thing that's not the nature of a person, not a single person who I interact with, is to be dead, right? That's not, as a philosopher would say, the ontology of humanity is not to be dead. The ontology of humans, one of the most fundamental attributes of a human being that I might go to lunch with, or hang out with, or watch a game with, is someone who is alive, right? That's very much the nature of human beings. And when they die that's a very unnatural thing. As I often say, as I said on Friday to that crowd, a packed crowd in that church, I said this is the most unnatural thing of all. And here's the deal, right? We have a God who has come to solve the problem, and he extends to us the promises. I quoted John Chapter 11 as Jesus stood at a funeral himself and said, "I am the resurrection and the life. If you believe in me, even if you die, yet shall you live." And if you live after you die and trust in me you'll never die. This is going to be reversed.

That's why Jesus popped out of the grave three days after he was laid in a sepulcher, when his body was unanimated, when he was dead, his spirit had departed from his body. And all of that resurrection where he now had a new body that he left and flew off the top of the





Mount of Olives to be with the Father. And then the angel said, the way he left is the same way he's coming. And it's been at least 2,000 years. And I can bet you this: the brown, glossy eyes of the Jewish Messiah are going to come back and his eyes will look as fresh and as beautiful as the day he left the Mount of Olives 2,000 years ago. And some of you only lived on the planet for 40 years and you can't get off the ground when you sit on the ground too long. Our bodies are decaying. And if you're 50 or 60 or 70, don't even talk to me if you're 80, it is a painful thing to grow old. And here's the deal. He went by the age of 80 a long time ago, 800 a long time ago. He's now 2,000 years in his new body and here's the deal. Everything works, all the cartilage works in his knees. Everything's working well on all the follicles of hair on the top of his head. They're all working beautifully. He is absolutely working as beautifully and perfectly as he can be. So much so I can say that the body that came out of the sepulcher on Sunday morning was so perfect that even some of his closest friends interacted with him and didn't even know it was him. That's how great he looked. Now, there's no mention of that. Mary and Martha go man, he's a really good-looking guy. They didn't have that in the Scripture. But why didn't they recognize him? Because he was now in his glorified body. Glory, by the way, is a word that is translated sometimes in Scripture to the Greek word "Doxa," to represent something that is absolutely stunningly beautiful.

Take a look at this text, verse 20. Philippians Chapter 3 verse 20, "Our citizenship is in heaven." Right now, if you're a Christian, you are fully qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. And that means you have a citizenship card, so to speak, stuck in your proverbial spiritual back pocket. And from it, this citizenship in heaven, from it, from heaven we are awaiting a Savior. Now there's the problem of a sick heart because "hope deferred makes the heart sick." I have to wait. That's the problem in the Christian life. And I'm waiting, though, for a savior to show up, the Lord, the boss, Jesus the Savior, Christ the Messiah, "who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself," the powerful God of the universe, fullness of deity, dwelling in bodily form. Every attribute of the Father existing in the Son is going to say one day to your body, if you die like the friend we buried on Friday up in Glendale, the day Christ comes to get his Church, that body is going to be reassembled according to the manufacturer's specs, with the DNA without any defect in impervious cells in a body that will no longer be subject to entropy or death or decay. No disease. And he's going to get a new body.

And if we who remain and are alive by that time, if we happen to live to that day, we're going to be changed "in the twinkling of an eye," it says in First Corinthians Chapter 15, and we're going to be translated, First Thessalonians 4 says, into the presence of God and we are all going to be changed. "We're going to be like him," First John 3, "because we're going to see him as he is." We're going to have fellowship with a perfect God in a perfectly glorified body. That is something that every day your bones ache, or every day you look in the mirror and say, I don't recognize that guy anymore. However, you go through life thinking this is really a problem, that the people you love are sick and dying, or I am sick and dying. Just remember this: the promise you hang on to, the plank of God's promise in the bobbing sea of circumstances, is the fact that you're going to have an absolutely perfect body, a resurrection body that will live on for eternity in a perfect place called the New Earth where righteousness

dwells. That's a good promise. And we hang on to that in the midst of all the difficulty. And if all you're looking at is the present and what the doctor says and what's the course of remedy and what's going to happen to me and all those other things, you're missing the point of where your mind should be. Philippians 4 says, your mind should be focused on, fixated on the things that are good and lovely and of good repute and all the things that God says that are positive. And we can only find those in the next life. We can only look ahead by clinging to the promises wherein those things are found.

One more, Isaiah 65. I only added this, it made the bronze, you know, category here, the third one in my list, because another question I got asked this week which I get asked all the time, and I want to take you to Isaiah 65 to answer it real quick. It's so important if you think to the future and think, well, I won't be all that good, you know. Well, you know, I hear people... I don't know, is it wrong for me to say that, you know, "I don't want Christ to come back till we have our first child because I want the experience of having, you know..." Oh, boy. Or they say things like, well, "I really can't enjoy the kingdom because, you know, I just will look back at this life and I'll just regret all the bad decisions I made and all the wood, hay and straw." Or "how can I enjoy this? Because my uncle, I loved him so much. He was like a father to me and he's not a Christian, so I know he's not going to be there. I'm going to be sad the whole time." Okay, these verses are for you. Isaiah 65. Look at verse 11. He's talking about his enemies here, those "who forsake the Lord, who forget my holy mountain." Right? They don't go to church, so to speak. They're not going up to the temple. They "set a table for Fortune and fill cups mixed with wine for Destiny." Their false gods hoping that, you know, their rabbit's foot, so to speak, is going to get them through. They don't pray to God. They pray to their false idols. They trust in their medications. They trust in their therapists or whatever. They're looking for help in other places. "I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow to the slaughter." They're going to bow to your idols, you're going to bow to the slaughter. "Because, when I called, you didn't answer; when I spoke, you didn't listen, but you did what was evil in my eyes and chose what I did not delight in."

Now interlaced is all of that unpacked. But then he interlaces in verse 13 that the first part of this with the things that didn't come to his servants. "Therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, my servant shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, my servant shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold, my servant shall rejoice, but you shall be put to shame; behold, my servant shall sing for gladness of heart, but you shall cry out for pain of heart and shall wail for breaking of spirit.'" Okay, all of that. He's going to say this, though: I know my people are going to be good. Well, interlacing all of that in verses 13 and 14, I think, well, that's the problem. I'm not going to be very happy if I know there will be hungry people and thirsty people and people put to shame and people in pain. I can't be happy in heaven. Verse 15, "You shall leave your name to my chosen for a curse, and the Lord God will put you to death, but his servants he will call by another name, so that he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth, and he who takes an oath in the land shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten and are hidden from my eyes." The word "my" there, that first person pronoun is God. Done. I'm not even going to think about it anymore. Well, I'm going to think about it. No you're not. Verse 17, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind."



But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; and no more shall it be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress."

And as he goes on in verse 20, we know that the immediate application is this first phase that we call the Millennial Kingdom. And it's going to be good but it won't be perfect. The next one is even going to be more perfect than the one he is describing here. And as the language is picked up by Christ through John in Revelation Chapters 21 and 22, it is the perfect new heaven and new earth where none of this is ever going to be coming back for a reprise. There will be in the Millennial Kingdom at the very end, but in eternity never again. And all I'm telling you is that the promise is not going to come to mind. You're not going to look back and go, "I could have done a lot more for Christ." You're not going to think about that. You might deal with that at the Bema Seat, but then he's going to wipe away every tear. And we're not going to recall those things. You're not going to have regret. You're not going to have sadness. You're going to say, well, I was married to a non-Christian. I really loved him a lot, but he's lost. You're not going to think in those terms. You will not. The God of justice will do what is right and for you he'll lavish on you grace. Yes, you'll enjoy the kingdom because here is the promise of God, enduring joy, the former things forgotten. I got forgiveness and I got acceptance. I got the grave conquered and I got new life that will last forever that's perfect. And I've got a guarantee of joy without any regret, without even looking back on all the former things that made me ache forgotten.

That's the truth of the Bible based on the promise of God. I don't have any of it right now. I just have to hang on to the promise that every time God has made a promise it's come true and God has made this promise to us. I just pick three, pick some more in your small groups, go through some of the promises of God. That's great and just know that's where our focus should be. That's the thing that brings us comfort in our afflictions. Focus on the promises of God. Go into our bookstore. We got some books in there about the promises of God or just go online. What are the promises of God? Be a good Bible student. Be a good Berean. Not every promise is for us, but those that are you better cling to tightly. What do we need? We need faith in those. We need to, look at the word there, believe in God's promises. Jot it down. Study it on your own. Hebrews 11. That's where it starts, "The assurance of things hoped for," the assurance and the guarantee, the confidence in the fact that the unseen things are real. This is how my outer man can decay day by day but the inner man can get stronger because I'm focused on the assurance of the things that are to come, because God's promises can be relied upon. That's the key.

Do you remember that triumvirate of great virtues in First Corinthians 13:13, right? Now, the last one is love, the one that your grandma, you know, needle-pointed that's in the hallway of your house, right? Love. "The greatest of these is love." No, I get that, but there are two that precede it in that great trio of virtues, right? Faith, hope and love. Now, faith and hope we need those now. And we should be exercising love. But just know the importance of faith and hope. The hope that in my life has to be deferred can still bring me joy if I got enough faith to believe that. That I have a confidence, an assurance of things unseen. You have to have faith, and you have to have the kind of hope that is absolutely certain. As I often say, it's not a



hope that's a cross-your-fingers kind of hope. It's a confidence that God will always do what he says, and then you can be comforted by the promises that they will be to you, precious and very great promises.

Yeah, but the world's a mess. No. You're right. Go back to our passage. Acts 27 verse 39. Let's start at the beginning of the passage now. "When it was day, they didn't recognize the land, but they noticed the bay with a beach ... if possible to run the ship ashore." We've already lost all of our stuff. We lost all of our luggage. We lost all of our backpacks. We lost all of our grain. We lost any hope of any kind of monetary benefit from this ship and all of its cargo is gone, it's at the bottom of the sea. They took the anchors they left them there, and then they put the sail up, it brought them into land, but it hit the reef. The bow was stuck and the stern just kept getting broken up. And so it's all falling apart. Now, in that moment, I just want you to picture this, right? This is absolutely a mess. Being a part of a sinking ship. Right? This is not a place where you think your faith is vibrant. It's all going to end, you know it's going to end in verse 44b, "And so it was that they were all brought safely to land." Now this is not the kind of way I want to be brought safely to land, and it's not the kind of way Paul wanted to be brought safely into the kingdom in Second Timothy Chapter 4, by having his head cut off in a Roman prison. But that's exactly how it ended. But the truth of the promise was true, right? The reality of what God promised is going to come to pass.

But right now there are all of these contrary circumstances. And what God is asking you to do, and always has been, number two, is to trust his promises, "Believe Despite Contrary Circumstances." And contrary circumstances there are a lot of them but let me start with the first one. This is one that is most prominent in everybody's mind. It's the thing that most people start to doubt God because of this. It's found in Second Peter 3. You don't need to turn there, but the mockers start piling on because it's been so long since God has promised these things. It's been so long. When God made the promises, for instance, regarding crushing the serpent's head in Genesis Chapter 3, we don't even know the date of that, we don't have a date, we can only guess. But just think of how long it was until that took place in a forensic way, a theologically legal way, on the cross. Thousands of years. Think about even when God made promises regarding Israel and the land, right? They were nomads in a desert in Sinai. And yet God made the promise. And it was a thousand years until even the security of the post-exilic realities that were talked about in Deuteronomy ever came to be. A thousand years!

Here's the problem, time. The problem is you being made to wait. There are people defecting from the Christian faith right now. They didn't really have the possession of the Spirit but they sat here with us and they're out. Why? Because where's God? Where's God? How many times are you tempted to say where's God? The problem of waiting is the problem. That's a circumstance that all of us have to struggle with. And I'm just telling you this, don't ever let the circumstance of ongoing time, like God's not doing what he said. Don't ever let that be something that stumbles you in the Christian life because God has said, you know, "a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like a day." The time issue should not be a problem for you. Every time God makes a promise he keeps it. Whether it's a thousand years later, whether it's 2,000 years later, whether it's 10,000 years later. The things God promised



to Abraham in the 20th century B.C., many came to fruition at the time of Christ. And some of them haven't happened yet. I'm just telling you when Jesus left and the angel said, the way you saw him go, that's the way you're going to see him come back. I'm just telling you, just because we've waited now 2,000 years and every preceding generation of Christians has read that saying, well, I hope it's now. Come quickly, Lord Jesus, Maranatha, we want you to come back. We want this "world and its kingdom become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ." And Christmas cards have been sent for a long, long time saying, "The government shall rest on his shoulders" and it still hasn't happened. Don't sit there and think, well, it hasn't happened so I really can't trust the promises of God.

God doesn't forget a single promise he made, and every single one of them has come true in the past that was meant to come true in the past. And there's been hundreds of them that have come true, and he's got hundreds of them yet to be fulfilled. I cannot say where's the promise of his coming. I've got to be able to say, I believe God's promises, which is the whole point of Second Peter Chapter 3. Believe it, and it ends with this: we're going to live in "a new earth where righteousness dwells." You better bank on that promise regardless of the circumstances of prolonged time. You may suffer with an intractable disease. You may be the Apostle Paul with a thorn in the flesh that is so bad you may never get healthy, right? That's why this whole prosperity gospel is a joke. It's a joke. God never promised you good health. Here's what he promised you: that you would get sick and die. Genesis Chapter 3. Now you don't send that card to your friend who's sick, like, "Hey, praise the Lord, he's keeping his promises. You're in the hospital, you're sick, you're dying of cancer. Hey, praise the Lord. He's faithful," right? But you could because he is. Because that's exactly what he said was going to happen to every successive generation until he comes back. And so we're saying, God, you're keeping your promises. You said we would not be, as we talked about last time, you have not said that we're exempt from suffering. So we're going to trust you that your promises are true because even our suffering promise has come true.

And the circumstances of suffering, as God made clear to Job, you don't need the answer why. How many times as pastors do we get people saying this terrible thing happened to me? Why? Right? Terrible things happened to Job. And what did God say? He shows up to answer Job. Did he at any point give Job in that monologue that God gives to Job, because it was a monologue, Job just keeps covering his mouth, and God speaks to him. Did he one time explain any of this? No? Somehow it was explained later because we got the book of Job and we know why at least it started but God never gives him a reason why he had boils and pus all over his body. He never had a reason why his seven children died. He never had a reason given to him. All God said is, I'm God and you're not and you just need to trust me. Because in the end all of God's promises are true. And that's the part we struggle with. You can read books about suffering and evil and the problem of evil. We call it theodicy. You can read about the theodicy in theology but here's the bottom line. Every promise of God is going to come true. We can understand rationally why there's evil in the world both physical and moral evil. We can understand that. We can say that makes more sense than the non-Christian explanation. But at the end, all we can say is, I don't know why your kid got in an accident. I don't know why you got cancer. I don't know why your husband left you. I don't know why the economy is falling apart for you. I don't know. I don't know the specific reason,



but I know this: all of God's promises are true. You cannot let suffering and pain and sickness and waiting ever be something in the contrary circumstances that makes it look like we're on the wrong ship. Right? Breaking apart and you think I picked the wrong ship to get to Rome. I picked the wrong time to get to Rome. But that's the boat God's got you on. And your boat may be different than mine. And yours might be going down faster than mine. Mine might be going down faster than yours. I don't know, but God's promises are all true. And you better hang on and believe those promises regardless.

I got one more section. I have no time to elaborate on it, but First John Chapter 3 verses 19 and 20. It's the core of an argument about when circumstances get their tentacles into my heart. And when your heart starts to condemn you, that is a circumstance of sorts. It's an emotional reaction to what's going on in your life and it may be your own sin. Some of you struggle even with the fact that as God's child you're defying him in some area or you've fallen and stumbled. And all I'm saying is even when your heart condemns you the Bible makes this statement: God is greater than your heart. Can you just realize the statements and promises of God are bigger than any circumstance, including the way you feel about yourself? You have to believe God's promise. Believe it despite any contrary circumstances. Are you still in Acts 27? Look at verse 42. "The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners." Now was that God's plan? It was not God's plan but it was the soldier's plan. Now the soldiers have the thing strapped to their hip that can enforce their plans. Their plans are to kill the prisoners and they have swords on their hips and daggers strapped to their calf muscle. They can kill the prisoners. Prisoners don't have those swords or daggers. The soldiers had them. They were strong. They were gifted to do the work that they were doing and they threatened to kill the prisoners.

Now here's what God said. All 276 are going to make it. God has given you all the passenger's lives. So here are people who have made themselves opponents to God's will. God's promise is you'll be saved. Here are people who have pitted themselves against the promises of God. There are not only contrary circumstances, they're contrary people. Let's just call them contrarians. Number three, you need to "Believe Despite Contrarians." Contrarians are probably harder for some of you than circumstances. It's people who you respect who are saying things that are completely opposed to God's promises. I mean, think about just some basic ones. I mean, the Bible says people and people's hearts without Christ are sick, desperately sick, right? The world thinks people are basically good, most people do at least. You look at all kinds of things that the world says. These people oftentimes give you a different sense, sometimes an absolutely oppositional sense of what God has said. And you need to realize there's no person who can ever in any way undo the promise of God. Think about Romans Chapter 8 at the end of the chapter he says there is not an angel, there's not a principality, there's not a power in this universe that can do anything to undo the promise of God, which on the table there is that you are Christ's and his love is never going to be removed from you. The acceptance and forgiveness and the promise of a resurrected body in a new place called the New Earth in which righteousness reigns, he's never going to renege on that, ever. No prince, there's no contrarian to God's will and God's promises that can ever take away. It's done. In God's book, it's done.



And here are these Roman soldiers. Well, we're going to kill them. They didn't think, well, you know, God's promises are they are all going to make it. They didn't care about God's promise. There are people in your life who are like Sanballat and Tobiah. And I put that passage in Nehemiah 4 for your small group discussions, and you should talk about the Sanballats and Tobiahs in your life. There are people uttering things to you seemingly so persuasive that say God is not true. His promises are not real. Whether it's about the creation of the world or the end of the world. And you need to believe despite the contrarians because God, as it says in Scripture, "Let God be found true and every man a liar," because at the end of the day the one with the power is going to win. And he is one who sits outside of time, so to speak. And he is one who's made promises about the future. He's the only one who can control all this, and you can't even have Satan himself undo the promises of God. He's on a leash and that leash is only let out so far. And so we know God has said, you got to believe what I say, not what these others say no matter if it's a demon in your life whispering to you the temptation that all of this is a farce, you got to believe God, not the contrarians. There are all kinds of contrarians and I don't know who yours are, but there are mockers and scoffers and opponents and antagonists, and you need to know they're out there.

But praise God. How does God respond to the contrarians? Look at the middle of verse 43. "But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan." Okay, now I don't think just because the centurion seemed to like Paul and gave him some lenience as they traveled, I don't know that he's there holding hands and praying together or having Bible study together. I'm not sure this guy is a Christian, as a matter of fact, I'm going to assume he's not. I hope and pray maybe he is. Maybe he became a Christian before this was all over. But I'm thinking here's just a guy in the military who happens to be in charge of these other people, and he gets in the way and blocks. He is the one who outranks them and by God's favor he directs the affairs of individuals that aren't even his. Let's just assume that. God's got plenty of examples in Scripture where they're not his. And he takes people who are not followers of God and he says I'm going to use them to block this plan that's trying to block my promise. And God uses, I put it in my notes and I don't mean any disrespect here, but God uses pawns, and in this case a mighty centurion with stripes on his shoulders. This is a pawn in God's plan.

And there are people who step in to say, yeah, God's plan is going to succeed and they don't even know it. Do you think Pharaoh played into God's plan? Absolutely. The whole point of his opposition was to get to the ten plagues so that God could demonstrate his power through Moses the prophet so he could write the first five books of the Bible. I mean, if you really want to look at it in terms of Hebrews Chapter 2 verses 1 through 4, that's what's happening. This is God working through secular means. I always quote the end of Isaiah 44 and the beginning of Isaiah 45 to talk about Cyrus, the Persian king. I always talk about the Mido-Persians who overcame the Babylonians, and that's true. But eventually the Persians overpowered the Medes and expelled them. And so the Persians were in charge and Cyrus was basically this monarch of the Persians and he could do anything. Now, he's not a Christian. But God says, I'm going to grasp him by my right hand and I'm going to use him to accomplish my will because my promise has to be fulfilled.



God's going to use secular people in your life. People who do not love God, do not know Christ, do not go to church, do not study the Bible, do not believe in God's promises, but they're going to be utilized in your life to put you in a place where God's going to realize his promises in your life because there's more than just eschatological promises. There are promises for you to get from here to there. And you watch what God does in bringing people into your life just like he brought Xerxes. You could look at Xerxes in Esther or Cyrus in Ezra or Gamaliel early in the book of Acts. He's not a Christian, but it all works in favor. Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel, Ahasuerus in Nehemiah, Artaxerxes. You've got so many examples of God using secular powers to become pawns to make sure his promise gets fulfilled in the lives of his people. That's an amazing thing. And God is using the centurion here as a pawn to block the plan of people who are opposing the promise of God, the fulfillment of God's promise.

There's one more group. I just can't help but point out when I think about the contrarians. It says here in the middle of verse 43, "He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make it to the land, and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship." And I picture these people, picture them with me, they're jumping in, 276 people, they all make it and they all have to get wet. They all got to swim or they have to get a kickboard and start kicking. 276. Picture this in a storm with waves. They all are eventually going to roll up on the sand, sandy and wet and cold from the rain in October. This is what's going to happen. Every one of them has to strive to get there. Now all of them trying to strive to save their life are actually doing exactly what God had promised. Now, I'm not going to try to compare your Christian friends to them but I am going to make the connection that all of us who are seeing that God has a plan and purpose for our lives to get us to his excellency and his glory, that we're all going to be ending up walking through this narrow road, through the small gate into the kingdom. We do it with fellow travelers, if you will, strivers. As Paul said, he's striving in Philippians Chapter 4. He's pushing. He's forgetting what lies behind. He's pressing on to what lies ahead. He wants to take hold of that for which God took hold of him.

And all I'm saying is you don't do this alone. Circumstances are contrary. You got people who are contrarians, but you've also got people who God uses as pawns and that's a good thing. But also people who are swimming right next to you, heading toward the fulfillment of God's promises. They're "working out their salvation in fear and trembling" just like you are. And if you're watching this online and unless you're sick in bed with a doctor's note you need to get to church, you need to be involved in meeting together, "not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together." We need each other in proximity with each other physically to care for each other, to be in small groups where our chairs go face to face. You've got to be involved in other Christians' lives. That's why I always try to talk about the small group discussions in my sermons because I want you to go to a small group and discuss the sermon. And I want you to be in relationship with other Christians who are striving and moving so that they might one day, as Peter put it, have "a rich welcome into the kingdom." They hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" We need people around us like that. Don't live the Christian life on your own. You're part of a team here and it's important, especially because all of us can tell stories in our small group about the contrarians in our lives and even the secular pawns that God uses to block. But it's the fellow strivers that we need to trust in in terms of our own strength.





"A cord of three strands is not easily broken." As Philemon verses 1 and 2 say, there are all these words, fellow servants and "fellow workers," we all work together at this.

One last passage as I run out of time. Turn to Psalm 62. and let me just tell you a spiritual cardiologist in your life cannot fix completely the aching of your heart because all of us are longing for home. I get that. But hopefully some cardiologist work, if you will, on your heart can be done every time you're directed to the truth of God's Word, and you go away from studying the Word and you say, I get it. It brings comfort to you that God has a plan, that he's working that plan out. Let me read what a responsive listener to this sermon should be able to say. Verses 1 through 8, Psalm 62. Are you ready? Here it comes. "Psalm of David. For God alone my soul waits in silence." Not even the fellow strivers are going to get me there. It's God who is going to get me. I'm waiting for him. "From him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress. I shall not be greatly shaken." Oh, I'm going to be wet. I'm going to be shivering. I'm going to have to swim on a plank or whatever. It may be hard, but I'm going to be greatly shaken. But why are you going to be shaken at all? Verse 3. Because people, "How long will all of you attack a man to batter him, like a leaning wall, a tottering fence?" He feels like a punching bag here. This is David the king. Well, he knows what it's like to be chased down as a fugitive, that's for sure.

Verse 4, "They only plan to thrust him down from his high position." So we're assuming this is written during a time when David has ascended to his position. And who hasn't, when they've had some promotion, had people around them because of envy and jealousy and contention? Have people talking behind your back and fake to your face. Even that is a pain. Even that's frustrating. "Only plan to thrust him down from his high position. They take pleasure in falsehood. They bless with their mouths, but inwardly they curse," and they go talk around the water cooler behind your back. Verse 5, "For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is in him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory, my mighty rock, my refuge is God." That's a great text, the first seven verses. But I said eight verses because at some point when you have that experience grappling with God's Word and letting the truth of God's Word like a sharp scalpel come and get involved in the thoughts and intentions of your heart, and you leave strengthened with a courageous endurance, then you need to turn to God's people. Then you come and you share it. Look at verse 8. Now he turns to them. "Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts before him," pray, put your trust in God, "God is a refuge for us." The pronoun shift there is super helpful. I want you to deal with the truth of God's Word. Let it strengthen you. Let it give you courage. Let the promises of God give you hope. And then turn to others and help them through. Grab their hand and let's get to the kingdom. That's what it's all about. In the meantime we do good. In the meantime we grab other people. We share the gospel. But we'll get there because God promised we will.

Let's pray. God, help us in our day with the troubles and pains of our culture and our life. And as things go wrong and things go bad, and even if things go from bad to worse, whether it's an election or a war or the economy or whatever it might be, may we never be shaken as Jesus, you yourself said to us, when all these things happened, let us not be alarmed. Certainly you warned us, you told us, including sickness and death. You said these would be



the norm. This would be the season of that darkness. But you've delivered us out of the domain of darkness. We're not going to stay here forever. You've given us a "qualification to share in that inheritance with the saints in light." So give us more confidence in that. Let us look forward with hope. Let it change our disposition now. Let it give us courage and strength as it says in Scripture to even have joy and thanksgiving in the midst of it all. Change our attitudes, God. Let us be stronger and not just for ourselves but let us turn to others and say to all the peoples, all the people around us, all our friends, all of our fellow parishioners at church, let us say, yeah, let's trust in the Lord. He is our refuge. He's a refuge for us, a fortress for us. Give us more of that strength in our hearts today.

I pray in Jesus name. Amen.