



Preparing for the Kingdom-Part 3

Making Sure We Don't Miss the King

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Both of our boys were under five years of age when we planned their first trip to Orlando, Florida. Now, having grown up, of course, down the freeway from Anaheim, they had a taste of the Magic Kingdom. But, of course, Orlando in their mind—that was the real deal. I mean, that was the conglomerate of amusement parks that surpassed any kid's wildest imagination.

So, of course, Mom and Dad—we planned this months in advance and we hyped it up, as most parents do. Even ordered those glossy brochures from, you know, the parks and went through them at night, and the kids got all excited. Now what we learned is, while we were busy planning this trip for months, they were fixated on the destination. They gave little thought to the trip itself. I mean, we were the ones that were working all that out. In their minds, when the day got there on the calendar, they were gonna blink their eyes and be on a ride. That's kind of, you know, kind of how they viewed this thing.

But, of course, we had reservations to make, we had bags to pack, we had a plane to catch. We flew out of San Diego on this trip that I mentioned. This was two weeks after 9/11/2001—just like the day after the anthrax was sent through the mail to the senators. We knew that it was a mess. We got to the airport and we had planned ahead, we got there real early, but the lines—they were through the terminal, out the door, down the street, literally just to get into the airport. There were, you know, guys in camo and machine guns and bomb-sniffing dogs. It was an absolute mess. It was painful. It took hours just to get in there and get through all of that.

Well, a few hours into the process, you know, our boys are thinking, “Where’s all the happiness?” Right? “This is terrible.” And I understood it, and it just kind of got worse because we had the flight and they were young and, you know, we had food issues. We got to the terminal there in Dallas for our connecting flight, we had to run to catch our flight. Of course we had to get there; it’s been a long day of traveling. We had to stand in line to get our rental car. We had to get our rental car, had to pack our rental car. We had to get to the hotel, you know, and about this time our kids are looking at us going, “You are liars,” right? “There’s no fun involved in this at all—at all.”

Well, at that point I started quoting Acts 14 to my kids. Verse 22—you know the verse, right? “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom,” which, of course, applies not only to the Magic Kingdom but to God’s kingdom. And that’s so important for us to understand, particularly the original context of that, where the Apostle Paul had just been beaten up and left for dead. And after



being revived, he and Barnabas had to go on a specially planned preaching tour through all these cities where the disciples were so excited about the coming kingdom. And they had to say—here’s the whole verse—they went through there strengthening the hearts of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” You have to realize you’re not going to blink your eyes and be there. There’s a path, there’s a journey. There’s a season that God has planned between the first coming and the second coming, and you need to endure. It’s through many tribulations that we enter the kingdom of God.

Now, in our study of Luke, we’ve reached chapter seven, verse 17. We’re going to deal with seven of these verses here today as we continue in our study, and we meet John the Baptist having some concerns and some doubts. Now, I hate to compare John the Baptist to John and Matthew Fabarez, but, you know, there’s a real connection here as John the Baptist languishes in a prison. You might remember from chapter three, he’s in a prison and Herod’s got him locked down. And as he languishes in this prison in the Judean desert—right, actually, in the Jordanian desert, in the Transjordan, Josephus tells us—and he’s in this prison, and he’s, you know, looking through, if you will, in the memory of his mind the glossy brochures about the kingdom in the book of Isaiah that we looked at a couple of weeks ago and saying, “Where’s all that? This doesn’t look at all like what it was hyped up to be in the Bible.” And he asks the question, “Are you the one?”

Remember the text? Let’s read it together, beginning in verse 17, when it says, “This report…” Now, look back up. You might remember we went through those verses that dealt with the healing of the centurion’s servant. Then the next section we looked at last time we were together was the resurrection of the widow’s son there in Nain. All those things took place up in the Galilee and Capernaum, of course, right there near the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Then, just south of Nazareth a few miles, we had Nain, that little village. But we’re all still in the northern part of Israel.

And it says, “This report”—the report, after all those things they were saying in verse 16, you can see there—“A great prophet has arisen among us,” and, “God has visited his people.” Well, that report spread through the whole of Judea. Now Judea is not in the north; it’s in the south—the whole southern area—and the surrounding country. Now, across the gorge, the Jordan River, called the Transjordan, you’ve got this area where, according to Josephus, John the Baptist is locked up, and you remember he loses his life there, being beheaded—more on that another time.

“But the disciples of John reported all that they were hearing about Jesus up in Galilee to John. And John,” verse 19, “calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying”—here’s the question—“Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”” And when the men had



come to him, come to Jesus, they said, “John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’”

Now, again, that’s such a big question. Some people have tried to talk their way around this because we revere John the Baptist so much, but here’s a good man reading the right things about the coming kingdom, but he’s confused because he’s not seeing it all happen. Verse 21: “In that hour,” your God had orchestrated in this particular time, this season of time, “he had healed and was healing people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.” Verse 22: “And he answered”—Christ answered these two emissaries—“and said, ‘Go tell John what you’ve seen and heard: the blind receive their sight,’” now, this is a quote—if you’re with us, we were dealing with this two weeks ago—from Isaiah 35, “they receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, the poor have the good news preached to them.” And then the stinger of a verse, verse 23: “And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” Go tell John that. Interesting response. It’s a big question.

I talk about the glossy brochures of the kingdom there in Isaiah. I’d just like to turn there, would you? Let’s review a little bit. I don’t want to go back over what we already dealt with, but at least let’s cherry-pick a few of these verses and just remind ourselves—some of the high points that would forge in John’s mind his eschatology, his view of the end, his view of the coming kingdom. It was very positive, it was very big, it was very triumphant.

Isaiah 33—you might remember, we looked at some of these verses. I’ll just hit a couple of these real quick, just to get them in your eyes. Verse 17: “Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty.” The king is coming—Christ’s king, Christ’s Messiah, the coming king. Verse 22 (Isaiah 33:22): “The LORD is our king.” Now it is this issue—even this underlying view of his deity—that the incarnate God, he will save us.

Let’s go to some familiar verses. We could spend all day on 33 and 34 and 35, but go to chapter 40. Remember these from the Christmas singing, Handel’s *Messiah*. Look at verse 5: “The glory of the LORD will be revealed.” Okay—the greatness, the weightiness, the importance of God—it’s all going to be shown, and “all flesh shall see it.” Everyone’s going to see it—be evident, be obvious, it’ll be big. Verse 10: “The Lord GOD—he comes with might, and his arm rules for him.” The Messiah is going to rule for him. “Behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.”



Now, if you're in a dungeon, and you know that you are the prophet preceding the coming of Messiah, and you see none of these things—the beauty of the king, the salvation of the king, the glory of God that everyone sees and recognizes, the might of God, his rulership, the reward for the righteous and the recompense for the wicked—if you're not seeing that, I can understand the question, “Are you the one, or should we be looking for someone else?” Those are expectations that are legitimate.

But there's more to the picture of the coming Messiah, and it adjusts the expectations. As a matter of fact, it's a hard set of promises regarding the Messiah to reconcile together. And the way that we do it in retrospect—because hindsight is 20/20—is that this was not all going to happen in the same coming. Turn to the most famous chapter in Isaiah—Isaiah chapter 53. This part of the prophecy makes it hard for people to comprehend it. How do we understand this? And God sets it up that way. Verse number 1: “Who has believed,” Isaiah 53:1, “what he's heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD”—that we talked about in chapter 40—“been revealed?” Well, it should be obvious—I thought all the earth is going to see it together—his salvation, his beauty, his majesty, his glory. Of course—well, that's kind of hard, and people didn't believe it.

Why is all said in the prophetic perfect? In other words, it's said as though it's already taken place. But clearly, this is a messianic section of Isaiah, and it says of the Messiah: “He grew up before him,” the Messiah grew up before the Father, “like a young plant, like a root out of dry ground.” Now, you don't picture that as a description of this mighty one who comes with the strong arm of the Lord, rewarding the righteous and repaying the wicked—and yet that's him.

And it says, in the middle of verse 2, “He has no form or majesty that we should look at him.” Now, every king has majesty—I thought that's what chapter 40 said. No—“there was no majesty, no beauty that we should desire him.” As a matter of fact, here are some words to highlight—verse 3: “He was despised, rejected by men. He's known as a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.” How bad is this? “As one from whom men hide their faces.” So, the whole glory of God being seen and everyone seeing and everybody being attracted to him and everyone recognizing—what are you talking about? Yeah, “they hide their faces.” He was despised—“as one from whom men hide their faces”—and “we esteemed him not.”

Here's some more words to describe—verse 4: “Surely he bore our griefs,” he took on our griefs, “and carried our sorrows.” So, he's known as a man of grief, a man of sorrows. “Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.” Look at those words. Now, if you're looking for the coming kingdom and you're John the Baptist, as we said a couple weeks ago, forging and settling in your mind your own eschatology from the Old Testament, these are the verses you kind of skim over because you don't know how they possibly fit. They're what I like to call the fine print. Now, they're in the same



font size as the rest of the prophecies, but they're the parts we like to skip. They're what I like to call the verses that never end up on the DaySpring cards—you've heard me say that before. These are the things—when I'm thinking of the coming of the Lord, I don't want to think of these words: despised, rejected, acquainted with grief, a man of sorrows. I don't want to think of it that way. I'd rather stick with chapter 33 and 34 and 35 and 40—those are the ones I want to make my kids memorize. Those are triumphant verses.

But here's the thing—God said them both. There are, as Pollyanna put it, happy texts and there are not-so-happy texts. Both of them are true. How do we reconcile those? We reconcile them in hindsight by recognizing: in his first coming, he came as the suffering servant, and he will come again as the triumphant king. Now, is he the king at the first coming? Well, yes—but he hasn't taken his power and begun to reign, which is evidenced in John's life as he sits there, as the number one prophet, in a dungeon in a desert, under lock and key by Herod, who's exercising power—really unjustly—over the people of God.

Number one on your outline—let's put this down and identify with John on this—we need to **govern our expectations of the king**. And by that, I mean you need to think about Jesus Christ, even in the current dispensation, as the king who is going to fulfill everything that the Bible says regarding himself and his dealings with us. And I know, just like the Old Testament saints thinking about the coming of Christ, the New Testament Christians look at the Bible and we see in the New Testament happy texts and not-so-happy texts. And the not-happy texts are the ones that never end up being memory verses for our children—they never end up being crocheted and needlepointed for your wall in your grandma's house. I mean, they're the verses that we point out a lot.

Even in the Old Testament we have them, right? We pulled in one a couple of weeks ago from Genesis chapter 3, verse 17—that God, after he says he's going to add thorns to the fabric of the universe, he's now going to take our bodies made of dust and make sure they return to the dust. Fine—go into our bookstore and look for that greeting card: “You're dust, and to dust you'll return.” We don't like that. And yet it's true, is it not? Is that not the promise of God? Well, of course it is.

“All those who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus,” Paul wrote Timothy, “will be...”—you know the next word—“persecuted.” Did you make your kids read that one in Awana and memorize that? Did they get points or Bible bucks for reciting it? Never. You know why? That's not a happy text. That's the New Testament version of the fine print. Or how about this one—when Jesus said, “You know what, if they hated me, they're also going to hate you. If they persecuted me, they're gonna persecute you.”



You want another text that won't be on a DaySpring card (for one, because it's way too long)? How about this—the book of Job. If you've read the book of Job, talk about a string of non-happy texts. Godly man—what happens? Bad stuff. A lot of bad stuff.

Here's all I'm saying: you can have people that love to look at the happy texts of the current dispensation—the current epoch that we live in, the era of Christianity today in this world—and they just want to extract the happy. Most of those happy texts—most of them are all about the end, what we call eschatology. They take those things and they want to see them now. And they write books like *Your Best Life Now*, just to be modern and current. And when our good buddy Joel writes—those of us being facetious—when he writes those books about having your best life now, it's not that he's not quoting the Bible. The problem is he has what the Corinthians had, and that is an **over-realized eschatology**. You ever heard me use that phrase? They want to see those things now.

Didn't John want that? That's the only reason he's questioning whether or not Jesus is the Messiah. "I want the oppressors to be put down. I want the recompense of the Messiah exacted on Herod now, and I want the righteous to be rewarded. That's what I want. And I want it now. Now, if you're not the one, should we be looking for someone else?" Of course, his answer is "No." But his expectations had to be carefully weighed. And I know it's very hard, but he could have said, "Well, I haven't seen the Isaiah 53 phase of the Messiah yet. Maybe that's the phase when he's stricken, and our leader's going to be hated and rejected and despised, and like one from whom men hide their faces—people are going to despise him. And if we're allied with him, then maybe that's going to be the reality for us. Maybe that's why I'm sitting here in a prison right now. I see everything's on schedule."

Now, we don't have time to look at 1 Corinthians 4, but it'd be worth jotting down, because there's a great text about people that wanted the kingdom now. And by that I mean every aspect of the greatness of the kingdom now. And Paul says—dripping with sarcasm—in chapter 4, "Oh, I see that you've become kings—and that without us. Oh..." Here's what he says: "I wish that you were kings, because then we'd be reigning with you." In other words, "You're not kings. Stop trying to be." You know what that's going to cause? A set of false expectations that will never be met in this life. And eventually people are going to come through the revolving door of the church at Corinth and hear that their life is going to be fantastic, and they're going to leave disappointed because the life that they live is never going to match the promise that the preacher with over-realized eschatology made.

As a matter of fact, he goes so far as to say, "Well, listen, if we're the apostles and we came and brought the word to you, and you look up to us as leaders in Christianity, why are we"—here's where



the phrase comes from, 1 Corinthians 4—"why are we considered the scum of the earth?" Why? Because we're in a phase of the kingdom right now that is not only bad, but—here's another one from 2 Timothy chapter 3—it's going to go from bad to worse. That means the environment to commend your grandchildren in the Christianity that they, I trust and hope and pray, adhere to is going to be more difficult and filled with more persecution for them than it was for your grandparents. Are you tracking with this? That's the direction that we're on.

Therefore, we want to read the fact that the Bible has for us not only the happy texts, the joyful texts, the triumphant texts, and not only those about the present life being filled with some things like relief from our sin and the joy and relief of forgiveness and all the things that we read about in the Bible that are positive—but they're all set against a backdrop when Jesus made it clear: "In this world you have tribulation. But take heart, I've overcome the world." What's that? The kingdom is coming.

Let me turn you to a passage, please, on this—Acts 20. And now let me blow your mind—I've got eight subpoints here to give you. If that didn't blow your mind, that's awesome. It's early enough in this sermon where you didn't—no one fainted—with eight quick points. Let me give these. And the reason I chose Acts 20 is because Paul is about to go in his ministry—and just looking at the microcosm of his life—from bad to worse. The persecution is ramping up for Paul. He knows it's going to be bad for him as he goes from Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) back to Jerusalem, and he knows there's going to be a lot of bad things that happen. And as he tells the church of Ephesus, that he's been with for three years now, "Hey, hang in there. It's going to be hard," he's like the coach giving his team a final pep talk before he splits, and he's going to say, "Brace yourself." And he talks a lot about things that we need to hear as we traverse the Christian life—making sure our expectations are what they ought to be. Govern them. Govern them—make sure they're biblical expectations.

Let's drop into the middle of this—verse 22 (Acts 20:22). Are you with me on this? Eight things—real quick.

"Now, behold, I'm going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except," verse 23, "that the Holy Spirit testifies to me that in every city imprisonment and afflictions await me." Hmm. That's his expectation. And, you know, we could parallel that with passages like I've already quoted—2 Timothy 3:13—and "it's going to go from bad to worse," "in this world you have tribulation," all these passages.



So let's put it this way—**Number one: expect trouble.** Expect it. Expect it. If your life gets really, really difficult as a Christian, you're on the right road. And you can see why an over-realized eschatology just confuses Christians, demoralizes Christians, because it sets them up with expectations that are never promised to be met in this life. You will not have your best life now. It will be filled, according to the Bible, with difficulty. Can you have joy in the midst of those difficult circumstances? Of course. But it's not going to be a happy time. As a matter of fact, the promises—if we're going to be ultimate and frank about it—are that it's going to get hard. There'll be difficulties. You'll get sick, diseased, and you'll die. "I don't want to hear that." Well, maybe that's why even some people leave churches like this that are willing to preach all of what the Bible says. They may not say, "Well, should we look for another Jesus?" They say, "Let me look for another church that will give me another picture of Jesus." Our goal is to give you the whole picture. And the whole picture is a set of governed expectations that every ache and pain in your life is not going to be immediately quelled by God.

He says, "I know it's gonna get worse for me, so I expect the difficulties." But verse 24: "I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself." What life? The present life. Let's put it this way—**Number two: care less about this life.** Care less about this life. I'm not setting myself up to try and find my best life now. Why? Because this life is of little consequence to me in terms of comfort and convenience—all of the things that I want: prosperity and pleasure and power, and all the things that our hearts desire—[they're] not important. Now, you know where it's important? In the kingdom. That's where all those things—pleasure and power and prominence and all of that—are going to be fulfilled in a perfect way. And that's the world I should care about.

Now, I want to care about what? Middle of verse 24: "If only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord." In his case, he says, "to testify" as a missionary "to the gospel of the grace of God." That's his role. **Number three: care more about faithfulness.** That's all we should be ultimately caring about. In other words, in this life it may be hard, it may be difficult—I'm expecting trouble, I don't care about having every little whim and every little thing that I want, all my desires; I don't care about them all being met on this planet—but I care about being faithful. As I walk with God year by year and decade by decade, what God has called me to do, what he's called me to be—I want to do.

Verse 25: "And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again." I'm talking about the kingdom—it's coming—but you're not going to see me. Why? Verse 26: "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not," verse 27, "shrink from declaring to you"—here's a key phrase—underline—"the whole counsel of God."



He didn't have an over-realized eschatology. He didn't only focus on the happy texts; he was one who gave them the whole picture. Make it practical for your personal life—**Number four: read the whole Bible.** Over and over and over and over—over and over and over and over and over again—keep reading it. Have I said this a hundred times? The best safeguard to keep you from being driven and tossed by every wind of doctrine is to have the whole of Scripture in your life. That's why we encourage everybody in our church—I don't care if you're a first-time visitor—get on board with our daily Bible reading program and read through the Bible with us. On our website—you can get it emailed to you—all these ways that we try to say, "Please read through the Bible from cover to cover." That will keep you from cherry-picking twenty of your favorite texts and building the false expectations about what God is going to do in your life on a daily, weekly, monthly, annual basis. Read the whole Bible.

And I should say—and here's where I'm going to say it again, especially for our radio audience, because I hope you're here—but if [you're in] whatever church within driving distance—within reasonable driving distance—find a place that preaches the whole of God's word. And that doesn't mean they've got a sermon from every book of the Bible, but that means that they're not afraid to teach not just the happy texts but the difficult texts—the realities of the Christian life. Find a church that teaches the whole Bible.

Verse 28: "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock," he says to these pastors in Ephesus, "in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock." Now it gets worse. Verse 30: "And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them." If that didn't send a chill up the spine of those pastors, I don't know what would.

So, one thing for us as Christians to think about—our bodies are decaying, we're going to die, there's going to be disease, we're going to have adversaries, people are going to hate us, the culture is going to get hostile toward Christianity—hunker down, persecution is coming. But as we get in the foxhole with these other Christians and put our arms around them, now you're telling me part of the trouble and persecution and difficulty and trial we're going to have is people within the ranks that I'm trusting are going to turn on me? That's what the Bible teaches. I put it this way—don't be surprised—**Number five: by betrayal.** Betrayal. You'll be betrayed. You'll be stabbed in the back. You will have people that you rely on as a fellow Christian in your life, and they will hurt you unjustly. They'll turn on you. So much did God want to impress us with this—think about this—that within the team that Jesus himself picked, the twelve leaders, he ensured (as prophecy predicted) he would have one betrayer among them. Think about that—just to remind you: you're always going to have your Judas. There'll always be—now, I'm not trying to make us paranoid about all of our friends—but I am saying this: the kind of trouble that's going to be for the Christian life—the governing expectations—need to be, "Hey,



there's going to be difficulty; it'll even get to the place"—which I think is the most severe kind of pain Paul ever testified to in the Bible. It wasn't the rocks that were being thrown at him by his enemies; it was the betrayal of those that were closest to him. That's some of the most difficult.

Verse 31: "Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears." Any three-year period of Paul's life—there's going to be a lot of trouble and a lot of difficulty. And as he made Ephesus his home base for three years, that was a picture into his life where they saw, "Man, this guy—really one of the most important instruments in the New Testament church, this great apostle, the Apostle Paul—look at his life. It's filled with it. He's crying. There's difficulty. There's pain in his life."

These quick principles—I worded this one this way—**Number six: remember every Christian 'hero' suffered.** You might want to add this: greatly. Everybody you look up to—John the Baptist? Yeah. Greatest prophet, in a dungeon, gets beheaded. Jesus Christ? Yes—crucified on a cross by the Romans. The Apostle Paul? He's going from one city to the next—sometimes being lowered out of the wall in a basket on a rope, sometimes leaving on a stretcher because they threw rocks at him and they left him for dead. I mean, and you can get into church history and see the same—you don't know one godly Christian person that you admire and respect—really—if you're judging that character by biblical standards—who has not suffered, suffered greatly. So all I'm saying is, if you want to get on the right road with Jesus—"I want to serve Christ. I want to be a good Christian."—now I expect Christ to do what in my life? Make everything great and perfect and painless? No. Not a single person you admire that's walked down that road further than you has had it paved without lots of things in the present age.

Two quick things—verse 32: "Now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace." That's key. What does it do? "It's able to build you up and to give you the inheritance..." Now think about that. The word of grace—the truth, the body, the corpus, the message of information about Christ, which now, thankfully, is codified by the New Testament apostles—we need to dig into the word. I put it that way. Don't just stay in the word—**dig** in the word. Be more than just getting the 30,000-foot view of the Bible once a year as you read through it. You've got to get into the Bible—dig into it. Go deep through the layers of Scripture and understand what the Bible has to say about any given topic. What does it do? It sends roots down; it builds you up.

One last thing—"among those who are sanctified." I know sanctification has two phases—in terms of a sense in which we are set apart as God's children—but there's also that pattern and growth of sanctification. I put it this way—**Number eight: keep growing.** Keep making the trajectory of growth move forward in your life to where you can look at your Christian life this year and say, "You know



what—yeah, I think it’s measurably better than it was last year. I think I’m following Christ with more ardency or resolve or faithfulness. I see more fruit in my life.” We want to see that pattern.

There’s a lot that helps us understand the expectations of what Christ is going to do in and through us as we just think: trouble’s coming; care less about this life; care more about being faithful; the Bible—I’ve got to get it all under my belt; never going to be surprised even by the pain of betrayal; I know every Christian hero has suffered greatly; I’m going to be in the word every day; and I’m going to keep growing as a Christian. That’s just a quick sermon-within-a-sermon from Acts 20 on helping to adjust and fine-tune our expectations.

Back to our text—it’s printed on your worksheet—verses 21 and 22 of Luke 7. Jesus responds, “Are you the one? Should we look for another?” Well, verse 21, God in his providence orchestrated that there would be—in the time that those disciples, those emissaries of John, were there—there would be healings—people with diseases being healed, people with plagues having them relieved, evil spirits being cast out, and many who were blind—a very obvious and dramatic healing—and he bestowed sight on them. And so he (Christ) answered them—the emissaries of John—“Hey, go tell John what you’ve seen and what you’ve heard. You’re his trusted advisors; you’re as trusted as I. Go and tell John what you saw. Tell him stuff like this,” quoting now Isaiah 35:5—“the blind receive sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed,” Isaiah 35:6, “the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the good news preached to them.” I mean, tell him that. Tell him that the message was ensconced with things that gave divine credibility to it.

Now, Jesus could have just said to the question—look at verse 20—“Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?” We could have saved a lot of ink in this part of the Bible if Christ had said, “Yes, I am the one.” That’s not what he said. Why? Because it’s not the pattern of Christ. He says, “Look at what I’m doing.” Jot this reference down—John 10:37–38. John 10:37: “If I am not doing the works of my Father”—right, God is supernatural—“if I’m not doing that, then do not believe me. But if I do do those works of the Father—even though you don’t believe me, my words—then believe my works, that you may know”—why?—“because you’ve seen my works, and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father.” You want to know who I am? I don’t want you to believe me just because I tell you. I want you to believe that I am who I say I am because of what I have done. And these are things that cannot be done by a normal person. So the credentials of Christ are on display. And he sends back to John something very gracious and compassionate—proof.

Number two: we need to reaffirm our confidence in the king. Reaffirm it, because that’s what John was getting through this message—here are two guys walking in (at least two guys) and saying, “Hey, we saw miracles; we saw blind people receive sight; and we heard all kinds of stories about these



miraculous things that Jesus was doing.” John goes, “You saw that? You saw that?” Suddenly—okay. “You saw things, and it was even described by Jesus with words that would be promised in the coming of the Messiah. I thought they would be, you know, coming with the rest of the things that I want to see Christ do. But, man, that is what the Bible says the Christ would be. And they are supernatural acts. And it does prove this to me.”

Now, you can look at this and say, “Well, this [was] 2,000 years ago—disciples of John—I don’t know, he’s in a desert, somewhere in the Jordanian desert, and—am I supposed to just believe that?” Listen, you don’t have trusted people in your life coming in saying, “Hey, I just went in the parking lot; I saw Christ do this; even if you’re doubting Christ and you’re thinking maybe I shouldn’t put my trust in Christ because he’s not doing what I want him to do—his plan is not matching with my desires—maybe I should be looking for some other thing to trust in, some other person to follow.” You don’t have someone coming in—“No, no, I just saw something, and it’s absolutely true. You keep trusting in Christ.” You don’t have that.

But you **do** have a few things—and we could go on really all morning with things that I think should be convincing to you. Let me give you three real quick.

Number one, you have his **resurrection**. There are a lot of things—you can look at the minutiae of the miracles that he did, and you can say, “Well, you know, I guess I have to take their word for it.” Listen, I understand when it comes to the resurrection, it’s on the testimony of others. But it’s a kind of testimony that is unlike any other kind of testimony in terms of its convincing nature. Let me just take five minutes just to talk off the cuff about this real quick.

Number one: if we’re going to think about the resurrection of Christ as being the thing—as Paul said, Romans 1:4, that declares him to be the Son of God—in other words, “I trust that I’m trusting the right person—I’m confident that I have my confidence in the right person because he rose from the dead.” He may not be doing everything in my time that I want. He may not be meeting all my desires. I may be frustrated at God about a lot of things. But when it comes to “Am I trusting the right person?” I can’t get around the resurrection. He’s declared to be.

Well, if you’re going to use that in your mind as something that helps you reaffirm your confidence in Christ, you have to have some confidence in the **documentation**. Now, I could talk all morning about the documentation, but let me say one thing about the thing that Satan does in popular culture to undermine your confidence in the documentation. Here’s one thing that’s been very popular—and



Satan is so, you know, savvy about this—in bringing this to popular culture through the “historical fictions” of Dan Brown. But let me say this—and I know it’s an old song—but it’s almost settled into the intellectual elite’s thinking about Christ, and here’s what they say: When you read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, what you’re reading are not first-century accounts of eyewitnesses. What you’re reading is fourth-century edited compilations that were all sanctioned by Constantine the Great, the emperor of Rome, who was trying to consolidate power, and he created this fable-ized, fictionalized, deified Jesus who was nothing other than just a normal human rabbi. There were no things about miracles or raising from the dead. Really what we have is a fourth-century picture of something that some man in a political office wanted to manufacture to get everybody kind of in line under his leadership.

Nothing could be more stupid—can I use that word?—than that. Nothing matches the facts at all. There is no legitimate historian who would ever come to that conclusion. As a matter of fact, Dan Brown—on that whole idea of creating this myth that has become almost “intellectual fact” in our day—is based on the fact that the picture of the “normal” Jesus was really the first-century picture, and the picture of the Gospels is the fourth-century. And the ones from the first century, they claim, are what are categorized by scholars (and have been) as the **Gnostic gospels**. You’ve heard of that? The Gnostic gospels.

Here’s the folly of Dan Brown’s book—and what everybody now seems to believe—the Gnostic gospels were written in the **third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh** century. These things went on for centuries. And, as I like to say, they’re the pot-smokers of the early church. They sat around in their VW vans with their inverted Frisbee, sorting out their cannabis, and they’re thinking about, “Well, man, let’s come up with this idea about Christ.” And they created all these fanciful, screwy tales about Jesus that had nothing to do with reality. And when they were read, everyone knew that—they were never even tried to be passed off as history.

And when you’ve got somebody saying, “Well, the picture of Jesus as a married father” (which is what Dan Brown’s book was all about way back in the day) “is based on the Gnostic gospels, and those were first-century texts, and your Gospels that you carry around talking about a resurrected Christ, who promised he would be—well, that’s fourth-century text”—it’s nonsense. Nonsense. You can travel the universities and museums of the world—and you can, as I have done—get these documents from the second century in your hands. And there are some scholars, like at Magdalen College in their library at Oxford, there are some scraps of Matthew that they believe are dated to the middle of the first century—within a decade of when they were written.

Now, I know—if you’ve been to school and you’ve heard apologetics—you’re talking about John Rylands’ papyrus in the library at Manchester, and they’ve always said, “Well, John’s Gospel—we



have fragments of John's Gospel—115, 110, 117 AD,” and that was within, I don't know, 20 years, 30 years of the writing of the Gospel. Now, that's impressive, but I think it even goes closer than that. We have copies of these things that are indisputably dated within a couple decades of when they were originally written, and (with some dispute among scholars) some within maybe even 10 years.

All I'm telling you is Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were the Gospels that were written by these eyewitnesses or the amanuenses—the emissaries—of eyewitnesses, who spoke of a Jesus who claimed he would die and then rise again, and then everyone testifying to the fact that he rose again. And as Paul said—even when he wrote to the Corinthians—there are people still alive within the hundreds of people that saw the resurrected Christ; publicly crucified (as he said to King Agrippa) and publicly resurrected.

And I love the line—and I always have to quote it when I speak to the veracity of the resurrection—Chuck Colson, when he talks about one of the things that intellectually convinced him of the veracity of the resurrection of Christ, he said, “It's interesting—in my experience, when we as loyalists to President Nixon tried to keep the Watergate thing under wraps and keep a lie going, we couldn't keep it going for two weeks, until someone turned state's evidence and said, ‘I'm not going to jail for this.’” You do understand that (barring Judas) the eleven remaining apostles—ten of them—died a gruesome martyr's death. Think that through—about the time you're about to skewer me or crucify me upside down, I'm going to say, “Hey, we made this thing up about the resurrection of Christ.” Documentation of people under pressure not recanting—a consistent testimony. You've got to deal with the resurrection of Christ.

Now, five minutes discussing it is not going to convince the skeptic, but all I've got to say is, “Go do your homework on this.” Many skeptics have, and they become convinced by this. And so, here's the deal: I could be frustrated with Christianity because I don't like the way Christ is doing things in my life, and I don't like the disease or the death or whatever might have happened in my life to where I'm really seriously demoralized—like Paul—saying, “Maybe I should be trusting in someone else.” But when I lay my head on the pillow at night, I don't know what to do with the resurrection, other than to say, “He was declared to be the Son of God by that.” I guess I have nowhere else to go. I have to trust in him. And I have to reaffirm my confidence as I think about the resurrection.

Let me give you another one—**predictive prophecy**. Number two, letter B—you've got a historical validation, and that's just one. We could come up with 30. But let's talk about one you carry around in your lap—that Bible that you have. Now, again, we could go on for hours about the amazing—what I call the *imprimatur* of God—his fingerprints of divine authority in the text. And the way he does that, according to Isaiah 46, is that he tells the end from the beginning. He's the only one that can do that.



Jeane Dixon can guess. Nostradamus can talk all weird and come up with a few things that people are impressed with. But only God can say things about, like, “The Messiah is going to be born” (Micah 5:2) “in the village of Bethlehem.”

Those are the kinds of things—the only way around to come up with a naturalistic explanation (now, let me simplify it) is to say that the Old Testament promises regarding the New Testament Messiah had to be written after the fact. That’s the only way this can be naturally explained—that all these exacting prophecies in the Old Testament about the New Testament reality had to be written after the fact. And about that time—that became a popular kind of (up in the upper echelon of academia) explanation—to say, “Well, God didn’t write these things; men wrote them, and they wrote them in retrospect and then lied about putting them in front of the New Testament.” That was all put to death by the discovery of the **Dead Sea Scrolls**.

For one—you do remember 1947—when they found this library that was buried, this **pre-Christian** library buried, that had all of the Old Testament books except for one—multiple copies of the books of the Old Testament except for one book. Thirty-eight of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament in this library—predating the time of Christ. Now think about that. God had to say, “Stop with your shell game.” Clearly, the Old Testament data was written before the New Testament. Can you stop with that theory? And all you have to do is put those in chronological order and then say, “How could this happen?” I mean, I like a lot of things about what Christ is doing, and I may say, “Man, if I were Christ, I’d do it differently.” And I may not really like the timing of all that he does. But I may have to go to bed tonight saying, “I’ve got nothing else I can do but follow Christ and trust Christ, because I can’t do anything with the resurrection intellectually, and I can’t deal with the text of Scripture.” And people that tell you otherwise either haven’t read it, or they haven’t done the research on the timing of when these things were written. I have no way out of this but to trust in the Christ of the Bible.

Lastly—I’ve given you an historical [validation], I’ve given you one that’s propositional that you can hold in your hands—let me give you another one that you’ve experienced. Now, I don’t use this when I talk to non-Christians about apologetics or try to convince someone about Christianity. But you sit here—many of you—claiming to be Christians, and there are times, like John, you’re going to be in the dungeon of some bad season of your life and you’re going to be saying, “Maybe I should be looking for another one and put my trust in someone else. I don’t—maybe I—why am I even a Christian?” You may have those thoughts that you would never share in your home fellowship group, but you have them.

Now, let’s talk about a subjective one—let’s put it this way—the **Spirit of God**, the **Holy Spirit**, in your life. The Holy Spirit in your life—that’s one, combined with some others, that should do some



things in your own heart that say, “Well, I can’t work around this.” One passage I want you to jot down—turn with me to Ephesians chapter 1.

Last fall we were dealing with this topic of the Holy Spirit—we spent twelve weeks on that, I think we did—and we went through several of the names of the Holy Spirit in the Bible, and two of them show up here in Ephesians chapter 1 that are used elsewhere, but they say something that is so important for us—even when we begin to doubt—especially when we begin to doubt. Look at this—start in verse 11 (Ephesians 1:11): “In him”—in Christ, this one we say we trust—“we have obtained an inheritance.” This is Ephesians chapter 1, verse 11. Are you with me on this? “In him we have obtained”—we have—well, it’s not here yet. “Where’s all the good stuff? Where’s the fun? Where are the rides? Where’s the happiness? This is very hard.” No, no—you’ve got it. It’s coming.

“We’ve been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.” Put in the margin—if it’s not already there—Romans 8:28. That, by the way, was a passage speaking about all things working together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. That was there in the midst of a passage about Christians that were suffering. And when you’re suffering, you need to know—even this period of tribulations prior to the king—that’s all a part of God’s good plan. God’s working everything after the counsel of his own will—he’s got a plan. “So that,” verse 12, “we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.”

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel”—the good news—“of your salvation, and believed”—or trusted—“in him, you were”—here’s the one label of the Holy Spirit I want you to know—“sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.” Just like 2 Corinthians 1—that picture of the Holy Spirit being the seal. Now, a seal is that wax emblem that was put on a scroll to close it, to show that this was an important one, and it was authorized by this person. Or in our day we put them on the back of envelopes—we don’t do it anymore (most of you), but you know what it is—to seal the envelope. The thing that closes it and says, “This is mine.” It authorizes—it shows that “you’re mine.” It’s this picture of “Yes, you are one of mine,” and “you have an inheritance.” Verse 14—here’s the second one—“who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.” You don’t have it yet, but you have it—verse 11 says you have it, but you haven’t received it yet. You are guaranteed the inheritance of the coming kingdom, but we haven’t gotten that kingdom yet—we haven’t possessed it. But here’s the guarantee of it: the Spirit.

Now, the “guarantee”—in the KJV this was translated with the word “earnest,” which—unless you’re in finance—I mean, we don’t use that word much either: “earnest money.” Here’s a word we use: a **deposit** (I think the NAS translates it “a deposit”), or here’s the idiom for it: the **down payment**. You



have a guaranteed inheritance coming, and the down payment for that—the guarantee for that, as the ESV puts it, the earnest money for that, the guarantee that it’s coming—is the Spirit. So, if you have the Spirit of God in your life, then you know the kingdom is coming.

“Well, do I know the Holy Spirit [is in my] life?” Great question—Galatians chapter 5. This is one we did teach our kids in Awana—the **fruit of the Spirit**, the evidence of the Spirit, the effect of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control—remember that list? Those are the kinds of things that, if you put your trust in Christ—you’ve had this encounter with the Holy Spirit who’s come to invade your life—you will see these kinds of things being produced in a way in your life that was impossible before. And if you’ve seen that and witnessed that, let’s add to the little quick repertoire of things that should redouble and reaffirm your confidence in Christ that you’re trusting in the right person. If you’ve seen that, that’s a guarantee that you’re part of the kingdom and you’re on your way. Oh, it’s tribulation now—I get that. But the evidence of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness—all the effects of the Spirit in your life—they convince you. I know it’s subjective. I know it’s experiential. But along with the other things that are not—that are propositional and external and objective—those are things that, when I go to bed at night, I can’t get around the fact: first, he rose from the dead—he’s the king, I trust him, I submit to him; second, he’s predicted in a book that speaks of him and tells me to trust and submit to him, and it’s a book that cannot be written by men—it’s not man’s best thoughts about God, it’s God’s thoughts on paper; and then, you know what? He’s changed my life. I can’t get around it. I try to explain that maybe somehow—but there you go. I just gave you three things—whatever it is that you can do in your heart in those dark times to—even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death—fear no evil, because you know God is with you; you know you’re headed to where goodness and mercy will follow you all day. You’ve got to have a place to hang your hat. And all I’m telling you is: you need to have that. You need to rehearse that. You need to have the kind of confidence that John got through his emissaries saying, “Hey, we’ve seen **objective** things that should make you trust—even in the dungeon of the Jordanian desert.”

The stinger—verse 23 (Luke 7:23). I call it a stinger because I can only imagine what it was like to have John hear that Christ had told his disciples to tell him this. Verse 23: “And blessed”—right, blessed; remember, happy—great is the condition—“is the one who is not offended by me.” Not offended by me.

Now, “offended” is translated variously, but maybe you’ve heard the word—if you’ve been in church long enough—*skandalizō*. That’s the verbal form. *Skandalon*—perhaps you’ve heard it in a sermon as the noun form—*skandalon*. *Skandalizō*, *skandalon* transliterates into English into what word? **Scandal**. What’s the scandal? Well, you know—your bosses, the executive board of your company—whatever—you trust in them, things are going along, everything’s fine, and then there’s a scandal. A scandal. And what’s the scandal? The scandal is this jaw-dropping, upsetting thing that all of a sudden—now, “Oh, I don’t know if I can trust these people. I don’t know—maybe they’re not all that they’re cracked up to



be. Maybe I put my confidence in the wrong place. These people that I thought were good leaders—I don't think they're good leaders. There's a scandal now." Scandal—that's the feeling of *skandalizō*. But the translation is often this: **to trip, to stumble**. And you can picture it—that's kind of a vivid way to picture it. You're going along, walking along, everything's fine, you're following the leader, everything's good—and then you trip. Then you're set off course. Then you go off the rails. Why? Because something in that person has caused us to say, "I don't know if I can trust you anymore."

Here's Jesus to John: "I know you're in a dungeon, and I know—more than you do about it—you're going to lose your head in that dungeon. It's going to be a terrible end for you. But blessed—happy—is the condition (great is the condition) of those who, even in the midst of those kinds of circumstances, they don't feel like that's scandalous. They're not 'offended' by that—not in the offended way we use the word 'offended' in the 21st century. I'm talking about: who doesn't stumble over the fact that Jesus would let that happen."

See, we've got to get past that. **Number three: we need to quell any frustrations about the king.** And you may not have one as you sit here listening to me today—you may say, "Well, I'm not frustrated with God." It's going to happen. And, as a pastor, you can imagine how often I hear people saying, "Well, I'm mad at God." They're not mad at God when everything's going well. They're mad at God when things go poorly. They're mad at God when their kid dies. They're mad at God when their wife gets cancer. They're mad at God when they get evicted from the house. They lose their job, they try hard and they don't win. They're mad at God because—"Come on—Christ is my king. Where's the good stuff?" They're mad at God, and they often ask me, "Is it okay for me to be mad at God?"

I wouldn't recommend it. No. You want to answer that question—ask Job. "Okay to be mad at God?" If you're new to all this, you don't know the book of Job very well—Job looks like such a godly man at the beginning of the book—and he is: "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away." He gives stuff, takes it away—the death of your kids—if you can say that, you're a godly person. Well, it didn't last very long—you know the book. The more the book went on, the more Job gets frustrated and angry and pounds his fist down and says, "God, I've got a beef with you"—Mike Fabarez paraphrase—"a beef with you. Give me a day in court, man. I've got my complaint and I want to air it." And chapter after chapter after chapter it gets worse and worse—until God says, "Okay—time to talk." And God shows up and speaks to Job out of the whirlwind and reminds him of a few things about his greatness. He—let's put it this way—**reaffirms Job's confidence in the kingship** of the Triune God. And after all of that—"Now, do you have something to say? You've got a complaint? Let's hear it." You remember Job's response—one of the best lines in the Bible: "I put my hand over my mouth." Paraphrase: "I'll shut up now. Sorry. I spoke once; I will speak no more."



Here's the thing: I know we're all tempted to feel like Job and pound our fist on the table and say, "God, why? Why did you let that happen? God, why is this happening?" And it may not be today, but if it's next week, next month, or next year, remember this sermon, would you? Remember John sitting in a prison, saying, "Are you the one, or should I be looking for somebody else?" And Christ saying, "Blessed is the person who is not offended by me—who doesn't trip up over the bad circumstances of their lives. Trust me."

Two quick psalms—Psalm 94. I want you to think about John. Remember now, there's so much going on in the Bible—Herod was such a bad character. There are many iterations of Herod. There was Herod the Great, of course, who was the one who killed all the babies. Psalm 94 is where I'd like you to go. He has a son, Archelaus—he reigns in his place. You might remember after the flight to Egypt (they call it), where Joseph and Mary and Jesus go to Egypt. They come back—because they heard that Herod the Great was dead—but Herod Archelaus was reigning, and so they didn't want to live there in Judea. So that's why Jesus was raised in Nazareth—to fulfill more prophecy. But there he was not in the arena because they were scared of Herod's son.

Well, by the time we come to the New Testament—where Jesus, believe it or not, starts calling, you know, Herod a jerk (I mean, that's another paraphrase), but Jesus says, "This guy's a loser." It's the third iteration—it's Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas—he's a bad character here in the Gospels. And he's the one who's locked up John. John is preaching against their immoral relationship, and Philip the brother—and it's all involved. I think we talked about it back in chapter three. And what happens is—throws him in prison. And then they have this debauchery, remember? The dancing, and the promise, and then they chop off his head.

Psalm 94:1 is the kind of psalm clearly a good Sabbath school graduate like John the Baptist would know by heart—and he's thinking it and feeling it, right? "O LORD, God of vengeance, O God of vengeance, shine forth!" And you said when your Messiah would come, his arm would rule for you, and he would bring your recompense, and he would bring your reward—reward for the righteous, recompense for the wicked. If you're not seeing that, I can understand the cry: "Rise up now—it's time to rise up, O judge of the earth. Repay the proud what they deserve." "O LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult?" Now there's a word you probably don't use every day. "How do they end up on top all the time? How do they end up happy and jubilant and winning all the time? How long is that going to happen?"

Now, remember—all the concerns, all the expectations of John—they weren't the wrong expectations. It was just the timing—the timing he was struggling with—and that's clear here in the psalmist's heart. "How long is this going to happen? They"—that is, the arrogant, the wicked—"they pour out their



arrogant words; all the evildoers, they boast. They crush your people, O LORD; they afflict your heritage. They kill the widow and the sojourner, and they murder the fatherless.” Can you imagine and see that frustration there? “God—and they’re getting away with it. They’re getting away with it—like there’s no justice in this world. The good guys are losing; the bad guys are winning.” John certainly felt that.

Verse 7 says these bad guys—like Herod—they sit around thinking they’re free from any guilt: “They say, ‘The LORD—the LORD you talk about—he really doesn’t see; the God of Jacob doesn’t perceive.’” Well, here’s some of the solution to help us fight the frustration when we feel that way—verse 8: the psalmist comes to his senses and says this in verse 8: “Understand, O dullest of the people.” “Hey, idiots—let’s gather the stooges together. I just want to talk to the fools for a minute. When will you be wise? He who planted the **ear**”—the one who designed those three bones in your inner ear and the eardrum and sending pulses to your brain, the one who designed all of that—two tools of perception on the side of your head—do you think he doesn’t **hear**? How about the one who formed the **eye**—the cornea, the lens, the rods and cones in the back of your eye sphere, your optic nerves—the one who designed—do you think the one who did all that—do you think he doesn’t **see**? You think he doesn’t see all the injustice? Of course he does. He’s not fixing it as fast as you would want it, but he sees it and he hears it. He who disciplines the nations that rise and fall—these empires—you’ve seen God come in and wipe out Assyria; you’ve seen him wipe out Egypt; you’ve seen him wipe out Babylon—you’ve seen that. Does he not rebuke? Of course he does. He’s got a history of rebuking. He who teaches man knowledge—the LORD, Yahweh—he knows the thoughts of man, and [as for] this Herod—it’s no big deal, John. He’s just a breath, just a mist. He’s no contender to God.”

See, that’s a perspective that says, “My expectations—if they’re biblically based—they’re not wrong. It’s just the timing has to be worked out. And I know that one day God is going to make all the rough places plain—to quote the whole thing: the valleys filled in, the mountains made low, the crooked straight, the rough places plain. It’s going to happen.” But in the meantime there are going to be things, like in your life, that you’re going to say, “I don’t like this. This doesn’t seem right. Why would God let this happen?”

I said two Psalms—let me turn you back to Psalm 73 and end on this one. Psalm 73. I picked this passage because that *skandalizō* word—stumbling, offending—that idea of slipping in your step—that’s how this psalm starts. The psalm of Asaph—very familiar psalm to you, I trust—starts with a principle. A principle that he affirms in his mind, but he doesn’t experience in his life—at least not at this point. Verse 1: “Truly God is good to Israel.” I believe the principle. That’s what I’ve been taught. I know that in my head. “And [he’s good] to those who are pure in heart.” I understand the bad guys lose and the good guys win—that I understand. “But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped.” Why? “For I was envious of the arrogant—I looked at their lives. I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” And it goes on—verse after verse—“Look at the iniquity. I see it all. I see



the greatest prophet of the Bible in a dungeon, and I see the oppressor in a palace. Something's not right here."

Drop down to verse 16: "But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task." He couldn't do it—**until**—there's the key word; underline that—"until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end." I realized God's justice isn't sleeping. I realized God is not "not perceiving it." Of course he perceives it. I realized it is not going to be like the present. "Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin. How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them," just like the other passage said—it's like a mist, like a phantom, like nothing.

"When my soul was embittered"—like that—"when I was pricked in heart"—before I realized this—and one of the things (my word), "I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you." What we don't want is that, and I'll bet John felt a little bit of that—"You know what? I know things aren't going the way I expect them to go, but God is still God. And the fine print of the Old Testament says it would be like this—I just didn't want to read it and didn't want to focus on it. I didn't want to claim those promises."

This is what I like to call **seeing the present from the future**. Seeing the present from the future. Some of us are not good at that. All we can do is see the present from the present. But one day it'll all be made right. In the meantime—speaking of the Holy Spirit—verse 23—we need to focus on God's willingness to **walk us through** the valley of the shadow of death. I want him to exclude us from having to walk through it—but he walks us through it. And the Bible says, "Nevertheless, I am continually with you"—Asaph says—"you hold my right hand; you guide me with your counsel." I know that you may have some terrible things happening in your life that you say, "Why? Maybe I should be looking for another leader, another Christ. Maybe I should switch religions—find another church." I don't know—you may be having those thoughts. But the text says—not only "see the present from the future," but **tune into the present benefits**: God walks you through this. And not only that—the **future** benefit: "And afterward"—bottom of verse 24—"you will receive me to glory." And if that's the case, I can handle this. Verse 25: "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you." Speaking of Paul—"My life is worth nothing." "My flesh and my heart may fail"—Herod may chop my head right off my body—"but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

Let's trust him—verse 27: "Behold, those who are far from you shall perish"—there's seeing the present from the future—"you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. But for me it is good to be near God"—I'll draw near to him; I'll trust him—"I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that"—



why?—“**I may tell of all your works.**” And it’s not going to be my present testimony of all the bad things happening in my life, Asaph says, but it will be the fact that you have proved yourself to be the king. And because of that, I’ll reaffirm my confidence in you.

We’ll get into this next time, but John the Baptist was considered great by Christ—so great (we’ll see this) that he’s at the top of the heap. But now he’s in a dungeon in the Jordanian desert; Herod’s in a palace. And one day—the point is—it’ll all be **reversed**. And because of that reversal, there’s going to be a kind of vindication that will allow us, I hope, to look back and see—because we saw the present from the future—we’re not ashamed of the way we dealt with these trials. That’s the whole point. And I don’t want whiny, sniffing, indulgent, snotty-nosed kids on the way to Disneyland being the biggest brats ever because they’re not getting what they want now. I want them to hang in there. I want them to know, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom.” I want you to realize: if you hang in there and endure, things are going to work out just the way the glossy advertisement said—but you have to wait.

Would you stand with me? Let me close us with a word of prayer, preceded by a text of Scripture that I hope is familiar to most of you, to avoid the meltdown—to avoid you shaking your fist at God. Once you close your eyes and bow your head, let me read this text and then I’ll close in prayer.

Romans 8: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. For the creation—it waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it. And he subjected it **in hope**, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth right up until the present time. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit—well, we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons—the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now, hope that is seen is not hope—for who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, then we will wait patiently for it.”

God, it’s obvious that we struggle, like John, not being as patient as we should be. Clearly there are times in our lives—every Christian in this room—when we are just thinking, “What are you doing, God? How is it that my trust in Christ has gotten me to this place of pain or difficulty or betrayal or frustration or disease?” But God, may we recognize that the hope of the coming kingdom—which has been proven in ways that should be so, intellectually, spiritually, personally convincing in our own hearts—should allow us, with that great hope (having the Spirit in our own lives), to wait patiently for it. God, keep us from the spiritual meltdowns. Keep us from being the bratty kids that just whine and



complain about every pain and ache and problem. Give us that kind of resilient and sterling character that stands strong and is able to endure—even with Paul—singing praises to you in stocks in a dungeon (his own dungeon in Philippi). God, I know that life is filled with difficulty, and you did not promise to exempt us from it. As a matter of fact, you said the more godly we get and the closer to the end we get, it will get more difficult. But we will wait patiently, God, as you enable us—as you give us the perspective that we need—groaning (albeit) through the process, wanting the end to come, eagerly waiting for it.

But God, just keep our attitudes in check. Let us quell every frustration we're tempted to have against you. And let us realize—like Job—without having to go through all of those days of complaining and begrudging God, help us to end the same way: worshiping the God who is in charge, who has sovereignty over all things, who works everything after the counsel of his will. Knowing, in the end, our experience of walking with you—having your Spirit indwelling our lives—and knowing what it means to look back on the historicity and the veracity of the Christian faith. Realizing faith is not trusting in something without evidence, but seeing the evidence and looking to the future—knowing that if you've kept your promises in the past, you'll surely keep them in the future.

God, make us strong come what may, and allow us, please, with the apostle Paul, to have that confidence that allows us to say that the present sufferings are not worth comparing to the good, to the glory, to the great things that are around the corner. We look forward to that, God. Dismiss us now with a sense of hope and encouragement in our hearts. I pray in Jesus' name, amen.