



Preparing for the Kingdom-Part 1

Anticipating the Defeat of Death

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So how are your packing skills—your packing skills? I have to admit I’m not the greatest packer. I’ve gotten better over the years. But there are still those times I get where I’m going and I unzip my suitcase and say, “Why did I bring that? You know, looking at this?” Or worse yet, I unzip my suitcase and say, “Why didn’t I bring what I needed?” Few things are worse than washing your underwear in a hotel sink—erase that image from your mind.

You know, when you travel you’d better prepare. You’ve gotta check the forecast. You’ve got to know what the weather’s going to be like, what kind of clothes to pack. How many changes of clothes you’re going to need, how many days you’re going to be there. You’ve got to make sure you download your boarding passes, make sure you triple-check departure times—there are all these things you have to do. And if you’re going to travel well, you’ve got to make sure you do all of that. And you know what that’s like.

Well, if it’s important for us to prepare well for a four-day business trip, then certainly you know it takes even more planning—and it’s even more important—when you’re moving from one house to another. Think about the last time you moved, especially if you moved out of state. Think about that. I remember moving from Arizona, when I was doing ministry there at the university, and moving back to California. You’ve got to time everything just right. It’s like the planning Olympics—make sure everything is in its place. Do I have the trucks here at the right time? Is the lease in on the right day? Is the escrow or the lease ready on the other end? Do I have just all the stuff, triple-checking your place before you leave it and handing over the keys? That’s a lot of stress. There’s a lot that goes into successfully moving from one place to another.

Well, as you know—and there’s no arguing this—you are in for the biggest relocation of all. You’re going to leave this present world; you won’t be here very long. And you’re going to transition and relocate into what the Bible calls, if you’re a Christian, the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, a place where he reigns forever and ever. That’s the coming kingdom—the kingdom that you were taught to pray about every day: “Your kingdom come.” The thing that really captured the heart of the early church when they would cry out, “Maranatha—come quickly, Lord Jesus.” They looked forward to this transition, and they were taught by Christ himself to prepare for it. It’s very important.



You say, “Well, I’m a Christian—I’m as prepared as I need to be, right?” No. I mean, that’s important—boarding pass, very important. You’ve got to have that. But there’s much more to this transition than just making sure you’re saved. That’s important, but there’s so much to this that God said you need to get ready for. And the more we can focus with clarity on where we’re headed, it’ll start to affect everything—how we make investments here and what we think about the things that we’re choosing to do or not choosing to do. It’ll adjust our attitude, it’ll calibrate our minds, it’ll change our expectations. This whole life, when you think about it: I’m leaving here; I’m going there.

As we’ve been working through our study of the book of Luke, we’ve come to the seventh chapter. And if you haven’t already, I’d like you to open your Bibles to Luke 7. We’re going to begin a section—a series of seven sermons now—where we’re going to look at the implications of the coming kingdom and how you and I ought to get ready; what we need to do to prepare. Obviously, we need to deal with some of the fundamental things like, “Are you sure you are saved?” But there’s so much more we’re going to learn in this series about being ready, because what we’re seeing here are forecasts of the kingdom.

As a matter of fact, as you glance through the chapter real quick—just look through your chapter, no matter what your translation is—if you’ve got an ESV I know for sure you’ve got these headings that’ll take verses 1–10 and separate it. That’s clearly one story, one scene of this centurion’s servant being healed. And then the next one you’ve got there, verses 11–16 (some include 17, the transitional verse), you’ve got another section where this widow’s son gets raised from the dead by Christ. But then after that, verse 17 or 18, you start to hear this very interesting, head-scratching scene where John the Baptist is sending disciples to Jesus saying, “Are you the one, or should we expect someone else?”

Now, when it comes to expectations regarding the kingdom, it is interesting that John the Baptist seems to be a little confused. His expectations didn’t seem to square with what Jesus was saying and teaching and doing, which sounds just impossible to compute, because if you know the story—and you’ve been with us through our study of Luke—we meet John the Baptist before he’s even born. His parents know divinely—his dad, Zechariah, the priest in Israel, knows for certain—that his son is the one who is to be the forerunner to the coming Messiah. Not only that, we meet him in chapter 4 preaching, and we know that he knows he is the one who is the forerunner, preparing people’s hearts for the coming Messiah—“not even worthy to untie his sandal.” He knows that he is the one who’s coming and presenting the Messiah to his generation. Now we’re in chapter 7, and he’s going, “Are you the one?” That’s a bizarre thing, isn’t it? “Are you the one, or should we be looking for someone else?”

I want to start thinking through this passage by considering John’s expectation. And if you look at the passage—just drop down to it—you’ll see that the answer Jesus gives in verse 22 is to go tell John—he



sent this little entourage—“Go tell him what you’ve seen and heard: that the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up.” Let’s just start with that section right there: healings taking place. Tell him that. And then this last line, which we were already encountering in Jesus reading the scroll there in his hometown of Nazareth from Isaiah 61, he says, “And tell them that the poor ‘have the good news preached to them.’”

But the thing that precedes the message of the good news, which we studied when he was there in the synagogue in Nazareth about these things—liberating them not from captivity but from sin and having reconciliation with God and forgiveness—all of that message is preceded by what? Healings. Look at the list: “Go tell them what you’ve seen: blind receive their sight, lame walk, lepers cleansed, the deaf hear, and even the dead are raised up.” Tell him that.

And what’s that supposed to communicate? Well, we’ve already encountered a healing scene in our study of Luke, and we said: when you see Christ healing, that certainly gives us the credentials of Christ. And we get that—understand that. We’ve been saying that’s important. Is he the King of the kingdom? Well, we have already, as we look at this with a lot more biblical knowledge from the New Testament than John had, we’re saying, “Well, yeah, we see that—that’s the credential of the Messiah, that God incarnate, the one who can heal with a word, the one who can create something out of nothing—that is the Christ.” But apparently that was something that was supposed to convince John, but John was questioning because that word had been out and people knew Jesus was healing. What’s with his expectation here? What’s going on?

Well, now you can look back up and see where we’re going to be for the next two weeks—verses 1–10 and verses 11–16. We’re going to look at these two scenes. One is an example of his healing, and one is an example of him raising someone from the dead. These are the things that John’s disciples are supposed to point John to after meeting with Jesus, that proves something about his credentials as King.

But what I want to introduce to you as I think through this morning—the eschatology of John the Baptist—he’s got to formulate that not from the New Testament, because he doesn’t have the privilege of reading Revelation 19, 20, and 21. He’s relying on the Old Testament. He’s got expectations about the coming Messiah, and Jesus is pointing out something about healing that’s supposed to put his heart at rest that he is the Messiah. And what we need to recognize is that has something to do with a preview of the coming kingdom.



Now, this is important. It's not normally how I preach to you—giving you the point first and then having some time to prove it. I try to prove it before you write it down. But let me have you write down the first point, and let's unpack it. I've just said it, and that is that you need to see Christ's healings as a preview—not just his credentials that he is the King of the kingdom—but as some kind of foretaste, some kind of sneak peek to what the kingdom is all about.

And I call it a preview for a lot of reasons. Let me start with the most obvious. When it comes to Jesus's healings, how long were these people healed for? Not very long—I don't know, not very long—because they all got sick again, and they died. Every blind man who got his eyes fixed were only fixed for, I don't know, however long they lived. Then they died. Every lame man, every paralytic that was able to walk and now has these great, you know, calf muscles that he didn't have before—how long? Not very long.

There's something about the kingdom that is different. There's something about the reality of the coming kingdom where those fixes are permanent. And we celebrate that all the time when we think as New Testament Christians about the coming resurrection. Now let's tie all that together in a minute. First, let's read the example of the healing that we're dealing with here. What's the example that Luke, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, records for us of Jesus doing the kinds of things that give us a sense not only that he is the credentialed King of the kingdom but that this is some kind of preview to the reality of this coming kingdom?

Verse 1, Luke 7: "After he finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people"—right, we just got done studying the Sermon on the Plain—"he entered Capernaum." We've already been introduced to this city that's become his home base here on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. It becomes his northern headquarters, his hub.

"Now a centurion"—century, centennial, give me a cent, a penny—all of these deal with 100. The centurion oversaw around 100 of the Roman soldiers. He's a Roman, leader of a cohort of about 100 people. "The centurion had a servant"—that word *doulos*—a slave, someone that was just seen as his property. Well, this is interesting—"his slave was sick at the point of death." The parallel passage in Matthew 8 says he can't even get up; he's just paralyzed on a bed about to die.

Well, this dying servant—this dying slave—"was highly valued by the centurion" (v. 2). Verse 3: "When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him"—that is, Christ—"to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly,



saying, ‘He’—that is, the centurion—“‘is worthy to have you do this for him. Why?’” Verse 5: “‘For he loves our nation, and he is one who has built us our synagogue.’” He underwrote it; he gave and made it a reality.

Verse 6: “And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, ‘Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you, but say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: I say to one, “Go,” and he goes; I say to another, “Come,” and he comes; I say to my servant, “Do this,” and he does it.’ When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.’ And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well” (vv. 6–10).

I just want to deal with the last verse to start with: “found the servant well.” This is not the first time we’ve seen a healing from Christ in the Gospel of Luke. But it is another one that will later be enlisted as an example to tell John he is the Christ. Jesus is the King—he is the King of the kingdom. And I want to twist that just a little bit and say: not just, “Look at it as he’s the credentialed King of the kingdom,” but that the thing he’s doing is a foretaste, a preview, a sneak peek to the permanent reality of the kingdom.

To do that, I said, we need to examine the eschatology—or the end-times theology—of John the Baptist. And we can’t get that from the New Testament; we have to go to the Old Testament. Let me show you why John had some doubts about Jesus. Go back to Isaiah 33. I chose the book of Isaiah not only because he’s quoting it in Luke 4, but because it gives us such great, full-breadth pictures of the coming kingdom.

Now, a little history on Isaiah as you turn to Isaiah 33. You understand, I trust, in the timeline of the Old Testament, we’ve got Isaiah here talking about the problems in Israel that are going to lead to the Babylonian captivity. Nebuchadnezzar and the king’s armies from Babylon are going to come and destroy Jerusalem in 586 B.C., carry them off, the prophets say, for 70 years as captives. Not all of them would be captives, but many of them would—like Daniel and his three friends. They would be there for 70 years, and then God would allow them, by a gracious decree of the new Persian king, to come back and occupy the land.



When they occupied the land, there was no king—there were only governors—and they built a temple, as we read about in the book of Ezra. And it's not anything like Solomon's temple that they worshiped in before. Those that were old enough to know what it looked like wept because it was not like the former glory of Solomon. So this was kind of a reconstituting of the Jews in the land. But everyone knew, "Well, it isn't anything like Isaiah talked about." Because when Isaiah talked about it—and Ezekiel talked about it, and all the prophets of old talked about it—they talked about not only this being better than Solomon, but they talked about the son of David being the ultimate King who's going to lead this whole thing.

And so everyone knew: whatever happened after the Babylonian captivity, that's not the big promise that God has promised for the nation of Israel and for the King. The King, when he comes, is going to be different. He's even called "the Lord" repeatedly—and that in the Old Testament is a word that's used for the God of the Old Testament.

Verse 17—here we are in Isaiah 33:17—you might expect anyone looking back on the book of Isaiah and expecting the coming King to say, "Well, this one we're talking about, the Messiah,"—verse 17—"Your eyes will behold the King in his beauty; they will see a land that stretches afar." There's the idyllic picture of the King reigning. The Messiah has come; Israel is put at peace. That's beautiful.

"And your heart" (v. 18)—you might think it would "muse on the joy of that scene"—underline "joy of that scene." Do you see that there? Is that what it says? This is why you need to have your Bibles at Compass Bible Church—sometimes the pastor reads the passage wrong. You'll muse on what? Terror. Terror.

Now we're going to read this, and we're going to get images of terror. And if you think about it, this is building John's theology. It makes perfect sense that when he sees himself as the forerunner of the Messiah, and he's out preaching in the fourth chapter of Luke about the one who's coming after him whose sandal he's not worthy to untie, "He is going to come and baptize them with fire," he says. And I said as we've studied that text—clearly we're looking at judgment there. And he's looking at these people: "Who warned you to flee from the wrath that is to come?" John clearly saw that with the coming of the Messiah there would be terror for sinners and oppressors, and there would be salvation for the repentant. He's preaching a message of repentance, knowing: here comes the Messiah, and it is going to be a good day—it's going to be a day of destruction for sinners.



As a matter of fact, keep reading (v. 18—we’re in the middle of it): “Where is he who counted? Where is he who weighed the tribute?” The accountants would figure out how much you owed, and the tribute was to the conquering army. “Where is he who counted the towers?”—“Well, how much do you owe, and let’s look at your facility, and let’s look at these ramparts.” “You will see no more the insolent people”—the prideful people—“the people of an obscure speech that you cannot comprehend, stammering in a tongue that you cannot understand” (v. 19).

Now, people say, “Well, we might be talking about the Babylonians here, or the Medo-Persians here...” No, no. The rabbis would read this—John the Baptist would read this—and know: whatever the King’s coming meant, it certainly didn’t mean the return of the exiles from Babylon. It meant the ultimate King that was coming. John, from the time of his birth, was told, “You are the forerunner to the ultimate King. The Lord is going to come; you’re preparing a way for the Lord, and the Lord is going to arrive in the person of the Messiah, and you’re preparing.” Better tell people that all the oppressors—the insolent people, the people that are counting out how much tribute you owe, who speak a language that to you is foreign—who were the oppressors taking taxes and tribute from the Jews when John was out preaching, speaking in a language they didn’t understand? They were called the Romans. And that language, by the way, was one that they would even put on the plaque in John 19, over the head of the Messiah: Aramaic (the dialect of Hebrew for the Old Testament thinkers), Greek (the language of the common man), and then under that you had one more language: Latin.

And here you have John preaching to people, seeing soldiers there speaking to one another in Latin—they just got off the ship from the Mediterranean. They stood around with swords in their hands. They were the conquering kings, commissioning the tax collectors to go and collect tribute and taxes and excise all these things on these people. And here were the people who spoke with that stammering tongue that you couldn’t understand. But you know what? When the King shows up, you’re going to muse on the terror. Why?

Verse 20: because he’s going to deliver Israel. “Behold Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; your eyes will see Jerusalem”—underline this—“an untroubled habitation, an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be plucked up, nor will any of its cords be broken.” There’s one thing John knew about Israel and about Jerusalem, the capital at the time he was preaching: it was not an untroubled habitation. It was an oppressed, subjected habitation.

At that time, though, when the King comes, it’ll be “an immovable tent, whose stakes will never be plucked up, nor will any of its cords be broken.” Are you getting the picture here? I know we often think, “Well, some people didn’t understand the coming of Christ.” If you’ve been around on a Palm Sunday when a preacher gets up and talks about, “Look at all these people—‘Save us! Hosanna!’”



Well, “they were just earthly thinkers, thinking about Jesus being a deliverer from the Romans, and, oh, you know, the spiritual people understood it.” John is a spiritual person who’s reading the Bible. And you know what he’s expecting the Messiah to do? To wipe out the Romans. Absolutely. He’s warning that. All you’ve got to do is think about Isaiah 33 and then look at what he’s preaching—John the Baptist in Luke 4—and you’re going to say, “Makes perfect sense. It fits.”

As a matter of fact, you’re in Isaiah 33—look at Isaiah 34. Go to the next chapter, verse 1: “Draw near, O nations, to hear; and give attention, O peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that fills it, the world, and all that comes from it. For the LORD is” (v. 2)—happy?—“The LORD is enraged against all the nations, and furious against all their host.” Think about that “host.” I know we think of that in the wrong way in the Bible—like stars. *Host* is armies. That’s the idea: against all the nations and their armies. “He has devoted them to destruction; he has given them over for slaughter. Their slain shall be cast out, and the stench of their corpses shall rise; the mountains shall flow with their blood” (vv. 2–3).

Now, a lot of you say, “Well, if that’s the eschatology of John, I’m so glad Jesus came and fixed his eschatology. Oh, Jesus—he’s loving; he’s kind; he’s never going to do that. I’m so glad Jesus came and fixed John’s kind of mean-y attitude and harsh message. I’m so glad that Jesus isn’t going to do that.” You with me on that one? You’ve read the rest of the Bible, right? Have you read the book of Revelation? Have you read it lately? Have you read about the blood flowing from the mountains and going into the valleys and rising up—to graphically state it—to the bits on the horses? Oh, all that vengeance is coming against the nations. All of these things are coming.

Now notice carefully something so important. When you read the Old Testament and you look at the coming Messiah, and you see the King coming in his beauty and you see the terror that he brings in judgment, you look at that—and because of our perspective from the Old Testament—it may look like one occurrence. You and I know, though, because we live between the two advents—which the Old Testament prophets couldn’t even fathom, that there were two advents—we live in this now 2,000-year valley between the first coming and the second coming of Christ. We recognize that all the promises of the Old Testament are true—it’s just that right now Christ came to redeem us. We didn’t see his beauty; most people didn’t recognize it, as Isaiah goes on to say. But one day he comes back as the conquering King to save those who are repentant and trust in him—it’s called the book of Revelation—and it’s going to happen. Nothing about God’s plan has changed. It’s simply that we couldn’t understand from an Old Testament perspective, and surely John couldn’t understand, because he’s asking the simple question—after preaching all those sermons on the coming fire—he’s saying, “Jesus, where’s the fire? Where’s the fire? You’ve been doing your messianic thing now for months—where’s the fire? Should we expect someone else?”



You see his expectation. Jesus has an answer. Next chapter—Isaiah 35. Jesus has an answer. Clearly, the thinking of John, just to use this as an example, is in Isaiah 33 and Isaiah 34. Jesus is going to tell him something about his credentials—and a preview of the kingdom—that’s going to relate to the things that he keeps on doing, albeit temporal healing. He’s doing some healings. Drop down to verse 4 just to get some context: “Say to those who have an anxious heart, ‘Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you’” (Isa. 35:4). So—destroy the world, destroy the nations, judge them; save his repentant people. It’s coming.

“Then” (v. 5)—when that happens—“the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.” And not only will he fix the bodies of these people—“waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water” (vv. 6–7). And he goes on to talk about all the things that are going to happen to the land.

“Are you the Christ, or should we look for someone else? Because I don’t see the fire.” No, you don’t see the fire because the fire isn’t coming now. But you know what you do see? You see blind people seeing; you see deaf people hearing; you see mute people speaking; you see people that are even dead living. “I am the King of the kingdom, John, and I have the credentials. And what I’m doing should prove to you—you don’t need to look for another; I am the Messiah.”

But note what I’ve said—preview, sneak peek, foretaste. Why? Because when the promises of the coming Messiah are spelled out in the Bible, these are permanent fixes. These are fixes where the lame people get to be ambulatory and walking, and they keep walking. They walk for hundreds of years—even in the promise of Isaiah the picture is people living for a millennium of time.

What’s going on here? Jesus heals people—they die. Jesus gets people’s blind eyes to see—and then they die and they stop seeing. That’s because it’s not the real thing. Oh, it’s real healing; it’s really, scientifically miraculous healing—I get that. But it’s not permanent. It’s foretaste; it’s preview. Why? Because that’s not coming in the first coming, John. It’s not even about establishing bodies that are whole. It is about showing you that I’m here to do the first thing that’s needed, and that is to deal with your sin problem—which means that I have to die on a cross as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. You do remember saying that, don’t you, John? And then we’re going to collect repentant people for—I don’t know how long—at least 2,000 years now. And then I’m going to come back and guess what I’m going to do: I’m going to judge the nations, subjecting them under my feet, and I’m going to heal bodies—and they will be permanently healed.



Let me quote a New Testament passage for you to sum it up as we stand between the advents of Christ. As Paul was writing in Philippians 3:20–21—between the advents of Christ—he said this. Listen carefully: “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ...” Now follow this: “...who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject all things to himself.”

Catch that. Here is a promise of the New Testament after the first advent of Paul saying, “Listen, we know the King’s coming—he’s gone to heaven; he’s coming back. He’s accomplished redemption, and that redemption has provided for us his authority to not only subject the nations—if they won’t do it through repentance and submission, it will be through judgment—and that same power that enables him to do that, he’s going to take your body and fix it: your lowly bodies, your disease-ridden bodies, your arthritic bodies, your aging bodies, your wrinkling bodies, your balding bodies—fill in the blank for yourself. It’s going to be replaced with a glorious body like the resurrected body of Christ—impervious to disease, sickness, decay, and death.”

Christ’s healings were a preview of that. Could he speak with a word and have people healed forever—now? No. Is it the millennial promise being fulfilled? No. Is it the New Jerusalem? No. But it’s a preview that he is the King of the kingdom who will one day inaugurate that.

Two passages real quick to jot down—for you note-takers—and you need to see this was clearly in the minds of the New Testament people. Acts chapter 1—you know this, I assume—verses 6, 7, and 8. In Acts 1, here’s Jesus with his disciples, and they’re saying, “Okay, you died on the cross; you rose from the dead. Here’s the question: is now the time you’re going to restore the kingdom to Israel? Now—do we get to see Isaiah 33, 34, 35 (and go on, count all the way to 66)? Are you going to do the Isaiah thing now? You’re going to do the Ezekiel, the Jeremiah thing now?” And he says, “No—you’ve got my thing all wrong. We’re on plan B now; I’m not going to do that.” (Somebody says.) He says in verse 7, “It’s not for you to know the times or the seasons.” But verse 8: “You’ve got a job to do. You’re to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.” Go collect people for my kingdom. Tell them to get right with me.

Here’s the second passage: Acts chapter 3—Acts 3:19–21. When they preach that message, and Peter was preaching in chapter 3, he says this: “Repent...that your sins may be blotted out”—okay, we hear that all the time. Here’s the next line—read and listen—“...that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.” And what did he say? The blind will see, the lame will walk, the deaf will hear, the



mute will sing. All of that's going to happen. And the bodies—to put it in terms of Philippians 3:20–21—that are lowly and disease-infested will become like his glorious body.

Our charismatic friends, unfortunately, read passages like Luke 7:1–10—“Do I want that? I want that! I want that.” Here's what you don't want: you don't want the short-term, temporary credential of Christ; you want Christ—and the reality of what this points to. Because here's the thing: even Christ's healings were all temporary. The reality is Christ said, in this life—in this period with your body—it needs to be redeemed, and it won't be redeemed until you get rid of this body and it gets transformed into the glorious body like Christ's. In other words, the promise of Genesis 3:19 is that you are made of dust and you will return to dust. But what we hope in is the Christ with the credentials that recognize one day he will redeem our bodies.

I was reading through a charismatic church's website this week, and I found a section on healing, and it read this way. Okay, and I'm thinking, “They're going to talk it; they're going to give their case for healing.” And here's what they wrote: “We believe that the redemptive work of Christ was not only sufficient or applicable to redeem our soul and our spirit, but also our bodies.” Now they're expecting me to disagree with that. I fully agree with that. I agree 100% with that. I absolutely agree the first coming of Christ certainly provided all the redemption we need for that. See, the problem is—and where we disagree—is on the timing. Because even if you claim—because I've got, you know, a bad knee, or I've got migraine headaches, or I've got... whatever—my daughter, she's paralyzed—if I'm saying, “Well, the redemption of Christ provided for her legs to get fixed,” I'm going to say, “I agree with you 100%.” The question is timing.

Because I know this about every healing here and now—even if there was some miraculous GT-1 (as I call it), a suspension of natural law, and there was something like what took place in Luke 7—what would happen to the tendons and ligaments and muscles in her leg one day? They'd be put in a casket and put in the ground at Forest Lawn. They wouldn't work anymore. As I often say, every person who espouses the theology of “the redemption of Christ applying to our bodies now”—they live by the theology of Genesis 3. Or in shorthand: every faith healer dies. You've heard me say that before. Every one of them. That's a problem for your theology, is it not? What—you only get to get healed for the first 75 years of your life? I don't understand. If the sufficient redemption of Christ is applying to your body, why does it stop when you get too old? Are the cancers too much? Then you've got to come up with fancy ways to get yourself out of all that and say, “Well, it must be your faith isn't good enough.” Stop with all of that. Let's just all agree that what Christ did supplied for my daughter's legs to work eternally—and everything that's wrong with your failing body—or, as it's put in Philippians 3:20, your “lowly body” (v. 21): it's going to be turned into the perfect glorious body that is impervious to disease, sickness, decay, death, or anything else that we read about in the Bible that you don't like about what's happening to your body.



That was a lot for the first point. And if you're trying to estimate how long the sermon will last based on that first point, I can put your mind at ease—especially because we only covered one verse there (v. 10). Point number two. Let's move on to verses 1–9, which will take a lot less time, but it's very important.

In verses 1–9, we read about this centurion's faith that should be remarkable to us because it was remarkable to Christ. He said, "Not even in Israel have I seen this kind of faith." And here's the word—he *marveled* at it. If you read that there in verse 9, he marveled at him. There are only twice Jesus ever marveled at people in the Gospels—once was at the unbelief of the people in Nazareth that watched him grow up. He marveled at the fact that they did not believe him. And then here—a positive marveling and amazement at a man's faith who wasn't even Jewish. That should make us say, "Wow—this is remarkable faith." The question is: what kind of faith is it?

If you just read Luke, you may think, "Well, it's the faith that Jesus has the power to heal his servant." Okay—it's certainly that, but it includes much more. Keep your finger here in Luke 7 and turn with me, if you would, to Matthew 8. I already told you that's the parallel passage of this account. I want you to note what Jesus goes on to say that Luke did not record here.

Matthew 8—drop down to verse 10 just to pick it up where we left off in Luke 7. Matthew 8:10: "When Jesus heard this"—what the centurion was saying—"he marveled" (there's our word), "and said to those who followed him, 'Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.'" Already got that information from Luke—thank you. What I don't have in Luke is what Matthew goes on to record about the rest of what Jesus said: "I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." He's just met this guy, marveling at his faith. He's not from Israel—he's from the West; he speaks Latin; he is a Roman centurion. And he's saying, "Look at his faith—man, that guy is going to be hanging out with Abraham one day, eating at the banquet table." "While the sons of the kingdom," by the way—those that claim some kind of lineage and heritage to Abraham in their DNA—"they're going to be thrown into the outer darkness." Why? Because they don't have the faith like the centurion. "In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vv. 11–12).

Weeping and gnashing of teeth—so you're going to have a reality after this life, and it's going to be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The only times I would ever describe my life as "weeping and gnashing of teeth" in this existence is when I'm sick. You know, the only time I ever want to die is when I have the flu. There's that sense of, "Wow..." And if you're going to talk to me about gnashing of teeth and



weeping—I don’t want to stretch this too far—but certainly it’s not the kind of disease-free future that, according to this passage, the centurion is qualified for, because his faith isn’t about faith in just having a healer heal his servant; it’s faith in the Messiah. He has saving faith.

Number two then—let’s put it this way: we need to get in on that disease-free eternity. The centurion was in on that because Jesus said he would recline at the table with Abraham. What Jesus is looking at is a man with saving faith—not just faith that he can heal the servant, but faith in him as his Savior.

Now, I want that. Therefore, I can look at verses 1–9, and I can ask the very first thing: Do I have the boarding pass to go to the kingdom? Do I have saving faith? I can look at his life and just start to build at least a template of saying, “How do I get in on that? What does it look like?” Look for these three categories.

Letter A: **Humility**. Is that not one thing you could say about the centurion? Man, if there’s one thing that struck us as we read through this text, it’s how humble this man is. Let’s start with the setting. Verse 2: the centurion had a servant—a *doulos*. He was sick at the point of death, and he highly valued him. Your servant, your *doulos*, was your property. If you’re rich like the centurion and you’ve got enough money to build the Jews a synagogue, you certainly have enough money to get another servant. When you have something that’s your property and it breaks, and you’ve got a lot of money, you throw it away and get another one, don’t you? Here’s a man who has so much compassion—and I call it humility, because the New Testament says we ought to be humble enough in our own hearts to associate with the lowly (I’m quoting now, in the book of Romans). And I’m thinking: here’s a man so humble, he has such an identification with his *doulos*, his slave, that he has a compassion and really wants him healed. He’s willing to go out of his way to see his life fixed. That’s a humble man who cares for his servant.

Verse 8—just to cherry-pick a few things in this and get descriptors of the kind of faith this guy had: What kind of guy was he? When he describes his own position—look at how he describes it: “For I too am a man”—that has climbed very high in this pecking order of the Roman army because of my acumen and my insight and my leadership qualities, and I have soldiers under me, and that’s why... Is that what it says? No, it’s interesting—he doesn’t say, “I’m a man of authority.” He says, “I’m a man who has been *set under* authority.” And in the pecking order of the Roman army, I have people under me, and I can command them to do this or that. I just love that little word *set*: “You put me there.” Now, it’s a passive, and it doesn’t give us the initiating object—I get that. But clearly, much like Nebuchadnezzar learned, no one is appointed to a place of leadership without God. And because this guy has saving faith, I’m thinking it’s the kind of humility that recognizes he’s not a self-made man. Everything he has has come from God. God has set him in a place of authority. He didn’t earn it; he



doesn't deserve it. He's not a self-promoter; he's not a man doing this about his accomplishments and his position. He's a humble man.

Verse 5, second half: "He is the one who has built us our synagogue." There are a lot of people that may give lip service to a certain theology, or say, "Well, the Jews are right about the Messiah—I'd like to have the benefits of Messiah." He's one who puts his dollars behind his theology. It's the humble man that's willing to take his "hard-earned" money and invest it in something here to teach people about that Messiah—the synagogue. That's what the synagogue was about: teaching about the coming Messiah. He's humble enough to give.

Verse 6—bottom of verse 6: the centurion sent friends, saying, "Lord..." He sent for Jesus. Now he's referring to him with his friends around him—who, I assume, are not the Jewish elders; these are his friends. He's telling Latin-speaking Romans, "You know what? He's the Lord. Tell him—tell the Lord: 'Lord, don't trouble yourself; I'm not worthy to have you come under my roof.'" Verse 7: "Therefore I did not presume to come to you, but say the word, and let my servant be healed." He humbly recognized the overriding authority of Christ. That's big. We could say more about that, but humility—and something that overlaps with humility and maybe another category to think through—

Letter B: **Honesty.** People that are honest enough to say what I just read (bottom of verse 6): "I am not worthy to have you come under my roof," is someone who's looking in the mirror in their own conscience and saying, "You know what? You're great, you're holy, you're perfect—I'm sinful." And I'm willing to admit that. Now think about how he's admitting that: he sent the elders to go get Jesus; they are coming to his house. How long does that take? I don't know. Where was he—how far away was he? But when he's coming to wherever he was stationed in another corner of Capernaum, he's sitting there thinking, "Who's coming? Who's coming? Jesus is coming. The Messiah is coming. This is the one expected in the Old Testament prophets." And he starts feeling unworthy. He's so honest about his own unworthiness that he says, "Just—hey, friends—go out and meet him, and just tell him I am unworthy to have him in my house. Just have him say the word, and I know my servant will be healed." Honest about his own sin.

He's honest about where to find the truth. Think about this: verse 3—he heard about Jesus; he sent to the elders of the Jews. Here's a Roman centurion who's in authority over the Jews asking the Jews to do him a favor. And verse 4 says their testimony of the centurion was, "He is worthy to do this; he loves our nation." Think about that—he's an outsider. You've got the worship of the Caesars; you've got the Herods; you've got all kinds of cultic things going on in Rome. And instead, he looks to the Jews and says, "They have the truth." And he's honest about that. He's even willing for his friends to



know, “You know what I’m about? I’m about the Jewish religion, about the Jewish Messiah. I’m about finding truth in the Jewish Scriptures.” He’s honest.

He’s certainly honest about who Christ is—he wouldn’t have saving faith that’s ever going to seat him at the table of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob if he wasn’t.

Just for the sake of time, let’s speed on to my third category here.

Letter C: **Determined.** He has a determined kind of faith. There’s a humble faith; it’s an honest faith; it’s a determined faith. Now, these are my categories, and you may pick other ones. But when I think through this passage, I think, “Well, how determined is this person?” It reminds me of the ones that brought the sick man on the pallet—they brought him down through the roof; you remember that? Man, those guys were determined. Well, so is this guy, this centurion. Think about it: it’s not even you—let’s say you can afford another servant, you can afford another slave here—but you are so determined you’re going to send for Jesus to come to your house. And you’re so determined you don’t send your friends out and say, “Forget it, forget it—he’s not comfortable with this.” No—you say, “Well, I don’t want you under my roof, but can you just say the word and you can heal my servant?” That’s a determined kind of faith.

Now, some of you will say, “Saving faith—determined? I don’t get that connection.” Here’s what the Bible says in Hebrews 11:6: “Without faith it’s impossible to please God.” If you have faith, you’ve got to believe that he is (or he exists), and—you know the rest of that verse—“that he rewards those who seek him.” There’s something built into saving faith that is—as we preached from Hebrews 11 (which usually focuses on sanctification)—we called it “ambitious faith.” Well, let me just suggest this: not only do you need ambitious, determined faith in your sanctification—there’s something about you being saved that requires ambitious, determined faith: “God, save me!” You’re calling out to God with the determination that you know he rewards those who go after him and find him.

It reminds me of the list—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jacob was renamed—what? He became the man who had the moniker that described the entire nation. His name was changed from Jacob to Israel. Do you know what “Israel” means? You read the footnote in your Bible as you read through that passage—*El* always means Elohim (it’s short for Elohim), but the first part of that word is “the one who struggles or strives with.” Here’s someone “striving with God.” And you know when he got his name changed from Jacob to Israel, don’t you? He was striving with God—he was wrestling with the Angel of the LORD. Why was he wrestling with the Angel, or what was he saying to the Angel while



he was wrestling? You know what he was saying—what was he saying? “Bless me. Bless me. I will not let you go unless you bless me.” Now, I’m thinking that’s an embarrassing scene in Jacob’s life. God would not rename him Israel and let that be the moniker for the entire nation for the rest of the Bible unless there was something that God said, “That is good—that’s a kind of determined, aggressive faith. I like that.”

You want to be saved? You need an ambitious kind of faith to reach out. You want your passport to the kingdom? Have a kind of faith like this centurion had. It was humble; it was honest; it was determined. Is the whole gospel spelled out here? Obviously not. But as we look at this, I want you to X-ray this passage and say, “Yeah—here’s a man with a humble, honest, determined faith,” and Jesus said, “That’s the kind of guy that’s going to sit in the kingdom and dine with Abraham.”

All right. Now, you see we covered verse 10 in the first point; you see we—at lightspeed—covered verses 1–9 in the second point. Now you see next to the third point on your outline—what do you see? What are the verses we’re going to cover there? “Typo,” right? That what you think? It’s not a typo.

Here’s the problem: I’m preaching about a very historic scene where Jesus heals a centurion’s servant. I’ve just told you this was something to prove to John and to us that Jesus has the credentials as the King of the kingdom. And I also said the kind of thing that’s going to happen to all of our bodies when the King arrives and establishes his kingdom is our bodies are going to be transformed from the lowly state—the decrepit, disease-ridden state—to the state of being like his glorious body. And this was a preview of that.

So that doesn’t really answer the question of how I deal with my diseases and sicknesses now. So—with two minutes left in the morning—let me deal with that for a few minutes.

Number three on your outline: I exhort you to **respond rightly to illnesses today**. Now, while our passage does not address that (that’s why there are no verses next to this), let me suggest so much of the New Testament does address it, and it should help us as we think through what happens when you sit across from the doctor after the test and he says, “You have cancer. You have a tumor. You’re getting... I don’t know, Alzheimer’s disease. This is inoperable—whatever. Or it may be operable—you’re scheduled now for surgery.” How do I deal with that now?



With no time left, let me give you six sub-points on this.

Letter A: **Don't be surprised.** Now, I've got to say that, because though you say, "Well, I know that—come on, everybody gets sick," you know what? It's funny that Christians sit around: "Oh my... cancer!" Stop with all of that. I feel bad for you; let's cry. But don't sit there and ask, "Why?" Because if you ask why when your pastor's in the room, I'm going to open up my Bible and turn you to Genesis 3. And in Genesis 3 it says you're dust and you're going to return to dust. And the verse in front of that said, "The ground is now going to bear thorns," and you're made of the stuff of the ground; we're cursed. And in the present state our bodies are not only subject to illness—if you avoid enough traffic accidents for the rest of your life, you will die of an illness. Nobody dies of "nothing serious." It's a serious problem that you're going to have that's going to put you in a box in the ground. Therefore, don't be surprised. I expect—if I can drive safely, or, you know, whatever—if someone doesn't drop a piano on my head, I'm going to get sick and I'm going to die.

Now, everyone that believes that somehow the redemption of Christ in the first coming should apply to bodily redemption now—I don't know how they square that not only with Scripture but with the reality of what happens. Every faith healer dies. (Have I said that enough times on this platform?) Every one of them. Therefore, don't be surprised. I just want to say: don't be surprised.

"So I should revel in my cancer?" Well, you know—here's the thing—I don't care if it's a cold or it's cancer, when you get ill, as a Christian, I think you should do what the Bible certainly encourages us to do, and that is this: **if you can get better.** So let me start now with number two with some things that may help us in this regard.

Number two: **Is this discipline?** God would never use sickness or illness or cancer to be discipline in my life—? You've got to read the Bible more if that's what you thought. It is all over the place. Let me start with a few passages—just jot down Hebrews 12. That's obviously a classic text (if you don't know) on the discipline of the Christian. In other words, God treats us like sons, and when we sin—and if we're not willing to quickly repent and turn from that sin as his children—he will discipline us. And here's the line: all discipline is unpleasant. There are a lot of things he can do to us that are unpleasant that aren't sickness, but guess one of the great weapons in the arsenal of Dad's closet? Sickness.

Let me give you an example—1 Corinthians 11:30. After explaining the sin of how the Corinthians were taking the Lord's Supper, he said, "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." That's discipline. I've got to read the next verse (v. 32). It says this: "If we had judged ourselves



truly, we would not be judged.” What does that say? I wouldn’t have been sick had I not been unrepentant and stubborn and rebellious against what God has said. Therefore, if you are sick, you need to ask yourself the question: Is this divine discipline? “How would I know that?” If there’s unconfessed sin in your life, it could be the connection. If there’s something in your life you’re running from God from—to put it in positive terms to fix the problem—James 5:15 connects illness with sin. Now, not every illness is because of sin, but sometimes in your sin God brings sickness, and he says, “Confess your sins, and you’ll be healed.” In other words, if it is discipline, you need to deal with that first and say, “God, I know the problem is based on my Christian life right now, which doesn’t look like it should, and I’m doing things I know I shouldn’t, and I’ve been rebelling and running, and I just... God, I confess this; I repent.”

Okay, that’s the first thing you should always ask.

Number three: James 5:13—speaking of the passage in James—two verses earlier he says this: “If anyone is suffering, let him pray.” Let’s just put that as number three—one word, four letters: **pray** when you get sick. Number one: don’t be surprised. Number two: “God, is this discipline?”—point that out to me if it is. Number three: “I don’t think it is; I just happen to be sick.” Well then, I’m going to pray. I’m going to ask God for mercy, for help, for deliverance—for fixing the problem. Do I expect a GT-1 miracle in this? I’d say no—there’s no reason for that. We don’t have that as the expectation. But I sure want—just like the Israelites fought the Philistines and sometimes the odds were ten against one—I would love the good cells in my body to fight the bad cells. I ask God to make my body whole. That would be great. What kind of whole? Whole with a small “w” and an asterisk—because I know it will never be whole until my body is transformed from the lowly state to his glorious body. And it’s not going to happen in this life. But I’m praying for some kind of relief. I’m praying for some kind of relative health. I’m praying.

Number four: **Get medical treatment.** “I’d have died by now because you put that number four on the list.” No, no—thank you, somebody got that. All this should happen in five minutes. We’re not surprised; we ask if it’s discipline; we start praying—and then you pick up the phone and you make an appointment with your doctor, or you go to the ER. If you are sick, medical treatment is the way to go. Why? Because in the New Testament that’s what we see.

Let me give you some examples: 1 Timothy 5:23. Here’s Timothy—he’s often sick—and he says, “No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.” Which, by the way, is not your license to go out to... you know—wine was the medicinal treatment. As a matter of fact, what’s interesting is Timothy’s not drinking any of the wine (and most people did), and Paul says, “You need some of that for your frequent ailments.” Now, we’ve got better stuff than



you just, you know, throwing them back tonight to feel better. There's other medical treatment. Talk to your doctor—he's not going to say, "Well, have some bourbon." He's going to give you medicine. And the medicine is good.

Even in the James 5 passage, some of us misunderstand this—most people misunderstand. They think what's being prescribed is a ceremony when it says, "Call for the elders of the church, have them anoint you with oil." Remember that passage? A lot of people think, "Oh, okay—peanut oil? What about sunflower oil? Where do I get some oil—bring it over, pastors!" That's not what we're dealing with there. In the Old Testament, oil was applied—that's the word "anointed"—applied to someone who was becoming a prophet, becoming a priest, or becoming a king. It was part of a ceremony. This is not a ceremony. It's the kind of "anointing with oil," the applying of oil, that we saw when Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. When he had wounds and he was beaten and he was cut, the Bible says he was then by the Samaritan anointed with oil. What does that mean? Oil was applied, and his wounds were bandaged. It was the medicine of the day. We had oil; we had wine. Medicine was very rudimentary in the first century. Oil and wine were often the two things to make you feel better and to fix your problems.

So when the elders of the church—why the elders of the church? Well, here's James writing to the Diaspora, to those who are Jewish people spread all out. They're living in little tribes a little bit. The person that was probably most apt to help you with your medical problem was the leaders of the church. And in that band of people—just like on the mission field today—when someone gets hurt, probably the best-educated, the most wise people were the pastors. Go to them—there's no ER; there's no Mission Hospital down the street. If you come to us, we'll pray for you (which the passage says we should do), but we're not going to cut you open and yank your tumors out—so go to the doctors for that. (That was an ugly thing to say, but you understand.) We're not going to prescribe you any medicine—go to your doctors for that. But that's the "anointing with oil."

I could prove that if I had more time—I don't know if to your satisfaction, but I think I can prove it.

By the way, prayer and medical treatment—you notice I didn't say "medical treatment and prayer." I said "prayer and medical treatment." You know why I did that? Because a lot of people often seek medical treatment, and if that doesn't work, they start praying. Prayer precedes medical treatment. Why? Because in the Bible, the concern of the person of God is that I know that whatever act is applied to my life to fix the problem, God is the giver of the good outcome. In other words, I don't assemble an army and, if it doesn't work out, now I pray. In the Old Testament, we prayed and assembled an army. Asa, when he got sick in his old age (in Chronicles), it says he sought the physicians but he did not seek the Lord. God's not against physicians—he just doesn't want you to seek physicians without



seeking the Lord. Seek the Lord, then seek your physicians. And that's not going to happen like, "I'm going to do a month of praying, and then I'm going to go to the doctor." I'm just saying: you do this concurrently, but your trust is in the Lord. That's why it says, "anointing him with oil *in the name of the Lord*." That makes people think it's a ceremony—I don't think it's a ceremony. It's that we are getting medical treatment to you, and you are trusting in God, who utilizes a lot of things to make things better in your body.

Respond rightly to illnesses today: don't be surprised; determine if it's discipline; pray; get medical treatment. You didn't think I really had six sub-points—I do.

Number five: **Learn from it.** Learn from it. "Learn what—to exercise and eat better?" No—although, okay, that probably would help. But that's not what I'm talking about. Here's what I'm talking about—James 1. If you would, Hebrews, James—fine. Hebrews—go next door to James. James 1. I just want you to read a couple of verses here in the beginning of James.

James 1:2—which is a hard first three or four words to swallow, but here it comes: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds." Talk about a hard verse to apply—there it is. What's the "trials of various kinds"? Well, it's various kinds—it could be anything. Could it be illness? Of course it could. That's a trial. You get cancer; you get a problem—that's a trial. Now why am I going to count it joy? "Count it joy" means I'm going to try to consider this thing that I deal with with a good disposition and a good attitude. Why? "For you know" (v. 3) "that the testing of your faith..." If you never had a problem, you never had an ache, you never had a disease, you never had a broken bone—here's something: even if I just think through the matrix of the idea of illness, it tests my faith. It tests my trust in the goodness of God; it tests a lot of things in my relationship with God. Well, when it gets tested, it produces—here's a word if you've been around; we've studied it a lot—*hupomonē*. It produces endurance—steadfastness. You come out of it tougher and stronger in your trust in God through the trial of sickness. "And let" *hupomonē* (v. 4) "have its full effect, that you may be perfect"—*teleios*—"and complete, lacking in nothing."

"Perfect"—that doesn't mean you never sin again. *Teleios*—that means "just right," that your life is now better equipped to do the thing that God has called you to do—what he's called you: your mom, your wife, your husband, your worker—whatever. Your illnesses, even if they're not cured in this life through the prayer and the physicians, you're learning from that a strong, enduring faith that produces a kind of life that's prepped. And I love this next word: "and complete." That Greek word gives us the idea of something whole. Now, that is a play on words. My daughter, as I've said many times, is paralyzed from the knees down. She will never in this life be whole—her spinal cord is permanently damaged. Think this through now. The Bible says if my daughter, as she puts her trust in Christ—



becomes a Christian and follows Jesus Christ—through the testing of her faith because of all of her disabilities... Think this through: because of what God wants to do through the disability, it makes her faith stronger as she grows in the Lord and becomes this godly person (we trust; we pray). She becomes “perfect”—*teleios*—and “complete.” In what way? Not physically—she’ll never jump, run, skip—do any of that. But she’ll be the kind of person prepped and ready—as it says elsewhere in Scripture—ready for every good work. Complete. Mature.

And if you think, “I don’t know how that’s going to work in this situation,” keep reading: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God” (v. 5). Just start praying, “God, how can you use this cancer? How can you use this problem? How can you use this surgery? How can you use this to make my faith stronger—more *hupomonē*, more *teleios*, more wholeness, steadfastness, perfection in that regard—*teleios*—and completeness in my life, lacking nothing?” And God will give you that wisdom.

Lastly, number six: You’re not far from 1 Peter, right? Go to 1 Peter 1—with this we’ll be done, I promise. 1 Peter 1—really 3 through 7, if you want the whole thing (1 Pet. 1:3–7): “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” Praise him—that means credit him; he’s great. Why? “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope.” A hope that’s confident—I’m sure of it; it’s not dead; it’s not weak; it’s not feeble. It’s living; it’s strong. Why? “Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” I can look at a historic event that is undeniable—it’s historically true, and the veracity of it is overwhelming. And because I’ve seen that, I’ve researched that, I recognize the reality of the resurrection, I have a trust in what? Well, in what we’ve quoted many times in this sermon—Philippians 3:20–21—everything is going to get fixed, everything subjected under his feet—new body. “And [unto] an inheritance”—includes the new body and all the other things—“that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you”—it’s got your name on it—“who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (vv. 4–5). I know you say you’re saved now—but the salvation hasn’t been completed yet: the salvation of your body, redemption of your body, the changing of the world, the kingdom arriving—that’s coming, and it’s going to be revealed in the last time.

“In this”—that demonstrative pronoun gets everything we’ve just read in verses 3–5—“in this you rejoice,” now that makes sense of James 1 for us, “though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that”—just to quote James here—“the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found [to] result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (vv. 6–7)—when he comes back.

Let’s put it this way—really simple, but maybe a bit wordy for the last point, but here it comes: **Focus on our disease-free eternity.** I’m going somewhere; it is guaranteed; it’s a living hope; it’s based on



the resurrection of Christ. I will never have a single physical problem when he takes his great power and changes my lowly body into one just like his resurrected body. And you know what—if I die on a gurney with a body riddled with cancer, the thing that can get me through that—besides all the other things we’ve talked about—is the fact that I know the destination where I’m going. It is confident; it is sure. And I can, in the inner man—as Paul said—though the outer man is decaying, the inward man is going to be renewed day by day. That’s the perspective we need.

Keep your focus on that. Why don’t you stand with me—we’ll pray and let you go.

Let’s pray together.

God, I know this is not theoretical for people in this room—many people. If it’s not their own body, it’s the body of someone they love. It’s like my life—I love my daughter. And clearly I would trade places with her if I could. And the pain sometimes we feel in the testing of our faith—sometimes we feel not even when it’s just my illness or my disability or my disease, but those in our families. God, it tests our faith, and we think, “God, what now? How do I deal with this?”

Well, many people are just saying—and I think, just in an elementary kind of line of thought—“Well, just ask God to do some more of that stuff he’s doing there in Luke 7.” All of that was to get me to trust in the King of the kingdom who has promised me that it’s not for now that my life’s physical health problems are going to be reversed. It’s that in the end, whatever band-aids we stick on—the temporary fixes we have in this life—even if there is some dramatic turnaround in my health, in the end what I’m looking for is that resurrected body that I can be confident in because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Where we’re heading, the forecast is really good. And we can recognize that a lot of what we want so badly to shove in our suitcase to get there is really not important. Let us realize what really matters is my faith, my character, my growth in Christ—not so much whether or not that appointment with the doctor this week gives me the right news. Let me realize that, and let us live with the kind of confidence and growing, maturing faith that makes my inner man stronger than it’s ever been.

God, I know, as I said, it’s not theoretical for people in this room. Some are in the middle of some of the worst health crises they’ve ever seen. And God, I just pray—give them great mercy. We do pray,



and it's natural for us to pray for help and strength and recovery and healing—we want those things. But God, let us realize there's something much bigger going on in the New Testament than just a temporary fix to our ailments. So God, we trust in you. We pray that that attitude would store up for us treasure in heaven. We pray that—just recognizing as we should, because of a passage like this—that you're the great King of the kingdom; that one day you'll establish a kingdom without any dying, any death and decay, disease, mourning, tears, pain—any of that—that our lives should be radically different. So God, make that the reality for us, I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.