

Thanksgiving: A Little & Big Picture

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[0 : 00] I remember hearing some time ago of an incident of a young man who had come into the council of his pastor because he was dealing with some very difficult issues.

Some very unpleasant things were taking place in his life. And it was only a couple of months after he had committed his life to Christ. And he was puzzled. So as he sat across from the pastor's desk, he began tearing up a little bit.

Some of the sufferings and difficulties that he was facing, disappointment, etc. And he said, I don't understand it, Pastor. I just don't know what's going on.

I'm really confused. And the pastor says, well, I'd like to help you any way that I can. Please explain to me. Tell me what's going on. He said, well, you remember because you're the one that led me to Christ about three or four weeks ago.

And he said, I was just really on cloud nine. And I remember you telling me after I prayed and received Christ as my Savior, I remember your words.

[1 : 03] You told me now everything is right and straight between you and God. And he said, man, I just fell on cloud nine and so relieved and rejoicing.

And then he started telling him this tale of woe of what happened to him the last few days. And he said, and then the bottom fell out.

And he said, you know the kind of life that I was living before I came to Christ. And it was anything and everything but God honoring. And then I came to Christ and received him as my Savior.

And it seemed like the root fell in. Everything's going wrong. And I thought, now that I'm a Christian, that's the end of my problems.

Well, the young man was naive. And he was really misunderstanding what it means to be a Christian.

[1 : 59] And there are two aspects to this thing called the Christian life that a lot of people don't understand. And of course, he was one of them. And one has to do with your position as a Christian.

And the other has to do with your performance as a Christian. And these are miles apart, even though they are connected. And in your performance, that has to do with the fact that you still, even as a believer in Christ, yes, you're going to heaven when you die, and Jesus died for your sins and all the rest of it, you still are a mortal human being.

And the proof that you are still in the flesh is the fact that you're going to die physically. Your body's going to die. And that's because it belongs to that realm where that flesh is.

And when you come to faith in Jesus Christ as a personal Savior, you enter into a position that is fixed and permanent, and it is based upon the integrity and the faithfulness and the power of God. But that is far different from your performance and your practice. As a Christian, you can still do stupid, ugly things that are not at all becoming of a Christian.

[3 : 17] And that's part of the flesh because we do not lose our humanity simply because we have adopted Christianity. We are still a flawed human being, and we still have the temptations that confront the flesh, and sometimes we yield to them, sometimes we give in, and we're sorry we did, and we're ashamed, and we pray, and we thank the Lord for His forgiveness, and so on.

So there are those two aspects. And we need to understand that just because you are a believer does not mean that God runs interference for you and just removes every obstacle and everything that would hurt you.

It just doesn't work that way. But it is an all-too-often assumption that people make. Gee, I thought now that I was a Christian everything was going to be okay.

Well, not necessarily. Sometimes all kinds of calamity comes into the life of a Christian that leave him puzzled. And we don't have a better example of that, of course, than he who is the poster boy of suffering, and that would be Job.

And we find in Job a tremendous lesson that is put there for our benefit of blessing. And I always think of Job when I read that passage in Paul's letter to the Romans, and he said, And the word means confidence.

[5 : 03] And I always think of Job when I read that passage. Because the trials, the misfortune, the pain, the suffering that Job experienced is exactly what he's talking about.

And we just wonder, what's going on? Is this any way for God to take care of his people? And only when you read Job, you get the story about Satan and the interchange that took place between Satan and God and about testing him and so on.

And you'll recall that God said to Satan, who was in his presence at the time, You consider Job. Among all of the fallen individuals on earth, he's quite something.

And Satan said, yeah, he's something okay. And the only reason he is, is because you pamper him. You take such good care of him. Why wouldn't he love you?

Why wouldn't he serve you? He knows where his bread's buttered. But I'll tell you what, if you take his goodies away from him, and let him taste real calamity, he'll curse you to your face.

[6 : 13] And God said, I think so, huh? Okay? I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to turn Job over to you. You can hand your way with him.

You can do anything you want with him. You cannot take his life. Anything short of that, have your way. So, Job was a godly man, had several children, has a man of wealth and prosperity, all kinds of livestock, lands and everything that went with it.

Job was living the good life. And then, through Satan's machinations, the roof fell in. He lost his family.

He lost his livestock. He lost his wealth. And then he lost his health. And here he is, sitting on a pile of ashes, scraping the boils on his skin with a piece of pottery, a piece of broken pottery.

And his wife, his wife had had enough. She, being a typical wife, was agonizing over seeing her husband go through this.

[7 : 31] And those of you who are married know that when one hurts, the other hurts too. And she was distraught. And finally, she just caved in and she told Job she'd had enough.

She said, I can't take this anymore. I can't stand to see you like this anymore. Job, just curse God and die. Get it over with.

I've had my limitations. And Job said, you speak as a foolish woman. Ought not we who have received blessings from the Lord also receive adversity?

God has given and God has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Wow. That is an attitude of real gratitude.

No wonder he is the poster boy for suffering. He's also the poster boy for thanksgiving and adversity. And he topped it off by saying, though he slay me, yet will I trust him.

[8 : 41] Fellas, that's kind of like the ultimate. That's kind of like the ultimate. I want you to turn to a couple of passages. And the first has to do with 2 Corinthians chapter 11.

Let's go there if we may please. We're going to be talking about thanksgiving in the midst of adversity. And you know as well as I, anybody can sing when the sun is shining.

But when the clouds come and the bottom of everything falls out, how's your singing voice then? 2 Corinthians chapter 11.

And the Apostle Paul is speaking. And let me preface this passage with something that was said earlier in the book of Acts chapter 9 when Paul actually came to know the Lord.

Remarkable passage. And I can't believe how many years as a Christian I just overlooked. It just didn't register. It just did not register. But the Lord had confronted Paul on the road to Damascus.

[9 : 56] And he was blind. And now he's in the home of Ananias in the street called Straight. And he hasn't eaten or drank anything for three days and three nights. And he's absolutely miserable. And he's still in shock from that vision of Christ whom he had been persecuting.

And the Lord told Ananias, a man named Ananias, I want you to go to him, lay hands on him, and pray for him that he may receive his sight. And then he said to Ananias regarding Saul of Tarsus, he said, And I will show him what great things he must suffer for my name.

Did it ever occur to you that the Apostle Paul was called to suffer? We know he was called to write about one-third of the New Testament.

We know he was called to be a splendid missionary who led more people to Christ than we can imagine. Blazing trails everywhere he went. We know he was called to do it. But called?

To suffer? Is that some way for God to look out for those he regards as his chosen servants? Where is the running interference for him anyway?

[11:18] How is it and why was it that God seemed to abandon him when he had all these problems? And problems that wouldn't go... Well, look at this. 2 Corinthians chapter 11.

And he is saying, let's just... I'll have to ignore the context, but we'll come down... We'll come down to verse 23. He's comparing himself with those fellow Jews of his with whom he was buddy-buddy when he was on their side persecuting Jews who were believers.

Now he's on the other side looking back at it and he says, reminding them in verse 22, Are they Hebrews?

Are they Jews? Paul said, So am I! Are they Israelites? So am I! Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I! I can meet with these guys on any level. Are they servants of Christ?

I speak as if insane. I more so. In far more labor, in far more imprisonment, beaten, times without number.

[12:27] Paul, how many times were you flawed? I don't know. I don't even remember. So many, I stopped counting. That was a favorite punishment of the Jews and they meted it out on other Jews who had embraced Jesus as their Messiah.

Kind of like, we're going to beat the Jesus out of you. And that's certainly what they tried to do. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes.

Because the law of Moses stipulated that a beating could be administered for no more than forty lashes.

And thirty-nine was the max. And these lashes were lashes. They were long pieces of rawhide with pieces of sharpened bone embedded in the rawhide and the straps, the rawhide straps were tied to a stick, a wand about a foot long attached to that and then they would take that and slash the body that was usually naked from the waist up and those bone fragments would dig into the flesh and then they would pull back on that and it would literally slice the skin and create all kinds of cuts on the body.

and there were thirty, there were thirteen of those rawhide strips in that lash and they would, I'm sorry, there were three, there were three strips in that lash and when they did that they would do it thirteen times and with those three things that would total the twenty, the thirty-nine and that was the limit so they would use that thing and give you thirteen of those lashes and with the three things in each of them and that would total thirty-nine so he had a back and a sides and his front that were just ribbed with rivulets of blood and scars and of course these were all subject to infection and everything else that went along with it so this is part and parcel of what he's talking about when he was beaten.

[15:05] Five times he endured that. Three times I was beaten with rods. That's different. Once I was stoned.

Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I've spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness.

He's always living on the edge. Dangers in the sea and dangers among false brethren. I have been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights in hunger and thirst often without food in cold and exposure.

and all I can ask in reading a passage like that is, good grief, where is God when you need Him? Is this any way for God to treat His friends?

God has unlimited power and wisdom. Why in the world would He subject a chosen vessel like this who committed his life to Christ and to winning the lost to endure these kind of things?

[16:26] I'm going to give you a principle now that is very, very important, very little understood, but this is the way the world works. And it is this. We live in a fallen world.

That means the world literally is a mess. Things are awry. The world is not as it ought to be. The world is the human makeover of the original that God created.

And the makeover was not for the better, but for the worse. Because into that all kinds of fallenness, negatives, and everything enters. That's what sin does. And as a result, God has made provision for that through the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, that He promised to be human redemption. And when He comes, when He came, He established the basis for that. The miracles that He did were simply demonstrations of the way things ought to be. And all of this was designed to show by way of a contrast the distinction between the way things are and their fallenness and the way things ought to be as Jesus administered His miracles and healings and everything else that went with it. So what I am saying is this, and this is really important, guys, I want you to pick up on this. This fallenness that we experience is across the board.

[17 : 55] There is no portion of the globe that is exempt from it, and there is no human that is exempt from it. And while we look upon this as a situation where God is in control and God is all powerful, we just ordinarily ought to think, well, God has the ability, why doesn't He just intervene and make those bad things go away, or limit the people who were doing the bad things, or take them out of commission, or whatever.

He has the ability to do that. Why doesn't He do it? Think of it. Because if He did, that's going to completely negate the whole concept of fallenness and redemption and everything that goes along with it.

The time is coming when that is precisely what He will do, but He will do it according to His timetable, not according to ours. If He did it according to ours, I would have had it over and done with a long time ago.

And so would most of you. Because that's just the way we think. But God has His own plan and His own program and it is going to come off exactly as He wants it.

In the meanwhile, in this present world, Jesus said, in the world, you will have tribulation.

[19 : 16] Count on it! But aren't we as Christians supposed to be exempt from that? No! No! We're not! Not in any way. We can feel the same pain, the same disappointment, the same heartache that an unbeliever can.

Because even though Christ has cared for our eternal being and has placed us in union with Him, that's our position. And it can't change, it can't diminish, and it can't increase.

It's perfect because Jesus did it. But that does not relieve us from the consequences of living in a fallen world. We've got to take our bumps and bruises like everybody else.

We've got to suffer the losses, the pain, the disappointment like everybody else. So somebody might even say, well, what's the big deal about being a Christian? If you look at the long picture, if you look at the big picture, it makes all the difference in the world.

Not only that, but even in this world, as a believer, you have access to fortitude and depth and understanding that is beyond your own simply because you are in Christ.

[20 : 27] So there's a great deal of advantage, even though you're not exempt from the heartaches of the world, there's a great deal of advantages in just being in Christ because you've got the ability to have Job's perspective.

Or you've got the ability in the flesh to fall into the pity party and play that old tune. Why me? What did I do to deserve this?

I thought God loved me, and now this. And where is God when you need Him? And if that's the kind of God you're going to be, I'm not going to read your old Bible anymore. And not going to your old church anymore either.

Forget it. What we want is for God to be reasonable and do it our way, don't we? Of course we do. In the midst of adversity, there is a crisis.

Is it going to be a pity party? Or is it going to be Thanksgiving? Thanksgiving? And because this is personal, I'm not all that comfortable in sharing it because I've shared it before.

[21 : 38] But to me it was so powerful, I don't want to deprive you of it because not all of you have heard it, but I'm talking about 16 years ago at Riverside Methodist Hospital in Columbus, where my wife Barbara was in a coma suffering from a brain aneurysm, cerebral bleeding of the brain, and the doctors said there's nothing that we can do.

She's had massive bleeding in the worst possible part of the brain. So she was on this breathing machine, the ventilator, kept her going, and they came in and said the doctor thinks that you ought to think about taking her off the ventilator, and of course when you do, it probably won't be long and she'll stop breathing and she'll be gone.

So you need to talk to the family about it, and our immediate family was there of course, and we got together. And we decided, and we prayed about it, that there was nothing that could be done. Of course, God can work miracles, he can do anything he wants, anytime he wants. And some people think that because we are people who rightly divide the word of God, or we are dispensationalists, that healing is out of order for this generation, for this dispensation. Well, that's nonsense. God can heal anybody, anytime he wants, of anything he wants. He's not limited in any way, shape, or form, regardless of what the dispensation is. So anyway, I had one of those little sticks with a sponge on the end, and all I could do was dip it in water and smear it over her lips, because her breathing would dry her lips out, and put the swab in her mouth, because she was so dry.

[23 : 42] And I could tell that her breathing was becoming more and more and more. It was becoming less and less, actually.

And the nurse came in and I said, all I can do is stand here and hold her hand. Is there any way that I could put my arms around her?

The nurse said, absolutely. You can get right up there in the bed and lie beside her and hold her that way.

That was a gift. That was a real gift. And as I caressed her and held her and kissed her on the cheek, I thought about the power of God and His ability to do anything.

And you know, as much as I wanted her alive, I could not bring myself to ask God to spare her. I knew He could do that.

[24 : 49] But I don't think that there was any reason why He should do it for me, exercise that power for me. And as this went on, it was about two o'clock in the morning and the immediate family was there all gathered in the room.

And each time I swabbed her mouth and her lips, I could tell that her breathing was less and less and I could actually pinpoint the very last breath that she took and I knew that she was gone.

And I could not bring myself to ask God to spare her life or to bring her out of this or whatever. But I was actually overwhelmed with gratitude, with thanksgiving.

Because God had given me this wonderful creature for almost 50 years. And all I could think of was Job who said, the Lord has given and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. And I'm not claiming to be any kind of a modern Job or Paul and nothing even close. But this is just a personal illustration of the provision of God in the midst of crisis.

[26 : 31] And God was gracious in allowing me to collect on all of the wonderful times that we had for almost 50 years.

And you know, God has only made since creation, God has only made two absolutely incredible indescribable women.

And I got both of them as a wife. How's that for grace? Got both of them. My Barbara and my Marie.

And the Thanksgiving, well, let's go for the time left, let's go to Philippians. Philippians, chapter 4, very familiar passage, I know many of you have committed to memory, but it is just so powerful.

Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice. Now wait a minute, Paul, is this the same guy that suffered the beatings three times, and the shipwrecked in the deep, and the imprisonment, is this the same guy?

[27 : 58] Yep, it's the same guy. And here he is saying, rejoice in the Lord always, again I will rejoice. And remember what he and Silas were doing when they were in that stocks in the Roman prison there in Philippi?

They were singing! Singing! Singing praises unto the Lord. And the prisoners heard them, and well you know the rest of the story, the earthquake and all that went with it. Rejoice in the Lord always.

And I'm glad he said always, because you know what that includes? That includes the bad times, difficult times, hard times. Rejoice in the Lord always.

Again I will say rejoice. It's almost as if rejoice in the Lord. Now some of you may not think that I really meant that, so let me emphasize it.

And we emphasize things by repeating them. And again I say, rejoice. Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Hey fellas, even when he seems so far away, he is near.

[29 : 07] He's always near. Be anxious for nothing. Again, we might try to personalize this with Paul and say, well, that's easy for you to say.

The word anxious simply means it could be translated by our word uptight. Don't be uptight or upset or discombobulated about anything.

Anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, and here's the word, with thanksgiving.

That's the extreme opposite of griping and complaining and questioning. Thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known to God.

God. And the way most of us would like for the rest of that to read is, let your requests be made known to God and He will give you whatever you ask for.

[30 : 15] But it doesn't say that. It says, and the peace of God, the rest, the calmness, the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension.

That means the peace of God that can flood your soul and mind and heart in the midst of adversity is beyond human ability to really understand.

But it is there. It is a God thing. But my impression is it will come about only when it is accompanied with thanksgiving.

And sometimes it may take a while for that to come about. And sometimes a person never does. Because they can't it's a term that sounds crazy to use, but I use it for the purpose of trying to communicate.

It's crazy to think in terms of forgiving God, forgiving God as if it is in our purview and our responsibility to forgive God as if God is looking for and dependent upon our forgiveness.

[31 : 42] It doesn't work that way. We're talking about the supreme infinite being of the universe. He does not need our forgiveness. Now granted, we can go a long way with understanding more than we do.

But if we, and this is easy for me to say, but it's not always easy to do when the time comes, and that is just remember who you are and what God has made you in Christ and the fact that He never promised you a rose garden, did He?

And the roses, they're there, but roses have thorns, and that's part and parcel of living in this fallen world. But listen, the thanksgiving ought to come charging in when we realize God has already made more than gracious, ample provision for us in the big picture.

Don't get hung up on the little picture. And that's what we tend to do. Because the little picture is where it hurts, right now. The little picture is our limited perspective.

And you can all agree that that little limited perspective can contain a whole lot of pain. Not just physical either.

[33 : 07] Gut wrenching emotional pain. But that's all part of the little picture. Fellas, don't become enslaved to the little picture.

This too shall pass. Keep in mind the fact God has a big picture. And in the big picture, we will be able to better understand that phrase that says, I am persuaded that the sufferings, and he's not minimizing them, he's saying they're real, that the sufferings of this present time, that's the little picture, are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us.

So when the hurts and the heartaches come, guys, just remember, put in your mind's eye, if you will, over here on the left, it's the little picture. picture. And it can be fraught with pain, disappointment, heartache, reversals, losses, everything that goes with the fallen world.

That's the little picture. And over here, the large, big screen, the big picture. Don't ever confuse the pictures.

pictures. Everything in this life, good and bad, is part of the little picture. But God is in control of the ultimate big picture.

[34 : 46] Sufferings of this present time, sometimes they're physical, sometimes they're emotional, sometimes they're both. Sometimes the suffering can be so great, just refuse to take it any longer.

And we use our own hand to end it. And those of us who've never done that may ask, I don't understand how anybody could do that.

Well, I would suggest it's only because you are not in their place, and you probably never will be. So you cannot be expected to understand it.

But if you haven't walked in somebody's shoes like that, we ought to withhold judgment. That's all I'm saying. So little picture, big picture. Sufferings of this present time, little picture, not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

And the revelation closes with God wiping away all the tears, the suffering, the disappointments, and everything will all be but a bad dream if we're even able to recall it from that time.

[35 : 56] So what we're talking about is perspective. Perspective. Perspective is the way you see things. If all you see is a little picture, man, I feel for you.

You're in for a miserable ride. But just keep in mind, it's a big picture. And Job was a big picture guy. though he slay me, yet in my flesh I shall see God, Job said.

Wow. Amazing. Comments or questions, anybody? Yes, Job? You're kind of saying that big picture is our position in Christ.

Don't ever forget where you're positioned. Amen. Thank you for making the connection. And what you're a citizen of, of heaven, and not this country.

So that's true. And then also, Romans 8, 28, has always been my favorite verse. All things work together for good to those that love Him.

[37 : 06] So whenever things are going wrong for me, or bad, or I got out of ailment, or somebody else I love does, or something, well, somehow all that is for my good.

I don't understand it. I don't know how He's going to work it out. But somehow, whatever happens is for my good. That's a tough sell. But it's a necessary one.

And if you wrap your brain around that, you'll understand that it really is for your good, like Joe says. And by the way, the way some of these texts read, that all things work together for good, that's pretty flimsy.

That's not adequate really. It isn't all things work together for good. This is the way, the kind of faith that the world has. Well, just have faith and hope that everything's going to work out okay. The text says, all things do not work together for good.

God works all things together for good. They don't just happen. They don't just fall into place. God is the master orchestrator and He knows exactly when to do what and whatever it is that you need.

[38 : 14] And here in Romans, this is precious, in Romans 5, Paul says, therefore, he's talking about Christ having been delivered up for our transgressions and was raised for our justification and chapter 5 opens with therefore, terrible chapter division, terrible chapter, but here it is anyway.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, that means having been declared righteous by God solely on the basis of believing. That's what justification by faith is.

It means being declared righteous just because of believing. Not because of doing, but because of believing. He says we have peace with God.

That means the war between fallen man and holy God is over. And peace is declared between you and God because of Christ.

He is our peace. We have peace with God through, and this is the only way this peace of God comes, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand and we exult or rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

[39 : 34] And there's another word that needs clarification. The word hope does not come with a question mark in the Bible. It does in our world. In our world. When we say, I hope it doesn't rain today, what we mean is, it may or it may not.

But I don't want it to, and I hope it doesn't. The Bible does not use the word hope that way. It uses it as confidence. Confidence. Confidence. We have confidence.

That is a slam dunk assurance. We do not hope in the glory of God, and maybe there will be glory by and by, and maybe there won't be, but we hope so. Nonsense. It is a slam dunk.

It is an absolute certainty that we will exult in hope, in the confidence of the glory of God. This is what Paul meant when he wrote to the Colossians and said, Christ is in you.

That is your hope, your confidence of glory. That means you are going to be a finished product that you are not now.

[40 : 41] Remember when Jesus went into the Mount of Transfiguration and they saw his glory, and Peter and John later wrote about it, said we beheld his glory in the Mount.

It was the glory as of the only begotten of the Father. It was Jesus pulling back, pulling back the film covering, the humanity film covering his glory, and there was a brightness that shone through like, like the brightness of the noonday sun, and it was awesome.

That was the effulgence, the glory of God revealed there, and it was designed to shore up the lack of confidence of Peter and James as they went into the Mount.

It's a beautiful thing, because Jesus knew his death was upcoming, and they were going to be really thrown for a loop, because he was going to die on the cross, and he was giving them a preview of what his glory is going to be like.

And fellas, that's what yours is going to be like. We will not be dealing with these miserable bodies of clay. They're miserable in the sense that they're fallen.

[41 : 56] But when we are redeemed, when our body is redeemed, even as our spirit has been redeemed, then we will be that new creation in Christ, and it is going to be absolutely.

Let's go on. And not only this, verse 3, we exalt in our tribulations. What is that? We exalt. You know what that means? It means we're thankful, we're glad, we rejoice in our tribulations.

Are we a glutton for punishment? Is there anybody here that really likes pain, suffering, disappointment? I'll walk them out to avoid it. I really will.

I'm not into pain. I don't appreciate that at all. I want to be as pain-free as possible. And sometimes I just can't hardly wait for my ibuprofen to kick in.

And it helps. We rejoice, we exalt in our tribulations, knowing, not suspecting, not having a hint, but knowing knowing the tribulation, tribulation brings perseverance.

[43 : 20] That is staying power. That is hanging in there. That is when adversity comes and sorrows come, and you reach the end of your rope.

If you have a rope, someone says, just tie a knot and hang on. That's perseverance. It's always too soon to quit.

Don't give up. Perseverance. And perseverance, proven character. And proven character, and we're right back to confidence.

Wow. You know, guys, listen. This is, as a believer, this is walking in Christ first class.

Let me tell you something. There isn't a whole lot of this going on in the body of Christ. But where it is, for whom it is, they can be the catalyst, the encouragement, for onlookers, fellow believers in Christ.

[44 : 34] Because we're all in this growth period. You know, we're all maturing. And sometimes, sometimes our maturity is two steps forward and one step back.

And we don't have this thing called life altogether, because that too, that loss of perspective is part of our fallenness. And yet, in the midst of it all, this is the formula, and all I can say is, it worked for the Apostle Paul.

And out of all of the adversity and everything that Paul experienced, and you know, he had to wonder, he had to question. There was a miraculous, remember the Philippian jailer we talked about earlier?

The earthquake and the other chains fell off and walls caved in and everybody was free to go. Wonderful. But the time is coming. And it won't be too far from that where Paul will be in prison for the second time.

This time, he won't be in his hired villa in Rome where he can receive guests even though he's chained to a Roman soldier 24-7. This time, he's going to be in the Mamertine prison.

[45 : 50] The dungeon down there with the rats and the vermin. And the time will come when a guard is going to come to Paul's door and say, Paul, it's time.

And they will lead that beloved apostle down to where there is a little clump of trees. And Paul will lay his head down on the chopping block and his neck will be bared.

And do you think Paul is wondering, where is my miraculous deliverance now? Great that God sent that earthquake, freed us from prison there in Philippi.

Great that he rescued me from the stoning and sustained my life and so on. Where is he now? And the executioner is standing there with that sharpened axe and he's going to sever Paul's head from his body.

Where was God? Why did he... You know what all this is? Even the severing of his head. You know what that is? That's little picture!

[47 : 13] That's all little picture! And then he enters into the big picture to the extent that God has provided for him that he can grasp.

Amazing. Absolutely amazing. So no matter what comes in your life, and by the way, I want to issue this as a warning. Some of you are going to be called to put this into practice.

and it may be very soon. I'm not a prophet, and I'm not predicting or saying anything. All I know is this is the way the world is. This is the way life is.

And yet, in the midst of it all, God is in charge, and he knows what he's doing. Years ago, I had the pleasure of chauffeuring around. I was a young man, 25 years old at the time.

Good grief. It's been forever ago back before the earth crossed pardon. Dr. Walter Wilson was in town, and I had the privilege of chauffeuring him wherever he was speaking.

[48 : 22] And he got in the car one time. We were talking about what was going on in the world. I don't remember what it was. But I said something there. I said, well, in the midst of it all, it is really good to know that God is still on the throne.

Right, Dr. Wilson? He said, well, young man, I would have to disagree with you there. And I said, what do you mean? And he said, that God is on the throne is true.

But he isn't still. He isn't still. He is working all things after the counsel of his own goodwill. And in reality, we shouldn't want it any other way.

He knows the way that I take. And when I come forth, I will be purified as gold tested in a fire. This is an amazing thing that we're on, this thing called human life and human existence and living in a fallen world as a redeemed believer but with a fallen body.

We are, of all people, the most blessed on the face of the planet. And don't you ever forget it. Don't you ever forget it. Any other comments or questions?

[49 : 34] Anybody? I thought the food would be here by now but it isn't. We will return next week, if we may, to our subject that we were dealing with before.

And that has to do with, there will be some real eye-opening questions.