



Christ's Perfect Provision-Part 4

When Our Expectations Aren't Met

Pastor Mike Fabarez

No one likes an interruption, for which, by the way, children are notoriously known, right? And the good news is diligent parents can work hard on their children and be able to correct that behavior. And you know, with a lot of work, you can get a kid to learn not to interrupt mom and dad.

But it's not just impulsive children. I remember preaching once at a conference some years ago when, in the middle of my message, this angry man stands up and just starts screaming at me in the middle of the message. And the good news is the ushers—very strong and stout ushers—were able to deal with that interruption and then quell the chaos rather quickly, which was kind of nice.

But there are some things that go far beyond impulsive children and rude and angry adults. There are some things that nothing can really stop until they're done on their own. I mean, I think about preaching—I've told you the story—I was preaching one Sunday morning here in Southern California and there was an earthquake in the middle of the service. Ushers and parents could do nothing about it; it was going to keep going until it was done, right? It was what insurance agents call "acts of God," nothing human to do to stop it, prevent it, or in any way restrain it.

Something as simple as a rainstorm. Think about a week ago at our Fall Fest. Here we are in the middle of Fall Fest, and, you know, we may not want it to rain, but the downpour of rain is going to come, and nothing you can do can stop it. You can pray that it doesn't rain, you can pray that the rain stops. But everyone scurried around under the awnings, and we were shut down—at least for a couple of minutes there in the middle of the Fall Fest.

When we talk about things that interrupt, we like to have control over those things. We like to mitigate them; we like to work through them or around them. But when God interrupts—and I'm not talking about things that don't have long-lasting implications, like rain in the middle of an event—but when God gets involved and starts interrupting our life or our plans, there is nothing that can prevail against that. We know this as Christians: that God is powerful, and he's authoritative, and he's sovereign. And as it's put there in Proverbs 19:21, the mind of man—we may purpose or plan to do this or that, when we plan our way—but it is the Lord who is going to have his purpose prevail.



And if we read Isaiah, like we read recently in our DBR, you know he repeats over and over again, God's purpose will stand. Who can hold back his hand? If he stretches it out and decides to do something, his purpose will be established. We realize that our plans are subject to his plans. All of our thoughts and intentions and goals and direction in life are really subject to God's sovereign intervention. And when he wants to have our lives turned down this path or go up that hill or dive into that valley, that's the way our life is going to go. And we realize how small we are in that regard.

We may acknowledge that in our theology; we may anticipate that in our lives. But we know sometimes how frustrating that is. And while we would never verbalize these things, sometimes we look at God's interruptions in our lives and we say, "Your plan is not as good as my plan." And my plan is not some selfish plan; it's not an ungodly plan. It's a righteous plan. It's a biblical plan. It's a plan I've prayed about; it's good. It's obviously something that is going to benefit ultimately not only the people that it affects, but, God, I can't see how you can't see this as a God-honoring, glorifying, good Christian plan for life. Why in the world would you interrupt that?

We think those things and we feel those feelings. When you open your Bibles, you recognize there are people in the Bible who experience that in ways that are so dramatic and obvious that it should help us to maybe readjust our expectations. Because there are few things that rock us more than unmet expectations. We expect one thing—and we have Bible verses to quote to expect those things—and then all of a sudden God does something different. We need to understand this is a recalibration of our thinking about God and how he is going to function in our lives.

No better example of that than in Luke chapter 9. When we reach verse 21, we come on the heels of a passage that maybe would lead us to think that the verses that would come next would be completely different than they are. Think about the last time we were together studying this text that ended in verse 20. After all the wrong opinions that people in the crowd had about Christ, Christ looks at the disciples and says, "Who do you say that I am?" And Peter speaks up for the crowd and says, "We know you are the Christ of God. You are the Messiah." And as the parallel passage in Matthew says, Christ even adds the commentary, "Well, it's not flesh and blood that's revealed this to you—God has revealed this to you. You're right. Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. You're right. That's the right answer."

So let's go down to Kinko's. Let's print up the banners. Let's put a parade together. Let's call a press conference. Let's tell everyone the truth. That's what I'm thinking is going to happen. The crowds are confused. The disciples got it right. Jesus affirms that it's right.



Verse 21: “He strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one.” What are you talking about? The Christ of God has to be, to the Israelites, presented, accepted, and enthroned. As it said when the angel announced his birth: he will sit on the throne of his father David, and of the increase of his government there will be no end. You’ve got to rule and reign, ascend the throne. Now’s the time. We got it right; the crowds are wrong. Let’s do this thing. “No—don’t tell anybody.”

And not only that—let’s, just for a minute, think of your visions of putting that crown on my brow. Just let me talk about what’s next on the schedule. Verse 22: “The Son of Man must suffer many things. He must be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes”—who, by the way, you would expect, if anyone’s going to welcome the Messiah, the leader who’s going to throw off the chains and the oppression of the Roman Empire, would be those guys. You mean to tell me, instead of going to Kinko’s and printing the banners, you want to tell me that you’re going to have to be rejected by them? “Oh, it’s worse than that—and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

That had to be an amazingly unexpected statement after Jesus had just asked, “Who does everybody think that I am?” And you say, “Wow, we know who you are.” They say this, that, and the other—but “we know who you are.” And he says, “Don’t tell anybody; I’ve got to go be killed.” Now—what?

I’m doing something unusual in my exposition this morning in that I want to grab a passage that reiterates this very same thing down there in verses 43–45. You’ll see on your worksheet I have both of those passages printed for you. And if you’re in your Bibles, I want you to skip past the Transfiguration—which, of course, you can only imagine, and we’ll get to it, Lord willing, and we’ll study that. I mean, you want to talk about being impressed with the power of Christ and being confirmed that he is the Christ of God—that’s an amazing passage. And then another passage there with the healing of the boy with the unclean spirit. Look past that, and you’ll say, “Wow, there it is again—he’s showing his dominance over not only people and disease, but even demonic spirits. This is the Christ.”

Verse 43: And when they were astonished with the majesty of God, while they’re all still marveling at everything he was doing, Jesus said to his disciples—note the precursor to this in verse 44—“Let these words sink into your ears.” You’re thinking, “Okay, what’s that?” “The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men.” Use the word “Son of Man”—if you’re a Sabbath School graduate from first-century Galilee, you’re going to say, “I know the Son of Man—Daniel 7 Son of Man.” Much like the announcement of the angels when this baby came into planet earth there in Nazareth and was born in Bethlehem, we know the Son of Man is going to be the one, as it says in Daniel 7, who’s given all authority over all peoples, over all nations. This is the King of kings. And you’re telling me instead of ruling over them, you’re going to be delivered into their hands? You’re going to be subject to



them—like you said earlier: suffering and rejected and killed? That’s the future. And you preface that with, when we’re marveling at an amazing thing—that you are the powerful Almighty God in human form—now you’re saying, “Hey, let these words sink into your ears. I’m going to be delivered into the hands of men.”

Well, this is the understatement of our sermon this morning—verse 45: “They did not understand this saying.” I don’t get it. What in the world are you talking about? There was something to this that went beyond just our natural expectation. They wouldn’t understand it—God ensured that they didn’t catch it—and it says it was concealed from them so that they might not perceive it. As they sat there going, “I don’t get it. I don’t get it. I don’t get it,” they were afraid to ask him about this saying. But they didn’t get it, and they knew they didn’t get it. No one ventured to ask Christ. Now, they’d get it later—but you’ve got to put yourself in the sandals of the disciples, saying, “We get who this is. We know the good and righteous promises and prophecies of the Old Testament. We understand this is the Christ of God, the Messiah. The majestic power of God is incarnate now right before us. He’s headed to his Father’s throne—David’s throne—and he’s going to rule over all the nations, not just Israel. He is the conquering King.” And instead of thinking of the crown, you want my mind to go—and sink into my ears—to the cross. “You mean... the cross? That even fit? We don’t get it.”

God’s plan for Christ was to not just give him a crown, but to send him to the cross. And you’re a Christian, and you understand why, and you know all of that. But you have to understand what a bizarre thing that was—to have the gruesome expectation of the cross precede the crown. And then you’ve got to say, “What’s it like to be a follower of that King?” And then let’s inject this where we’ll settle in, in terms of application this morning. He looks at his followers and says, “It’s not just me. If anyone would come after me, let him take up his cross.” You’ve got a cross too. “Let him follow me.”

“What’s this whole thing then about, you know, who’s predestined and called, and he’s justified, he’s going to be glorified? Let’s get to the glorified part. We want the blessing of God and the goodness of God to be endowed upon us. That’s the thing we want. You have to forgive us of our sins—we get that—and the cross—okay, I guess in retrospect we can understand that. But cross for us? Why in the world cross for us?”

Our series has been entitled “Christ’s Perfect Provision.” It doesn’t seem like much of a provision to have us see Christ’s ministry that seems to be ramping up in the right direction—at least among his disciples—to interpret his life as everything the Bible said he would be, and now you’re telling us it’s going to take this terrible turn into a Roman execution. What kind of provision is that? Well, it’s a great provision if it’s the truth, because it helps us understand that the expectations we may assume as good and righteous aren’t always the right plans. Because though we would think about not only Christ—if



we were here, we can't rewrite history; it is what it is—but about our lives, the trajectory of our lives. We can assume certain things about our life as a follower of Christ. But we need to have the provision of Christ, which is: you've got to change your expectations.

You can see on the worksheet—if you've got it out there, pull it up digitally—you can see the first word of every point this morning: expect, expect, expect. Now the subtitle is "When Our Expectations Aren't Met," and surely the disciples' expectations about Christ were not being met in these two revelations that Christ was going to go to the cross. And it really is something that we can fall into—expecting Christ to do this, that, and the other with our lives as we follow the King of kings. And what we need to do is adjust our expectations. The provision of Christ is for us to rethink what we expect from him and what we expect about how he's going to lead us in this life.

So—three points. Changing our expectation. And I don't mean to be cute about this, but the first point—let me just say it this way: what you need to expect is a plan that you wouldn't plan. You would never plan it. What God has in store for you in this life is not something you would ever script out for yourself.

I'll prove it to you. I don't know how long you've been a Christian, but let me talk to the people in the room that have been a Christian for, I don't know, at least ten or twenty years. I want you to go back to six months after you were a Christian—you got saved, you put your trust in Christ, you got endowed with the presence of the Spirit, your life was transformed from the inside out. Old things passed away; new things come. You're now reading the Bible with a whole new perspective; you're soaking it in; you're excited about what it means to be a follower of Christ—indwelt by the Spirit, making a difference in this world, salt and light, ambassadors of Christ. And if I said, "Great—let me now give you a pad of paper and a pen, and let me now give you a few hours to chart out in your mind how you think your life is going to go."

Think about how your life is going. Now, if you were younger when you were saved—maybe you hadn't been married—you thought about, "Okay, find a godly spouse, and then establish a Christian home, and then make a difference in my career for Christ, maybe serve in my church in this way, see people won to Christ here in my neighborhood," and you map all these good and godly things out. And they're all based on biblical principles, and you're on fire for God—you're a new Christian. My question would be: how many of those plans played themselves out in real life the way you anticipated they would go? Oh, maybe the major elements of serving Christ and being an impact and having a ministry—maybe that's true—but did the details of that plan really work out the way you expected them to?



Now, I get you at this particular point in time—whether you’re a new Christian or old Christian—and I’m saying, “What do you think about the future of your life?” And all I’m telling you: if you’re following Christ, there will be unexpected twists and turns on your path that you would never plan for yourself. There are chapters of your—quote unquote—autobiography that you would never put; you’d never include them. They just didn’t make sense. But in real life, that’s what’s happened.

Already quoted a proverb from Proverbs 19. I’d like you to look at four quick proverbs with me in Proverbs, just to get us to a place where we understand where we should be in thinking about God’s will in our planning. Okay—turn with me, if you will, to Proverbs chapter 21.

Let me start here. Because if I start talking about God’s overarching sovereignty in your life, a lot of people may be tempted to think, “Well, let’s just let it play out, and I’ll draw the bullseye after it’s all done, and I won’t do much planning. Let’s just call it a bullseye when I’m finished, and I’ll be more reactive, and I’ll be more loose and flexible, and I’ll just improvise. And so if God’s in charge, then he’s in charge, and I won’t have to worry about any of this planning stuff, ‘cause it’s never going to—what you told me—never going to work out the way you plan anyway. So stop planning.”

Proverbs 21:5: “The plans of the diligent surely lead to abundance, but everyone who is hasty”—reactive, doesn’t give it thought—“comes only to poverty.” Now, let me just underscore something you should know, I suppose, with a Christian work ethic and any Christian virtue that you’ve been taught: planning is a good and godly thing. And planning good and godly plans is even better. You look through the Bible; you’ll find godly people setting forth plans for their lives—not just what they’re going to do tomorrow, but what they’re going to do in the next five years, what they’re going to do in the next ten years, your future. Think it through; plan it out; use the Scripture to focus on what your plans should be.

Look at the Apostle Paul if you want a case study in this and see how he looked at his life. He was often talking about his plans. I mean, at the end of 1 Corinthians, for instance—chapter 16—he said, “I’m going to go here, I’m going to do this; I’m going to come here, and I’m going to do that.” That’s all good and godly. But look in church history at guys like Jonathan Edwards—gets saved as a young Christian—and talk about writing out your autobiography. Well, he didn’t predict or prophesy about his life, but if you’ve ever read Jonathan Edwards’ Resolutions, where he sits there and, in the Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards, he says, “I’m resolved to do this” and “resolved to do that.” That’s great. Let’s make good and godly plans—about how we’re going to live, about what we want to accomplish, about where we’d like to go. Good and godly thing. It’s a good thing.



Proverbs chapter 16: I've already said—and you know by testimony, and you see it in the Scripture—that all the good plans in the world in no way supersede God's plan for your life. Look at verse 9: Proverbs 16:9—"The heart of man plans his way"—and that's a good, godly thing; we just saw that in chapter 21—"but the Lord establishes his steps." Now, it's a good thing for you to plan; it is a good thing for you to say, "Well, to follow Christ in life, I want to see this happen, this happen, and that happen," and you can plan all that out—and that's a good thing. But where that ends up going—that's God's territory. God's plan will trump your plan. That's what the Bible teaches.

Now, I suppose you could say, "Well, there's a lot of circumstances and variables and sinful decisions that are made, and I can see where—I don't know—maybe my good planning will work out the way... and I'll blame it on God's providence and all of that." Look up at verse 1. God is so intimately involved in working out everything after the counsel of his will that even the distance—not between your planning sessions and real life, five, ten years later—but even the distance between your brain and your mouth, God's sovereignty is involved. Look at verse 1: "The plans of the heart belong to man"—that's the center of the thinking; you know, the control center of your thinking—that's how "heart" is used—*lēb* in Hebrew, your control center. You can plan in your heart what you think you're going to do—it's there—"but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord."

Now, I think the right interpretation of this proverb—though there are two ways to see it—I think is exactly what he's going to unfold in verse number 9, only not in terms of a long distance between planning and living out your life down the road, but thinking about what you're going to say and what actually comes out of your mouth. God is so involved in the sovereign oversight of your life—even in the things that come out of your mouth—God has sovereign capacities and administration and oversight over. Well, that leaves me with a lot of confusion. Well—me too.

Proverbs chapter 20—let's look at this proverb, and maybe this will be where we'll land. Let this resonate. I'm going to plan. It's a good thing for me to say, "I want these good things to take place." Nothing wrong with that. I get that, and those are plans—got it. But when it comes to the steps, when it comes to the path, when it comes to—as Proverbs 16:9 says—where my life actually goes—that's God's territory. Proverbs 20:24—"A man's steps are from the Lord." Okay—we already established that, even with my good planning. Now underline: "How then can a man understand his way?" Answer: you're right—I can't. I don't know.

Now my life—and I don't want to be too personal here—but my life certainly hasn't gone the way I planned. This is not the plan that I had. All the twists and turns in my life, especially the ones that have



been painful and difficult—I wouldn’t have planned all that. Therefore, when I look ahead to the future, how in the world can I understand the way of my future? I can’t. I can’t. I don’t. I can’t. Do I give up now and improvise and never plan? No—I’m going to plan. But, much like James says, I’m going to hold my future loosely. Because, following Christ in this world, I may think it’s going to take me in this direction because these are good and godly principles that will glorify God and it’s in keeping with the Scriptures, and I want to do these things for God. And when my life ends up going over here, and I end up in a different profession than I thought, and this particular situation falls apart when I thought it would be established, or this business tanked, or this ministry turns into a whole different kind of— I don’t know. I’ve got to hold it loosely. And James puts it this way: for those of you that plan to do this, that, and the other tomorrow and the next day and the next year—you ought to say, “If the Lord wills.” I’ll just at least hold it loosely. I don’t know what God’s got planned. I’m always going to say, you know, this is all contingent on the will of God.

Now, kids don’t come into the world understanding their parents’ thoughts—you’ve noticed that, right? Even when you try to explain your thoughts to your kids, they don’t seem to get it. They certainly don’t understand when they’re very little what you’re doing with them—whatever it is you’re doing to them—from their point of view: whether you’re strapping them into a car seat, taking them to the doctor, giving them things that they are supposed to eat that they don’t like—whatever you’re making them do—they don’t get it; they don’t understand. And you recognize that they don’t understand, and you say, “Well, I don’t care. Do it anyway. Get in that anyway. We’re going here anyway. You’re getting that shot anyway. You’re eating those green beans anyway.” We say, “My will is going to prevail over your will. It doesn’t matter if you understand.”

Now, think about this: if the distance between parents and a little child is a distance of understanding and wisdom and knowledge and perspective, then how is the distance between the most intelligent Christian in the room and the infinite God of the universe? It’s a pretty big gap. That would be just a subtle illustration to start to describe the distance between our comprehension and God’s.

Now, if you’re note-takers, jot this one down: Romans 11:33. After Paul talks about God’s plan in the world and a lot of the things that we don’t understand in God’s plan, he stops and says, “Oh, the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his ways”—there’s a good vocabulary word: *inscrutable*. Use that five times this week—“and his judgments beyond tracing out.” Can’t figure it out; don’t get it. That distance needs to be respected. It’s not a cop-out. Not a cop-out. Christian theology is not a cop-out. You look at your life; you affirm the sovereignty of God; there are things in God’s plan you don’t understand. Don’t ditch the concept of God. That’s what your non-Christian friends do: “How can there be a good God who oversees everything? Look at all the mess in the world. Man, if I were God, there’d never be—I’d never have that mess.” Well, that assumes a particular knowledge of all things—that you know better than God—which is what Romans 11 is all about. You don’t know. And you don’t know how God sovereignly guides your life. I know you wouldn’t choose



this for yourself, and you wouldn't choose these things for the world. But God's sovereignty can't be ditched. The biblical definition of God can't be ditched. God's got a plan.

When it came to Peter, James, and John sitting there listening to Christ, God's plan involved a cross—as incomprehensible and inscrutable as that might be to you. So get used to the plans of God not really being something that you would ever plan. You need to expect—and here's another way to say it—the unexpected. Just expect that there's going to be twists and turns in your life that you never would have traced out for yourself. Because Isaiah 55 probably says it as well as any passage—verses 8 and 9. You know the passage: "My thoughts are not your thoughts; my ways are not your ways. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my thoughts above your thoughts and my ways above your ways." That's a good place for us to be when we sit there and look at our lives and say, "Why, God?"

I get that. When Peter pulled Jesus aside in Matthew 16, after Jesus talked about these things—"I'm going to be rejected by the chief priests and scribes; I'm going to be..."—Peter says, "No, no, no, no, no, no—Lord, stop talking like that. That is not going to be what happens to you." And that is probably one of those stinging rebukes we find in all of the Gospels. Jesus looks at Peter and says, "Get behind me, Satan." *Satan*—what's that? *Adversary*. "You're standing in the way of God's will here. Why would you say such things? Get behind me, Satan." Well, here's why—because then he explains in his commentary: "You're setting your mind on the things of man, not on the things of God." And that's the problem, Peter. If you sketched out the Messiah's path, it would not include a cross. And, by the way, if you sketched out the plan for your life, it wouldn't include a cross. But you know what? God's plan is going to include that kind of thing.

As a matter of fact, those words are pretty chilling in verse 22: "The Son of Man must suffer many things, must be rejected by the elders and chief priests, and must be killed." Those three descriptive concepts should remind us that if the God of the universe plans for his own beloved, perfect Son a plan that involves these negative things, then how in the world do you think God's plan for you wouldn't include a lot of those kinds of things as well?

I'll put it this way—number two in your outline: we ought to expect pain in God's plan. It's going to be painful. That's why he says, "You know what? I know my life is about a cross before the crown. You—if anyone would come after me—let him take up his cross and follow me." Why? Is that where he wants us to stay? No, no, no—eventually those who are called and predestined—they're going to be justified and glorified. But between the justification and the glorification, there's going to be this path that will include some crosses that you would never sit there as a young Christian and say, "I know what would be really a godly thing and glorify God: if I had a handicapped child; if I got stricken with cancer in the middle of my life; if someone I loved got killed; or someone I trusted betrayed me; or if



the job and ministry I had tanked and I ended up having to start over in the middle of my life.” You’d never plan all that. I get that. But there’s going to be pain involved in this, and we need to get used to that.

Now, there are reasons this takes place. That may sound trite if you’re in the middle of some very difficult times. But as we look at the God who plans the path for Christ—and he obediently endures that path, and that path includes suffering, rejection, and being murdered—I think we need to see: how is it that the Bible would teach us that the expectation of pain still gives us a sense that God is in control, working this out, and there’s some good involved in this?

Let me give you four things real quick—if you’re taking notes—number 2a, b, c, d. Ready?

Letter A came in our daily Bible reading yesterday when we read in Hebrews chapter 5 something that is just out of the box. Because if you look at this, you may say, “Well, you know, Pastor, you talk about Christ going to the cross. I get it—but there was a need for that. And the need for that was: the wages of sin are death, and God the Father, to forgive our sins, had to put him as a lamb there in a sacrificial position, and he had to suffer and be humiliated on the cross so that we could be forgiven. And that’s the necessity.” Let me give you a whole ‘nother perspective that does not relate to the crucifixion and your redemption. Here it is in Hebrews 5:8–9—and if you’re quick to pull it up on your device or turn to it in your Bible, this might be good to put your eyeballs on—Hebrews 5:8–9: “Although he was a Son”—we’re looking here at Christ’s life. Although he was a Son (which means, by the way, couldn’t be any more loved, couldn’t be any more favored—talk about a tight relationship with God the Son and God the Father)—“although he was a Son, he learned obedience through the blessings that God supplied”—underline the word *blessings*. Do you see that anywhere? “Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through the prosperity that he enjoyed.” No. “He learned obedience”—through what?—“he suffered.” He learned obedience through what he suffered.

You may look at our passage this morning and say, “Yeah, I understand—he had to go to the cross, and that was a necessity. But, you know, God’s plan would never require suffering if it weren’t for the fact that he had to be the Lamb of God and take on the sin of the world.” And this text says even the path for him to be obedient that would prepare him for what he was going to do—that would also be painful. The process to get him ready to do that painful thing was pain—suffering.

Verse 9—now here’s the object here: “being made”—if you’ve been around the teaching, you’ve heard this Greek word, because I have to pull it out since it doesn’t really in English come across the way it



ought to—and that’s the word *teleios*. That’s the root of this word here—*teleios*—and it’s translated “perfect.” And while this is not trying to speak of some flawless moral character—although he was flawless in his moral character—this is a word that I often illustrate with my dad telling me when I was a kid—when I would just go grab whatever thing in the toolbox I thought might work to get the wheel off my bike so I could change the inner tube or whatever—and I’d get, I don’t know, a pair of pliers or something—he’d say, “No, no—get a 9/16 box-end wrench because that’s what that’s made for.” And that’s—“get the right tool—the right tool for the job.” I remember hearing that: the right tool for the job. That’s the word *teleios*. The idea of this is “just right for what it’s intended to do.” He learned obedience through the things that he suffered so that he was then made perfect—he was ready. It’s not talking about “he had some flawed character that needed to improve.” It’s that his life had to be shaped and prepared—cultivated—for the job of going through the cross. And to do that, the process was pain—suffering—to be *teleios*. “And being made *teleios*”—love this—“he became the source of eternal salvation.” He did it—he accomplished salvation on the cross—for all who believe in him”—underline the word *believe*—is that what you see there? What’s the word? “Obey him.”

Now, of course, to get saved, you put your trust in him—we’re not saved by works; you’re saved by faith—but those who are saved by faith are called to obey him. And when you obey him, here’s the thing: you are going to have to be shaped for that obedience the same way that Christ was shaped in his obedience—prepared for what we’re purposed to do the way Christ was prepared for what he was purposed to do. And the process for that was suffering. So expect some pain in God’s plan for your life. What’s he going to do with you? I don’t know. What’s the purpose of you being on planet earth? Well, I can name some general principles, but how is he going to use you in this world? I don’t know. But I know this: he’s going to prepare you through suffering. That’s going to be one of the ways he prepares you.

“Well, you have to have suffering for those really unruly children—they really had nothing else communicate to them but pain. Do you think Christ needed pain?” If that’s your theory—no, of course not. He’s a Son. Even though he’s a Son, he was prepared for his job; he learned that obedience to walk the path to the garden and to the cross through the suffering he suffered prior to that. And so it is for us. “Being made perfect, he became a source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.”

If you’re taking some notes and you want to put it the way I put it in my notes: pain can cultivate obedience/preparation. I’m obeying God and being prepared and shaped and cultivated by that pain. It cultivates the obedience that prepares me for what’s coming in the future.

Number two—and you don’t need to turn to this one; you know this one; I quote it often—2 Corinthians 12:7 and its context. 2 Corinthians 12:7—this is the passage about Paul and his thorn in the



flesh. You know the passage—smile at me if you remember that passage: thorn in the flesh. What’s that? That’s his poetic way of talking about some physical, chronic ailment that he had. And he prayed to God to do what? Same thing you pray for when you get sick—“God, take it away.” And God did not take it away. And here’s the reason why—verse 7: “It was to keep me from being conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations” that he’d received. Now think about this: in the purpose God has called me to, I’m in a situation, in an environment, doing a certain thing. There are certain vulnerabilities in that thing that I’m doing—in the life I’m called to live, with the family I have, the job I have, the ministry I have, whatever it might be. And I know this: God sometimes—like he did in Paul’s life—uses pain to curtail my sin, to plug the vulnerability in my life. And pain does that. Pain can cultivate obedience; it can curtail sin.

Number three—letter C. I quote these passages all the time so I won’t even run down the parable of the soils. 1 Peter chapter 1—suffering tests the genuineness of our faith. Think that through. In the soils—you’ve got good soil; it bears fruit—one out of four. Soils two and three look good, but that’s until the pressure, or the pain, or the suffering, or the persecution—because of their adherence to the word—when those things come and the temperature rises, they fall away. So I know this: pain—I’ll put it this way, number three—it clarifies our trust. It’s going to reveal whether or not my trust in Christ is real.

Now, we quote those passages all the time, and I guess I just quoted them again, but let me give you another passage on this I don’t normally quote. This is a great text—(they’re all great, I understand)—but this is particularly great for what we’re talking about: Proverbs 17:3. And sometimes in Proverbs this week—can you tell?—Proverbs 17:3: “The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests the heart.” And you’ve got to think a couple layers deep to get that proverb. The crucible is for silver and the furnace is for gold—and the Lord tests the heart. Crucible and furnace don’t sound fun; they don’t sound pleasurable. Those are painful things, and they are—in the analogy—they are burning off dross; they’re purifying the gold; they’re getting rid of all the imperfections. All of that is much like what’s going on in your heart—who do you trust? Who do you love? What are you trusting in? And like Abraham, who was called to Mount Moriah with his son—when God says at the end of that, and it really wasn’t for God’s benefit but for everyone’s benefit who would follow in the faith of Abraham—God says, “Now I know you love me.” Now it’s clear. Now I can see it. Everyone—it’s on display now.

See, the way these crises in our lives determine whether or not we’re just like everybody else in our society—that you really just have religion as kind of a cosmetic coating on your life—or whether or not you’re genuinely trusting in the living God—your faith will be revealed; it’s going to be clarified by the difficulty and pain you experience. Pain can cultivate our obedience; it can curtail our sin; it can clarify our trust.



Let me give you one more: pain can compound our strength. Cultivate obedience, curtail sin, clarify trust, compound strength—I had “cultivate, curtail, clarify, and compound.”) Compound our strength—you know, you can see this the way we normally see this: you go to the gym, you tear down the muscle fiber, and they build back even stronger. As it’s put in—here’s the text for you to write down—Romans 5:3–4: “Knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character.” I even put it in terms a non-Christian can understand: my character is strengthened; I have sterling character and virtue in my life and the kind of strength to face whatever’s next because of the suffering in my past. It’s produced endurance; it’s produced character and grit. And I have in my life the things I wouldn’t otherwise have if it weren’t for suffering.

It’s going to cultivate that obedience that prepares me for my calling, whatever that might be. There’s a pain that can curtail sin, that plugs the vulnerabilities in my life. There’s a pain that clarifies my trust and is a crucible for my theology. And there’s a pain that compounds my strength—I come through much stronger than I ever was before.

Oh, I know—we can look at sin and evil and suffering and pain and say, “That’s bad—it’s inherently bad.” I understand that. But God uses it for good. That’s not a trite platitude when you’re suffering—it’s the truth. And the truth in the text that we’re studying this morning in Luke 9 is only given to us by way of hints in one last phrase in verse 22—underline it, highlight it, bracket it, circle it. You’ve got a lot of negative here on the tails of the declaration that he is the Christ of God, and you have here negative terms like “suffering,” “rejected,” and “killed,” but then it ends with this: “and on the third day be raised.”

Now, if I didn’t understand the other stuff, I certainly don’t understand that—although that sounds different. You want to sing the Sesame Street “Which one doesn’t belong?” That one doesn’t belong. I get you’ve turned us from a positive and the euphoria—like in verse 43—of marveling at the majesty of God, and now you’ve taken me to “delivered in the hands,” and I got these clarifications earlier of “rejected” and “killed” and “suffering,” and now all of a sudden you tacked on this last line: “and on the third day be raised.” What does that mean? That sounds like, after all this terrible stuff, there’s some kind of—I don’t know—hope and good stuff.

Two passages—it may be helpful; I don’t know. Romans 1:4 says that he was declared—speaking of Christ—“to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection.” There are a lot of things that spoke to his divinity and his right to rule on the throne of his father David—the stretch of his authority and government having no end—all of that, all the fulfillment, all the Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah promises of the coming King. All of that was declared by a lot of things, but nothing more definitively than his



resurrection. Death—the enemy that is complete and final for the rest of us—is not for him. By the power of God, he’s resurrected.

The other passage would be Hebrews 1:3—that after making this atonement, this propitiation, this satisfaction for our sins, he is now seated at the right hand of God. To give you another one, I guess—and I’m just piling them on now—but Philippians 2: after all this obedience and humiliation all the way to death—the ignoble death on a cross—he is now given a name that is above every name, exalted to the highest place to where every knee shall bow, every tongue confess that he is Lord. The resurrection does that.

You want to talk about the good: it’s more than good—it’s perfect. To get back to our concept of *teleios*, let’s put it that way. You should expect that in God’s plan for your life.

Number three: we ought to expect God’s plan to be perfect. It’ll be perfect. It’ll be painful. There’ll be bad diagnoses; there’ll be betrayal; there’ll be suffering; there’ll be difficulty. But when you look back on it, you’ll say, “You know what? That’s exactly what it ought to be.” And if you know that ahead of time, you’re not devastated, dismayed, depressed, or anything else that’s negative because you hit the rough patch. You realize that the cross precedes the crown—but the crown is coming.

One passage on this—Hebrews 12. I want you to turn to this one, if you would. Hebrews 12. I want you to start in verse 2—I know it’s in the middle of the sentence; we’ll get back to the first part of the sentence in a minute. Look at verse 2: the *teleios* plan of God for Christ is crystal clear—even though there’s pain, not only pain that buys salvation, but the pain that prepared him to fulfill his role. I see that the pain all played into God’s sovereign plan for perfect redemption—I see that. And in our lives, we should look to Christ—this pattern, this template—“who is the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2), “who”—now, now you’ve got to sort this out; play the shell game here in this sentence; you’ve got to get the components and keep these straight in your mind—“who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Look at that again: “for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” If you take the words “joy that was set before”—what is the joy? If you put a circle around that and you try to draw a line to it, it certainly isn’t the cross—there’s no joy in that. It’s certainly not the shame of the cross—that’s not the joy. But that was before



him in his path—God’s calling for his life. No—the joy must be the last phrase: “seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” To see him exalted and glorified—that’s the good thing.

And as he’s walking with his disciples telling them, “Hey guys, you know that I’m the Christ. Hey guys, you realize the majesty of God in the Transfiguration and the healing of this boy with the unclean spirit—you can see who I am. And you know one day I will ascend that throne, and God will put that crown on my head, and I will fulfill the thing that God has called me to be and to do. But right now, let these words sink into your ears: I’ve got the cross to endure.”

How did he view that? Here’s the intervening phrases: “He endured the cross, despising the shame.” Those two verbs are so good—*hupomenō*—that’s the Greek word that translates “endured.” You’ve heard me talk about that multiple times: *hupo*—under; *menō*—to remain. He stayed in there; he hung in there; he stuck to it. He endured that cross experience. “Despising the shame”—and maybe you’ve heard me talk about this Greek word because it’s another one attached to a preposition, and those prepositional words—those compounds—are so vivid and helpful: *kataphroneō*. *Phroneō* is to think, to consider, to ponder; *kata* is the Greek preposition “down”—to think down on it. Translated “despise.” The cross—I have to endure. There’s a lot of shame and a lot of pain and a lot of terrible, embarrassing, horrible things about the cross. But I’m going to look at that thing that God is going to have me walk through so I can get to the joy that’s set before me, and I have to *kataphroneō* that—I have to minimize it; I have to think down on that.

Matter of fact, let’s take the visual here—I don’t want to overthink these words—but when it comes to *kataphroneō*, I want to put that in my mind *down*, so for the joy set before me, I can look ahead to the crown; I’m going to look *over* the pain to the fact that God is going to take my life to the place that he’s designed it to be; he’s going to accomplish in my life what he wants to accomplish.

And that’s where the sentence started—verse 1, Hebrews 12:1: “Therefore, since we’ve been surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses”—and this is not the kind of witnesses that sit in the bleachers and watch; it’s witnesses who get on the stand in court and testify. And they’re testifying from chapter 11—they’re testifying to what? Same thing. Same thing that Christ is going to be the ultimate example of: guys like Abraham—called from Ur of the Chaldeans; he didn’t know where he was going (that’s what he is, one of many in chapter 11), and yet all his life he lived as a nomad without a land, in tents, going from here to there. But he kept his eyes on what: he was seeking a city whose builder and architect is God—this eternal home. Moses was willing to be counted with the children of Israel and be despised by the Egyptians. Why? For the joy of what was to come. He was ready to endure the reproach of Christ because there was something better—beyond it. He took the



shame of what it took to do what God made him do, and he looked down on that; he looked over that; and he kept his eyes on where he needed to go.

And he says, “Hey—we’ve got a cloud of witnesses testifying to that principle. And so let us lay aside every weight”—he had something, the *ōgkos*—this terrible weight—“lay it aside, and the sin which clings so closely.” And one of them is our grumbling and complaining and our dismay over God’s path—stop all that. “And let us”—same word—“run with *hupomonē*—with endurance—the race that is set before us.” And guess what? You’ve got a cross too, don’t you? You’ve got chapters in your autobiography that don’t feel good, that are painful, that are difficult. Expect God’s plan to be perfect—even though it involves pain. And recognize that your race set before you—a lot like Christ’s—will involve those things, and a lot like the disciples’ will be a surprise to you. Not a surprise to God—but a surprise to you.

With that in mind, you can quote verses like Romans 8:28: “For we know [that] those who love God, [who] are called according to his purpose, that God works all things together for good”—even those terribly difficult and terrible, awful things. Joseph—when he’s in jail, sitting there in a prison, falsely accused—he’s not winning; he’s losing; he’s in pain. If he could just look forward to what he would later say one day, and that is, “You guys meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.”

And don’t misunderstand that good. It’s not like: “Yeah, my car got banged up in the parking lot, but, you know what, it’s a bad thing—it’s a good thing; got me a better car. My boyfriend dumped me and it’s painful—it’s okay; God’s going to give me a more handsome boyfriend. I lost my job; I got fired—but that’s okay; I’m going to get a higher-paying job.” That’s the stupid, one-dimensional prosperity gospel. That is not true.

The truth of it is that when the Apostle Paul—here’s an example—gets the thorn in the flesh, the good that came out of it was not: he went to the doctor, and from the thorn in the flesh they said, “Oh here—oh, I diagnosed an even greater problem, and I healed you of that, so it’s great; this is where your health is even better than it was before.” No—he kept that chronic illness all the way to his temporal death on this earth. But what was the good? He’d put this vulnerable spot where he could sin—the sin of Satan himself—of pride, and God curtailed that. Now he lived with pain—his autobiography clearly involved that chronic illness. But what was the good? God was working that good out. God meant it for good. Expect God’s plan to be perfect.



Let me close with a proverb that I trust you learned as a child—probably the most famous proverb in all the book of Proverbs. It's found in chapter 3, verses 5 and 6—Proverbs 3:5–6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own”—what?—“understanding.” Okay, now here's the thing: it doesn't make sense to me. I've got to trust God because the way I'm doing it doesn't make sense; but I can't trust in my own understanding—I don't get it. I've got to trust in God. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him.” Now, that's not just saying, “Oh man, I'm going down this weird alley that God's taking me down; I just got to say, ‘God, I acknowledge you.’” What does that mean? It's the Hebrew word “yada”—to know. I have to know God. It's the sense of: God is in this. I don't get it. I don't understand it. I wouldn't have written this. I wouldn't say, “This would not have been the chapter I would have written for my life that I'm in right now.” But I acknowledge God in this—God's here; God is in this. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths”—what?

Now think about that. Peter, James, and John listening to Jesus say, “You know what? Yeah, I am the Christ. Yep—the majesty of God—you should be impressed with it; you've seen it on display. Now we're going to the cross.” It looked like a detour. But from heaven's perspective—do they not look back on that and see what looked like a circuitous, twisty road that led them to heaven? Can't they look back and say, “That's a total—that's exactly right—that's a straight path.” It doesn't look straight while I'm walking it.

It reminds me of those spinning combination locks where the cable comes together—not the kind with the dial, but the ones that come together and you have to encode the numbers—the cheap bike lock. And you put a number in there—your wife's birthday or your anniversary or your phone number or something, right? And you never remember what it is because you never really use it all that much. So you're sitting there and you're turning it, and it's like this crazy—“I don't get it.” But then while you're turning the outside, you're trying to get it to unlock. And when you're doing the outside, on the inside—you know enough about the locks; you can even see it with this simple bike lock—you know that those tumblers all line up. Now, you thought it was your wife's birthday, but really it was your anniversary. And so you're turning the outside and you end up turning it to the right one, which is your anniversary date, and you're going, “Ah, those numbers do not look right.” But on the inside, it is right. All those channels line up.

All I'm saying is: those outside numbers—the way that you see your life playing out right now under the sovereign, good hand of God—may not be what you planned or would ever plan. But when that thing slides out and you stand in the presence of God, having now on this earth “known in part”—to quote now 1 Corinthians 13:12—you will then see him “face to face.” We see “through a glass dimly”—then face to face. And you've known in part, but then you'll know fully, even as you've been



fully known. God looks at your life; he sees the inside. But all he knows is he's lining your life exactly where he wants to take you. And you're going to see that with the eyes of a brand-new perspective.

Would you stand with me? Let me close this with a word of prayer and commend you to never be distraught, frustrated, depressed, anxious. God's provision—knowing his sovereignty and good intention in your life—should be the kind of provision that all of us cherish.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him. He'll direct your path.

God, that simple proverb—for most of us, many of us in the room from our childhood—we learned that verse with a sucker or a ticket or a badge or something. And some proverb that's been in our minds, many of us, for decades is the truth that many of us need right now. When the diagnosis comes back as cancer. When the thing that I'd hoped would last a lifetime—it ends. When the friend I thought would walk through life with me betrays me. The difficulty of whatever it is I never would have anticipated is upon me.

Let us see your good and sovereign plan for the pain in life; to know that that pain is so essential for us in your economy right now that you even utilized that in the life of your own Son, who couldn't be loved any more than he was. God, so help us run with endurance the race that's set before us. Encourage this church and every congregation I speak to right now. Encourage them. Give them strength and endurance and perspective—to *kataphroneō* the shame and pain of whatever they're facing; look down upon it, despise it, because their eyes are set on the joy before.

We trust you, God. We look forward to seeing the straight path that you've brought us down—from your perspective it was right on schedule, right on the path that you planned. Help us to rejoice in that ahead of time. Give us that faith and confidence in you. In Jesus' name, Amen.