

2 Tim 1-10 Immortality 21-12-22b

We're going to pick up our study now. We have just seen all of these uses of the word parish. Then this in and of itself is not conclusive.

You could define parish as just being away from good things, but look at the biblical imagery that is associated with eternal punishment, with the lake of fire. You find Jesus using the expression, the fire of hell in Matthew 5, 22, whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. Whoever says to his brother, Raka, shall be in danger of the council.

But whoever says, you fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. And the idea isn't so much, do we understand everything that Jesus is saying in that verse, but his reference, Jesus' reference to the fire of hell. It is a fire.

So there is fire associated with it beyond just a revelation chapter 20. In Matthew 18, nine, we saw this. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you.

It is better for you to enter into life with one eye rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. And eternal fire was mentioned in Matthew 18, eight and in Matthew 25, 41, the sheep and the goats. He will say to those on the left hand, depart from me, you cursed, enter the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

It is a fire, not to mention the lake of fire, Revelation 20, 14, and 15. Fire is something that destroys. This is why we have incinerators.

And our God is a consuming fire. Fire consumes. John the Baptist said that the judgment is going to burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

The wheat will be gathered into the barn. He will burn up the chaff. The chaff doesn't just stay there.

I mean, wouldn't it be great if chaff was an unending source of fuel and well, just get a chaff stove, put in some chaff. You'll have heat all winter long. The fire consumes.

The chaff is not there very long once thrown into the fire. And you can put with that Luke 3, 17, his winnowing fan is in his hand. He will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor, gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

So to quote John Stott, who I mentioned earlier is a very erudite, thoughtful scholar. The fire itself is termed eternal and unquenchable, but it would be very odd if what is thrown into the fire proves indestructible. Our expectation would be the opposite.

What is thrown into an eternal and unquenchable fire would be consumed forever, not tormented forever. Hence it is the smoke, evidence that the fire has done its work, that rises

forever and ever. And I personally don't think there's literal smoke rising forever and ever.

I think, you know, for days after a bad house fire, we had a brush pile out here that smoked for days. The smoke is a reminder that there once was something here that has been destroyed. And the smoke, I think as a metaphor, speaks of the memory and the recognition that God's judgment was irrevocable and irreversible and eternal.

The smoke from that fire and the sense of the memory that that judgment took place will never die. But the judgment itself is not unending. And the fact that the smoke of it rises isn't the same as the fire of it burning.

So, and John Stott also does a good job because there are objections to this. People say, well, doesn't scripture say that hell is a place where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched? You have this in Mark 9, 48. And Stott's answer to that is, Jesus is quoting from the last verse of Isaiah, which is 66, 24.

"They shall go forth and look upon the corpses "of the men who have transgressed against me, "for their worm does not die and their fire "is not quenched. "They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh." Which refers to the metaphorical dead bodies of God's enemies being consigned to the city rubbish dump to be eaten by maggots and burned. So it doesn't mention everlasting pain.

It doesn't mention conscious torment. The worm will not die and the fire will not be quenched, at least not until their work is done. And I would add beyond what Stott says that one of the interesting things about worms, maggots, they don't eat living flesh.

They only eat the dead. That's why people that have necrotic tissue on their wounds, they will actually, to this day, treat it with maggots because they will not eat anything that is still alive. They only eat what is dead.

Necrosis has set in. And if the worm doesn't die, that's kind of like the fire is not quenched. And this again speaks of the permanence.

You're not coming back from that. The worm and the fire are everlasting, not the persons subject to them. There's a second objection in Jesus' reference to eternal punishment in contrast to eternal life in Matthew 25, 46.

You remember 24 and 25 are the second coming. The end is not yet. There are wars and rumors and wars, famines, but sign of the Son of Man in heaven, the earth will mourn.

He will come in power and great glory. Then you have the sheep and goats judgment mentioned after that. And at the end of the sheep and goats, it says, and these goats will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

And so the argument is if eternal life means the righteous will live forever in conscious bliss in

the presence of God, wouldn't the parallel require that wicked unbelievers would forever experience conscious separation from God and punishment in hell. But I like Stott's answer to this, that you're kind of reading into the text something that isn't there. Jesus said both life and punishment will be eternal, but he didn't define the nature of either one of them.

Life is eternal. And the penalty for rejecting life is eternal, i.e. there's not going to be a third or a second resurrection. There's not going to be another shot.

Well, we'll leave you dead for X amount of time. And then we'll bring you back and see, well, have you learned your lesson? You know, are you ready to experience universal salvation? In John 17, three, Jesus said, eternal life. This is eternal life that they may know you.

This is again, the high priestly prayer of John 17. This is eternal life that they, my disciples may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. The definition of eternal life is that relational experience and knowledge of God.

It's a conscious enjoyment of God. It doesn't follow that eternal punishment must be a conscious experience of pain. On the contrary, this is a quote from Stott.

Although declaring both to be eternal, Jesus is contrasting the two destinies. And the more unlike the contrast, the better we're understanding it. So the more unlike they are, the better.

The others have pointed out that Jesus did not define the nature of either eternal life or eternal punishment in 25, 46 of Matthew. Jesus simply stated that there will be two destinies and leaves it there. And the main point of that passage is the finality of that judgment.

Whatever happens at that judgment, there is no remedy. There's no second chance, no do over, no mulligan. And a third objection is based on the rich man and Lazarus story.

Some don't think it's a parable, others of us do. But this of course is Luke 16, 19 through 31. And you've got the rich man and we've covered this in detail.

This isn't actually a picture of the second death or the great white throne judgment. This pictures the consequences similar to those coming up and knocking on the door and saying, Lord, Lord, in your name, did we not preach in the streets and do these works? And he's gonna say, I never knew you depart from me. This is the man without the wedding garment who is bound hand and foot and put in the darkness, which is outside.

And it is addressed to those who, as Abraham famously says at the end, your brothers that you want Lazarus to go testify to, they have Moses and the prophets. These are God's people that are under this judgment. This is God's people judgment.

They are by definition saved and heirs of eternal life. But the quality of that life becomes an issue once you have it. There are those who are last who will be first and the first will be last.

And there is a spectrum of overcomer blessings, citizenship, dwelling in or outside the new

Jerusalem and so on. Where are you in the new earth? How close are you to the new heavens and so on? But that's a separate issue from the lake of fire. And the Lazarus enrichment story is manifestly not about the lake of fire.

So you can't legitimately use it as an argument for conscious torment, but there are people who ask about it. There's also connected with this, the idea that there is a period of realization of consequence at the judgment. I would wonder, well, if the dead are dead, why raise them to judge them and then send them to the lake of fire? You know, you're bringing them back just long enough to send them on.

Why do that at all? But there is a, this is not in anything I read, but it's my own personal view. There's an element of restitution. You know how people like to face the accuser or parents like to face the murderer of their child and look them in the eye when they see their sentence passed and their conviction is assured.

And people want to see, there's an element of vindication and of justice that you and I both see that you did something wrong. And now the consequence, the penalty, vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. And that those, you know, why do the wicked prosper? And there are those who seem to go all the way to death without really getting their comeuppance and their return to a conscious judgment and realization that there really was life available and you really did reject it and your wicked deeds really do count against you.

Your works are read out of the books and in the holy environment of the presence of God, you find out what a horrible, stupid rascal you really were. That's really believer or unbeliever, but especially the unbelievers to, in the same way that God doesn't judge us for what we are about to do or what we might do or what we would have done if things are different, he only judges us on what we do. To pass the sentence and the ultimate final judgment in the conscious presence of the accused is a principle of justice that even human courts recognize.

We try not to try someone in absentia unless there's just no other way. You want the perpetrator there to face their accusers, to hear the charges, make whatever response they want to make. It is found inadequate.

And at God's judgment, they will know as the words come out of their own lips that it's inadequate. Then they are cast into the lake of fire. So sometimes when you hear things such as gnashing of teeth and so on, even if that applied to the unbeliever's judgment, this is at the point of the judgment being rendered.

And I've got a separate study we'll do one of these days. I'm so fascinated by the whole gnashing of teeth idea. And just in a nutshell, the clue to understanding that, you go back and look at Old Testament places where gnashing of teeth, the psalmist, one of David's psalms, he says, my enemy gnasheth on me with his teeth.

And it is an expression of anger. And it's very interesting when you trace out, do sort of, it's not

a word study, it's more of a phrase study. But gnashing of teeth, weeping can be for all different reasons, but gnashing of teeth biblically, you can construe it and understand it.

And it works every place it occurs as an expression of anger. And if that's true, when those who are cast out into the darkness and there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, they're still unrepentant. They still don't get it.

And they're angry at the judgment. They don't agree with it. They don't see the righteousness of it.

They're not content. And the gnashing of teeth, and that's another reason that even the saved who gnashed their teeth have to be kept at arm's length because they're a menace to themselves and others, even in the resurrection. If somebody is gnashing their teeth, they're angry.

And they're gonna need, I think maybe this is the answer to the question, why do people need the healing leaves from the tree of life to heal and rectify? And in that sense, I think there may be some progress and sort of the stages of grief working through. You start out with anger and you eventually come to reconciliation, but it's not immediate. And this gnashing of teeth idea seems to happen immediately at the point that the judgment is pronounced.

It doesn't seem to persist forever. It's the immediate reaction, but when you calm down, and I think through observation of how God's perfect environment works, people are gonna say, okay, I was a little hotheaded there, but I see now why this works the way it does. And so gnashing of teeth is never said to be eternal, but at the point the judgment is pronounced, there's weeping and gnashing of teeth.

So I find that to be a helpful perspective. So a fourth objection against this conditional immortality, and so the opposite of that is conditional annihilation, is the concept of God's justice, the belief that God will judge people according to their deeds, which is stated, Revelation 20, 12, the books are open, they're judged according to their works. And then another book is open, which is the one of life.

And the implication being that there's gonna be proportional justice. It's sort of an eye for an eye, and this is the hotspots in hell idea. And he who sinned little will be punished little, beaten with few stripes, and the other servants beaten with many stripes.

Once again, that is kind of drawn in from other passages that are talking about servants. The servant who was grossly disobedient will be beaten with many stripes. The servant that was mildly disobedient will get a few, but that's because he's gonna be around in the master's house in the future, as it were.

But this Stott's answer to that is that if eternal conscious torment is administered as a punishment for sins done in time, there is a serious disproportion between the wrongdoing and the penalty. Okay, so you abused a woman, you were a thief, but this is a finite crime

against God's law being punished, if it is for sin, as many see it, being punished with an infinite punishment. If it's proportional, you have to have committed an infinite crime.

So then the argument is, well, rejecting Christ is the infinite crime and requires the infinite punishment. But infinite punishment for finite sin seems to kind of be a problem. And the argument is a finite being cannot commit an infinite sin, even if it is against an infinite being.

I think there are some who argue, well, rejecting Christ is an infinite sin, blasphemy of the spirits, witness, and so on. But the other objection, and I'm not alone in making this point, I think Clark Pinnock and others have suggested the idea that the eternal conscious punishment of the wicked serves no purpose. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens, and He scourges the sons whom He receives because we respond to discipline.

We learn and we don't repeat a mistake. But unending punishment just seems vindictive to any balanced mind. You're the wickedest person that you could ever imagine, and you can think of examples in history were only around for a few dozen years.

And whatever they did was finite and can be remedied. If He killed people, God can bring them back to life if they're believers. If people were tortured, God can bless them.

If you lost in this life, you can have a hundredfold in the next. There is recompense, momentary light affliction, eternal weight of glory. God can fix the consequences.

So why is the act of rebellion, disobedience, lawlessness, wickedness, evil, whatever it might be, why does it require infinite punishment? And to me, the only tenable position on that would be, well, rejecting the work of Christ is an infinitely grievous sin and requires an infinitely conscious punishment. But again, what's the point? What good does it do? There's also an argument that because God's universe, His realms before the heavens and the earth were created are perfect. And then you have the incursion of sin and evil through Lucifer and later through the fall and in human history.

And then in the restitution of all things and in the kingdom of the father to have an eternal presence of evil, however segregated off it may be, it is never gone. It's like, well, we've put your cancer in remission and it's not metastasizing, but there's still a corner of creation where there are God-hating, fist-shaking people eternally cursing God. And it just, it doesn't seem very useful.

Does God just want to keep them around as an example? Well, that'll happen to you if you ever change your mind. It doesn't fit with what we know of God and it doesn't fit with the God-given conscience that we have to, eternity is a long time to inflict unending and incomprehensible pain on conscious beings. You know, we put animals out of their misery.

A horse breaks a leg. Nobody says, well, you were a bad horse. You shouldn't have thrown me in.

I'm just gonna leave you there to suffer until you die. We, there's no thing other than sort of a Calvinistic, I don't understand it, it's God, so it must be right, and you don't think it through. But in education and in criminology, retributive punishments without an opportunity for probation, even human criminal justice recognizes this is not useful.

Also, John 12, 32, some people say that there is universal salvation preached in scripture. And again, the progressive Christianity seizes on these verses. So 12, 32 of John, Jesus says, I, he's talking about the serpent lifted up in the wilderness, son of man must be lifted up.

I, if I am lifted up from the earth will draw all to myself. I will draw all to myself. 1 Corinthians 15, 28, when all things are made subject to him, then the son himself will be subject to him who puts all things under him, that God may be all in all.

And there's kind of a subtle argument that if there's a part of the all that is bobbing around in conscious torment and hell, it's really not in subjection. It might've been quarantined. It might've been segregated off, but is it really, you can say, well, God put them there.

So they're in subjection. But when all of creation is reconciled to God, right now the creation groans, waiting for the redemption of the children of God. But when that happens, the more straightforward understanding of verses like this is there will come a time when everything is reconciled to God.

Everything is related to God, maybe more closely and more distantly in some cases, but there is nothing that is not subject, is not reconciled, is not in harmony as it was in the beginning. This is the doxology that those of us who have been Methodists in the past, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. Well, as it was in the beginning and as it ever shall be, I'm with that, but it's not that way now.

Paul says, we do not yet see all things made subject to him. Not all things have been put under his feet, but there's a time when they will. And the idea that the way this is done is kind of the parable of the wheat and the tares.

The son of man will send forth his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom. What offends? It will be gathered in bundles and burned. And now there are no tares and all of the wheat can serve its useful purpose and the tares are no more.

They were there for a time, let them grow till the time of the harvest, but they are separated out. They are gathered and they are destroyed and they are no more. Now, all of the productive aspects can be fulfilled and carried forward.

So, same thing in Ephesians 1.10, in the dispensation of the fullness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth in him. And that is the ultimate description. In the kingdom of the father, all things have been reconciled to the father in Christ.

Even the old Testament saints, but when you get through the millennial kingdom and it accomplishes its purpose, everybody's in Christ. And the lamb is the light of the kingdom of the father. Philippians 2.10 and 11, same thing.

At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow of those in heaven, those on earth and those under the earth. Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God, the father, because there are no other tongues left. There are no other knees that refuse to bow.

And you can see that there is a fulfillment there. People want to use that for universalism and all knees that have ever been and all tongues that have ever been are going to confess. Satan's not going to confess.

Third of the angels that followed him are not going to confess. These people who are similar to them in attitude and in rebellious spirit, who hate God, are never going to voluntarily bow the knee, and they are never going to confess that Jesus is Lord, grudgingly or otherwise. It's the opposite of Job.

Though he slay me, yet will I trust him? I will never trust him, so slay me. And there are people who are of that heart and of that mind. And when they are, when they get their wish, I don't want to exist in a universe that has this kind of God in it.

God says, fine, you don't. Then every knee can bow, every tongue can confess to the glory of God the father. And in a way it is, you can look at it this way as well.

It is an expression of sacrificial love. God is not willing that any should perish, Apollumi, but that all come to repentance, but to bless, to protect, to nurture those who do come in repentance and faith, God has to sacrifice the part of his creation that will not come. And I don't think God does it gladly.

I don't think he does it happily, but he does it necessarily, in the same way that you have to make sacrifices often for a greater good. You regret the sacrifice, but it is necessary. You have to sacrifice one thing for the benefit of something that is greater.

And you can view it in that light. It is kind of unloving of God to force everybody in some universal sense into a salvation that in their own free will, they do not want and will not choose. So that was Philippians 2, 10 and 11.

You can also look at Colossians 1, 20. God by him reconciles all things to himself, by him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of his cross. And how these non-penal substitutionary atonement people, they have to get rid of Paul.

They have to become an enemy of the apostle Paul, like we saw in second Timothy, because Paul makes it clear, as does the Old Testament, that it is substitutionary and it is through Christ's death that peace is established. What does the angel say to the shepherds? Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace toward Anthropol Eudokia. Eudokia is thinking and

judgment and E-U is good.

Eureka, Eureka really means I'm having a good sight now. I see a good thing. I see what I'm looking for, but E-U means good and Eudokia means perception, understanding, assent, acknowledgement.

And so peace on earth to men. This is why you find various translations. Are they men of goodwill? Are they men who themselves express good conscience or are they men upon whom God's favor rests? I've seen that translation.

Is it God's goodwill? This is the Calvinist approach. There's going to be peace on earth to the men that God has decided to express his goodwill toward, but it is the men. It's men who respond in repentance and faith when they hear the good news.

But glory to God in the highest realms. There's glory in the high realms, in the highest. And on earth, there is peace to a conditioned subset of humanity.

Men who believe that God is and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him, Hebrews 11.6. So that's the proclamation at the birth of the Lord Jesus, men of goodwill. Well, those who are not of goodwill, men love darkness rather than light. He comes to his own, his own receive him not, and end up choosing to be goats instead of sheep are heading into this fire.

So it is not universalism. In fact, I choose to see it as an argument for the elimination of those things which offend, not just in the kingdom of the son, but also the kingdom of the father. And the objections, I don't find persuasive to this.

You look at what destruction is. Jesus says in Matthew 7.19, trees with bad fruit are burned, Matthew 7.19. John 15.6, unfruitful vines are pruned away and burned. Useless weeds in Matthew 13.40 are burned.

These figures are all pictures of a final reckoning. The inextinguishable fire is a fire which burns without interruption. There is no suspension of that judgment.

It doesn't burn partly and then is suddenly stopped. It's not the voice from heaven stopping Abraham before he plunges the knife into Isaac. This fire, once it is lit, is going to burn to completion.

These worms, once they start eating, are gonna eat until there's nothing left. So, that which is cast into the fire will burn up. And when you see burn with unquenchable fire, whatever, the Greek word there is katakio.

It means to be consumed. It signifies to completely, utterly, totally destroy with fire. This is the word that's used in the Septuagint in Exodus 3.2. Remember, Exodus 3, Moses has been in Egypt and you've had the bull rushes and the killing of the slave and he's gone to Midian.

And in Exodus 3, he's out there and he sees the burning bush. He says, let me turn aside to see this strange sight. And it says in Exodus 3.2, in the Greek translation, when Moses sees the bush, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not katakioed.

If this is a bush on fire, it should soon be gone. And it isn't. This is very unusual for something to be in a fire and it is not consumed.

These passages we've been looking at, when they talk about being the tares or the chaff being burnt up with unquenchable fire, this is katakio. And it means you consume it and it's not there. So it's incompatible with the notion of conscious torment.

The idea here ultimately is, if you're still somewhere in the vicinity of Timothy, turn to 1 Timothy 6. 1 Timothy 6, and we're looking at verses 15 and 16. He's exhorting Timothy to keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing. We just saw the appearing in 2 Timothy, which he will manifest in his own time.

This is 1 Timothy 6.15, the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will manifest in his own time. He who is the blessed and only potentate, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who alone has immortality. He alone has immortality.

Dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen. And for those who want to quote John 1.18, this is a side note, and no man has seen the father, the son has revealed him.

And so Jesus says, if you've seen me, you've seen the father. This is Paul after Jesus has come gone and is seated at the right hand saying, there is still no one who has seen God. He dwells in unapproachable light.

No man has seen and no man can see. This is Paul, fully aware. Nobody's got a better handle on Christology than Paul.

And Paul says, even now, nobody has seen God. So when you're talking about seeing him, that's a different issue. So the destruction that is spoken of is a failure to receive immortality.

And again, when Jesus says, don't fear those who can kill the body, fear him who can destroy both body and soul in Hades. So Romans 6.23, some people look at this, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. I understand Romans somewhat differently than most people.

So I don't really go down that road, but the passages that really come to bear are James 4.12. There's one lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy, not to endlessly punish. Matthew 7.13 and 14, broad is the road that leads to destruction. Second Thessalonians 1.9, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction.

Philippians 3.19, whose end is destruction. Galatians 6.8, remember Galatians 6, 7, and 8, be

not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever man sows, that shall he also reap.

He who sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap. So, destruction. Psalm 92.7, they evildoers in the preceding context shall be destroyed forever.

So the upshot of this is when Jesus came and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, this is no small thing. There wasn't just a kind of immortality. You know, where would we have gone if Jesus had brought eternal life? If the soul is immortal, then even if Jesus had never come, well, would we be in the murky depths of Sheol, you know, waiting for something that never comes? This is not the biblical teaching.

The Bible's teaching is when you die, you are gone. And the power of the resurrection is a tremendous thing because it isn't the relocation of an immortal soul from Abraham's bosom or purgatory or wherever people thought it might go, Sheol. This is the absolute reconstitution of someone who was alive and died.

And when they come to the judgment in Revelation 20 and then are cast into the lake of fire, it says explicitly, this is the second death. Well, the second death is like the first death in the sense that there is no conscious existence of any kind. And the hope, the blessed hope of the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior, when he comes the second time and brings life and immortality, this is the gift of God, eternal life in its quality and its duration.

Remember, I used to argue that, you know, the gift of God is eternal life. This is a life of quality, but it is also a life of duration because the soul is not immortal. And Jesus said, God can destroy your soul, men cannot.

What men can do to the body, God can do to the soul. What do men do to the body? It's ashes, dust, utterly disintegrated. There's no presence of any kind.

Well, Jesus said, that's what God can do to the soul. And I think the Revelation 20 judgment makes that point. So when we celebrate the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who by his death and through his burial and resurrection, this is why I think, Paul says, I deliver to you as a first importance, the gospel, Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and that he was buried.

He died and was no more. He wasn't in the spirit, visiting souls in prison and the rest of it. He was no more, any visiting, any preaching he did to the chained angels was in the 40 days between the resurrection and the ascension.

But for those three days, Jesus didn't say, sign of Jonah, as Jonah was in the belly of the fish, three days and three nights. So the son of the man will be elsewhere for three days and three nights. He said, he will be in the heart of the earth.

And the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, having come to this earth to secure life, redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation for us is a big deal. And the gift of God, which is eternal life

through Jesus Christ, our Lord, brings with it immortality. Life and immortality were brought to light through the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And remember appearing, we made that wonderful study where both the first and second advent are sometimes combined. The appearing of the Lord Jesus, first advent, second advent, sometimes it is spoken of as all one thing. And we can celebrate the rapture and the second coming and the nativity all in one go.

It is the contact God makes with us in sending his son in the likeness of human flesh to accomplish our salvation and to give us this duration and quality. And the duration is secure when we're saved. The quality is conditional just as the immortality is conditioned on what think ye of Christ.

Are we going to be least? Are we going to be first? Will we enjoy overcomer blessings? Are we going to have the, you know, are we going to be, if you ever sat in the very last seat in the plane up against the bulkhead and the restrooms on the other side, or are you in first class? You're still on the plane, but there's a great difference in quality. And still glad to be making the trip, but wouldn't it be so much better to accomplish, as Paul says, to lay hold of that for which God laid hold of us, which is to fulfill all of the wonderful potential that we have in Christ. So it's a great thought, I think, for the holidays.

And I leave you with it as we close in prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for how clearly you communicate your grace, your faithfulness, and your love throughout the scriptures, but especially in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that during this season of activity and energy and hustle and bustle and distraction, that your Holy Spirit will constantly impress on our hearts and minds how blessed and privileged we are to be held in your gracious hands, secure in and through the Lord Jesus Christ, both now and in the eternal ages to come. We thank you and praise you for all these things in Jesus' name, amen.