

Delivered from Death

Individual Message

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Take your Bibles and open with me this morning to Psalm 116. Next week, it is very possible that we will start through our new series in Judges. I'm not absolutely sure yet. We'll start in the next few weeks anyway, but in preparing those messages and outlining and preparing to preach, everything changed on Tuesday this week. I wanted to preach a special message and will confess to you that working on the message for Ray's memorial, ministering to Joyce and to the family, coming home yesterday after the service and actually taking a nap whether I intended to or not, enjoying time under the ceiling fan, I got up in the afternoon, late afternoon and thought, "I've got to preach again in the morning," and I began to pray and to search the Scriptures, reading lots of Spurgeon this week. One of his messages that ministered to me was a message he preached on Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His saints."

Preachers preach from time to time and say often from the pulpit, "If you've got to do something to do it right with Christ. If you've got to do something to do what God wants you to do, do it today because we don't have a guarantee of tomorrow." I've preached it more times than I could probably count, preaching with all the sincerity of my heart that we don't know when we leave this place today if we will be back here the next week. This is what the word of God tells us but when it's driven home because it happens, it's not that we preach and, well, at least we shouldn't and just assume that we'll all be back again next week because that simply is not a biblical view. We are not sure. The book of Ecclesiastes tells us, the book of James tells us, we're not sure of tomorrow, we're not sure of the day or of the hour that God has appointed for us. What we do know and what we confess is that God is sovereign, he has set and appointed the days for us. He caused our conception, he knit us in the womb. Isaiah tells us he even causes the very day that labor comes upon our mothers and as we are born, he knows the days that he has fashioned for us before we were ever conceived, he knows exactly how long we will live on this earth. He numbers our hairs. He counts every thought. He'll hold us accountable for every word that we speak in this short life. I am sure that when it comes time to give an account, there are times that we wish this life had been much shorter than it is because we so take for granted that we have tomorrow.

And you ask how can you be prepared? How can you be ready? How do you live like that? The world lives in a constant state of fear. I can't even watch the news anymore. If

you watch the news, something is going to kill us all today and if it doesn't kill us all today, it's going to kill us all tomorrow, and if it's not a meteor in outer space, it's a germ that we can't even know how to treat. There are all of these things that are happening. Every week it's some new threat, some new contagion, some new disaster. It's because we do live in a fallen world and it's because the wages of sin is death, and it's because if Jesus does not come back, we all will one day die. And we say that and we automatically think in our minds one day way long far away, but as we look at the warning, the admonition, the encouragement that we don't have a guarantee of tomorrow, that's really not bad news because we have a guarantee of forever, and because in preaching that, I think Ray was the person most ready for heaven that I've ever met. He was ready. When God called, he was ready. He was ready to leave all of this behind. He was ready to be with Jesus. He was ready to be done with this world and with his own sin and his own sorrow. And in his optimism, every day is a good day, some are better than others, every day is a good day because this is the day the Lord has made.

So prayerfully last night I began to work an outline and found out that I could get a whole message from one verse. That doesn't surprise you all, does it? Psalm 116:8. I want to read the whole Psalm for you, all 19 verses, and then we'll look at verse 8 this morning. We think this was David who wrote this. We're not positive but whoever wrote this Psalm had just been spared from death and so he writes,

1 I love the LORD, because He has heard My voice and my supplications.
2 Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call upon Him
as long as I live. 3 The pains of death surrounded me, And the pangs of
Sheol [the grave] laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. 4 Then I
called upon the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I implore You, deliver my
soul!" 5 Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful. 6
The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. 7
Return to your rest, O my soul, For the LORD has dealt bountifully with
you. 8 For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears,
And my feet from falling. 9 I will walk before the LORD In the land of the
living. 10 I believed, therefore I spoke, "I am greatly afflicted." 11 I said
in my haste, "All men are liars." 12 What shall I render to the LORD For
all His benefits toward me? 13 I will take up the cup of salvation, And call
upon the name of the LORD. 14 I will pay my vows to the LORD Now in
the presence of all His people. 15 Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the
death of His saints. 16 O LORD, truly I am Your servant; I am Your
servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds. 17 I
will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, And will call upon the
name of the LORD. 18 I will pay my vows to the LORD Now in the
presence of all His people, 19 In the courts of the LORD's house, In the
midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!

In the midst of this hymn of love and praise for God of thanksgiving and of gratitude, we find verse 8,

8 For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from falling.

This is the work that Christ has accomplished for us by his righteous life, by his innocence as he was condemned to death by his crucifixion. Through his resurrection, through his ascension and even now as he sits at the right hand of the throne of God, Christ came to seek and save that which was lost.

We start with the fact that we're all born sinners. We're born that way. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death. Death was introduced into this creation by the disobedience of Adam and Eve. God's perfect creation was marred. The first sacrifices that had to be made were the animals that were slain so that their skins could be used to clothe Adam and Eve in their nakedness because of their shame, because of their sin, because of their abandonment of the word of God, and yet this was not a surprise, this was not Plan B, this did not catch God off guard. You understand, God is not the author of sin but when God gave Adam and Eve free will to choose in the garden, he knew what they would choose and he still created them. He knew what it would cost to redeem them and that is the whole purpose behind creation.

So often we think that God's plan of salvation was reactionary because of the sudden fall of Adam and Eve. No, God from the beginning, from before the beginning had determined to send his Son to be a man to live a perfect life, to be crucified to seek and save that which was lost. And what we learn from the Scriptures is that we can proclaim with the psalmist, "You have delivered my soul from death."

We were born dead. We were born carrying the weight of a death sentence. We were born carrying a conviction, a penalty, a judgment that we would never be able to pay. We were facing an eternity under the wrath of God for our sin against him and our rebellion and our hatred of him, and yet in the midst of that rebellion and in spite of that rebellion, God demonstrated his love in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. He has delivered us from death, first by giving us a new birth. If you've repented of your sin, if you've placed your faith in Christ, that is because you were born again by his Spirit. The doctrine of regeneration, that God takes dead sinners and brings them to new life.

I love it that R. C. Sproul says that God is not standing, Christ is not standing on the bow of a ship throwing a life preserver and a lifeline to a man who is drowning. No, Christ in accomplishing our salvation jumped into the sea, swam to the bottom where we were a dead corpse and brought us to the surface and breathed into us new life, revived us, forgave us, and embraced us with his grace.

In our study through Colossians in Colossians 1:24, Paul wrote, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church." We sacrifice for one another because he sacrificed for us, because he gave himself for us so that we could be made alive. In Ephesians 2:1-2 he wrote this, "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and

sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience."

We were dead. He's made us alive. He's given to us the new birth. This is what it means to be born again. It's been within my lifetime that we saw the movement where Christians began to identify themselves in the evangelical world as a born again Christian. Let me tell you something: there's no such thing as a non-born again Christian. If you're a Christian, it's because you've been born again. It's because you've been regenerated by the power of the Spirit of God. John 3:3, Jesus in talking with Nicodemus "answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'"

Do you understand that before our regeneration we wanted to have nothing to do with God? 1 Corinthians tells us, 2 Corinthians tells us, the New Testament tells us from start to finish we hated God, we repressed the knowledge of God, we didn't want to come to God. On our own, we were bound in sin. We were dead. We couldn't get loose. We hadn't even the desire to get loose. We couldn't will it. We couldn't believe it. We didn't have faith. We didn't have the ability. We were dead and Jesus told Nicodemus, "Unless you're born again, you can't see the kingdom of God." Now there are those who preach that when you repent and when you believe, then you are born again. No, you can't even see the kingdom of God unless the Holy Spirit has first regenerated you. It's his work that brings us to life so that we can even see that we need the Savior.

It is this new birth by the will of God, not the will of man. These verses make it so clear. This is so pure and it's so simple but we've got to be reminded of this. John in John 1, John writes in verse 12 and 13, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." If you're born again, that's God's doing. It's not our doing. We can't resuscitate ourselves. He is the giver of life. It's not of blood. It's not of the will of the flesh. It's not of the will of any man. It's the will of God.

John 5:21 says, "as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will." He gives us this new life. John 6:63-65, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, 'Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.'" In John 10, after identifying himself as the good shepherd, in verse 24 Jesus says, it tells us, "Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, 'How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's

hand. 30 I and My Father are one." In understanding salvation by the will of God, not the will of man, we have to confess that there are sheep and there are goats. God doesn't change the goats to sheep. He doesn't change the tares to wheat. He says, "You don't believe because you're not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice and I know them."

How long has he known us? Those of us who are born again, how long has he known us? Since before time. You know that's what the word "foreknowledge" means? People say foreknowledge is God looking through the tunnel of time and seeing who will choose what and who will do what and then God reacting based on what we do. Foreknowledge is not a term where you look through and see events. Foreknowledge in the Greek is a relational term. It means "I intimately know you." He knew us before we were even created. How is that for the awesome power of our Almighty God? He knew us intimately and loved us before we ever came into being.

This new birth, this regeneration is by the will of God and it's accomplished by the word of God. Psalm 19:7 reminds us, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul." It is the word of God faithfully preached that turns us away from our sin and to Christ. Romans 1:16, Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." Where does the power to believe come from? It comes from the power of the gospel. It is the word of God. Romans 10:17 tells us the same, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

In Psalm 119:130, the psalmist writes, "The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple." Now that's significant. I actually in preparing the message, I did a search for this verse and I misquoted this verse. I quoted this verse, "The entrance of Your word gives life." Now that's true but that's not what the verse says. The verse says, "The entrance of Your words gives light." Now why is that significant? What were we before Christ? Ephesians 5:8. It doesn't say you were in darkness, you were darkness, but now it says you are light in the Lord. Where did that light come from? The word of God. The living Word, through the written word, by the power of the Spirit applied to our dead self, our dead spirit, our dead flesh. It is the entrance of his word that gives light where there was only darkness.

As a result of being born again by God's grace, he gives to us. In Acts, he tells us he gives us the gift of repentance. He gives us the gift of faith. We hear the gospel, we believe the gospel, we repent of our sin, we trust in Christ. We now become a new being. We are converted. We are adopted. We're a son of God, a daughter of God. We belong to his family now and forevermore and that begins the process of sanctification.

2 Corinthians reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." This is how we've been delivered from death. We've been given new life and that new life is a new life that continues and that will go on and that is everlasting. It is a life of sanctification. It's a life of holiness. It's a life of being conformed into the image of Christ. We are a brand new creation now.

Now are we completely new? Not yet. We've been called to new life. We're repented. We've believed. We've been justified. We've been adopted. We've been indwelt by the Spirit. But we're still waiting for that redemption to be finally complete when this flesh is redeemed. We still live in these fallen bodies so what do we do? We still know that we're going to die. We still know that if Jesus doesn't come back, we don't know the day or the hour that he's coming or that we may be going to be with him, and as we face the certainty, the inevitability of our mortality, we have to trust that the psalmist knew exactly what he was saying when he said, "My soul, my life has been delivered from death." Because of this new life that is in us, this new life that is everlasting life, we quote John 3:16 all the time, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish." What is the life that we have now? Is it a temporary life? It is a life that we can lose. It is a life we can throw away, that we can give back? No, we've been given everlasting life. The life of Christ now in us and through us.

Romans 6:4 tells us, "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Our baptism is just a mere picture of the new life that we now live. We have died with Christ and we have been raised with him and now it's his life, it's his Spirit indwelling us, living through us. Romans 8:10-11 says, "if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin." You see, this is where we get so confused sometimes when it comes to death, we forget our body is already dead. We were born dying. That's where this body will end. If Christ does not come back and glorify us where we stand, we will be absent from this body at some point.

But notice he doesn't say you are dead, he says the body is dead because when you've got the life of Christ in you, you will never die. We'll never die. If Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin but the spirit is life because of righteousness, but if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. And here's the good news: we're looking forward to that day when we're given a new body and that new body is absolutely free of every taint of sin and self.

Can you imagine serving God with no doubt, with no worry, with no fear, with no confusion, without thinking twice about this and wondering about that? Can you imagine serving God with no temptation? Can you imagine serving God without there even being the hint of the idea that there's any self involved at all? Can you imagine communing with God and not thinking, "Is that the Spirit or is that me? Is that what I want or is that what God wants?" Self will be completely out of the way because sin has been conquered and we will be given new glorified bodies that are completely free from the fall.

This will be the end result of our sanctification at glorification. We'll be holy. We will be righteous. He calls us to walk in holiness and to walk in righteousness. Can you imagine being able to do that and it not being a struggle? Can you imagine being able to do that without your flesh fighting back? Can you imagine doing that because you want to and

because you are able to? Without any hindrance. Or being sanctified. Romans 8:29-30 remind us this is why we were saved, "whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son." We were saved to be changed, to be conformed to look like Jesus, "that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." The good news about my soul being delivered from death in Psalm 116 is that when Paul talks about glorification, he talks about it in the past tense. Now are any of us glorified yet? No, but in God's mind it's a done deal. It's sure. It's certain. It will come to pass because God has said that it is so.

John 17:17 reminds us it's also the word that sanctifies us, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." If you ever dare come to a place in your Christian walk and in your daily life where you think you don't need the word of God, we do need to hear the gospel. We need to be reminded that it's the word of God that called us to new life and it's the word of God that continues to conform us and mold us into the image of Christ. It is the word in the hands of the Spirit that the Potter is using to mold the clay so that we will look like Jesus. When we say my soul has been delivered from death, it's not just that we've been regenerated and given new everlasting life with the hope of heaven and a new heaven and a new earth living with God, with Christ, in his presence, worshiping him, adoring him forever. It's not just that we have a new being, that we are a new creation in him and are being conformed into his image. It is, indeed, that we will have new bodies, that he will glorify us, and that if we die before he comes, when he does come back, we will be raised from the dead.

The doctrine of the resurrection. Johnny Cash said it this way. He was a pretty deep theologian. "Ain't no grave gonna hold this body down." When Jesus comes back, when that archangel shouts, when that trumpet is blown, if we have died and gone to be with Christ, we will come back with him and we will be resurrected, the graves will be opened. People say, "How does he do that? How does he gather back all of your body together?" The point is it's not where your body is or where your body was. He's going to give us a brand new glorified body, raised to new life. That means that we go into the new heavens and the new earth not just as a spiritual being but with a physical body. You understand, that glorified body is a physical body. Jesus after the resurrection, what did he do? He had the disciples touch him. He had Thomas feel his wounds. He ate with them on the seashore. He was there physically in a glorified body.

We will be glorified and then we will be able to enjoy creation. Can you imagine the new heavens and the new earth? Can you imagine creation? It talks about fruit trees that bear 12 different kinds of fruit each in a different season, and can you imagine being able to enjoy all of God's creation with no sin, with no sorrow, with no stickers, with no fire ants? Can you imagine? If the fire ants are there, I'm still working on that Greek word about the flames from Gehenna, but if they're there, you understand that when God sets everything back when there is no taint of sin, all of creation lives in harmony and peace and we will enjoy that peace in a resurrected body.

1 Corinthians 6:14 says, "God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power." When we talk about the doctrine of the resurrection and about my soul being delivered from death, as I mentioned yesterday in the memorial service, in the eulogy, why then do we still die? If death has been conquered, why do we die? Well, it's the point that we don't really. We're absent from the body so this body no longer functions but Paul says to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord because this is what we confess when the Spirit of God has brought this new life to be in you, that new life will go on forever and whether we are here or in his presence, we are very much still alive. Those who are left with the absented body grieve. There is loss. There is loneliness. There is longing. These things are only natural but we can weep and rejoice at the same time. We can grieve and have joy because we know this truth, if we're in Christ we will never die. The life we've been given is forever. It's his life in us.

1 Corinthians 15, in this great chapter on resurrection, Paul writes, "someone will say, 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?' Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies." You understand, to become what God wants us to become, we have to die first. "And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain--perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead." This body, this fallen body, he says, "is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

If we're absent from this body and present with the Lord, we will one day be resurrected. We will be given a new body to inhabit the new heavens and the new earth. John 11, Jesus reminds us as he spoke with Mary and Martha. Mary and Martha talked to Christ after the death of Lazarus and it says, "Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.'" Isn't that interesting that so often when a loved one dies, one of the questions that we get asked is where was God in all of this? That's what Martha just asked. "'Where were You? If You'd been here, he would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.'" You see, when faced with the grief of death, Jesus preached the resurrection. Now we know what he was really talking about. "Martha said to Him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'" Martha said, "Yes, I know he's going to be raised later." "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'"

You see, this might be part of our trouble, our loved ones continue to die and Jesus continues to tarry. He hasn't come back yet and so we tend to think of the resurrection as some far off future event, and we tend to think of it in terms of the psalmist who writes, "My soul is delivered from death," and we rejoice in salvation but we're still faced with the point that at some point we'll die, even Lazarus after he was raised died again. There have only been two that haven't died, Elijah and Enoch. There are those who will be alive when Christ returns but that seems so far away.

You see, we think about the resurrection as so far future but what did Jesus just say to Martha? "I am the resurrection. I am the resurrection." You see, the resurrection that we long for is not some future event where our body is miraculously reconstituted and indwelt by our spirit that's been with Christ. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection. If you're in Me, I'm the resurrection. I'm the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.'" Jesus is our resurrection. We have to take hope in the fact that if we are in him, we are alive forever. Yes, we look forward to that resurrection, to that reunion, but you know, the reunion when Christ returns, that reunion is not about looking up loved ones, it's about being with Jesus. Now the benefit of being with Jesus is we then have all of eternity to enjoy our loved ones.

Can you imagine spending time in the new heavens and the new earth in a glorified body without the taint of sin, without the hint of sin, without the curse for sin with our loved ones? Can you imagine the walks and the talks and the relationships we can have when sin doesn't interject itself into everything that we touch? People talk about heaven on earth, not even close because then there will be no sin and it will be all about Jesus. All about Jesus.

The psalmist says, "My soul has been delivered from death." We can rejoice in the fact that Christ has accomplished this salvation by giving us a new birth, by making us a new being, and by promising new bodies. He also goes on and he says, "For You have

delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears." There are a lot of tears in this life, aren't there? Now there are tears of joy but more often than not when we're talking about tears, they're tears of sorrow. These extremes of emotion have the same facial expression, the shedding of tears. Job 5:7 reminds us, one of Job's counselors reminds him, "man is born to trouble, As the sparks fly upward." The word for "trouble" there can be translated "sorrow." Man is born to sorrow. People who tell us that we are not going to suffer in this life live in an imaginary fantasy world. This world is full of suffering. It's all around us. It doesn't mean that we can't rejoice, it doesn't mean that we can't be full of joy, it doesn't mean that, in fact, we're supposed to be rejoicing in those things. We're born to this.

Psalm 116:3 earlier in this passage, "The pains of death surrounded me, And the pangs of Sheol," of the grave, "laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow." You don't have to look very hard to find it, do you? Ecclesiastes 2:23 reminds us, "For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity." Ecclesiastes 2:5, "I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them." He did all of this work and wondered, "What's it for?" By the time he gets to chapter 2, verse 17, he says, "Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind."

2 Corinthians 7:10 reminds us though, "godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death." There is a godly sorrow. These tears that we cry, I've labeled them transient tears. They're only for a short time. There will come a time when the tears won't be there anymore but not yet. Even Jesus in the garden said to the disciples, to Peter, James and John, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." Jesus at that point in his agony in the garden asked Peter, James and John to watch and to pray. He said he was exceedingly sorrowful, he was sorrowful even to the point of death. This sorrow weighed upon him so much it felt like it was going to take his life from him, and when he asked these three beloved disciples, "Stay here and watch with Me," what do they do? They fall asleep. Three times he comes back.

Jesus said to them that he needed them to watch and pray because the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. All my life I've heard that from preachers and they would preach that he was telling the disciples, "I understand. It's okay that you fell asleep because I know, you know, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. I know you want to be here with Me but you just can't hold your eyes open." Jesus wasn't talking about the disciples. He was sorrowful even unto death and the reason he wanted them to pray for him is because in that moment, in that agony, he said, "My spirit is willing." We know that in the prayer that he prayed, "Nevertheless not My will but Yours." But his flesh was weak. The agony of the garden was the fact that Jesus was God in full human flesh. He was struggling. He was agonizing. He was sorrowful. There were tears. There were great drops of blood that he was sweating in that agony.

But the psalmist says, "My eyes are delivered from tears." How? We see a life full of tears. We see the sorrow. We see even the sorrow of Christ. We have to look at suffering like God looks at suffering and we have to see that even in those moments of the hottest

tears, of the deepest grief, do you realize that God treasures our tears? He treasures our tears. Psalm 56, starting in verse 8, he says, "You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book? When I cry out to You, Then my enemies will turn back; This I know, because God is for me. In God (I will praise His word), In the LORD (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God; I will render praises to You, For You have delivered my soul from death. Have You not kept my feet from falling, That I may walk before God In the light of the living?"

When he says there you number my wanderings, you put my tears in your bottle, are they not in your book, this in the Hebrew is a picture of the idea that God is writing down our daily walk on a scroll. He's keeping track of us where we are. And of course, we like to think that we plan our steps and the Bible tells us that we can plan our steps but it's God who directs our path. And as he records our wanderings, our going and our coming, when we're on track, when we're off track, as God puts those numbers into his books, it also says he puts our tears into a bottle. This from the ancient world is something that we have lost but you can actually look this up online. In fact, I shared from our missionary Trevor Johnson shared this week from some study he was doing, in fact, on this very thing about suffering and about tears and about the tears in the bottle. You know, you can order tear bottles online. It's a real thing and it's existed for thousands of years. Little clay bottles or little glass bottles with a little cork lid that are made to cup up into the corner of your eye and to collect tears. In the ancient world as people would go and as there would be funeral services and as they would mourn, they would take these tear bottles, they would take them to the funeral, they would collect tears during the memorial, they would cork it and they would either throw that into the grave with the remains with the body, or they would give that to the family of the deceased for them to keep and to have to see the sorrow that that death had caused.

God collects our tears. They are precious to him. And we think about the things that cause us to shed the tears and it's suffering and it's the horrible things that happen in this life, or it's the consequence of our own sin, our own stupidity sometimes. And yet God is preserving these tears in a bottle. He treasures our sorrow. It means something to him. He keeps them. We're reminded of them but do you know what's going to happen to our tears eventually? Not yet, not now, I wish now, but when we cry, God treasures those tears and he's promised us that he's going to transform those tears. In John 16:20, he says, "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you." The promise of Jesus that he will turn our sorrow into joy.

Isaiah 53 reminds us, the suffering servant, verses 4 through 6 it says, "Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our

iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Do you know here the source of the suffering, the sorrow of Christ, the tears that he was weeping even in the garden? It's prophesied in Isaiah, the source of his sorrows, the source of his grief is us. It's our sin. It's our transgression that was laid upon him for which he was bruised, for which he was chastised. And yet what does he do? In sorrowing for our sin, we have the promise that our sorrow will be turned to joy.

Psalm 30:5 says, "His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning." Joy comes in the morning. Can you imagine that morning when Jesus comes back? Can you imagine Ray Tuesday morning? He usually could smile a pretty big smile. Can you imagine seeing Jesus?

Revelation 21:4 tells us the truth about our tears. In the new heavens, the new earth in a glorified body free from the taint of sin, sorrow and death, when all of that has been wiped away, do you know what else is wiped away? "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." That's a reason to hope, isn't it?

He has delivered my soul from death and he has delivered my eyes from tears. What do we do in the meantime while we're waiting for this transformation, for the sorrow to be turned into everlasting joy? In the meantime, we weep with those who weep. We share and we treasure each other's tears with the hope that joy comes in the morning.

So the psalmist says, "You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears," and finally, "And my feet from falling." God promises us protection. In this new life, in this transformation, in looking at moving from sorrow to joy, not just as a way of life but as a state of being in heaven and in the new creation, he says, "Now while we struggle, while we sorrow, while we weep, while we flee," he says, "He has delivered my feet from falling." Psalm 37:23-24 David writes, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand." Even if we trip, even if we stumble, God has a hold of us. He holds us with his hand.

In Psalm 40:2 he says, "He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps." We sing the hymn, "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." He set our feet upon a rock. He's given us a sure place to stand. One of my favorite poems from the Psalms, "He has set my feet on high places, hinds' feet on high places." He's given us stability. He's given us a foundation. He's given us a path to walk and we will not slip.

Psalm 66:9 says, "Who keeps our soul among the living, And does not allow our feet to be moved." It is God. Proverbs 3:21-23 says, "My son, let them not depart from your eyes," wisdom and understanding. He says, "Keep sound wisdom and discretion; So they will be life to your soul And grace to your neck. Then you will walk safely in your way,

And your foot will not stumble." Psalm 16:1, David cries out, "Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust." It's not just about not slipping, it's about preservation. It's about the fact that God keeps us, God preserves us, God holds our life. We belong to him, we're his and nobody as we read it in John, nobody can snatch us from his hand. Christ has us and the Father has Christ and nobody can take us out of the Father's hands. How much more secure can you be in this life or the next? He has us so when David prays, "Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust," we know that he preserves us.

Psalm 32:7, "You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble," again the word could mean sorrow, "You shall surround me with songs of deliverance." Psalm 40:11 says, "Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O LORD; Let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me." God's mercy, his truth, his righteousness preserves us. Psalm 61:7 says, "He shall abide before God forever. Oh, prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him!" Preserved by mercy and truth. Psalm 121:8 says, "The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in From this time forth, and even forevermore."

We have hope even in the face of death because we've been delivered from death because our eyes have been delivered from tears and because our feet have been set on sure footing and he will preserve our going out and our coming in. Wherever we travel, he'll watch over us from this time forth and forevermore. Now there are those who take these things to extremes and they say, "Well, that means I should never be sick and I should never have sorrow and I should never have difficulty in this life." No, it means that when you do suffer those things in this life, God can still preserve us in the midst of suffering. God can even preserve us in the death of this physical body, can't he? In fact, sometimes the greatest healing that can come to a person is to be set free from this body of death to be taken into the presence of Christ and to be forever free from all that hinders us from following him.

Proverbs 20:28, "Mercy and truth preserve the king, And by lovingkindness he upholds his throne." It is God's mercy, it's his lovingkindness, it's his care for us that preserves us. 2 Timothy 4:18, Paul wrote, "And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!" He preserves us.

Jude 1, "Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ." He holds us. He preserves us. On the other side of preservation is the doctrine of perseverance. God protects us and preserves us so that we might persevere. Don't ever think that your perseverance relies upon you. If our perseverance in the faith relied upon us, how many of us would persevere? Not a single one of us. We persevere because he preserves. He holds us so that we could hold onto him, and even when we let go, he still doesn't. He's got ahold of us and even when we fail, he is faithful. He will never let us go.

Matthew 10:22 says, "you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved." Another way to say that is if you're saved, you'll endure to the

end. It's not a challenge like, okay, you have to do this if you really want to make it. No. It's a measure of hope. You will be able to persevere because you are his because he has you and he will preserve you. Our preservation, our ability to push on, our ability to endure, to be longsuffering, these things are born in us by the Spirit of God. They don't come naturally to us. God accomplishes this in us.

In James 5:10-11 James says, "My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord--that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful." Something that is telling here because we always focus on the suffering and we always focus on the patience and we always focus on Job and Job's perseverance and what Job did when God did and allowed Satan to do all that he did, then Job said, "The Lord gives, the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." He said in the midst of all of this whether it's coming or going, "All I can do is bless God." And we miss that last phrase in James 5:11. You see, it wasn't about Job, it wasn't about Satan, it wasn't about his kids, his family, his possessions, it wasn't about his friends, it wasn't about the test, it wasn't about his perseverance, it wasn't about his ability, it was that the Lord, the Lord is compassionate and merciful. It's that in the midst of all of the things that Satan brought to pass with the permission of God in the life of Job, it's not about how horrible Job was tempted and it wasn't about how faithful Job became because let's admit it, by the time you get to chapter 30 through 32 of Job, Job blew it. Job cursed the day he was born and started mouthing off at God. It's not about Job. It's about God's compassion and mercy, that in the midst of this life and this fallen world, we can lose everything and if we've got Jesus, we've got all we ever needed.

The compassion and the mercy of God to take us in this fallen world to preserve us, to sustain us, to love us, to walk with us, to nurture us, to feed us, to mature us, to grow us, to produce fruit through us, to give us good works to walk in, to give us all things that pertain to life and godliness, look at the compassion of God. He looks on us in this miserable estate, born into this life of trouble and he gives us a reason every single day to rejoice because this is the day the Lord has made. And it's not about us, it's not about our sorrow, it's not about our trouble, it's not about our loneliness, it's about the compassion and the mercy and the love of God. He has stooped himself so low to care for us.

John 10:28 and 29 Jesus says, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." He will preserve us. He will hold us. He will sustain us.

We heard in the last two messages from the end of Colossians there is no name higher than the name of Jesus and Jesus just told us that there's nobody mightier than God, and if God has ahold of us, nobody is going to be able to get us free from his grip. Do you know the real good news about the fact that Jesus has us and God has Jesus, the real good news there is we can't even wriggle out. It's not that other people can come along and pry us loose. We can't even wriggle loose. We might have tried a few times. We can't get loose.

In this perseverance then in Hebrews 13:5-6 we read this, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' So we may boldly say: 'The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'"

When we preach this truth, "You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears and my feet from falling," we know that he's done this because Jesus walks with us in this life. It's his life lived through us. It's Christ in us and whatever we face, whatever the sorrow, whatever the suffering, whatever the trouble, whatever the rejoicing, whatever the joy, whatever we walk through he says, "I'll never leave you nor forsake you." That's the foundation here for contentment because, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." Jesus says, "You have Me in everything you face. You have Me." And who did he tell us that he was? "I am the resurrection and the life." When we believe in him, we're told we will not die. Jesus asked, "Do you believe this?" Do you believe that Ray is with Jesus this morning? Can you imagine with the angels around the throne worshiping God unhindered? Yes, we grieve. Yes, there is a huge hole now to fill in the life of our church. Did God know this? Yes, he did. This was God's doing. This was God's time and it's his reminder to us are you ready to be with Jesus? Rejoice this week even as we grieve. Because of the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we can declare with certainty, "You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling."

Let's pray together.

Father, we do thank You this morning for Your word, for the assurance that it brings to us, for the hope that it gives us, for the work that You've done to save us, to conform us to the image of Christ, to give to us new life, to make us holy. We do look forward to glorification, to the resurrection, to being reunited with those who have gone before, and most of all for being with Jesus. But Father, remind us Jesus is the resurrection. He is the resurrection life living in us right now today where we are in this life that You have brought to us by Your grace. It is ours forever. I pray that we would spend that life in service to You and in service to others.

This morning we continue to lift up Joyce to You, Jeremy and Jason, Ally, Aaron and Quinn and Ray's brothers and sisters, nieces, all the rest of the family. Comfort them. Point them to the truth. Send along those to faithfully help them bear this burden and weep with them but also to rejoice. Father, I thank You that even earlier this week Joyce found solace in Romans 8. In light of the glorification, in light of what lays ahead, in light of the truth of the gospel, all things really do work out together for good to those who love You and are called according to Your purpose. We thank You for the transforming work of Christ in our lives, for the victory that He gives us over sin and death. Help us to realize more of that this week as we press on to be faithful to You. We pray these things this morning in Jesus' name. Amen.