

So, I missed last week, I was in Philadelphia. Do you remember Eric Mason coming to preach? It was a swap basically, so he came and did that and I went up there and did a frequency conference and then spoke at his church, which has a lot more rhythm than ours and I'll just leave it at that. They are much more encouraging when you preach than you are, but I'm not holding that against you either, you bunch of white dudes.

Anyway, I went up there, did that and then the week before on Easter, here's what we said out of Colossians Chapter 1. We said that you and I are alienated from God, and in that alienation, we have elevated creation to create a role, which means everything that was created was meant to bring our attention to and stir our affections towards the God of the universe. Instead, we let those affections and that worship and that desire terminate simply on the creative order. That alienates us from God. It alienates us from God and sucks the life and meaning out of everything else. And so, where food, relationships, money or all that stuff was meant to point to something greater, now it doesn't point to something greater and that leads to the next part. We're alienated from God, hostile in mind. So when you're not satisfied and content, somebody has to be blamed, and usually that somebody else is not you. Somebody else has to be blamed and you usually blame whatever area you've tried to elevate and make your god. And so if you just knew that getting married was going to fill all your whims and fill all your desires and then it didn't, then it's obviously your wife or husband's fault that you're not happy. And if it's your job that was supposed to do that then it's your job, and if it's your children that were supposed to do that then it's your children. And on and on we could go. And that alienation from God that led to the exaltation of creation, led to hostility towards creation because it could not do what it was not designed to do, which then leads to evil deeds. Okay, and that's what we walked through on Easter Sunday morning quite aggressively. And then we talked about the fact that, despite that Christ has reconciled us to Himself, He's solved the route so that the fruit is solved. Whereas, what we have tried to do is manage behavior in the hopes that it will change alienation, the Scriptures teach that alienation is handled, and that takes care of our evil deeds. Now, with all that review, we'll get into what is an unbelievably difficult text. So I'm telling you out of the gate.

Let's look at Colossians 1:24. "Now, I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions, for the sake of His body, that is the church." Now, you've got a phrase here and this is just Bible Interpretation 101. So for my seminary boys, this is basic hermeneutics. You can't take a verse that seems to run contrary to the rest of the Bible and interpret it a certain way. The Bible has to interpret the Bible. And so a lot of guys break that rule and end up on television. So they'll take a verse out of the metanarrative of the Bible and they'll make it say what they want it to say and they'll make a great deal of money doing that. But, I say that because we've got to do something with this verse, because the whole rest of the Bible teaches that what he just said can't be true. There can be nothing lacking in the afflictions of Christ. Because if that's true, then that means it's the cross and something else that saves us. So it's the cross and baptism, or it's the cross and good works, it's the cross and _____. Now we know this isn't true because the rest of the Bible says it isn't true. So the book of Galatians says pointedly and clearly that if you and I could be made righteous by behavior modification, if you and I could be made righteous by the law, then Christ Jesus died for nothing. The book of Hebrews says it this way, that "Christ died once and for all for those who are perishing." Which means the cross of Christ was complete and final in regards to its pronouncement of you and me as spotless and righteous before God, not by our behavior but by that work. So the cross of Christ cannot be insufficient.

So here's what we've got to do. There are two questions that I ask trying to get into this. One, we have to figure out how Paul shares in the sufferings of the Messiah, or the afflictions of Christ without taking away from the cross, and then we've got to figure out why he's rejoicing for the Colossians sake that he's able to do that. Those were the kind of two big questions that I needed to answer to make sense of this text. So, let me tell you what I've found. If you're familiar with apocalyptic literature or movies, here's how it ends. Things get progressively worse. If you grew up in the 70's you watched those really horrible End Times VHS tapes, where there's a guillotine (it's the future, but we're back to the guillotines), everything gets worse. You have disease, death and murder is rampant. It's just this kind of horrific time to be alive. That's been present in the Old Testament, speaking of the day when God makes all things new. So after the fall, sin enters the world, it fractures everything and we've got disease, we've got death, we've got strife, we've got hardship. In fact, if you think about what God told Adam, He said, "Cursed is the ground because of you, all that you are meant to cultivate will now war against you." So, for the man, for the woman, all that is supposed to bring life and peace and meaning and death, a war against them and life is difficult. And men and women die young sometimes. And children die young sometimes, and there's difficulty and strife and hurt and pain. And the Bible says that that's going to come to a head and then we're going to get the Messiah. We're going to get the Messiah and He's coming on a cloud and reigning and ruling and putting to death once and for all all of that and making all things new. And we see this in the Old Testament, and we see it building. And what you'll find, if you do get a chance to read some apocalyptic Jewish literature like 1 Enoch or something like that, is they believed there was a set amount of suffering and pain that would occur before the Messiah would come and make all things new. They believed that there was only so much that God would allow before He made all things new. It's 1 Enoch 47 for those of you who really want to go do that. For the record, Enoch would not be authoritative book of the Bible. It's not in our canon of Scripture which means you don't have to submit to it. What I'm telling you is this idea that we're talking about this morning isn't coming out of nowhere.

The New Testament takes that theme and just keeps going with it. I'll show you an example of this. Turn to Mark 13, starting in verse 19, "For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not cut short the days, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days." Now, what you see happening in Mark, you'll also see a little bit of it in Galatians 4:4. There is a set amount of suffering and pain that God's going to let occur, and then He's going to make all things new. He's going to put to death once and for all.

Now, in the Old Testament Jewish mindset, there were two ages: the age that is and the age that is to come. And the age that is to come is when the Messiah comes and reigns and rules over all things. When Jesus comes, one of the reasons they doubt Him is He was supposed to come in power. He was supposed to come with a crown on, He was supposed to rule and He was supposed to make all that go away. If you begin to think about Jesus, He actually does usher in a kingdom, which is what this reference is. So you get John the Baptist who's preaching that the kingdom is at hand, and you have Jesus who comes and His entire ministry is to show He has domain over all that ill's mankind. He's raising the dead, He's making the sick healthy and He is caring for the poor. Those are signs of the kingdom, signs of what is ultimately to come at His final rule and reign. This is a continuation of what the Jews taught and had learned from day one, that there is coming this day that Jesus Christ makes all things new. But in the meantime, there's a set amount of suffering, sorrow and pain that will be endured by all. Aren't you glad you came this morning? So this is how it solves our problem. When they speak of that kind of coming suffering in apocalyptic literature of Judaism, they call it the woes of the Messiah, which is synonymous for the afflictions of Christ. This is what's in our text. So Paul then is rejoicing in his sufferings for the Colossians because he is able to take on some of the suffering that remains, some of the woes of the Messiah that remain and bring the day when He makes all things new that much closer. So this is not an attack on the cross. This is eschatological. This is an end times idea of, "I'm absorbing some of the pain and some of the hurt. I'm absorbing that to bring the day of glory that much closer and to suck some of that up so that it's not all bearing down on you in Colossae. So that's why I was able to rejoice." This is not an attack on the cross.

So, what does that mean for you and me who are what scholars would call "already, not yet?" What I mean by that is Christ has come and ushered in the kingdom, He has already paid the price, He has already made us whole, already made us new, already made us righteous, but the Bible also says that outwardly we are wasting away. So, inwardly we are being renewed day by day, but outwardly we are wasting away. So theologically, people will go, "Hey, Christ bought and paid for this. He made all things new. He was crucified and was resurrected. He ascended into heaven so disease is not going to get God's people. Illness is not going to get God's people. Difficulty is not going to get God's people." Well, this is absurd. If you're going to interpret the Scripture like that, then where's our new body? Because the Scriptures are very, very clear that when that thing is consummated, you and I have imperishable bodies. And this body is perishing. These bodies are perishing. These have not been built for eternity. And even if you're in your 30's or your 20's, you get sore, you can break a bone. You can tell that you are perishable. And so we know that this can't be yet. So we're stuck between the ages where it's already been paid for, but it hadn't been fully consummated.

So, what does that mean for us? Flip over to Romans 8, and we'll do some work. Since we've got a set amount of difficulty, a set amount of afflictions before He will end it all, what does that mean for us? Romans 8, I want to pick it up in verse 23. This is after he says that all of creation, every bit of creation has been subjected to futility in hope, which means that all there is has been pressed down, hard pressed. It is not what it has been designed and created to be in its fullness, which makes you marvel at what the Grand Canyon should actually be, which makes you marvel at what Everest was actually supposed to be. So you've got this idea that creation's been hard pressed. Now listen to what this next part says, Romans 8:23, "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." Now I can get a little bit animated and get a little bit frustrated with prosperity preachers or the prosperity gospel, which just says if you have enough faith and you love the Lord, then you're going to have money and you're going to have health and everything's going to go well for you or just name it. Claim it faith healers that just go, "You know, you're not sick. I don't care what that MRI says. We'll wait on the Lord's MRI." And you're going, "Okay, well He just gave it to us through common grace. It's called an MRI, I have the picture. This is the word from the Lord: Anaplastic oligodendroglioma." You've got people that just go, "You don't claim that. You can't receive that." Isn't that stupid? I mean if it's not here, it's not here. So you don't walk in fear and go, "Oh no, this is eventually going to get me." But in the same way, when you've been shown, "This is going to be difficult and you're going to walk through a storm here," you don't pretend it's not true. Somehow you join in God's "tricksteration" or something to make it go away? It's just a silly deal. And here's why I get upset with it. Firstly, because everyone in this room is going to, at one time or another, suffer badly or have someone near them suffer badly. Secondly, since that's true, no one will be prepared for it if you believe that if you just believe this certain way or do this certain thing, nothing like this is ever going to happen to you.

So, since you're looking at me like I haven't been to seminary, let's chat. So let's do this, let's do biblical first, and then we'll do historical. And then from there, we'll get into some good news, because this is all hard stuff. If you just start walking biblically, we've got to try to figure out what date it was that God decided that the way He's done this for thousands of years needs to change because it wasn't working for Him. If we go back and look at Moses, everybody loves Moses, nobody wants his ministry. Moses literally wanders in the desert for 40 years with grumbling, complaining, whining people and has to wait for every one of them to die off before he can go into the Promised Land. They finally all die off, and he's literally walked in the desert for 40 years. They literally walked in a circle for 40 years. Okay, so bread is falling out of the sky to feed them and water is coming out of rocks. They're like, "Bread again? Are you serious?" Thank you for not being like that all the time at the Village. In the end, God takes him up on the mountain side, parts the clouds, shows him the Promised Land and tears fills his eyes. "Here we go. We're going in," and God goes, "No, you're not going in. Joshua's going to take them in. I'm gonna kill you up on the mountain." That's in the Bible. They didn't tell you that in Sunday School, did they?

David has a son who rapes his daughter and then leads a rebellion against him. Once again, we all know about David and Goliath, but we don't hear a lot about the fact that the sword never left the house after the Bathsheba incident. He actually is removed from his throne for an extended period of time by one of his sons, but we don't talk about that one.

What about Job? You know Job. He's no stranger to suffering. In an instant, he literally loses everything except his nagging wife. It's just in the Bible. I'm not trying to start a fight, ladies. I didn't say you're nagging; I said that Job's wife's nagging and I have textual evidence. Literally, his health, his wealth, his children are all taken away from him in an instant, and he praises God and his wife says, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die, you fool." So I would have been like, "Just give me a camel, and take the woman." I think that's a fair trade.

And then you have Jeremiah. Jeremiah has always been one of my favorites, especially when I get to preach to young preachers. God goes to Jeremiah and says, "If you say what I tell you to say and go where I tell you to go and do what I tell you to do, I'll give you the power to build up nations and destroy them." And Jeremiah does it, and almost every time he opens his mouth he gets beaten, he gets thrown into a ditch and left for dead once. Oh and by the way, the book ends with Israel never listening to him, and they all went into exile and guess who went into exile with them? Jeremiah. So in this real pointed scene, Jeremiah is in a ditch, he's naked, he's bleeding and he just got worked over again for saying what God told him to say. So he screams out to heaven, "You have seduced me. You have deceived me." What is his claim against the Lord? He says, "You wooed me in with this line that I could build up nations and destroy them, You reeled me in with that, and then this is what I've got instead." And so we watch Jeremiah walking through an immense amount of difficulty.

Some of you guys are saying, "This is real Old Testament, Matt. God's a lot happier in the New Testament. Okay, we can go to happy God in the New Testament. What about John the Baptist? What does the Bible say about John the Baptist? Born of a woman, there's never been a greater man. John the Baptist ends up in prison for calling out Herod's incestuous affair. By the way, I'm just doubting that prison in this period of time is like now. I don't think there's a lot of yard time back then. There's not a lot of exercise, not a lot of cable. I'm not straight up on my history there, but I could just guess. And so he sends a word to Jesus, "Are you the One or should we expect another?" Jesus quotes Isaiah 61 to him which is a Messianic prophesy but leaves off, ". . .and the captives shall be set free." Jesus sends word back and says, "Oh, I'm the One, but you're going to die in prison." So just so we're on the same page, the man of whom Jesus says, "There will never be a man born greater than this man," is beheaded in prison for doing, being and saying exactly what God told him to do be and say. Do you get that? I know some of you are like, "We should have had brunch, and we shouldn't have come."

Okay before Jesus is beaten and crucified, He prays, "Father, let's do this another way," and then goes to the cross. Paul is beaten severely, stoned, whipped, shipwrecked and then attacked by a snake. I mean, you wanna talk about long day? Shipwrecked, night and day at sea, end up on an island and then get attacked by a snake. At what point are you like, "Come on! Throw me a bone here." So in the end, the apostles all died very badly. They are beheaded, they are crucified upside down, they are thrown off the roof of the temple, they have their skull crushed in. The only one who dies, maybe quaintly, is John who was exiled in Patmos. But what we find out is, from tradition, is that they actually tried to boil him alive and he didn't die. It freaked them out, so they exiled him to Patmos. Okay, so it wasn't in biblical times that God's promise was that we wouldn't enter in to suffering. That wasn't the promise. And some of you have actually bought into a lie that is going to one day betray you. And that lie is that you can control the hand of God by your behavior, that if you do this, you get this. But Romans 11 is very clear, that you cannot put God in your debt.

We can also look at it historically. Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, died at 57. Despite the fact that he was an unbelievable preacher and he was unbelievably productive. I believe he wrote about 140-150 books, started an

orphanage, started a pastor's college. He was just a tremendous, tremendous man of God. He wrestled with and struggled with depression most of his life. In fact, there were large blocks of time where he was just AWOL and couldn't get out of bed with his depression. David Brainerd, probably not a well known name for most people, was a missionary to Indians in New Jersey. He contracted tuberculosis but continued to minister and never saw revival among those Indians. He never saw a lot of people come to faith but just faithfully served. One of Jonathan Edwards' daughter's nursed him through the last few days of his life. He died at the age of 29, and then Edwards daughter got sick with tuberculosis and eventually died. John Owen wrote probably the densest book I've ever read called *The Death of Death*, that talks about mortifying sin in the flesh. Owen had eleven children die before he did. Can you imagine planning the funeral for eleven children? I'll try to pull this up into a little more modern. If you grew up in church, you're probably familiar with the song *It Is Well With My Soul*. Horatio Spafford wrote that song after his two daughters drowned on a ship to England. And on and on I could go here, but I feel no need. So apparently, if it's true that we're not going to suffer and we're not going to have any pain, then God just started that. And then there's reality that shows that He hasn't started that. It's silliness. It's beyond that; it's silliness on steroids. It's an aggressive silliness.

Now, let's get to better news. By the way, since it's true that all of us are going to enter in at one place or another with suffering, we're in desperate need of one another, to be deeply known and to know deeply and we also need to understand it is coming so that when it comes, we understand. Let's finish this up. Go to Romans 8:35-39 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written," "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Suffering is coming, and we're all going to have a season where we personally walk through it or someone we love walks through it. It's imperative to know and grasp and understand that as believers in Christ, difficulty, sorrow, suffering and loss are not punitive. It's not God going, "Oh, you're not going to do that? Alright, then. Take that." The difficulty in sorrow for us is it's about mercy, not about wrath. Maybe that's a better way to say it. When you struggle, when I struggle, when you get sick, when our loved ones get sick, that's not God's wrath; more often than not, it's His mercy. We're not being punished. There's not wrath for those of us who are children of God. We have not been appointed to suffer wrath, but mercy. So the difficulty then, is about the mercy of God. I'll try and say it this way to make it really, really clear. The passive wrath of God is, to me, the most terrifying thing in the Bible. Here's what I mean by passive wrath. For God to leave you healthy and content with everything going perfect for you all the days of your life, right up into the judgment seat where you're damned, would be cruel of God. For Him to give you a thorn in your flesh, for Him to break your hip, for Him to get you sick, for Him to free up your hands off of the myth of control and show you how dependent you are on Him, is one of the most merciful things He could ever do. It is not the wrath of God, for those of us who are believers, for difficulty to befall us. Whether that difficulty is physical, whether that difficulty is in our relationships, whatever that difficulty is, He is revealing to you, out of His mercy, your desperate need for Him and your lack of control and your lack of ability to manipulate your environment for your own good.

Okay, let me move. Flip over to Romans 5. We're going to pick it up in verse 3. "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." Okay, I think we've got to relearn and rethink how we see the world around us, because I think that particularly here in the Bible Belt and here in Dallas, we buy into this lie that it's when everything is good and we're really, really pretty, that God is somehow glorified. Like you're going to be able to live a pretty enough life that someone is going to see that and someone is going to go, "Oh, I want that. I want that." Even if that's the case, what they want is not Jesus; what they want is your pretty life. And that's idolatry. So God's not ultimately glorified in you when you've

got your big house and everyone's happy and everyone's healthy and you got your cars and everything's going well and you're going, "Isn't He awesome? How awesome is God."

But you let a man or woman of God rejoice in their sufferings and now all of a sudden the whole thing comes unhinged. You let somebody get sick, you let somebody struggle, you let somebody hurt, you let them praise God in it and the world doesn't have any parameters for that. They don't know what to do with it. I'll give you an example just from our little journey together here the last 4-5 months. I find out that I have to have the resection done. They kind of run through the list of what could happen when they cut out a big piece of your brain. "You might not wake up, you might not remember, you might not be able to hold information and process it." They go through this list of things which was, to be quite honest with you, quite terrifying. So I shoot the video for you, not thinking I was going to die in the surgery, but I didn't know if I was going to be the same. So I shot a video and one of the things I said was that I was grateful that God trusted me with this, that He had been so good to us, and He had been so beautiful in this place and around this place for so long, that He would trust me then to suffer well in front of you. It felt like a real gift to me, and it's so confused the Associated Press that they had to come down and do a story. They literally came down and moved into the house for a couple of days. They were so confused by how in the world you could try to get to the bottom of how you could say thank you for this. Now, let me be very clear here. I'm no masochist, I'd much rather bring Him glory by preaching, I'd much rather bring Him glory by driving an '01 Impala that backfires in school zones, I'd much rather bring Him glory by giving away a large part of our income, I'd much rather glorify Him in those ways, than to have brain cancer. But I don't get to choose that. He gets to choose that. So what I wanted to do was walk faithfully in it and it confound the world to the point where Eric Gorski has to come and go, "Okay, we need your help here understanding this. How do you rejoice in this? So you're thankful that God's given you this?" So I got to clarify, "Um, I'm rejoicing in what He's doing in it."

So, there's a line there that I think some people cross in the other direction. That's what we see happening in Romans 5, where Paul is rejoicing in our suffering because in the end it leads to hope and glory. So it's not punitive, it's not random and it has not been given to us by God to show us whose boss. There's a purpose in it, there's a limit in it and in the end, God is not going to give to us what He will not sustain us in. God is not going to send something into your life that you will not be able to stand in. Now, if you're expecting that power to be there right now, I think you've got a false expectation. I think that power comes when it's time to walk in it. In fact, one of the ironies, is I was preaching in men's Bible study before this all happened, and I was saying that I think until something comes that takes the foundation out from under you or rocks the foundation that you're standing on, you just kind of hope you'll make it. You think you'll stand, you think you'll be strong, but you don't know until it comes. And I believe at that moment the Holy Spirit gives you the power to stand. Man, that's exactly what we found out and exactly what I've watched a lot of you go through and stand in also.

That brings us to our last little bit here. Let's go back to Romans 8 and read one more verse. We'll start it in 18. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time. . ." Can we agree that the sufferings of this present time are vast? You see, suffering is relative to where you are, what you've been through. So you could have an 18 year old just be absolutely devastated by an event that wouldn't rock a lot of us because we have had a little bit more life, but it doesn't take away the fact that it really hurts and it really wounds and it really presses where they are. And so suffering is relative, but on the grand scheme of things, you and I have it pretty sweet. And I'm including myself in that group. Just look at what's happened in Haiti. I'm talking hundreds of thousands of people that have died over the last couple of years of just disaster and disease. And there are people dying of disease today that we could cure for three dollars at Walgreens. So the suffering today is vast. It's vast for a lot of us personally; it's vast on the grand scheme of things universally. It's easy to see. So, listen to what he says here, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Let me be honest. I have a brain that's creative and I can think of a lot of

things, but this is hard for me to get my head around. Even if I use my imagination, it's hard to get. What could be so compelling in the future that all the suffering of mankind is not worthy to even compare to it?

Now what shifted from the Old Testament is we know who it is who comes reigning on the clouds. It's not a faceless, nameless Messiah; it's the crucified, risen Jesus Christ. And when He comes, all death, all disease, all sorrow, all pain, all panic and all anxiety die. Not only does it die, but all that existed before is not even worthy to compare. We don't even look back on that with, "Man, wasn't that horrible?" So, how beautiful is this over here? This promise for our future that all that we've walked through isn't worthy to be compared. So we look at it and what we find out in 1 Corinthians 15 is that you and I have physical bodies. I always want to try to unpack for you that you've got to get out of Tom and Jerry when you start talking heaven. It's not ethereal, you're not on a cloud, and you're not playing a harp. That's not how this thing ends, with thousands of years of you strumming on a harp with a bunch of other people. You have an imperishable body. You have a body that's not going to get weak, and it's not going to get sick. There's no pain, no suffering, no loss and we don't even need the sun anymore, for God will be our light. We will dwell with Him. He will dwell with us. There's not going to be the need for faith, there's not going to be the need for us to go, "Help me through this and show me that You're real. Show me You're there." He will dwell with us. We will dwell with Him. This is some of what is painted in the future and if you get back into some of the Psalms, apparently the mountains cry out, the trees dance and clap. It's going to be awesome. I'm hoping that we can fly. We'll see. I just made that part up, I don't know if that's going to happen or not, but I can hope. My wife always has dreams of flying, but I've never had one so I'm just jealous. So, I'm hoping on the day when we can fly. But this is our future. That this is what is to come when the ruling, reigning, anointed One of God returns to call His people to Himself and to present us to God, holy and blameless before Him.

And for now, we need each other and we need to understand that it's coming. You don't need to let it catch you off guard. And I know this is heavy. You need to settle into the fact that there is no one in this room that can't have their life completely altered with a phone call or a knock on your door, today. So if you want to know why I so aggressively come after your idols like I do, if you want to know why I'm constantly going, "What are you really holding onto, what do you really value, what are you really about?," if you want to know why I'm coming after you, if it's not Christ, then you've got nothing to stand on when it's your turn. Okay, your money's not going to help you on that day. Your beauty is not going to help you on that day. In fact some of you are going to have your beauty taken from you. I can go on and on here. Your house isn't going to be able to save you. The pride you have and how well you can do your work, it's not going to work. There's coming a day that all that you've put your hope in and all that you've tried to manage and all that you've tried control will be laid bare. It's coming. If not for you, personally, for somebody you love around you that you'd trade everything for. It is a mathematical certainty. So, are you prepared for that? And what I mean by prepared is, are you trusting in, hoping in and pursuing Jesus Christ? Are you trusting that He's enough and are you trusting that He would never send into your life more than what you could bare? Are you finding your strength in Him? I think these are questions that have to be answered. Some of you are answering them right now. I am not the only one hurting in this season. I am not the only one that has sickness in this season. I am not the only one that has circumstances that are difficult in this season. In fact, in elder lead prayer just a couple of weeks ago, we almost didn't have enough guys to help us pray for other people. People are hurting. They're banged up. I don't think Jesus is the lamp. I don't think you rub it and all things are made perfect. I think Jesus sustains. The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not that if you follow Jesus everything goes well for you. That's not the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is that no matter what comes, He'll be enough. You get God, that's what you get. You get reconciled, you get alienation fixed. And so no matter what comes, you get Him. And I've said that before, and I'm saying that now.

Let's pray. "Father I thank You for these men and women. Some of them I know by name and I see and hear. I know the situation they're in, and I know the sorrow they're walking through right now. I know the difficulties that are pressed on them. And some of us are nowhere near that. Some of us, something like today is means to prep us for what is to

come. And so I thank You that You love us and I thank You that suffering has a limit. I thank You that it has a time frame and that for those of us who are in You, that we do not suffer wrath, but mercy. And so, that even the things we prayed for last Wednesday for so many people, from difficulties in relationships to sick spouses, to sick people, we pray that those afflictions have a purpose and that You have not abandoned Your people to walk in that. You will draw near richly and sweetly to those who are afraid. And so we thank You and praise You for that. Help us to reflect now and think as we move into a little bit of worship. Stir up our hearts and minds towards You, a heart of gratitude that You are near, a heart of hope that you will not leave us or forsake us. It's for Your beautiful name I pray, Amen."

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