

“From Tribulation to Apocalypse” Part 1

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

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September 30, 2022

Jeff: You know, I want to tell you something. Don does the transcribing. So he edits out anything he doesn't want and he keeps in anything he wants, and he puts in stuff that he wants. *(Laughter)* You know what I'm saying?

Don Maurer: No, I don't know. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I'm sure you don't. *(Laughter)* Okay; well, let's pray. *(Music)*

Our gracious heavenly Father, we thank You. We certainly bow before You in humble adoration. We look to You and we know that from You we experience every good and blessed gift. Father, as we come to You we come to You in Jesus Christ, united to Him, knowing that You've given us every spiritual gift in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. We know that we have His justification. We are adopted through Him. We're sanctified, being made more holy day by day. And we look forward to the glorification that is to come. Father, these things and many others we possess in Your Son. And we ask, Lord, that You will continue to prosper our own thinking as we think Your thoughts after You in connection with them.

But Lord, we also give You praise and thanksgiving for the gift of prayer. We lift up to You now our thanksgiving that Kevin is in rehab now, and making progress, we pray. Father, we are so thankful for Bruce and his wife, that they are now post-COVID, and Lord, hopefully on a good road to recovery.

Father, we pray for our brother Sig. We ask that Your hand would be upon him for good. We pray that his recovery would be going well. We pray for his good wife Nancy, and ask that Your hand would be upon her even as she continues to recover herself.

Father, we ask that You will bless us today as we open Your word. We recognize that in our world there are few places to stand safely, and only one place wherein we can have confidence. And so Lord, we stand on Your word, for You have given it to us for our comfort, for the preservation of truth. And Lord, we stand on it and ask, Lord, that You will cause us to embrace it and love it and live according to it. So Father, thank You for the opportunity to study it. And we ask that You'll help us in Jesus' name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: Let me have you turn with me to 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. And today we'll begin looking at the next segment. I want to read verses 3-12 though. We started looking last time at 1:1 and we made it down to about verse 4. Today I want us to look a little further, and so I'll start our reading in verse 3 and culminate at the end of the chapter. This is the word of the living God.

“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness of faith in all your persecutions and afflictions that you are enduring. This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering, since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to bless, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He comes

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on that day to be glorified in His saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

“To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling, and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by His power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is God’s word.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: Don, this is a blank screen now. Should it be? I didn’t know if it should be or not. So I’ll let you give it a double check.

Don Maurer: Thank you, Jeff. It’s always a blank screen. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Doing well, okay. All right, so today I want to talk to you about the same theme that we’ve been thinking about. I want us to think about standing firm in the faith during times of testing. And what I want us to do today is that I want us to remember at least the outline that I’m using as I take us through. So I want us to remember the God who hears; that’s something we looked at the last time. And I explained a little bit of the structure as we looked at that piece of it. Today we’re going to look at “From Tribulation to Apocalypse.”

Now that is basically 5-10. And I read a little before that because what I want us to do is to pull verse 4 into our thinking today because verse 4 is really a conclusion of those first three verses. And so it kind of leads us on into the next set of verses. So that’s why I had us read what we read.

Well let me throw up the outline for you that we’re going to be looking at. We’re going to be looking at some introductory points, God’s people, God’s punishment and God’s *Parousia*, and Paul’s prayer. So I want us to look at those things today.

The first thing I want us to do then is to look at some introductory points. Now I have a question for you as we start, and I want you to think about it. Have you ever boasted? Now some of us probably have. And some of us have not done it in a godly way, and some of us have done it in a godly way. And you’ve probably wondered what the godly way is to go about it.

Well, perhaps the best way to think about boasting in a godly way is to think about the subject in which you are boasting. And if you are boasting in self, that’s probably not a godly, humble boast. But if you’re boasting in God, that’s certainly a godly boast. And if you are doing what Proverbs says you ought to do, Proverbs says that you ought to speak one of another. In other words, let your praise come from another. And so if you are giving praise to another you’re probably in the right vein of thinking, as you lift someone else up—not puffing them up, but encouraging them with genuine knowledge or genuine assessment of abilities, and so on.

And that’s what Paul is doing in this text; Paul boasts. And he boasts of the saints in Thessalonica.

Now I want you to think about this for a minute because it’s an important thing for us to consider. These Christians weren’t very old. Paul was in Thessalonica three weeks before he got chased out. But he sent back a couple of brothers. And they came back with a report. And then he sent a letter and then got another report, and then sent another letter. So there was some correspondence that took place, even though these were young believers. And so the great thing about it is that Paul has this admiration for these young believers despite the fact that they are young believers. And so he boasts about them.

Now we’re going to talk about his boast in just a minute. But what I want you to see is that his boast corresponds to what will happen to them. God will eventually boast about them on the

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great and last day. How? When he glorifies them with all the other saints in Christ Jesus. And so there's a sense in which verse 4 and verse 12 go seamlessly together. Paul's boast about the Thessalonian church will be made good by God on the last day when He Himself glorifies them or makes good on Paul's boast, if we can put it that way.

Now the question that we have to ask ourselves when we think about this text is: what in the world did he boast about? What was the subject of his boast? Well, his boast was about their steadfastness and their faith. Those were the two things he boasted about. And I want to stop for a minute and just think about those things, because those things are really important for what we're thinking about today.

The first thing I want you to know is that I'm going to tell you three things, and the first thing is this. I can tell that I'm rattling on. You know when you're rattling on. But if you have any questions along the way as I rattle I'll be glad to stop. But it's not going to appear that I'm willing. *(Laughter)* So if you have questions, please feel free to ask or interject.

But I want to say a couple things because this is important. What is *steadfast* and what is *faith*?, because these are the things Paul is boasting about.

Steadfast is a word made up of two words. It's made up of a preposition and then it's made up of just a regular old word. It's made up of *hupo meno*. The *from* that it's really in is *hupo menes*. And it's really basically a simple word.

Meno is the word for *remain*, or *abide*, or *live*, something like that. And then the word *hupo* is not *hyper*. *Hupo* is *under*, right? And so it is to *remain under*; to live under, to abide under.

Now you say to me, "I don't know what you mean by that." Let me give you an illustration of that. The weight lifter abides under, lives underneath the weight. Now the sense of this word is to live under something in a controlled manner.

Now I'm sure I've given you this illustration before because I love it. I like weight lifting, and I like watching it. And I just love the Olympic lifters, although I've never Olympic lifted. I love the Olympic lifters because they have to clean jerk the weight, put it over their heads. And this is not a good lift, right?

Brave Men: Right.

Jeff: I mean, that's not a lift. And so what they have to do is, they have to hold it there as if they're just having the best day of their entire lives. And yet every muscle fiber in their bodies is screaming at them one word: dummy! Right? *(Laughter)* And the judges look at them and they determine whether or not they are under control, or we might say *hupo menes*. Are they living under the weight? Are they steadfast? Are they bearing up?

Now I want to tell you something; let me just stop and interject. How do you do that? Because we get bombarded all the time day by day with difficulty. And yet the Scriptures say this is a good thing; *hupo menes* is a good thing. It's a good thing to live under, to bear up under difficult things. How do you do that?

Well I'll tell you how I do that. One of the things that I preach to myself quite regularly is what the *Westminster Confession* says about God in His providential acts. It says three things to me. It says to me that God is good, that He is wise, and that He is all-powerful.

Now I don't know about you. When I listen to myself when I preach,--I don't always listen to myself when I preach,--but when I listen to myself when I preach I tell myself those three things about God. And I listen, because I know that those are the things that are going to carry me through the difficult situations. When I believe that I'm in a situation that an all-wise God put me in by His providence, that this is no accident, and that the situation will work out for my

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betterment and my good, and that He is all-powerful and has the ability at any given moment to change my situation, I can't help but think to myself that the best I can do is stand and wait upon the living God to grant me His help.

And so that's the best advice I can give you in terms of how to live steadfastly under difficult situations. But that's not the only thing. Faith is the other thing.

Now what is faith? Well, this is basically the definition of faith given by the Reformers. And it's fancy language, but we'll break it down.

Notitia basically means knowledge. Faith knows something. And faith assents—that's *assensus*—to what it knows.

Now let's stop there for just a minute. For instance, let's say that I have only those two things. Let's say that I have knowledge and assent. James says that qualifies me to be a demon, because that's what the demons know. And that's what the demons assent to—they assent to knowledge and they know. But that doesn't make them believers. It's enough to make them demons.

What is it that makes faith saving faith? What is saving faith? Saving faith is *fiducia*, and *fiducia* is trust. And what is trust? Trust is the embrace of the heart to what we know to be true and assent to be true with our minds. It is that willing embrace; it is that loving embrace.

Let me put it this way. The demons know that God exists and that Jesus is His Son. They assent to that and hate Him. But the believer knows that to be true, assents to that and loves it, trusts in it. He puts his or her whole self into that knowledge; that's the idea. That's what saving faith is.

Now I want us to think about that saving faith in two ways. First of all, faith can be objective. In other words, I can write up here on the board the Apostles' Creed. And I can say, "Let's recite this together." And you guys wouldn't give it a thought. I doubt that one of you would say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa! We're not saying that; that's not right." You would all say that the Apostles' Creed is generally something that all Christians can gather around and recite together, and so let's recite it. That's an objective, outside-of-us, declaration of our collective faith. We believe, and so on.

Now that's objective faith. And there is also subjective faith. The subjective faith is how you personally hold to this. For instance, let me give you an example. I say to you objectively that God is good; God is all-wise; God is all-powerful. That's objective. And my guess is that every one of you would say, "Amen, brother!"

My guess is that every one of you would say, "Amen." But if I went around the room and I said, "How are you feeling about that?", you'd say, "You know, I'm having a little bit of a difficult time. And I know this to be true; I'm struggling a little bit. And some of you might say, "I'm struggling a lot. And if I allow myself to admit it I'm struggling with the wisdom of God at this point." And some of you would say, "I'm not struggling at all; I'm right in there."

That's subjective faith. In other words, that's how each one of us holds to the objective faith that we all confess.

Now I want you to know something. This aspect of subjective faith is important, because for instance the Bible talks about "*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*" I think that's James 4:4. What is he talking about? Well, it's talking about that subjective aspect of faith. In other words, how do you feel right now? Do you feel distant from God? Well, that's because the way you hold the faith right now is weak.

Can I say it? That's not something that's startling. Nor is it something that is foreign to any one of us—not only in this room, but in the whole collective Christian body.

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So we’re all at different places at different times. And we all need to continually be like the disciples: crying out to God, crying out to Christ, “Lord, increase my faith.” Okay?

Now Paul has both the objective and the subjective aspects of faith in mind. And what I want you to gather is this. And if you’re a Christian both have to be in mind, right? If you exercise faith you exercise faith in an object of your faith. What’s the object of your faith? It’s always Christ. Your faith—your subjective faith—is always reaching to its object, and that’s Christ.

Now the subjective effect is steadfastness, right? How do you define *steadfast*? I can say that my faith is strong. If I’m not feeling all that steadfast, if I’m feeling that I’m wavering under the weight, then my faith is a little weak.

Here is the thing that I would say to you before we go to the next point, and that’s this. The thing I would say to you with absolute conviction is that even a weak faith will lay hold of the whole and entire Christ. And therefore it isn’t the weak faith that saves or the strong faith; it is the Christ who saves us through faith.

Somebody comes up to you and says, “You have such a strong faith! I wish I had that.”

You say, “No, no, no. This faith of mine is strong and weak at any given moment. But what you want is the Christ of faith; that’s what you want. You want the object of my faith, because if you have the object of my faith you’ll have a faith that will reach for Him too.” That’s the idea.

So that leads us to God’s people. Now how do you know that you are among God’s people? How do you know you’re among them? That’s a good question. I think that’s a question that plagues a good many people. And so we have to answer that question.

And here’s the answer to that question. Steadfastness plus faith equals evidence. Let me show you that, because it’s important for you to see that.

Look with me at verses 4 and 5. “*Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith.*” Go down to verse 5. “*This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God.*”

Now we’ll enlarge on that in just a minute. But steadfastness plus faith equals evidence. This is how you know that you belong in the church, or that you are part of the church.

Now let’s think about that. How is this evidence seen? How does it come into view? Well that’s part of the enlargement of the verses that we just read: persecution plus affliction equals *hupo menes*; it equals endurance; remaining under—the exercise of steadfastness and faith. Persecution plus affliction equals those things.

In other words, how do we have evidence that we are part of the people of God? The evidence comes from how we hold to the object of faith. Yes; go ahead.

Brave Man: Persecution and affliction are really kind of the same thing.

Jeff: Ah, my friend, good question. That’s a wonderful segway. Should I pay you for that? (*Laughter*) Or are you happy just to volunteer? Persecution has a spectrum to it. Think about it like this. This word for *persecution* can mean anything from “harass” to “take one’s life.” And everything in between—to chase, to inflict pain; it has that kind of spectrum to it, okay?

So when we think of *persecute*, it can be and has been used in the Scriptures in a positive way. If we are to persecute righteousness, we are then to pursue it, to chase after it, right? So the idea is not necessarily that, although it’s oftentimes and in the main used for that because it can mean to harass or to cause death. That would be a bad thing, right?

Now how about affliction? Affliction describes not just the intensity—the harassment all the way to the cause of death,—but it describes the sphere. And affliction encompasses the physical,

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the mental, the economic, the social; it encompasses all those things. So one word describes for us the intensity level. And the other describes the sphere in which this takes place.

So this is kind of a fascinating way that he does this. He basically says that no matter where you are in terms of your life, maybe your home life is going well. Maybe your social life is going great. But maybe it's your economic life. Maybe it's work that's very down on you because they're making you do something that's not according to biblical principles and so on, and you're having a really difficult time there. Or maybe that sphere stretches, and you're experiencing difficulty in other areas of your life as well. That's the sphere, and the intensity is obviously part of that.

So what's happening here? Well, what's happening here is that we're finding these people in the experience of tribulation. And this tribulation for them is being caused by the fact that the government is on their heels.

Now why do I say that? It's because Paul is preaching, and they don't like what he's preaching. Jews are there stirring up trouble for him. And the people of the city drag Paul to the magistrate of the city. It's actually Jason because Paul slips out. But they point at Jason and they say, "This guy and the guys that he lets stay with him, the guys that he allowed to preach, these guys are turning the world upside down." This is what we said last time. "They are proclaiming another king. They're claiming that Caesar is not lord, but that Jesus is Lord." And so they're experiencing tribulation. As Paul says in 2 Timothy, they're in the mouth of the lion, shall we say?

Now I want you to think about this just for a minute. I want to pause and I want to ask the question: Why is it that we experience this kind of trouble in this life? Well I have a couple of quotes for you that I want you to see. This first quote is a wonderful quote and it's by Ronald Wallace; it explains so much. Let me read it to you; it's great.

“The tribulation is due to the tension and fear that evil has of the triumphant and developing kingdom of Christ around it. It is the increase of goodness on the earth that causes this intense reaction of evil from the simple motive of fear.”

“In other words, as gospel good goes forward, evil and fear of it and hatred for it will react with an oppressive move. And so in this life there is always going to be gospel good rising, surging up. Why? Because the Rider on the white horse is riding and bent on conquering. And yet following Him are plagues, death and war. And they are always seeking out of the motive of fear to devour. The good.”

Let me give you another quote. *“The question is sometimes asked whether the world gets better or worse as it grows older. An optimist and a pessimist take opposite sides upon it; both are wrong.”* This is James Denny. James Denny is a theologian of about a hundred years or more ago.

And this is what he goes on to say. He says, *“It does not get better only, nor worse only, but both. It's progress; it's not simply a progress in good—evil being gradually driven from the field,—nor is it simply a progress in evil, before which the good continually disappears. It is a progress in which good and evil alike come to maturity, bearing their ripest fruit, showing all that they can do, proving their strengths to the utmost against each other. The progress is not in good itself or in evil itself, but in the antagonism of the one to the other.”*

Now I think that describes where we are and where we have always been for the two thousand years of post-Resurrection history. In other words gospel good, the climax of the gospel that was foretold in the Old Testament, that always is better; that always is increasing and surging

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forward. But in its face is evil trying to suppress it and hold it down. And that will always be the case until the very end.

Now I realize that I’m speaking contrary to two other different camps. One camp, the pre-millennial camp, is going to say to me, “Brother, you’ve missed it, because the evil is only going to get worse and the good is going to diminish.”

And then I have my other brothers on the other side saying, “no, no, no.” The post-millennialists say, “Brother, you’ve missed it, because the evil is going to eventually recede and the good is only going to get better and rise up.” And I realize that I’m right in the middle. I mean, being right is a lonely thing. *(Laughter)*

And so what are you going to do? Well, just continue to proclaim. Yes, Kirk? By the way, Kirk, it’s good to see you.

Kirk Ellerbusch: Thank you. Throughout history there have been some ups and downs.

Jeff: Yep.

Kirk: Okay. At certain times it seems like righteousness is prevailing.

Jeff: Yes.

Kirk: And at other times—and I think even now in our culture today—it seems like righteousness is attacked more so than ever.

Jeff: Yeah.

Kirk: You know, I see what you’re saying.

Jeff: Yes.

Kirk: But there is that fluctuation throughout our history.

Jeff: Yes. But don’t you see that fluctuation that as the good rises the evil pushes back? There’s a diminishing, and yet the good rises. And there’s a diminishing, and so on; however you want to draw that curve, you know?

Well let me give you an illustration; I’m going to call it “the man in the box.” I don’t want to do too much with this illustration, except to prove my point. Not only do you see this on a larger scale theologically for the sake of argument, but you actually see it in just an incidental example.

I had a friend who is a p.j.—a Para jumper—who was training to be a Para jumper at the time. Apparently the Para jumpers are the special forces that are not only trained to fight, but they are also trained to rescue. So for instance, if the Green Berets get into trouble, the Para jumpers go in and rescue them.

I’m only understanding this from hearsay and what I know about it through these two friends of mine who have become Para jumpers. But this is the elite of the elite. Part of their training is really more of a blind thing; I would never want to do it. Apparently there is a box. And they are made to ball up and get inside the box. And your head’s not up, so you’re made to ball up your head down in your arms. And so you’re all smooshed in this box like a ball.

And my one friend went to sleep in the box.

Brave Man: Wow!

Jeff: He was able to just calm himself and go to sleep. And his trainer told him, “If you are ever taken captive, do not do what you’re doing now.” Apparently he was able to calm himself in many situations and just relax and endure a lot.

And they told him, “Don’t do that, because if you are that calm in the face of your enemy, they are only going to be that much more hostile and aggressive toward you. So show a little fear; show a little bend, because that will mitigate the response,” right?

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But you see, the gospel is not mitigating its response. The gospel of Jesus Christ is going forward with power. And the antagonism that is coming against that is an onslaught, and we should expect that.

All right. So this is our context, and it produces what? It produces evidence. It produces evidence that we are part of the body of Christ, that we are part of Christ’s kingdom.

Now I want to show you something. It says in our text that this is evidence that we are worthy of the kingdom of God.

Now I want to ask you a question, and I hope you’re asking this yourself. Is what Paul is teaching works righteousness? Is it works righteousness? And I hope it’s not. (*Laughter*) And it’s not. Paul is not teaching a works righteousness.

So how do we reconcile this? Look again at the text. *“This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God.”*

Is that works righteousness? No. It might be considered works righteousness if we didn’t have what comes next. What comes next is in verse 11; take a look at it for just a second. *“To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling, and may fulfill every resolve for good, and every work of faith by His power.”*

Now think about that. You are only worthy because God has made you worthy. God fulfills every desire in you for good work. God fulfills every work of faith by His power, not by yours. And so God gives faith which produces endurance, which is evidence of worthiness. So if I can put it a little bit differently I would put it like this. I would say that God makes us worthy through faith by His power. That’s the way to think about it. That’s how verse 11 rounds things out for us, how it gets us out of thinking that this is all on us, because it’s not all on us. It’s all on the One who made us to be what it is that we are, and that is worthy.

Now I want to pause. Do you have any questions about that before we go on? Does that strike a chord, or are we okay? Yes, Don?

Don Maurer: What if a person who professes to be a Christian is not exhibiting any evidence in his life?

Jeff: Right. Well, we’ve talked about that before, and that’s always a question worth pondering again. And we’ve said it like this. We’ve said that our union with Christ is like a big circle. Don, I just drew a circle.

Don: Yes.

Jeff: And that’s the union that we enjoy with Christ. And within that union that we enjoy, we enjoy forensic benefits. And those forensic benefits are things like justification and adoption. But we also enjoy renovative benefits. And those benefits are benefits like sanctification, both definitive and progressive.

And what I mean by that is this. I mean that in union with Christ, as Ephesians 1:3 says, we possess all the spiritual blessings that are in Christ. And that means we possess justification in Christ. But we also possess sanctification in Christ. And therefore a person may not say, “I am a justified Christian. But I am not a Christian who has received the gift of sanctification.”

If one says that, one is saying, “I don’t know Christ,” because if I’m in Christ then there should be both forensic and renovative benefits.

Now that’s not to put a quantity on the renovation. I think the renovation can be minimal. I think with regard to the Thessalonian believers that it probably was minimal at this point in their lives. They didn’t know much, although when you read the letters sometimes it feels like they

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know more than we do, especially as it pertains to the man of lawlessness, who we’ll look at next week.

So the idea is that sanctification can be more or less in a person’s life, and yet it must be in a person’s life. That’s the point that I’m making to you, Don; it must be in a person’s life, great or small. There must be some sort of renovative work going on. Does that—

Don: Yes; well put.

Jeff: Okay, good. Okay, anything else? Yes?

Don Bishop: When I was in high school I was part of “youth for Christ.” We used to call them “Clairol Christians.” *(Laughter)*

Don Maurer: Don, you’re giving away your age.

Jeff: Yeah, Clairol Christians; got it. I don’t think anyone outside of this room is going to know what you’re talking about. *(Laughter)*

Bob Busted: I just wanted you to talk to us just a little bit more about this situation that we sometimes see good rising up, and then other times we see evil taking over, testing our faith, I guess.

Jeff: Yeah.

Bob: Just talk to me a bit about this. Is that God’s plan? Is it God’s plan that we should always be in that mode, because you said it was all equal or all the same. Is it God’s plan that we should be in this mode where once in a while good prevails and once in a while that evil seems to be the powerful ones? And if so, what is He trying to accomplish by that?

Jeff: Yeah; those are good questions. So I’ll start with your last question. What is He trying to accomplish by that? I think He’s trying to accomplish and is accomplishing Christ’s likeness in us. And He does that by having His church walk through humiliation like His Son walked through.

So for instance, as the letter of Peter finishes up, *“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and He will exalt you at the proper time.”* So we walk now through the valley of tears, through the way of humiliation, which is the way of the Lord. We’re not better than our Master, right? And so as we walk through this trying time we’re becoming more like Christ; it’s a refining process.

Did God intend it to be this way? I think He did. I think that after 2,000 years that is what we see. Now let me talk to you about that for a little bit. So for instance, when I think about it in our own country, I think about our founding.

Forgive me if you have a different view; you can interact with me if you’d like.

But my own view of our founding is that we were not perfect. But we were a people seeking religious freedom, and we found it. And the Puritans found it in the Plymouth colony. And not only did they print Bibles and psalters, but they made beer. *(Laughter)* And so in this colony we had a flourishing religious freedom.

And then comes the first Great Awakening. And the first Great Awakening was based on Calvinistic principles—Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield. My own view is that I think it was beautiful.

And then comes the Second Great Awakening. And by the time you get to the Second Great Awakening, religious freedom had in some ways produced a byproduct. And I don’t mean this disparagingly, but this is the point of it. It had produced people like the Mormons, and deviant cults which were able to exercise the same kinds of freedoms. And so there were inroads made into the church, so that by the time the Second Great Awakening comes about, there is more of a

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synergy in terms of their understanding of man’s way of salvation. In other words, man contributes in some way to this whole endeavor of salvation.

So for instance you have Charles Finney who has the anxious bench. People come forward and they sit on the anxious bench. We’ll make you as fearful as we possibly can. We’ll try to get an emotional response from you, because we believe that we’re responsible in some way for our part in this salvation endeavor. And so that’s the Second Great Awakening. We begin to see the deterioration.

And then after the Second Great Awakening you find liberalism rising up after the Civil War in our country. And there’s a battle. But the battle is pretty short-lived. And by the 1920s we find that liberalism has taken over the institutions and the seminaries of our country. And we live on the laurels of a past faithfulness. And by the time the ‘60s come, you find that the slide into theological liberalism is pretty great because you have the God Is Dead movement, and so on.

So for instance, when I think about our own country, I think we started in a good spot, and then we descended. The question will be why did we descend? Well, I think we descended because the good of the gospel is never going to be unopposed in this life; it just isn’t.

The question is, how will we stand? And let me just pull in Ligonier’s latest theology survey. If you guys looked at Ligonier’s theology survey you will recognize that one of the things that they say is this: Gender identity issues, as the world understands them, are creeping into the church. There’s a slow creep of the world’s view of gender issues that’s coming into the church.

And that’s how it happens. The church doesn’t remain steadfast. The church doesn’t remain faithful to the Object of its faith. And all of a sudden we begin to believe what the world believes. And often it’s so the world will leave us alone. Remember what happens. If you back off, then the world lightens up.

And that’s what’s happening. As the church backs off because they don’t want the full onslaught of evil coming at them, the evil backs off because it says, okay; you’re going to play our game; good. You know, that’s the kind of thing.

And so the way the church gets it’s backbone and begins to say to the world, “No, we’re not going to do that anymore,” and “No, that’s not right,” and that sort of thing, all of a sudden what will happen is that I think you’ll see the church surge forward. And I think you’ll start to see the same things happen. Bob, does that help?

Bob: I think so.

Jeff: Anybody else?

Kirk: Everything seems to be going downhill.

Jeff: It is. And we’re still in the downhill mode. I actually think—

Kirk: I mean, even with the founding of our United States, the way you presented it, it seems to me that it’s up and down. The way you presented it, it seems like that.

Jeff: Well I can say along the way that there were certain individuals who had retrieved moments. For instance I said that from after the Civil War until the 1920s was downhill, but it really wasn’t. For instance, from the late 1850s you find that great battle that happens between Princeton and Union Seminary. And from 1850 to 1920 I think Princeton is winning. And Princeton is winning because you have people like A. A. Hodge and Benjamin Warfield, and stalwarts who are writing and keeping at it. But once they die what happens is this. It’s what J. G. Machen says about Princeton. After the death of B. B. Warfield he said that Old Princeton died with him. He said that when they carried out Warfield’s casket it was like watching them carry the seminary out along with him. And I’ve painted a sad picture. And so you’re right.

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Kirk: But I’ll say this; it’s like what Jesus said: “The way is broad that leads to destruction.”

Jeff: Yes.

Kirk: And the thing is that as God’s children we have to be—and I’m speaking to myself here,—we’ve got to be willing to fight and get in the battle.

Jeff: Yes. The question is, what does that mean? I agree with you. “When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith?” And I think that’s the question, right? Will He find faith?

And I want to be careful about this because I’m a Second Amendment guy; I believe in possessing guns. But it doesn’t say, “When the Son of Man comes, will He find the right to bear arms still intact?”, right? And I want the right to bear arms still to be intact. But He says, “Will He find faith?”

And really this is my problem. My problem is that in our world today what we’re finding is, we’re finding especially among men—and I’ll just say this to you—we’re finding men all of a sudden waking up and saying, hey, we’ve been feminized for far too long, and we need to take this back. And so what they end up doing is that they end up saying, “Hey, where is this thing called patriarchy that everybody has been downplaying for so long? That needs to occur.”

And so what happens is that they begin to adopt a type of patriarchy. And then all the battles become about gender. And what I mean by that is, here you have a trans-gender saying, “Don’t call me a man anymore; call me a woman.” And you have the conservative man who has all of a sudden discovered his masculinity saying, “Oh yeah? Well, I’m a man!”

And it’s like wait a minute! This is not about gender. Yes, you are a man; that’s right. And so is this person, even though this person doesn’t believe he’s a man. But this is not a battle about masculinity. This is a battle about faith. This is a battle about steadfastness. This is a battle that has an entirely different sphere to it. And the problem is that we get lured into fighting the battle on the world’s terms. And that’s where we get all messed up, you know? Are we done? I don’t mean are we done, but are we good? I knew it! Don?

Don Maurer: And that’s what the world and some of the church doesn’t realize. These things are gospel issues.

Jeff: Yes.

Don: The reason we won’t back down isn’t because we enjoy confrontation and want to start a fight.

Jeff: That’s right; some of us don’t. But Don does. *(Laughter)* You know how he pokes a little bit. *(Laughter)* Tom, I just want you to know something. I don’t want you to leave here thinking that we pick on the blind guy, and that it’s terrible. *(Laughter)* You know what I mean? It’s Tom, right?

Tom Benedict: Right.

Jeff: Tom, this guy is a poker. *(Laughter)*

Tom: I like it. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Yeah, and he’ll poke. Now I want you to know, I just want you to know that you like him, but he will poke you too. *(Laughter)* I’m just saying—

Don: I’m an equal opportunity poker. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Yeah, he’s an equal opportunity poker. *(Laughter)* Don, go ahead.

Don: But you know, the reason—before I was so rudely interrupted!—*(Laughter)*, but the reason that we keep on keeping on is not because we enjoy confrontation.

Jeff: Yeah.

Don: It’s because these are life and death issues.

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Jeff: Yes.

Don: You know, they are 1 Corinthians 6 issues, if you will.

Jeff: Yes.

Don: And it’s a gospel issue.

Jeff: Yes. And actually, Don, that’s what I was going to say. We know what faith is; we’ve already talked about it. The question is, what is power? It says that we’re kept by His power.

So what is it? In other words, how does He make us worthy? And I think the answer to that takes us back to 1 Thessalonians 1:5. Just go back there a second. It says, starting in verse 4, *“For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you because our gospel came to you not only in word but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.”*

In other words, the power of God is manifest through the preaching of the gospel. And the gospel is taken up by the Spirit of God and it’s applied to the person. And that person comes alive; he has a sense of conviction, and so on. So Don, that’s absolutely 100% right. And in fact he says something very similar in chapter 2; absolutely right.

But for what purpose? I think I’m going to stop here, and we’ll pick it up with the purpose next time, okay? So why don’t we pray, and then we’ll close out.

Father, thank You for this day, for the blessing of life in Jesus Christ. Thank You, Father, for Your word. And thank You for enabling us to take our stand upon it. Father, in the world we know we’ll have trouble. And yet we also understand that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. And so Lord, we ask that You’ll cause us to stand fast in the Lord Jesus Christ no matter where we find ourselves facing the struggle. And we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. *(Applause)*