

**The Memoirs of Peter**  
**The Future According To Jesus, Part 4**  
**Mark 13:3-37**  
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Tonight we return to our study of the future according to Jesus Christ. Our Lord laid out for us what to expect, what's coming. We know the future because He told us exactly what it would look like. You know, people live in a certain amount of dread and sort of a sense of impending doom about the reality that the world may in fact at some point end. From the proverbial sort of joke of the guy wearing the sandwich board that says 'The End is Near' to the sort of ideas that creep across the culture and permeate the culture, the sense that the end is coming is clear. According to the National Geographic website, one of those potential ends is feared this year – perhaps you've heard about it, the whole 2012 thing. December 21, 2012 (give or take a day) supposedly was very momentous to the Mayan civilization. And a Maya expert at Colgate University, Anthony Aveni, explains that "during the empire's heyday, the Maya invented the Long Count, a lengthy circular calendar that transplanted the roots of Maya culture all the way back to creation itself." He goes on to say: "During the 2012 winter solstice, time runs out on the current era of the Long Count Maya calendar, which began (according to them) at the dawn of the last creation period: August 11, 3114 B.C. In December of this year, the lengthy era ends and the complicated, cyclical calendar will roll over again to Day Zero." In light of that – and although all the Mayan experts say they didn't predict the end of the world this year; it's simply the end and rotation of the calendar. In spite of all of that, there are a lot of people (I don't know if you know this or not) who are genuinely worried that December 21, 2012 might bring the end of the world.

NASA's website reports thousands of questions they've received regarding the 2012 doomsday predictions. David Morrison, senior scientist with NASA Astrobiology Institute, said this: "A lot of the submitters are people who are genuinely frightened. I've had two teenagers who were considering killing themselves because they didn't want to be around when the world ends. Two women said they were contemplating killing their children and themselves so that they wouldn't have to suffer through the end of the world."

So there is in the background of the human psyche and awareness the reality that, at some point, the world will end. We don't know when. We certainly have no reason to expect it's December 21, 2012, but we do know this: The world will come to an end. History as we know it will end. This planet will end because our Lord said so. The process for that could begin tonight or maybe next week or maybe next month or next year, or it could still be a decade away, a century away

or even a thousand years away. We really just don't know. But according to our Lord Himself, there is an appointed end. It's coming.

He told His disciples about it on late Tuesday afternoon of the Passion Week. As the sun began to set over the city of Jerusalem, Jesus and His disciples were resting on top of the Mount of Olives looking back across the Kidron Valley to the temple mount. In that context, four of Jesus' disciples (the intimate circle of His disciples) came and privately asked Him three questions. They asked Him when will the temple be destroyed that You have just prophesied will happen? Secondly, what are the signs of Your coming? And thirdly, what are the signs of the end of the age? Those were their questions. And in a remarkable sermon, Jesus answered all of those questions. Jesus explained to them (and through the inspiration of the Spirit, we have had it revealed to us) what the end will be, what the future looks like.

Now just to remind you, the sermon that Jesus preaches here to these four disciples is organized into four parts. First of all, verses 5 through 13 describes what I've called the beginning of birth pangs. This is the period of time from Christ's life on earth to the midpoint of a future seven year tribulation (and I'll explain why that transitions with verse 13 into 14, Lord willing, next Sunday night). The second part of this sermon comes in verses 14 to 23. It is the great tribulation period. This is the period from the midpoint of that future seven year tribulation period to its end. The last three and a half years is typically referred to not as just 'the tribulation,' but as 'the great tribulation.' The third movement in this sermon comes in verse 24 to verse 27. It's the second coming. This happens as an event in history, to bring history as we know it to a conclusion. And then fourthly, the sermon ends in verses 28 to 37 with an exhortation to be alert, to be ready. The events that Jesus describes might be set in motion tonight. They might be set in motion tomorrow, but they will come. Our Lord promised it will happen. In this sermon, Jesus specifically prophesies what will happen from His life on earth through the age in which we live and all the way to the second coming.

Now we have begun our study of just the first part of this sermon, the beginning of birth pangs – that period of time from Jesus' life on earth until the midpoint of that future seven-year tribulation. Let me read it for you again. Mark 13, and I'll begin in verse 3:

As [Jesus] was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?" And Jesus began to say to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' and will mislead many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will also be famines. These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.

But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them. The gospel must first be preached to all the nations. When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”

In this first section of what’s called the Olivet Discourse because it was given on the Mount of Olives, Jesus describes the period that began with His own resurrection and will end at the halfway point of the tribulation period. Jesus describes that entire period as the beginning of birth pangs. Notice the end of verse 8: “These things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.” The birth pangs Jesus predicts here will occur throughout human history but, like contractions and a woman giving birth, these things will occur in relentless and ever-increasing waves of intensity and frequency as we approach the end.

Specifically, Jesus identifies several of these birth pangs. We looked at three of them last week – first of all, false Christs, prophets and predictions. People will come and say, “I am the Christ.” Prophets will come and prophesy falsely. There will be predictions that are wrong that the end is now. Jesus says don’t believe them. In verses 7 and the first part of verse 8, Jesus predicts there’ll be war. There will be war, actual wars. There will be rumors of wars. There will be wars between individual nations and there will be wars between kingdoms, between great world empires, great world rules. Thirdly, there will be natural disasters. The end of verse 8 gives us those -- they include earthquakes all over the globe, devastating famines and worldwide epidemics of disease according to Luke.

Now that’s where we left off last time. There are a couple of other birth pangs that will occur throughout human history but, again, keep in mind that while they occur throughout human history, they occur in much greater intensity and frequency as we approach the very end. The fourth birth pang that Jesus identifies here is intense persecution. You see that in verses 9 through 13 that we just read together. Now the persecution that Jesus describes in these verses -- He tells us will come primarily from three sources. First of all, it will come from false religion. Look at verse 9: “But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues...” Jesus warns His followers (in this case, the apostles who faced this in their lifetimes, as we’ll see in a moment, Christians throughout the church age, and those who will come to Christ during the tribulation period) that religious persecution will be a frequent reality. “Be on your guard,” Jesus says. The Greek word means beware, watch out for a specific danger, a specific hazard.

Specifically, what's the danger we're to be alert for? He says in verse 9: "for they will deliver you to the courts..." The Greek word translated 'deliver' is often used in the New Testament of arresting someone. The word for 'courts' is the plural form of the word 'Sanhedrin,' the great Jewish court, the seventy men who ruled over the nation. There were smaller, local versions of this. It describes local Jewish courts that were connected to each synagogue. The judges in those local synagogue courts had the authority to hear charges of heresy. And when they found a person guilty of such charges of heresy, they had the authority to carry out punishment, and often that included flogging, a punishment allowed by Deuteronomy 25; you can read about it in verses 2 and 3 of Deuteronomy 25. The Mishnah, one of the Jewish documents, records how that flogging prescribed in Deuteronomy 25 was carried out and applied in everyday Jewish legal practice. The beating was inflicted with a strap made of calf leather divided into four smaller leather straps, and then even smaller leather straps were woven through those four to make them stronger. Deuteronomy 25:3 says that the strokes could be no more than forty. So Jewish law demanded that those carrying out the flogging be flogged themselves if they exceeded the forty strokes that are mentioned in Deuteronomy 25. So in normal practice, just in case they miscounted, they would never give forty strokes -- they always stopped at thirty-nine. That's why in 2 Corinthians 11, Paul says: "Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes." Five times in synagogue courts, Paul was found guilty of heresy because of the view he held of Christ and was flogged. Thirteen of the thirty-nine strokes were delivered to the chest. Twenty-six of them were delivered to the back in normal Jewish practice according to the Mishnah. Jesus told His disciples that day to expect religious persecution. They would be found guilty of heresy and they would be beaten severely. Luke adds that Jesus added this: they would also be thrown into prison (Luke 21:12). Jesus warned His disciples that all who would become His followers -- for them, religious persecution would frequently be a reality.

And didn't that happen? If you're familiar with the early chapters of Acts, in Acts 4 and 5, shortly after the ascension, the apostles are arrested, brought before Jewish courts. And in chapter 5, verse 40, all the apostles received the flogging I was just describing -- thirty-nine lashes. In Acts 8 and 9, a man named Saul comes along and he ravages the church. He arrests Christians. He has them beaten. He imprisons them and even has some killed. Our Lord's words came to fruition very early and it has continued throughout church history. Tragically, throughout the history of the church, the worst persecution to come against the church has come from the religious, from false religion. Do you know that's still true in the world today? If you travel much -- certainly Christians are persecuted by secularists, they're persecuted by governments, as we will see in a moment, but some of the major persecution even in today's world that comes against the church and our brothers and sisters around the world comes from false religion. When I travel to Russia, most of the persecution the church there encounters doesn't come from the secular authorities; it doesn't even come from the secular people and atheistic culture. It comes from the Russian Orthodox Church. And the same thing is true around the world. As our own country continues to drift from its Judeo-Christian roots, I think we can

expect persecution of various forms to come. Don't be surprised if that persecution comes from cults, from Roman Catholicism, from liberal Protestantism, from 'acceptable' forms of religion.

Jesus also promised that persecution would come against us from another source – not only from false religion, but from secular authorities. Look at the second half of verse 9: "...and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them." Literally, the text says: "You will be made to stand..." In other words, you're going to be brought before the secular authorities accused of a crime, as a criminal. The word for 'governors' describes Roman officials like Pilate and Festus and Felix in the book of Acts. The word for 'kings' describes less important potentates – men like Herod Agrippa and Herod Antipas, local kings over smaller regions. Jesus' point here is that His followers would face persecution from official secular authorities. Why? Well, notice that Jesus gives both a human reason and a divine reason. Notice: "for My sake," verse 9 says (literally 'on account of Me'). Because of our loyalty to Christ, we will sometimes face persecution before the secular authorities. And you know, if you're informed at all, that there are literally thousands of Christians right now, tonight as we meet here, who are being persecuted in various ways around the globe. And when it comes to secular authorities, it's because of their loyalty to Christ. But notice, I love this, there's also a divine side. God has a purpose in this -- He's not off of His throne when persecution comes. Notice verse 9 says: "...as a testimony to them." God has arranged that official persecution will come against His people so that the secular authorities might hear the truth of the gospel. And some of them, according to the book of Acts, will come to genuine faith in Christ.

So persecution will come, but the question is why? Why does persecution come? Well, there are a number of reasons given in the Bible. Our Lord mentioned that they'll hate you because they hated Me, and they hated Me because I was the Light that exposed the darkness of their sin. I'm reminded often of that encounter with the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot. Right after unrighteous Lot – and I know he's righteous before the Lord, but he was unrighteous in his living pattern—right after unrighteous Lot offered his daughters to the men of Sodom instead of allowing them to ravage the angels who were visiting with them, what did they say to Lot? "Wait a minute. Who are you to be a judge over us?" In other words, by not catering to our preferences, you're sitting in judgment. And that's the way the world responds to us as well.

But Jesus gives another reason for persecution here. Why does persecution often come on believers? What often starts the persecuting of Christians? One of the reasons is in verse 10: "The gospel must first be preached to all the nations." Buried right here in the heart of a passage about persecution is the spread of the gospel. Persecution often starts when Christians attempt to fulfill the mission of evangelism because the message of the gospel is offensive because it says you are spiritually blind and you are spiritually dead and you are reduced to a beggar before God. You have nothing to offer Him, and your only hope is to throw yourself on His mercy. That's offensive. Do you remember Jesus gave that message to His hometown synagogue in Nazareth? He said: 'I've come to set free the prisoners and I've come to give sight to the blind.' He was

talking spiritually. And what was their response to that? ‘Oh, it’s a wonderful hometown boy come home. We’re thrilled to have Him.’ No! They became violent, tried to kill Him.

So often when believers engage in this same mission of evangelism that Jesus did, it exposes them to the same rejection that He faced. You’ve encountered this, right? Sometimes, you know, people in North Texas are nice and you try to share the gospel with them, you try to bring up your faith and, and they’re polite about it – perhaps not open, not receptive -- but polite. There are other times (and we saw this in California especially) when people are angry. Sometimes persecution comes from false religion. Sometimes it comes from secular authorities. And often it comes because of the offense of the gospel.

Now when this persecution comes from either secular authorities or from official religious authorities, how are we to respond? Look at verse 11: “When they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit.” Now folks, this text has been terribly abused by students, by lazy teachers and preachers. I’ve actually heard pastors say something like this: “You know, I don’t really need to prepare my messages. I just get up and the Holy Spirit tells me what to say.” That’s not what this is about. This text has nothing to do with the normal teaching and preaching of God’s Word. He’s talking about your defense when you are arrested and brought before either religious or secular authorities. When that happens, He says, don’t worry about what you’ll say. The Holy Spirit will help you in that moment. And if you doubt that, read the book of Acts. It’s amazing what the Lord allowed those in the midst of persecution, how He allowed them to respond. Read about Peter and John and Paul and you’ll be reminded that this promise has been fulfilled in the distant past. Read the story of the martyrs. Read ‘Fox’s Book of Martyrs’ and you’ll be amazed at the power of the response those who were facing persecution and death had -- and that’s because Jesus is fulfilling His promise. In the midst of that defense, it’s not you who speaks, but the Holy Spirit through you. If that time comes for us (and of course, we pray that it doesn’t but it might; and if it does come for us), this promise will be good for us at that point as well.

So expect persecution from false religion. Expect it from the secular authorities. Tragically, the third source of persecution is much harder to deal with -- it comes from personal relationships. Look at verse 12: “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death.” It’s tragic, isn’t it? Persecution and hatred will even come against Jesus’ followers from their most intimate relationships – that of brothers and sisters and parents and children and uncles and aunts and so forth. Close friends – you come to Christ and your friends are no longer your friends. Why? Why do people who say they love us turn against us because of our faith? Well, there are any number of reasons – perhaps out of hatred for the gospel, perhaps out of personal jealousy and resentment, perhaps out of a desire at some points to save their own lives, or perhaps to win approval and enhance their reputation and, and the list goes on and on. But regardless, brother will betray brother, parents their children, and

children their parents. Why? Ultimately, the reason is that our spiritual loyalties run far deeper than our blood relationships. Read John 8. I won't take you there right now, but you remember in John 8 Jesus says that every human being either has God as his Father or Satan as his father. He's either a child of God or a child of the devil. That's it. Those are the only two choices. You, as you sit here tonight, fall into one of those two categories. And you are oriented more toward the people who are fellow children (either of God or of the devil) than you are even to your blood relatives. That foundational relationship determines where our true loyalties lie, even when it comes to people who are close to us. The sons of the devil will hate the sons of God even if they're blood related. And the sons of God love other sons of God even more than blood relations.

Now notice in verse 11 Jesus promised the Spirit's help in all persecution, but the Spirit's help doesn't always mean things will work out well. In verse 9, it may mean that we'll be arrested and that we're found guilty. And we might even be physically punished or thrown into prison. In verse 12, Jesus tells us that persecution will sometimes even lead to our death. Now in verse 13, Jesus summarizes what He's been describing about this persecution that, as His followers, we'll face. He says: "You will be hated by all because of My name..." That doesn't mean hated by every single individual, obviously. That means by men in general, as Hendriksen said: "regardless of their rank or station or race or nationality or sex or age." Indiscriminately, we will be hated by different categories of people. By the way, the tense of the Greek verb translated 'hated' is really unusual -- it means this will go on and on and on. They will keep on hating you.

One commentator writing on this phrase "because of My name" writes this, I love this. It's going to happen because of My name. Here's what Lane writes: "The abuse heaped upon the disciples is really intended for Jesus. And the disciples are persecuted only because they are identified with Him. The lash laid on the back of a Christian was actually intended to strike the Lord." Can I encourage you? If you find yourself persecuted for your faith among your family, among your friends, the people you grew up with, maybe the people at work, you find yourself persecuted – understand it's not personal. It's really not about you. It's about their hatred of the truth, their Creator who has every right to tell them what to do, and that you remind them of that reality – "because of My name."

Notice the end of verse 13: "...but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved." The second half of verse 13 is a wonderful promise. The one who remains loyal to Christ in spite of this intense persecution will be rescued physically and spiritually and will enter into God's own presence. It is a promise of what theologians call the 'perseverance of the saints.' If you have come to genuine faith in Christ, God Himself will preserve that faith through the most difficult and challenging circumstances. Your faith won't fail. I love what Jesus said to Peter: "Satan has requested permission that he might sift you like wheat (and as John said when he was here, you know, you're tempted, if you are Peter, to say, 'You told him no, right?') The Lord says, no, I didn't tell him no; but "I have prayed for you [Jesus says], that your faith [fails not]." We have

an intercessor who intercedes on our behalf in the form of the Spirit within us and in the form of our Lord Himself in God the Father's presence, and He prays that our faith will not fail. You may be going through difficult trials tonight as we sit here. If your faith is genuine, God's not going to let it fail. You may find yourself in the midst of persecution. Your faith isn't going to fail. It will endure. You will be rescued. Perseverance in the faith is always evidence of genuine saving faith. I love what Tertullian, the early church father, said. He said: "Go on, rack, torture, and grind us to powder; our numbers increase in proportion as you mow us down. The blood of Christians is their harvest seed." That's how God has always worked. Out of the death of one Christian comes a spiritual harvest.

Jesus tells us that one of the birth pangs that will mark the time from His life to the end is relentless, intense waves of persecution. It will come against us from false religion, from secular authorities, and even from personal relationships. Now there's one other important sign that will mark all of human history, and especially as we approach the end. Jesus included it in the middle of His argument about persecution, but I want to treat it as a separate point because I think it is. Let's call it the global gospel. Go back to verse 10. Buried in the middle of that section on persecution is this statement: "The gospel must first be preached to all the nations." That really deserves a message all its own because every single word in that sentence is important, but I want you to notice the key word. It's the word 'first.' That word goes back to verse 7 and *the end*. Jesus is saying before the end comes, the gospel must be preached to all the nations. Now in one sense, the gospel was preached to a lot of the inhabited earth in the lifetime of the apostles. You can read statements like that in Romans 1:5, Romans 1:8, Colossians 1:6, Colossians 1:23. You can read statements where the apostles talk about the gospel having gone to the ends of the world. They meant, at that point, the ends of the inhabited earth. But Matthew 24:14, the parallel passage, makes it clear that Jesus is talking here not about what happened with the apostles in the first century, but what must happen right before the end of the age. Listen to Matthew 24:14: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come." This has to happen. And this will happen, as well, in increasing and intense waves. The gospel will be shared and preached until the end. The world itself will be reached – not that everyone believes, but that the gospel is preached.

There's something else in this statement as well though. There's a promise. Jesus is giving us His promise that the gospel and the advancement of His kingdom could not, would not be stopped by persecution – even the intense persecution, the gospel keeps marching on. Do you understand that this is our mission, this is your mission? It's a mission with each of our lives right where we are, with your neighbors and family and friends and coworkers, and for some of you (and my prayer is this) that God would raise up people from this church to take the gospel to the ends of the world and He has. And my prayer is He'll continue. Some of you sitting here tonight – my prayer is that God would give you a heart and a passion to reach unreached peoples of the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. For some of us, that's Christ's intention – that our mission would be somewhere else on this planet. But regardless, it's to bring the gospel to bear.



So, the beginning of birth pangs – Jesus says throughout human history, there are going to be these relentless wave of birth pangs. In a sense, they will occur throughout human history, but when they occur throughout human history (what we’ve seen so far), they’re not even the beginning of birth pangs. They’re like Braxton Hicks contractions. But as we truly approach the end of human history and the second coming, all of these things will occur with much greater frequency and intensity. You want to know what these things look like when the end really comes, when birth pangs really start? Read Revelation 6:1-11. I’m not going to take you through that passage tonight. I just want to highlight this for you. Read it and look at how remarkable the resemblance is between Mark 13:5-13 and the first five seals recorded in Revelation 6. Let me just show you this. It’s pretty remarkable. The first seal in Revelation 6:1-2 corresponds with the passage here in Mark, and it describes a false peace promised by (guess who?) antichrist, a man promising to be the Messiah Himself who’s going to solve the world’s problems. The second seal that’s uncovered there is also parallel to Mark’s gospel. It describes worldwide war. Incredible war will take place. The false peace of the first horseman of the apocalypse is quickly shattered by a second horseman who takes peace from the earth. There’s always been war, but this second horseman will usher in a time of unparalleled war. We’re talking now about the period from the time the seven year period of the tribulation begins until its midpoint – these five seals which very much resemble what we’ve studied in the Olivet Discourse. So here is how it gets the most intense – right at the end – this is when they’re truly birth pangs. The third seal in Revelation 6 describes scarcity of food that comes from the aftereffect of war – famine. The fourth seal describes earthquakes and pestilence and death on a global scale. Death comes by the sword, by famine, by pestilence. In fact the epidemic described in Revelation 6:7-8 is so horrendous that burial can’t happen immediately. There will be rotting corpses lying around. And from those rotting corpses, additional diseases will create new sources of death. Great earthquakes. And then the fifth seal also comparable to what we’ve studied – there will be martyrs of those who have put their faith and trust in Christ, and divine judgment in response to that. Really remarkable – remarkable the parallels between the first five seals of Revelation 6:1-11 and what we’ve studied so far in Jesus’ sermon. So while those events described in Mark 13:5-13 occur in waves throughout human history, if you want to see what they look like in their most intense form, when the birth pangs really come, when the Braxton Hicks are over, read Revelation 6:1-11. Those are the real birth pangs.

So what did we learn from tonight? Let me give you several things to consider. First of all, expect persecution. Expect it. Don’t be surprised by it when people don’t like you or hate you or insult you or ridicule you, or eventually perhaps it becomes even more intense and violent than that. Don’t be surprised by that. You remember the beatitude? Look back at Matthew 5. We just studied this a few weeks ago. Matthew 5:10-12: “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” If you’re a citizen of the kingdom, if you live out the rest of the beatitudes in your life, then you’re going to be persecuted, but it’s okay because the kingdom of heaven is yours. You’re in. “Blessed are you when people insult you.” Here are the different forms it can take – they insult you, they

persecute you, they falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” Listen. Don’t be surprised. Expect persecution. Second Timothy 3:12 says: “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” It’ll come from false religion. It’ll come from secular governments and secularists. And it’ll even come from family and friends. Don’t be surprised.

Secondly, we need to pray and care for those Christian brothers and sisters who are experiencing real persecution in other places in the world. Do you ever do that? Do you ever pray for our brothers and sisters who are facing physical torture and the threat of death because of their faith? You ought to. We’re commanded to. Look at Matthew 25. You remember this? At the judgment of nations as it’s called at the end of the tribulation period, there’s this judgment. And our Lord judges the people who are there. “All nations will be gathered (those who’ve survived that holocaust) ...and He will separate them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” The sheep He’ll put on His right, the goats on the left. And then notice what He says to those on the right. Here are the true believers. They’re not saved by what they do. They evidence the reality of their salvation and their faith by how they live. Notice: “Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” That shows it was grace. It’s not their activities that earned it. It was prepared for them before they were ever born. But here’s how they manifested the grace of God in their lives. Jesus says to them: “For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me” (now watch this); “I was in prison, and you came to Me.” He’s talking about those who are in prison because of their relationship to Jesus Christ. And they’ll respond: “‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? When did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’” We need to care about them.

But look at Hebrews 13. Here it’s stated very explicitly. Hebrews 13:3. As the writer of Hebrews finishes the great doctrinal section about Jesus Christ and comes to practical, everyday implications of that, he says this in Hebrews 13:3 – “Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.” Let me encourage you to make a regular part of your prayer our brothers and sisters who are truly suffering for their faith in the world today. If you don’t know about that, there are websites and others where you can be exposed to that, where you can learn what’s really going on. Do you understand that that’s true like where the countries where the Arab Spring has happened? I was talking to a man last Sunday night who has served as a missionary for many years, most of his life, in one of the Middle East countries, and he was telling me just that. He said, “You know, we think, ‘Oh, there’s this wonderful wave of democracy sweeping the Middle East.’” He said, “It’s

the worst thing for Christians you can imagine because under the control of even the dictators, there was some freedom from persecution.” They could carry out their faith because most of those dictators were interested in themselves and their own lives of luxury, etc. and to just keeping the peace so they could enjoy themselves. But as those dictatorships have fallen, those in false religion can use the opportunity to inflict serious persecution on our Christian brothers and sisters. Pray for them. They’re in hard places.

A third implication or application of the text is don’t mistake God’s patience for indifference. Here we move to what’s coming. Jesus says, “Listen. It is coming. This is what it’s going to be.” We live our lives, and you know what a lot of people do? They mistake that ‘nothing’s happened so far, nothing’s happening now’ with ‘that must mean nothing’s ever going to happen.’ Don’t mistake God’s patience for indifference. A couple of passages come to my mind. Romans 2 – God says judgment is coming. But look at 2 Peter 3:7. We’ll come back to this text in a few weeks, but I want you to just look at verse 7 right now: “But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire” (God’s going to destroy them), “kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” Do you understand that right now, by God’s word, this universe, as we know it, is continuing in existence, but it’s continuing in existence because it is reserved for destruction and judgment? The destruction not just of the planet, but notice the end of verse 7: “the destruction of ungodly men.” Wow. It’s just a matter of time before God unleashes the full fury of His just wrath and anger, against those who have abused His name and abused His Son and abused His Word. It’s coming. Verse 8: “But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.” In other words, God’s not in a hurry. He doesn’t march by our timetable, but it is coming. Verse 9, part of the reason it’s delayed is: “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but He’s patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” The reason God’s wrath is restrained for now is out of His patience, but don’t mistake that for indifference.

Clearly, one of the great reasons for the great tribulation is for God to pour out His justice and wrath against unrepentant sinners. You understand that? Listen to Revelation 6:16, those who are alive on the planet at that time when God begins to unleash His fury: “They said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”

A number of years ago, I came across a quote by the great Puritan Stephen Charnock in his book ‘The Existence and Attributes of God.’ Listen to what he writes: “Patience in man is many times interpreted, and truly too, as cowardice, a feebleness of spirit, and a lack of strength [that’s how it looks in men]. But it is not from the shortness of the Divine arm that He cannot reach us, nor from the feebleness of His hand that He cannot strike us. It is not because He cannot level us with the dust, dash us to pieces like a potter’s vessel, or consume us as a moth. He can make the

mightiest to fall before Him, and lay the strongest at His feet the first moment of their crime. Presume not on God's patience! You know not how soon His anger may turn His patience aside and step before it. It may be His sword is drawn out of His scabbard, His arrows may be settled in His bow; and perhaps there is but a little time before you feel the edge of the one and the point of the other. Do you know how few sands are yet to run in your glass? Are you sure that He that waits today will wait as well tomorrow? How can you tell, but that God that is slow to anger today may be swift to it tomorrow?" Those are sobering words, but they're so true. Don't mistake God's patience for indifference.

And finally, thank God that for every believer, God's wrath has been completely satisfied. That impending doom and wrath that Jesus talks about in this passage – it's not for us. In fact, I want you to finish with me by looking over at 1 Thessalonians 1. I love this passage. First Thessalonians 1:9. Paul writes: "For they themselves report about us what kind of reception we had with you, how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God" (there's repentance and faith – you were saved) "and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus" (underline this, underscore it, remember it, memorize it – Jesus), "who rescues us from the wrath that is to come." You and I who are in Christ will be rescued from the wrath that God Himself will pour out on those who are His enemies. May we thank God that His wrath has been satisfied in Christ during those six hours one Friday two thousand years ago. Let's pray together.

Father, we are frightened by what our Lord shares about the future. Not for ourselves – we thank You, O God, that we are secure in Christ, that He rescues us from the wrath that's coming. But Father, we're frightened for people we know who are not in Christ, people who will face the full fury of Your righteous anger. Father, help us to love them enough to pray for them faithfully, to share the gospel with them – not to be concerned about what they think about us but to be concerned about their eternity, to be concerned about the wrath that is coming. Father, thank You that You've told us how it's all going to end. Thank You that we can live our lives here in full confidence that You're on Your throne, and that history is marching toward a predetermined conclusion. Lord, we love You and we're so grateful that in Christ we are sheltered from the coming storm. It's in His name we pray. Amen.