

We Know How the Game Ends



1 Peter 3:13-22

Bro. Chris Lawrence

It is just such a blessing to be working at this amazing church, and I just can't say enough about being able to work with Ricky and Kory. Kory has been one of my best and dearest friends and a genuine brother and Christ for years. Ricky has been discipling me for close to twenty-five years now, which is crazy to think about. To say that he has shaped my ministry and the way I live out my Christian life is an understatement. I've modeled so much of how I minister as a pastor, as a husband, and as a father through looking towards Ricky Cunningham. He has shaped me. I agree on so many things with Ricky and Kory, but there's one thing though that we disagree on. The majority of you, probably ninety some odd percent, will agree with them and you're going to disagree with me, and it's not about theology, it's about basketball. Ricky and Kory, of course, are diehard UK fans. My dad played for the Kansas Jayhawks, so right out of the womb I'm a huge Jayhawk's fan. We we've had these ongoing conversations for years, and the worst year ever for me was 2012. Now, for a lot of you folks, that was one of the best years because that was the year of Anthony Davis. Kentucky played Kansas at the beginning of that year and absolutely just slaughtered it. It was almost like 50 points; it was just embarrassing.

Of course, I just knew it was going to be Kentucky's year. It's the one year I didn't want Kansas to make the Final Four, because I knew if they made it to the Final Four they would probably play Kentucky, and it was going to be bad. Sure enough, it happens, Kansas makes it to the Final Four. They beat Ohio State and Kentucky beats Louisville. I knew this is just going to be bad, and what made it worse, there are two people on the face of the earth that I didn't want to be at the ballgame...guess who they were? Ricky Cunningham and Kory Cunningham. So I'm going to watch this game, Kansas vs Kentucky, and I'm going to hear about that game for the rest of my life (and I have!). Even when Kansas made a run and made it a little bit close towards the end, still I had a defeated spirit the entire time watching that game. It was just horrible.

Now the second story is different, it was in 2022. Of course, Kansas actually wins the championship that year so I love it! I had gotten back from Nicaragua with our college students and I had scheduled a meeting the same time Kansas is playing Miami, the winner would go to the Final Four. So, I'm in this meeting upstairs in my house while my boys watched the game. I get done with my meeting and go down to watch the replay of the game, and they were doing their best to not let on who won, but I just could read them...there weren't tears, there weren't things being thrown in the house, so I knew Kansas had won just by watching them. So it was amazing how different watching that game was because even when Miami made a run, I knew the outcome. I knew what was going to happen.

The reason I say all that is because as we've been going through 1st Peter, we've been talking about being elect exiles—we're elect, we're chosen, we have an inheritance, all these amazing truths—yet we're in exile. We've been in an exile camp for a while, and we've been hearing about all these people that are in these very difficult situations. So many times when we're in these exile situations where we feeling like we're absolutely defeated, when we're suffering and we don't know how we're going to get by, that is all the more reason to remember that we're elect and we know how the game ends. This morning, I want to tell you that you're going to suffer and you're going to suffer for righteousness' sake, but we know the end result and that's what we want to hit on this morning.

Scripture

"Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into Heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him."

Last week, Bro. Ricky said we were called to be a blessing and that we're living out our identity as being part of the church, and the face of the Lord is upon us. Now, here in verse 13, Peter says, "Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?" If you're doing the right thing, life should be good, right? But then we get to the next part, "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you'll be blessed." That word, blessed, right there means you're happy...so even if you're suffering for doing what it's right, you're going to be happy (I'll come back to this in a second, because that doesn't make too much sense). "Have no fear of them, nor be troubled." When we think about being exile, I think that 'have no fear nor be troubled' is the tension that we're feeling as we've been going through the different passages in 1st Peter.

Now, we've had a shift in our country and it's happened really over a sixty year period. From around 1960 to 1980, even if you were not a believer and follower of Jesus Christ, our culture saw it as a good thing, as a positive, for you go to church and even to send your children to Sunday school. Then, there was another shift from 1980 to 2000 where we saw the church going from being a positive thing to more neutral. It didn't matter if you went to church. If you wanted to go to church that was great, if you didn't go to church no big deal. It was just more neutral. But from 2000 to 2023, in particular the last ten to fifteen years, as a whole our culture has gone more negative. Now, it is not seen as a positive or neutral thing. If you're a part of a Christ-centered Bible believing church, it could actually be negative. The train has left a station and there's no stopping it—it could get harder, more difficult, and more costly for us to live out our Christian faith. And so, we feel that tension right now.

What are we going to do? What this passage is saying is even if we suffer for righteousness' sake, we don't have to fear, we don't have to be troubled. Now why is that? Well, we're not alone. In a lot of ways, welcome to the club. There are around 145 countries in the world today that are hostile towards Christianity. That's more than any other faith. There are over 360 million Christians right now who can be persecuted and suffer for their faith. There are Christians dying every single day for the name of Jesus Christ. God has not left them and God will not leave us. All the more reason He is with us. If I could use another sports analogy, I heard Michael Wilbon from PTI, the famous ESPN show, was being interviewed about what it's like to be a sports writer in the nineties with Michael Jordan. He is from Chicago and he was talking about the Bulls had hardly ever had any game sevens, but they have a game seven against Indiana Pacers in 1997. They were losing with about three or four minutes left to go, and Wilbon looks over to another sports writer beside him and he says, "I think they're going to lose." The sports writer looks over at Wilbon and says this, "Do you know who's on the Bulls team?" It was Michael Jordan and they won.

The point here is life is hard, life is difficult, but God is with us. If you look from Genesis to Revelation, I don't care if it's Moses, I don't care if it's

Joshua, I don't care if it's Paul—every time these men have to take great steps of faith where there could be suffering, there could be persecution, do you know what the Lord tells them? Do not fear, do not be troubled, for I am with you. God is with us. Now, you could say... *Well that's great, He's with us, but I don't know how in the world I can be happy.* Yes, at times when we're suffering, the pain is real. We feel it. You felt it through whatever experiences or trials you've experienced, but you can find happiness. Here's how—one, you become like Christ. And in those moments when you become like Christ, even though you feel the pain of suffering, you experience the joy of Him. I would venture to say that there are people in this room who have gone through trials, gone through tribulations. And in those moments, you've held onto a verse, or you've come into this building and you've heard a sermon, or you've listened to a song, and for a brief moment, you experienced the joy in the presence of Lord, and that's unmatched. Not only do you become like Christ, you become like a Christ to others in a way that others can't, meaning the Lord uses your suffering for you to be able to give a defense for His name, for what you're truly putting your hope in. That's what's awesome. As you suffer, it opens up the door for you to defend the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This leads us to the next verse, "...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense..." "Always"—I don't know Greek, but I think it means always, like we're always ready to do this, always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope. That hope is like a hundred percent hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect. So the goal here is as we're suffering, we see it as a blessing because we are becoming more like Christ and we have an opportunity to share it with others. Now, the key thing is you do it with gentleness and respect. The goal is not to win the argument; the goal is to win the soul. We do it in a way that points people to Jesus, and we are to be prepared for that. In a few moments when Kory comes up here, he's going to say, "You're not dismissed; you're sent." I love this about our church. We wear rope bracelets to remind us to pray for missions. You could put a different rope on every single week of summer at Hardin Baptist Church. We had Belize last week, we've got Chicago this week, we've got Brazil this week, and we've got North Carolina coming up.

We're constantly sending people out from this church. This church has a mission mindset, which is awesome—but you could still be a part of this church and the thought of what to tell someone about suffering and defending the way you're living terrifies you; you have no idea what to say!

So, I just want to take a few moments to think about how to prepare yourself to give a defense to the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you know how to do it that is great, but if you don't, here are some practical things. First, if you have no idea how you would share the gospel of Jesus Christ, I suggest you just start praying, praying for people that don't know the Lord. Even if you just buy a globe and put your finger on the map once a day and all you do is say I'm going to pray for that country, that's great, but you actually start praying for people that are lost. You pray, and you ask people to pray for you. In Ephesians 6, while Paul is in prison he asks the church to pray for him. What does he want them to pray? That he may speak the gospel of boldness. If the Apostle Paul is asking people to pray for him that he might speak the gospel of boldness, I think it's a good idea for us to do the same. I saw Steve Duncan a week or two ago, and I said, "Coach Duncan, just pray for me." Now nothing was wrong, I just know that man is a prayer warrior. He's going to pray for me and it's going to help me share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Then, not only do we need to pray, we need to practice. I have got four kids—eleven, nine, seven, and three years old—and we practice every day. We're always practicing. We have practice for gymnastics, we gave practice for piano, we gave practice for baseball, and we gave practice for basketball. Why are we doing that? We're doing that so they will be prepared for the game. They're going to be tested and we want them being ready to go. I think it's perfectly okay, I think it's glorious, for the church to practice to be ready to defend the gospel of Jesus Christ. I think it's good to maybe do it in safe environments. When I'm in a backyard with my two oldest boys and we're working on shooting the basketball, I'm trying to relieve them of the pressure and work on their form. I tell them, "I don't even care if you air ball it, we want to do it the right way so you'll be prepared for the game." The church can be the same way, whether it

be in our Sunday schools, whether it be in our small groups, whether it be in your home, it's good to practice being able to defend the gospel.

Now, what does that look like? Maybe it's asking your Sunday school teacher or your small group leader, "How do *you* do this?" and they give you a way to do it. There can be ways where maybe you just practice sharing your testimony...asking three questions: what was your life like before Christ; how did you come to know Christ; how has your life changed since Christ? We do this thing with the college ministry. About once a year, we do a testimony workshop. And do you know what's interesting? We do that every year and just about one person comes to Christ every year. We do the workshop because they realize they don't really have a story when it comes to how Christ has changed their life. They start analyzing gospel, they come to Christ, and there's many times those students have never shared that. But just being able to share with their friends how Christ has changed their life, even if it comes off bad, meaning they feel like they didn't communicate that well, they're in a safe place. It starts giving them the confidence to go and do it, but thoroughly then, it's the people.

Eventually as you are praying, as you are practicing, you're going to be sent out. God's going to put a situation in your life where you're going to be tested, you're going to suffer, it's going to hurt, but the goal is even in that moment, even when you don't know what's going on, you're still living out your Christian identity and there's going to become a point in time, because of the way you suffered, the way you conducted yourself, someone's going to ask this question: what are you living for? That's your opportunity. Even through the suffering you've been through, you're going to be filled with emotion and joy to share the good news of Jesus Christ.

Do you know what's awesome in that moment? When you're experiencing the joy and happiness of the Lord, you cannot lose. Do you know why? We've already won. There are going to be two outcomes when you share the gospel of Jesus Christ. One, look at the beginning of the section on suffering in 1st Peter chapter 2, verse 12, "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so when they speak against you as evil doers..." Okay, so you have shared the gospel and they're still slandering you, but what is the result — "...they may see your good deeds..." you still live out your

faith — and the result is “...they glorified God on the day of visitation.” Even though they slandered you, even though you felt rejected in the moment, because of the way you conducted yourself, shared the gospel, and defended it, the result is they eventually give God glory in the day of visitation. I believe this to mean they came to Christ, that by your witness other people are going to experience the goodness of God for eternity.

The other option is that they don't come to Christ. Let's pick back up in our text in chapter 3, verse 16, “...having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” So what's the end a result? Even if they reject you and they continue to slander you, they're going to be put to shame and you're going to be on the right side. Now, I'm not downplaying somebody who's going to Hell, but the point is you cannot lose. It's better to suffer in that moment than be on the losing team and compromise and give into evil. And that's exactly what the next verse says, verse 17, “For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should God's will, than for doing evil.” We can have that fear about what's coming our way when we think about suffering. Let's just go to an extreme example. Right now in North Korea, if you pray, if you have a Bible, if you even talk about Jesus, you can be put in prison, on the spot, for fifteen years, you're in a concentration camp, you get hard manual labor for twelve hours, and you get beaten with metal rods.

Louie Giglio tells a story about speaking to somebody who experienced this. It was an old lady from North Korea who spoke to some Christian leaders. She had to change her name because there were security issues and so forth, but her story is she gets arrested for being a believer and she goes to prison in North Korea. She tries to find a way to spend time alone with God and the only place that she can go is a toilet. It is horrific—the smell, the conditions are beyond what we could possibly imagine—but she knows because none of the guards will go in there that she can pray. She continues to go there, having her place of church where she can pray and be alone with God. She is suffering for Jesus, but guess what happens...as she's suffering, someone asked, “What are you doing?” It opened a door to defend the gospel, and she leads another prisoner to Christ. So now, there

are two people going to the North Korean prison toilet throughout the day to have church. The next thing you know, someone else asks. Now, you have this group of three, four, five, six—a small little group of believers who now are going to the worst part of the prison to have church, to pray and be alone with God. Later, she was asked, “Do you regret what you have done?” “No.” She talked about how it was a blessing and how by her being able to be in there, others have gotten to know who Jesus is. I just don't think when Jesus comes back she's going to regret it. The point is we might not be in a North Korean prison this week, but there are going to be times where people are going to test us and challenge us, and we're going to be tempted to go to evil instead of suffering for doing good. In those moments, it's going to be worth it not to give in to the losing team, but continuing to live out your identity of who you are in Jesus Christ. Why is that? Because we know how the victory's been won.

Let's pick up in verse 18, “For Christ also suffered once for sins...” See, when you and I suffer, we can point people to Jesus, we can become like Jesus, but we don't fix the problem, the suffering still continues. But when Jesus suffered once for sins, it fixed it—no more disease, no more death, Victory over our sin for what He did on that cross. He took our punishment, 1st Peter chapter 2, “By His wounds you have been healed.” The result of that is we get life, we learn about how we get life, and we learn about who He suffered for in the next phrase of verse 18, “...the righteous for the unrighteous...” Jesus, with no sin, died. He suffered for you and me. You and I have been contributing to the sin problems around the world...and He died for us. Now, the next question is why did He do that? “...that He might bring us to God...” The thought here is that even through all the suffering and pain the end result is everything will be fixed, not because we're getting an inheritance, but because we're getting God and God will take care of us. And Christ was able to do this because He was put to death in the flesh, but He was made alive in the Spirit. That's how our victory is won—the cross of Jesus Christ. No matter how difficult our situation might be, we need to continue to go back to the cross again and again and again remembering that He actually did it. This actually did happen. He did die for us. And when He died, it's important to know, too, that He had victory. He had victory over everything, which leads to not just

how He died for us and how He claimed victory, it is who He has had victory over.

Now, let's look at what Peter says in the next verses, verses 19–20, "...in which He [Christ] went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water." People say this passage is one of the toughest verses in the New Testament. Like, what in the world is going on there? Christ has just died. He's been made alive in the spirit. He's preaching to spirits in prison because they formerly didn't obey in the days of Noah, what is going on here? Half of the commentaries I read talked about how Martin Luther was wrestling with this—there are all these different opinions, different thoughts. I am going to say a couple things. One, whatever I say this morning, it's hit on again in 2nd Peter so Ricky and Kory can clean me up here a few weeks down the road from now. Two, I still have some thoughts.

So again, Jesus died in the flesh and was made alive in the spirit, now He's preaching to the spirits that formerly didn't obey in the days of Noah, what's going on? We can make some observations. One, when we look at Scripture, it talks about that there's this world that we cannot see. If you go to the Book of Job, at the very beginning of Job you see that God is having conversation with Satan and Job did not see that. He didn't see it and we're not able to see all this stuff either. Even if you look in Ephesians 6, verse 12, Paul is talking about putting on the spiritual armor of God and it says, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood..." All the flesh and blood that causing all the pain, all the people we're upset with, we do not wrestle against them, "...but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." That's our spiritual battle. That's who we're fighting against, that's who's influencing the world.

And then, Peter brings up Noah. What's going on in the days of Noah? Those evil forces thought they had won, literally. As God is being patient, more and more people are becoming more and more corrupt. It's getting worse, yet Noah builds a boat and right before he gets on that boat, the

enemy is thanking he has won, because basically the whole world is living for the enemy. But do you know what God does? He puts eight people on that boat and He keeps His covenant promise going. We have a similar situation with the cross. Satan and his evil forces have rejected and rebelled against God, and here God's own Son is put on the cross to die. He died in the flesh, killed by His own people, and Satan and his forces could be thinking they've won, but God wasn't done. Jesus died in the flesh but He's made alive in the spirit. What I believe is going on in this passage is Jesus not only died, but when He was made alive, He's declaring victory over all the evil satanic forces. In the heavenlies, wherever they might be, He declares the game is over—I have won. We still have to live here, but the victory has been declared. He is over all the spiritual forces, over everything. He has won.

What is awesome is we get to participate in that victory statement with our baptism, which leads to the next verse, 21, "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..." Our baptism points to the victory of Christ. Now, let's say a couple things about baptism. That says baptism "now saves you..." but the next phrase is really important..."not as a removal of dirt from the body..." We believe in salvation by grace through faith alone, not by works. If you are believing that baptism is necessary for your salvation, you're on dangerous grounds. If you do not believe me, read the book of Galatians where they try to add circumcision to salvation and see what Paul says. It's graphic and it's horrific—and it's dangerous.

Secondly, there are other Christians who believe in salvation by grace through faith alone, but still baptize differently than the way we do. I was so blessed in college to be part of fraternity. Out of this fraternity, we had people come to Christ. We had eight people go to seminary when I was in that fraternity! Three went the Presbyterian route, five of us went the Baptist route, and we would have hours of conversation debating over baptism. They believe that you can baptize by sprinkling and you sprinkle infants. I love those guys, but there's disagreement. I come from a Methodist church background. Basically, my entire family is all Methodists.

My grandparents on both sides—believers, I love them to death, and so thankful for them. They were a huge influence in my life, cannot wait until the new heavens and the new earth to see them again. I love them, but...I think by sprinkling babies, I have a problem with that. You see, this passage is saying baptism saves you, not as a removal but as an appeal to God for good conscience. That people should be baptized, not because they're an infant, but because they're *calling out* to God to be made right. That's the picture of baptism. And what also is really important too is the mode. Sprinkling doesn't cut. Being dunked is a much, much better picture of really what is going on when we're having our victory in Christ, so let's flesh it out a little bit.

So what's going on here with Noah? What's the story? Everybody is disobeying God, and the result of that (with the exception of Noah and eight people are put on a boat) is they are at the bottom of the ocean floor, dead under the wrath of God. 1st Corinthians 10 talks about Moses and the people following Moses—they were baptized into Moses, through the sea and cloud. What happened there? The Red Sea was parted and Moses and the Israelites walk right through that sea and they are on their path to the Promised Land. What happened to Pharaoh's army? The sea came crashing down and they were dead at the bottom of the sea. Now, what's the picture for us? Baptism is a picture of that. What it's saying here is that each and every single one of us, without Christ, are dead at the bottom motion floor. We're dead...under His wrath. But what God has done through His Son being made alive, the Holy Spirit that raised Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11), now has entered into us and given us life. The result is you have a funeral and a birth going on at the same time. That's what the baptism is picturing; it is that the old self that was dead at the bottom of the ocean floor is no more. That person is done. God has brought you up out of the bottom of the ocean floor and He's put you on the boat. He has not just put you on the boat; He's put you on the path to the Promised Land. But those events in the Old Testament are temporal. What God has ultimately done is what Roman 6 has talked about. You're no longer a slave to sin, your slave to righteousness. You have this new life. You've been buried with Christ, but you also been raised with Him.

Because of that, as you come up out of the water, it's a picture of you having this new victorious life in Him.

Now, I have this reputation about baptizing people here at Hardin Baptist Church. My reputation is that if you're going to get baptized by me, I'm going to dunk you hard—eighteen, nineteen, twenty year olds, they can take it. I love baptizing hard, let me explain why...because it's the picture of what the baptism represents. I have usually one or two, but sometimes some Sundays I've had four or five, and I love those Sundays, for many reasons! But every time I baptize, I have to take a deep breath because I'm about ready to cry because I'm just so excited! Let's say we got a Sunday where I'm baptizing five. I start baptizing the first, then the second, and by this time, what starts happening is it almost becomes like a wave pool in the baptistry. And then, by the time I get to the fifth, it starts splashing out of the baptistry and coming down the wall. Now I know it's not good for the walls, but I love the picture! Here's the picture of the baptism...when I take that young man or young woman and I'm putting them under the water, they were buried, they were dead, they were under the wrath of God with no hope; they were unrighteous. Yet what has happened? What has God done? He's raised them up out of the water! They have new life! And the result of that is I know when they walk out of those baptistry steps life is going to be hard. They're going to be sent out, and they're going to have struggles with family, with work. They could be going to places around the world; we have students where you can't even say the name of Jesus! But do you know what? I know they're going to win! They have victory in Christ! No matter what this world or the evil forces behind this world do, we win because we're in Christ. That is what our baptism represents and pictures. We know that because of who Christ has defeated.

Let's go to the last two verses, 21 and 22, "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into Heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him." It's over! Now, let's look at verses 13–14 and verse 18 of chapter 2, and chapter 3,

verse 1. Verse 13, "Be subject for the Lord's sake (key words, be subject) for Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be the emperor as supreme, or to the governors who sent to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good." You're reading that right there. Be subject to an emperor who's going to want to kill you in the near future. Verse 18, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust." If you continue to read on, those servants are going to be beat by their masters and they're called to be subject. Chapter 3, verse 1, (key words, be subject), "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the Word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives." These people are stuck. They're stuck. They can't move away from the country, they are getting beat by masters, and if you get divorced during this time period, these wives are going to starve to death. They're stuck.

Let me just say this as well...we're not saying that we should be silent if we see Christians getting arrested, or we see a master beating a servant, and we should be fighting for marriages. What we're saying here is you don't compromise, you continue to live out your identity. When hostility comes your way, you continue to be holy because you are in Christ, because ultimately, all these institutions will be subject to Christ. Let's read verse 22 again, "...who has gone into Heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to Him." Christ is going to take care of everything for us. Let's say we're in a place, whether it be here or another country, where an emperor or king wants to persecute us, do you know what we know? Whoever the earthly king is, we know our heavenly King. Let's say we're enslaved because of our faith, what does Roman 6 say? We're no longer slaves of sin, we're slaves of righteousness, and we have been set free no matter what our situation here is on earth. Now, let's say right now you feel like in your marriage you made a mistake. You feel like you're married to the wrong person. Do you know what you do? You treat them like the right person. Do you know why you do that? Because you are married to the right person. Jesus is the groom and we are His bride...and we do that because He has won.

Now, ok great, you get it. But let's play devil's advocate...no pun intended. This is hard. This is difficult. It's one thing to sit there and preach; it's another thing when you're actually going through the trial, when you're actually having to stand up for your faith and it costs you. I just want to remind you, we know how the game ends, and it's good to think about how the game ends. Think about teams when they're practicing. Do you know what some teams do? They practice cutting down the nets. Do you know why? Because they're thinking about the end result. Think about business ventures. Sometimes they give you a trip and they give you a picture of paradise—if you work really hard, you go to paradise. I'm not saying our salvation is based on works, but I'm saying we focus on the end result. I think we need to spend more time thinking about the new earth and new heavens. I think it's going to be better than I could possibly imagine. I don't know what all it would be like, but I know there's going to be some things we won't be doing. Some of you are going to be looking for jobs. I don't think there's going to be any doctors or nurses there. Why? There's no more disease. There are no more grave diggers. Why? Nobody else is dying. This is going to be better than you can possibly imagine. Now, I'm not a crier but I think about how many times I've cried. I've cried over some silly things. I've cried over some big things. I've cried over ballgames. I've cried over relationships. I've cried over people being sick, I've cried over people dying, and you have too. You know what the end of the book says—He's going to wipe away every tear from our face. The reason we know this, and the reason we hope is because of what the book says.

We started out with sports, let's intensify it; let's go to actual war. In World War II, General Patton fought Rommel, the famous general of the Germans tank warfare. And the story goes is that between World War I and World War II, Patton just read and read and read and read stuff to prepare for the Germans and ultimate military combat, and Patton had a lot of success. Years later, they made a movie about him called Patton. There is this scene in the movie showing the war conflict going on, people are dying, tanks are shooting at each other. Patton stands up, knowing he has victory, and he says, "Rommel, I've read your book," meaning the battle is still going on, I know what to do and I know we're going to win. Here's the point for us. I

don't always understand and know what's going on in your life. Believe me; I get that. But I know what the Book says...that no matter how hard we have to suffer for righteousness' sake, we cling to this Book, and this Book says we win and we hold onto the truth, no matter what comes our way. The challenge is for folks in this room. If you are an believer in this room right now, even if you have mocked Christians in this room and you're just here for whatever reason, you have two options. You can either repent and give God glory in the day of visitation, or you will be put to shame. My challenge is for you to truly understand what Jesus has done for you and come to know Him. Today can be that day. Or two—I know with a big room like this there are issues and situations going on in each and every single row, and I know maybe today or tomorrow you could be in a situation you didn't see coming and you don't know what's going to happen, and you don't know why. If you're a believer in this room, my challenge for you is don't compromise, don't give in. Even when you feel like you're in exile, the Lord is going to bless you. If you're going to be able to give a defense for Him, it's going to be worth it. Because one day, even though you don't feel it right now, even if you feel like you're the biggest outcast out there, you are elect. My challenge is to truly live out your elect identity by being chosen by God.