

We are finishing up a series we began three weeks ago. So I'll catch you up if you've missed the last few weeks. Some of this will work today, but it will stand alone. I don't think it works best when it stands alone, but we started three weeks ago by talking about death. Some of you are glad you missed that one. We just simply said, "Here's what death is, here's the origin of death, here is what God had done in view of death, here's how the believer in Christ should view death and here's where our hope goes in it." And then last week we talked about heaven, what heaven is, what heaven isn't, what relationships will be like there and what we can expect. We unpacked that last week. And that leaves just this week. And here's why I know I need to be a bit careful but also lovingly blunt this week. For most evangelicals, the story just stops there. We die, we go to heaven and now we're waiting for the trumpet to blast, everybody else to get sucked into heaven so God can nuke this joint. And that is eschatology, end times theology 101 for most evangelicals. It's a spectacular story that is biblically incorrect. So I want to correct this misnomer that when all is said and done you and I are ghosts playing a harp and God has nuked earth. This will be, after almost twenty years of preaching, my first message ever on what theologians would consider eschatology, how the world ends. Let me give you my excuses why I have not done so. They are not good excuses, but I have learned from my children that even if they're not good, just throw them out there. Excuse number one is it has been my experience that once you get into eschatology, people get really weird. They become unbridled with passion almost always based on conjecture and not fact. So I had bad experiences early on from a guy who made me scrolls in his garage to show me his point to the guy in the sandwich board that says, "The End Is Near" to French preachers who believed that they could unlock the Bible code and tell you the exact moment Christ is going to return and make all things new. It seems to me that eschatology is this magnet for energy and focus that distracts from what God has given us in the mission of Christ to reconcile all things to the Father. So I have stayed away from it. And then excuse number two is it's not easy to work through. Let me be frank with you. Every generation since the ascension of Christ has believed that they are the generation that will see the return of Christ. They point to things in their day and go, "Uh huh, that's like 1 Thessalonians! Oh that's like Jesus said in Matthew." Every generation since the ascension of Christ has done this. So when you start reading it, you'll get crazy. Like in the 80's, Gog from Revelation was Russia. But now it's China and the locusts are Apache helicopters or M1 tanks. You see it gets goofy, strange and weird, and it's so much based on conjecture and guesswork. So I've stayed away from it.

Two things have happened in the last couple of years to make me devote quite a bit of time to trying to get to the bottom of this. One is a simple one. I got diagnosed with brain cancer. When that happens, you start going, "Huh, I wonder what the future is going to be like?" You start to give a little more thought to it in that day. Because I was, like many of you, walking in an arrogant position. Here's what the arrogant position is. We are well aware that people get sick, we are well aware that people die, but we are convinced that it will not be us. So it's real, but it's not real. And the human mind is brilliant at justification. Why isn't it going to happen to you? Because you eat right. Because you manage your stress well. Because you're a careful driver. I could go on and on. You have enabled yourself to protect yourself from the fear of being an early departure, if there ever was such a thing (We covered that in week one), by having a list of reasons why it's not going to be you and it's going to be other people. So I was just there until it is me. And then all of a sudden I wanted to dig around. That was the first thing. And then the second thing is I had a good friend who is also a pastor who pulled me aside and started asking me some questions about where I landed on this and that. And I gave him the same kind of lame excuses I just gave you. I said, "I think it can really hijack the mission of God and people start concentrating on what they can't control at the expense of obedience to what they know." And he just very nonchalantly, very gently and firm said, "So I guess God just put it in the Bible because He just thought, 'I think I'll just confuse My people?'" So then

I came up with my second excuse. I was like, "Well, it's mostly conjecture. Is it the Apache helicopter? Is it China? Is it Russia? It gets so convoluted and so cloudy." So he, once again, lovingly and firmly said, "Matt, you're losing the forest for the trees." Now I grew up in the city; I have no idea what that means. So here's how he explained it to me. "You're so busy trying to look at this tree, this tree and this tree that you're not standing in awe of the forest. Stand in awe of the forest and then let's look at the individual trees." And he said, "It's simple Matt. Answer these two questions. What does it look like when everything is said and done? And where are we? Answer those two questions and you have the forest. Then from there you can go Millennial Reign, Pre-, Post-, Mid-Post after you've seen the forest, but don't get into those things before you see the forest. Or you're just going to confuse yourself." So here's my goal in our limited time together today. I want to get high enough to see the entire forest. So there are specific questions I'm going to be unable to answer because they deal with trees or a specific tree, and I'm not interested in answering questions today. That's not my goal. My goal is to paint a picture of the forest according to the Scriptures. So here's all we're going to do. We're going to look in Genesis to Revelation at what the Bible teaches when it teaches the restoration of all things. I'm going to tell you a few implications of that, and then we'll be done.

So let me just start this way. When the Old Testament talks about the redemption and renewal of all things, it speaks 100% of the time of the creative order being renewed. So it is not the Old Testament idea of the renewal of all things that God is going to nuke the earth. In fact, when they prophesy about what is to come, they talk about the renewal of the earth and a different kind of earth than the one you and I currently reside upon. So if we follow the story, God comes to a man named Abram. He pulls him from the nations of the ancient world, and He basically says, "I'm going to make a people out of you. You're going to outnumber the stars in the sky. You're going to outnumber the sand on the beach. And I'm going to show the world My glory through you." And if you follow the story, God gives them the law. If you ever want to get into the Law, here's what you're going to find about how God unpacks the law. It governs every aspect of Israel's life. The law dictates how they interact with the environment, how they interact with one another as spouses, how they interact with their children, how they interact with their pets, how they're supposed to build their houses. The law covers all the details of the life of an Israelite. God's purpose was to show what it looks like for a man and a woman and a nation to line themselves up with how He designed the universe to work. And in lining themselves up in obedience, they would show the world God's glory. But here's the questions. How well did they do? Epic failures. You have to do research to find someone who has failed as often and as passionately as the nation of Israel did in the Old Testament. Even on their good days, they're just kind of getting these right to the detriment of these. And then they'll come over and get these right to the detriment of these. But in the whole of the Old Testament, you've got about nine hours of a good job, and the rest of it is God going, "Listen, there are repercussions for this type of rebellion." So as the nation of Israel began to taste the fruit of their rebellion against the law of God, the prophets show up and begin to speak into the brokenness of the world, and they begin to talk about the great and glorious day of God. They begin to prophesy about what the world would one day be like.

So I'm just going to read you some of those. Isaiah 35:1 tells us that the deserts shall blossom as the rose. Now, we have flown in to Sudan multiple times. The way we go into southern Sudan is from Dallas to Amsterdam to Africa. That second leg is an eight hour flight, for about six hours, you are flying over the Sahara desert. So if you can stay awake, you will look out your window and for hour after hour after hour see nothing but sand. And when we think of the desert and the ecosystem in the desert, we think of it as lifeless, we don't want to live there, we don't want to visit there. The desert has names like Death Valley. But the Bible says when God restores all things, when He fixes all things, the desert will bloom like roses. Now that's earth-bound. That's not heavenbound; that's earth-bound. Amos 9:13 says that the plowman shall overtake the reaper and that the mountain shall drop sweet wine. Now mountains this side of eternity are spectacular. They are awe inspiring. If you live in Dallas this time of year, you want to go see the mountains. I'm flying out tomorrow for three days in Vail. It was 53°F in Vail. It was 102°F here yesterday. Now, those mountains that we look at do create awe. There is a romanticism in us about the mountains. They are spectacular, and the prophet Amos is saying,

“When God heals all things, when God restores all things, those rocky, snowcapped tops will produce sweet wine, they will be fruitful. Do you see what he’s doing? The prophets are taking what doesn’t produce life here and saying, “When God restores the brokenness of the world, things that cannot sustain life now will sustain life then.” It keeps going. I’ll give you a few more. In Isaiah 65, Isaiah prophesies that there will be no more sounds of weeping heard on earth. That’s important. Because it’s not that there are no more sounds of weeping in heaven, but there are no more sounds of weeping on earth. Isaiah 65 also says that the days of God’s people shall be like the days of the tree and that on the earth, the wolf and the lamb shall feed together. Now right now, the wolf and the lamb do not feed together. They feed, but not together. When one is eating, the other one is not. When one is eating, the other one is being eaten. So that’s different. So when God restores things, particularly in the creative order, the wolf and the lamb eat together. Now it’s complete conjecture to guess what they’ll be eating, but we know they’ll eat together. I don’t know if the wolf is eating grass going, “Man, this is awesome. I should have been doing this all along.” I don’t know exactly how it works. It would be guesswork to do that. I don’t want to do that with you today. I just want to keep pointing you toward the fact that the wolf and the lamb are eating together on earth. Isaiah 11 says that no one will hurt or destroy anything in all of God’s holy mountain, and this is true because evil has been thrown in the lake of fire. So there’s no more evil on earth. And then Habakkuk 2:14 says that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the seas. So where is that glory known? What does that glory cover? The earth. It’s not just heaven; it’s earth.

Now, Jesus shows up in light of all these prophecies about the consummation of all things being a restoration of the planet earth and He doesn’t correct them. He instead enters into that framework and strengthens it. When Jesus shows up and starts saying, “The kingdom of God is at hand” and begins to preach the gospel of the kingdom, He’s saying, “What these prophets have prophesied is here.” Even His miracles while He is on earth are showing that the ushering of these promises is coming into the world. Think about Jesus’ miracles. The eradication of disease. He can simply command disease to go away. The end of death. We covered that a couple weeks ago about Christ raising Lazarus from the grave. Lazarus is not the only person He brought back to life. The brokenness of the world submits to Him. He’s on a boat, there’s a storm, everybody is afraid they’re going to die but He rebukes the storm and it stops. So you see in the miracles of Jesus the ushering in of this kingdom that was promised to the prophets. And Jesus will even tell His own disciples in Matthew 19, “When the new world is set up, I will sit on a throne and you will sit with Me. And you will judge the nations with me. So you’ve got Jesus joining the prophets. And I don’t believe I need to say this, but nobody comes along after Jesus and corrects Him. Nobody else in the Bible is going to go, “Jesus said this, but He’s a little off.” Because if Jesus is a little off, then He’s not God. And if He’s God, then you can chalk Him up to Gandhi or some other teacher of moral code. So the rest of the Bible is going to stay in this vein. It’s just going to echo these refrains.

So let me show you a little bit of that, and then I want to answer a big question about what fire is and what this reference in both the Old and New Testament of fire falling on the earth and burning up the earth is a reference to. So let’s look in Romans 8, starting in verse 18. “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and 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 until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” So Paul is saying here, “No matter how difficult life is right now, no matter what the pain I have to endure, God is going to set free not only me, but He’s going to set free creation.” And in the same way that creation is in bondage because of our sin, creation is set free by our redemption, which is why creation knows it’s bound up, longs to be set free and knows it will be set free in Jesus Christ. And then there was a little hint there in the end about us, and it’s where we’ll go next along these little ideas. Because he says, “Not only does creation groan, but we ourselves, who have tasted

the firstfruits, groan. We've heard and responded to Jesus Christ, we've been transformed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but now we wait eagerly for the redemption of our bodies."

Now flip over to 1 Corinthians 15. This is a spectacular text. We're going to pick it up in verse 35. "But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." Now let me make this as simple as I can. My children, ages 8, 5 and 2, are completely unaware that their body is perishable. You learn that as you get older. My kids right now can live on their bicycles for six hours, they can hop off of that, eat something, swim for four hours, go to sleep exhausted upon threat, only to wake up the next day not sore and just do it all over again. I can hurt myself sleeping. I can't wake up and have something be wrong, and I didn't do anything but lay there. So there is this progression. You don't know that your body is perishable, and then you move to this place where you can still do what you used to do but it just feels different when you're done. And then you move to not being able to do what you used to be able to do. And then you move to not wanting to do what you used to be able to do. And then you die. The whole point of 1 Corinthians 15 is that this body is seed. It is not the flower, it is not the wheat but it is a seed. It is perishable and it is going to give out. It doesn't matter how much of a lust you have for life, it doesn't matter how powerful your spirit is, your body will wear out and fail you. That's his point. What you are wearing, that birthday suit of yours is not going to make it. You'll have a few glory years, some of you more than others, where everything works well and your mind and body match up. Because that's a pretty key component. Some of you can see in your mind you doing something that your body is like, "Nuh uh." So you'll have a few glory years. And the Bible is clear that there is a glory to the perishable body, but he's real quick to go, "Hey man, lift all you want, eat all you want, manage your stress, get your sleep, drink plenty of water, do all that. That's responsibility; that's not sovereignty. Even in light of all those things, it's going to wear out. Your flesh and your blood will grow tired. Your heart, no matter how much chronic cardio you do, is going to one day cease to beat. Because what you're wearing right now is perishable." But Paul keeps coming back in this text to the flip side of that, which is that what we get next is imperishable. He uses this graphic language that what is sown is in dishonor. I don't know if you've seen someone die, but dying is not pretty. There is a lot of dignity that goes if the way you die is wasting away in a hospital bed. You are unkempt for the most part, unclean for the most part, your mouth is open, you're drooling. You are sown in dishonor, but the Bible says you're raised in honor. You are sown in weakness. All death reveals the weakness of the human body and the human mind. All death reveals our weakness. If you die in a car wreck, it's because your bones and what was meant to protect you could not protect you from the accident. If you die of disease, it's simply this picture. You are weak. You're not strong enough to beat the cancer; you're not strong enough to overcome disease. And this is not will. Please don't hear me talking about will. I'm talking about that physical body of yours. It's going to give up, it's going to break and it's going to cease. And that's what Paul is talking about here.

Then he's going to keep going in this next part. It's going to stretch us a little bit. "Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven." So you and I and the bodies we currently find ourselves in are a result of the fall of mankind in the garden. We are sons and daughters of

Adam and Eve. We are by our nature objects of God's wrath, and because of that, we are wearing what is perishable. Paul is saying in this text that, for those of us who have trusted and put our faith in Jesus, we get the heavenly body that's hard for us to even comprehend. We get this little glimpse of it in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When all is said and done, you have a body. You're not a ghost. You're not floating about in a white robe playing a harp. You have a body. Jesus, upon His resurrection, is touched, He walks, He eats food and He talks with His friends. Now He also teleports from Emmaus to Jerusalem, so we might have that coming for us. He also just walks through a wall once, so there's that. So if those things are coming, that's going to be awesome. But when all is said and done, He has a physical body. When we sing and talk about what is to come, if you'll listen, it's almost all ethereal and ghost-like. "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun. . . In mansions of glory and endless delight." It's this picture of us on a cloud with Tom & Jerry playing harps and singing. And it's really cute, but it's just not biblical.

Augustine was the bishop of Hippo, Northern Africa as the Roman Empire began to fall. So as the Roman Empire is invaded and as his health fails, Augustine begins to think about and ponder these kind of texts. He wrote a book called The City of God. He actually dies right before the Germanic tribes overthrew Hippo and killed the bishop that replaced him. So he got to go out in his sleep right before, and the bishop after him got the nastiness. But let's look at this quote. It is excellent. "How great shall be that felicity. . ." The word "felicity" is happiness or bliss.

"How great shall be that felicity, which shall be tainted with no evil, which shall lack no good, and which shall afford leisure for the praises of God, who shall be all in all! . . . All the members and organs of the incorruptible body, which now we see to be suited to various necessary uses, shall contribute to the praises of God." So if I could just make it simple, he's simply saying that so much of the vitality of our metabolic conditioning on the brokenness that is this earth is built around defense. Your immune system, your liver, your kidneys all function to protect you from the brokenness of the world. What Augustine is thinking, pondering and writing about is that when all things are made new, you don't need those things. So all the energy, vitality and weight of those systems go into praising God rather than protecting you, because there will be nothing to protect you from. See what you can do when you don't watch a lot of TV? Look at this next line. "What power of movement such bodies shall possess, I have not the audacity rashly to define, as I have not the ability to conceive. Nevertheless I will say that in any case, both in motion and at rest, they shall be, as in their appearance, seemly; for into that state nothing which is unseemly shall be admitted. . . God Himself, who is the Author of virtue, shall there be its reward; for, as there is nothing greater or better, He has promised Himself. . . He shall be the end of our desires who shall be seen without end, loved without cloy, praised without weariness. This outgoing of affection, this employment, shall certainly be, like eternal life itself, common to all." Again, I want to keep trying to make this as simple as possible. He's saying that with imperishable bodies that do not get sick, bodies that do not get tired, bodies that do not grow weary, in the presence of God all our desires will be gone. Think about that. That means that God in Himself is so spectacular that any other desire we might possess is gone. Now for some of you, this doesn't mean much. You're not creative and you don't have a big imagination. God has made you a little bit more mathematical in how you think. And some of you are real artists and you can kind of conceive what heaven might be like. The Bible says you won't have a desire for anything. So great will it be in His presence in our imperishable bodies, you'll have no desires. So the desires that haunt you now, the desires that drive you now, the desires of your heart that you spend all that energy, effort and passion on trying to achieve and accrue, he's saying you won't have them. In the light of God, you will have no other desires. They will be gone. That's how Augustine works through these things.

Now look back at 1 Corinthians 15:50. As we finish out this part of the text, you'll see where verses get hijacked to mean something they don't. "I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised

imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality." I said at the beginning that every generation since the ascension of Christ has looked at things in their life time and said, "Surely we're the generation." The funny thing about the current one is, on the historical level, it's not anywhere near what the earth has seen before. We just have better news coverage. You want to talk about a traumatic time in world history? Talk about the fall of the Roman Empire. You want to talk about a traumatic period in world history? Talk about World War I. Talk about World War II. Talk about the Great Depression. There are plenty of other times in history that make today look like some sort of fair where we can eat all we want, play all we want and dance all we want with very few worries. In fact, life has become so simple, it's killing us. So he's saying, "Even the generation that makes it to the end will need new bodies." What this text has been hijacked to mean is that the trumpet blows and in the twinkling of an eye you're sucked up and God nukes the earth. But that didn't say that, did it? It doesn't say that at all. It says that when that last trumpet blows, in the twinkling of an eye, the dead in Christ shall be raised imperishable, but those who get to see the sky cracked open and the return of Christ will be changed in an instant into imperishable bodies.

And then look at this next line. Verses 54-55, "When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" Using his text at a funeral as a present reality is erroneous. How can you say, "Where, O death, is your victory?" when you're feet from an occupied casket with family sobbing their eyes out around you? This text points us to a future hope. When do we get to mock death? When do we get to ridicule death? When we put on what's imperishable, when death is no threat because he has been put to death himself. That's when you say, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" That's when he's swallowed up, not today. Although it's been purchased, the consummation of it hasn't occurred yet. So yes and amen to pointing towards the future, but no and untrue for there not being any sting in death today. We covered that in week one at length. A picture of this that I love is in Isaiah 65:17. This is another idea of the new heavens and a new earth. "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind." So when God's work is done and there are imperishable bodies on a new and renew earth, the former things, all the loss, all the difficulty, all the painful days are not even remembered. So spectacular is the consummation of all things that, regardless of how deep the sorrow today, it's not even remembered.

Now here's something I want to try to answer. Because one of the things you see over and over again in both Old and New Testament teaching on the consummation of all things is this idea of "new." You've got new things there and the old has passed away. You've got fire falling down from heaven and dissolving, destroying and burning up. So what do you do with those kind of texts if what I'm saying is true? Well I'm glad you asked. Let's look at Revelation 21:1-2. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." So here's that idea. You've got the new heaven and new earth, and the old heaven and old earth were kind of ghetto, so we just threw them away and got new ones. And that's one of these ideas where people will go, "No, what you're saying can't be true. Because the Bible clearly says that there's an old thing that's thrown away and there's a new thing that's brought into being." And then you've got the text about God destroying stuff. 2 Peter 3:11-13, "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, . . ." He's talking about the creative order. This is the second time in this chapter alone that Peter is saying that creation as we know it will be dissolved. There's even a verse in an old hymn that says, "The earth shall soon dissolve like snow." Let's keep reading. "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." Just like in any language, words can have nuances and categories. The word "new" in the Greek can be translated a multitude of ways, but there are two

primary ways the word “new” is translated. The main word “new” in Greek is new in origin. But the second most popular usage of the word “new” is new in quality. So when you see the word “new” in your New Testament, nine times out of ten it’s going to have one of those two meanings. It’s either new in origin or it’s new in quality. If you build a new house, that’s new in origin. If you buy an old house and fix it up, that’s new in quality. Every time the New Testament discusses new heavens and new earth, it uses the Greek word for new in quality, not new in origin. Which means God doesn’t take this earth we’re on and throw it in the trashcan. And the fire reference and the dissolving of what is here is a reference to the burning away of unrighteousness and the shaping of things into righteousness. So like a blacksmith, God sticks the earth into the fire and hammers, beats and chisels and He pulls it out, cools it off, and now you’ve got deserts that are producing roses, you’ve got wolves and lambs eating together and you’ve got mountain tops producing sweet wine. You’ve got this beautiful new order of things where disease is gone, there’s no sound of mourning anywhere, there’s no fear, there are no locks on doors, there’s no reason for weapons and death itself is dead. And we find ourselves with imperishable bodies on an imperishable earth, not playing the harp but reigning and ruling with God forever. And that’s how it ends.

Now what are the implications of this? Let me try to be as simple as I can on the implications. If this is true (and as believers in Christ, this is where our hope is), this makes obedience today, no matter how difficult, worth it. This makes hardship today, no matter how difficult, worth it. I’ll get even more practical than that. Let’s say you married crazy. You didn’t know you were marrying crazy. There were some signs, but you thought, “Surely, those would work themselves out after I enter into a covenant to never dissolve that union.” Maybe you thought he/she was acting that way because of distance, because surely if you got in the house together and can see all of your weaknesses, they would work themselves out. So let’s say you married crazy and it has been difficult. I don’t want to minimize that, because it can be exhausting. What will end up happening to you if you’re not careful is, instead of having your mind and heart set steadfastly on what is to come and what Christ will bring about, when all things are said and done you begin to think about here, you begin to think now and you begin to say really ridiculous stuff like, “Well God would want me happy.” No, God wants you obedient, because obedience brings joy and glory. That’s what He’s after. And happiness is a cheap, cheap substitute for joy. Happiness can be taken from you in a second. Joy can’t be taken from you. Our pursuit is joy, not trite, silly, fleeting happiness. Now if happiness comes along with the package, yes and amen. We don’t hate happiness. If that gift has been granted to us, then that is grace upon grace. But Paul says, “If the resurrection isn’t real, then we should be pitied above all men.” Why? Because we’re steadfastly locked on that day. We are steadfastly locked with our hearts and minds on that day. And Paul goes so far as to say that any suffering here and now, any difficulty here and now is light and momentary compared to what is to come. The crazy thing about his list is it smokes yours. He is stoned twice and left for dead. No body has ever beaten you, thought you were dead and walked away. If so, we would like to get your video testimony. You haven’t been shipwrecked twice in the open sea only to crawl on land to get attacked by a snake while trying to serve the Lord. You haven’t been assaulted by your own people, rejected by those you have sown your life into. He has just an unbelievably difficult life. And he’s rewarded in the end by having his head cut off after being in prison for an extended period of time. And our boy says they are light and momentary troubles. Why? How can he say that? How can he say, “To live is Christ and to die is gain”? How can he say, “I consider all these things rubbish next to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ my Lord”? How can he say these things? Because he believes this. He sees this. And if you’ll get it, it will change how you live your life. You see, I don’t need to spend all my money on me. I can be generous to my brothers and sisters. I can be generous to those who have not been afforded and blessed like I have been blessed. I can risk my life. I can get on a plane to Sudan. I can kiss my wife goodbye and head to places where there is a real present threat. I can do that. Why? And no, it’s not because I’m a moron. I believe this. And if I am a fool, I’m a fool for Christ along with Paul. Because I believe that this body is failing me. If anything, I’ve got nothing but objective evidences of that in the last couple of years. But the next body won’t. So our confidence is there, our focus is there and our hope is there, and that hope enables obedience today regardless of how difficult that obedience is. Because we know there is a day coming. You’re an hour closer to that than you were when you came in. “What about the rapture?

What about the millennium?" That's another weekend and another time. All I wanted to do today was show you the forest.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You that You love us like You do. Thank You that despite us You have purchased all of this for the glory of Your Father and for the joy of Your adopted sons and daughters. So for my brothers and sisters in here who wrestle with a physical ailment, a lagging pain, God, I pray that their hope would be put in the imperishable body. For those of us who are in difficult situations and we know what it means to be obedient to You, we know what it means to obey You, we know what it means to submit to what You have asked of us, but it feels impossible, it feels difficult, it feels like if we were to do that, it would cost us joy in life, I pray that we would live for a greater joy in the next body. I thank You that You have said clearly that You are coming and that Your reward is coming with You. So I pray that we would grow in confidence in these things. Help us in our obedience. Help us in our worship. I thank You that we are not looking to escape while You destroy the world, but rather we are looking to reign and rule with You in imperishable bodies and in a different kind of earth. Thank You. For all the beauties of this world, they are broken, and I pray that that would stir up awe in our hearts towards You today. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."

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