

02-10-04a Revelation

Let's take a moment, as is our custom at the beginning of our study, to clear our minds and prepare our hearts, seek the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, who dwells within us and is ever ready to minister God's Word to our souls. It's a great thing to be able to receive a boost to our spirit and spiritual nourishment from God's Word. So let's take just a moment to make sure we can take full advantage of our time together in the Bible, shall we pray? Father, it is a great privilege to be alive in this dispensation, at this time in human history, in this place, in your plan, the beneficiaries of so many wonderful blessings that have come to us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is an unimaginable privilege to be chosen to be in this group and with the destiny and the blessings and the future rewards that are potentially ours through fulfilling the calling that you have issued to us. And we pray that as we study your Word tonight, that the issues will be clear, that the truth of your Word will be clear, that God the Holy Spirit will find that which he can minister to our hearts, our specific situations, our needs, our weaknesses, and enable us to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray it in his name, amen.

We have essentially completed our study of five of the seven churches to whom Jesus sends letters in Revelation chapter 2 and 3. Tonight we will begin our study of the letter to the church at Philadelphia in Revelation chapter 3 verse 7. However, it is such a fascinating subject to examine when you look at the book of life, when you look at the various methods and means and ways of understanding the different references that God makes to books in his Word. And we find ourselves perhaps coming to a slightly different understanding than is common when it comes to having your name in the book of life or blotted out of the book of life. And because we have not really treated this subject in any detail in the past, I have alluded to it many times, thinking we would do a more detailed study when we got to it here.

Well, here we are, so it is time for a more detailed study. We did most of that last time in the sense of looking up the passages that talk about the records that are kept in heaven and the things that are written in God's presence. We saw, for example, the early reference in Exodus chapter 32 verse 32 where Moses is making an appeal to God on behalf of the Israelites who have just committed a grievous sin in making the golden calf and dancing and cavorting about at the base of the mountain while Moses was up there receiving their national identity and their spiritual heritage and all of the other things that are a part of the law of Moses.

And so Moses in Exodus 32 says, but now if you will forgive their sin, if not I pray blot me out of your book which you have written. Now this puts us in mind, you may recall that there is a similar statement in the New Testament, one that we studied when we went through the epistle to the Romans, Romans chapter 9 verse 3. You remember Paul is talking about the grief that he has, he says in Romans 9 verse 1, I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying. My conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart.

For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the very things that Moses was receiving on Sinai. And yet Paul decries the very same error that Moses encountered when he came down the mountain with Joshua. Joshua said there is the sound of war in the camp, but when they got down there it wasn't the sound of war, it was the sound of partying.

Today I guess the most recent way people party, teenagers and young adults party is to have a rave where they all get together and play music super loud and bump into one another and pass around ecstasy and so forth. But the Israelites at the very point of great opportunity, at the point of definition of their spiritual heritage and their national existence lose focus, lose perspective and become occupied with immediacy and living in the moment. We need a God we can see, let's make the golden calf, this is the God that brought us out of Egypt.

And they begin to mimic many of the pagan worship rituals that they had seen for hundreds of years in Egypt. That's what was familiar, that's what was usual, this whole worship of the God of Abraham had fallen into a very tiny minority. People like Moses' parents, Moses, Aaron and Miriam, their parents and a few others in Israel were still faithful worshippers and held to the old truths, the old doctrines that had been handed down from generation to generation.

But most of Israel in bondage had let those things lapse and so they revert to what's usual and what's comfortable. Same thing by the time of Christ and the first generation of the church, people want to revert back to what's usual and what's normal. Here's a new set of truths coming, the church age doctrines, things that come after Pentecost.

Here's Paul the Apostle revealing the mysteries of which he is a steward. And Israel does just like they did in Moses' generation, they start to catch on and then it's a little too strange, it's a little too new. What about the old familiar ways? And they start quoting scripture one another, remove not the old landmark.

Nobody has said that the law of Moses has been abrogated and they go back and they want to fall back into comfortable ways, ways that are familiar. And so, somewhat ironically I think, and perhaps consciously, Paul makes a very similar statement to Moses in Exodus 32 where in Romans 9.3 he says, I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ. And the word there is anathema, anathema, it means to be expelled, to be cut off, to be, it's literal meaning is not blotted out but the idea is if you were on a membership roster in a club and they kicked you out they would cross your name off the list and say you don't belong here anymore.

And the idea is to be anathema from Christ. You'll remember this same general idea is found over in Galatians chapter 3. O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of

faith? Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit, are you now going to be completed, made perfect by the flesh? And that's that teleo or tetelestai, the same verb we talked about last time in connection with pleroma.

Are you going to be perfected by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain? And if you scroll down a little bit you'll find Paul saying you who desire to be justified by the flesh are enemies of the cross and you're cut off from Christ. Now this does not mean that salvation has been lost and we have this sort of two dimensional understanding in Christianity when we're not very far along, when we have a shallow understanding of scripture and we think well all fire in scripture is hell fire, all really bad news is for unbelievers and all the good news is for any believer who is called by Christ's name and over the years it's gotten flattened down to the point that there is no room for God's judgment of his own people which is the entire message of the first 39 books of the Old Testament. Judgment begins with the house of God.

John the Baptist came and said the axe is laid at the root of the tree. He doesn't mean God's going to cut down Israel never to rise again but you're going to have a stump. The Lord Jesus was the root shoot from the stump of Jesse, the tree was cut down but it wasn't killed and we don't allow for the discipline and the chastising and the consequences of faithlessness and apathy and indifference.

So back to our being blotted out of the book of life. The promise to the believers in the church at Thyatira here is that their name will not be blotted out of the book of life and they will walk with me in white because they are worthy. This is a book of the righteous and we looked at several of those passages and I'm not going to review all of those but I would like to commend a couple of additional ones to your attention.

You have for example in Psalm 56 and verse 8 you have taken account of my wanderings put my tears in your bottle are they not in your book. Sometimes we think well my sufferings are the load that I bear, it's the cross that I carry. God is fully aware of our testing, of our trials, of our sorrows, of our disappointments whether they are self-induced or come from interaction with others or the falling through of anticipated circumstances, whatever the cause of tears.

He says you have taken account of my wanderings, you have made a record of them, they are recorded. Put my tears in your bottle, are they not in your book. They are stored up, they are preserved, they are known to God and there is a record.

Knowing that should give us a fresh perspective when we are in the midst of a sad time or a down time. Sometimes we are not literally crying tears but we are just depressed. It's depressing to look back over a pattern of failure.

I know that I am not alone in having had this experience of looking and saying you know you would think by now with all these many days and weeks and months and years and decades of Bible study that I would do a better job when I hit this particular test. I just am like the bug hitting

the windshield, I just completely splattered all over the area and did not avoid that oncoming truck and I failed just like I did the very first time I ever hit this test. What is the matter with me? And it's depressing.

And you can shed spiritual tears, there have been people who have taught whole doctrines on godly sorrow. I don't know how godly it is but you can certainly have sorrow because you recognize that you ought to do better, you ought to know better. There are also things that just occur, there is bereavement, there is loss, there is change.

Even when change is necessary, that when you move out of a house that you have lived in for a while you have memories there and as you leave it you can get kind of choked up when you move away from friends. Anytime we have a radical change and there is a loss or a separation it creates some sadness and some tears and that is a soul test. Don't think well such is the lot of man, everything that happens, every circumstance, every loss, every sorrow, whatever the source, whatever the cause is in God's book.

And you can think of it kind of like a grade book. You know when I was teaching in private school I found myself on the other side of the grade book. I always used to wonder what the teacher was writing in the grade book.

I knew some of the things, I knew the grades but they read all kinds of stuff in their grade books. And then I was a teacher and had a grade book and so I had to make a list of my students and I would have a quiz and I would have a paper and I would have a test and I would have different things, different challenges that I put in front of my students. Sometimes I would give them a pop quiz, told them at the beginning of the year there will be some pop quizzes so don't fail to do your homework.

I would grade different things but they were given challenges and then I wrote those down and how they did. Well these books in heaven are basically God's grade book and every quiz, every problem, every test we get a score and I don't think it's just strictly pass fail. Sometimes we say oh I failed that test, oh I passed that test, usually the former rather than the latter.

But you know in any system of grading, in any system of evaluation you don't typically just have pass fail. There are gradations and you get partial credit and you notice as Jesus evaluates these churches there is partial credit. He says you have done these things well but I have a few things against you.

Well I have many things against you, you've got one or two good things, you've got mostly good things but I've got this one. He's looking at the whole picture and it's comforting to me to know that everything is in God's book. Sometimes you get into a test and you do pretty well for a day or two or three days and then you fall apart.

Well there is partial credit. God says well you know you didn't just fold like you did the first time,

you lasted longer this time, you did better this time. So that's what Psalm 56 tells us, you take an account of my wanderings.

What are wanderings? Aren't we supposed to be on the narrow road that goes straight through the gate? So even when we wander God knows where we are, He keeps track. When I was a second lieutenant out in Quantico learning how to read a map and locate myself and try to keep from getting totally lost in the woods. The woods in Virginia in the summertime are so thick with leaves you can't see ten feet in front of your face and they have orange boxes that are a couple of clicks apart and you are supposed to take your map and your compass and they say proceed so many meters in a certain direction.

Well you have to know how long your pace is and you have to have your compass and be able to hold a course and then you have to do this what the boy scouts and civilians call orienteering but to me it's kind of like Chinese water torture, they drop you in the middle of the Virginia woods and say find your way out with nothing but a map and a compass. Well God sees our wanderings, when we don't get it quite right He knows where we are and He sees well you got close, you did fairly well and it's an encouragement, it's designed to be an encouragement. The record keeping is not designed to be a threat unless you are just not even taking an interest.

If you sit down under a tree, park your map and compass and pull out the canteen and say I'm just going to wait until they blow the whistle and call everybody in, I don't have any hope of finding my way from box to box, which there were a few individuals who did. Well there is going to be a penalty for that but if you are in there pitching, if you are picking yourself up, claiming God's grace and trying to move forward, God keeps track of that, He keeps track of our wanderings. He says put my tears in your bottle, they are not lost, they are not wasted, they count for something, they are recorded by God, they are in His book.

You find a similar concept when you go to, kind of an opposite mode perhaps in Psalm 109 verse 13. Here the psalmist is talking about those who are enemies and this is what you call an imprecatory prayer. You have to be careful about imprecatory prayer but lest the judgment with which you judge others comes back on yourself.

But he says in verse 6, appoint a wicked man over him, let an accuser stand at his right hand. Who are these people? Well look at verse 2, these who have opened a wicked and deceitful mouth against me, they have spoken against me with a lying tongue, they have also surrounded me with words of hatred and fought against me without a cause. In return for my love they act as my accusers, but I am in prayer.

Notice he is not in debate, he is not on the defense, he is not in the self vindication mode. As these people who return hatred for love and who are spiteful and use a lying tongue and words of hatred and fight against him without a cause, this of course is anticipating the Lord Jesus Christ himself who came and expressed nothing but love for the nation of Israel in that generation and

they accused him, they used a lying tongue and ultimately got him executed by the Romans. In return for my love they act as my accusers, but I am in prayer.

If there is one thing that characterizes the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ it was prayer. I suspect there wasn't a day that went by that Jesus did not spend a lot of time in prayer early in the mornings. Thus they have repaid me evil for good and hatred for my love.

Now this doesn't mean that you can't be righteously indignant and that you can't recognize the wrongness of what is being done, it means that you don't retaliate yourself. You take your case to the supreme court of heaven, you make an appeal to the judge and let him pass sentence. And so this is the request that the psalmist has here for these who are attacking him.

David says point a wicked man over him and let an accuser stand at his right hand. Not David you notice, let some other accuser stand at his right hand. When he is judged let him come forth guilty and let his prayer become sin.

Let his days be few, let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. Let his children wander about in beg and let them seek sustenance far from their ruined homes.

You can tell David was pretty upset about these people. Let the creditor seize all that he has and let strangers plunder the product of his labor. Let there be none to extend loving kindness to him nor any to be gracious to his fatherless children.

Let his posterity be cut off in a following generation, let their names be blotted out. No longer written among the living, no longer written among the righteous. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord and do not let the sin of his mother be blotted out.

Let them be before the Lord continually that he may cut off their memory from the earth. Why? Verse 16. Because he did not remember to show loving kindness, but persecuted the afflicted and needy man.

Now if you think this is harsh, I heard a friend of mine talking today, his wife works for Child Protective Services in another state and they have families coming in where there has been child abuse, where there has been sexual molestation of children by their own parents in both directions, mothers with sons and fathers with daughters, where they have locked them in closets, where they have made them eat their own feces, where they have inflicted all kinds of unnameable cruelties. Do you think now that for such, those who are in that category, that this is too harsh a prayer? It's not. Those who abandon loving kindness, those who persecute the afflicted and persecute the needy, persecute the despondent in heart, put them to death, David says.

He loves cursing, and so it came to him. He did not delight in blessing, so it was far from him. He

clothed himself with cursing as with a garment, and it entered into his body like water and like oil into his bones.

Let it be to him as a garment with which he covers himself, and for a belt with which he constantly girds himself. Let this be the reward of my accusers from the Lord, and of those who speak evil against my soul. But you, O God, the Lord, deal kindly with me for your namesake.

Because your loving kindness is good, deliver me, for I am afflicted, I am needy, and my heart is wounded within me. I am passing like a shadow when it lengthens, I am shaken off like the locust, my knees are weak from fasting, and my flesh has grown lean without fatness. I have become a reproach to them when they see me, they wag their head.

Help me, O Lord my God, save me according to your loving kindness, and let them know that this is your hand. You, Lord, have done it. Let them curse, but you bless.

When they arise, they shall be ashamed, but your servant shall be glad. What do you think he's talking about when he says, when they arise? That's the resurrection. These are believers who are losing all of their potential blessings, who are losing their place in the kingdom.

When they arise, they shall be ashamed, but your servant shall be glad. Do you think David didn't know about the resurrection? Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and beyond that I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Let my accusers be clothed with dishonor, no robe of righteousness.

Let them cover themselves with their own shame as with a robe. With my mouth I will give thanks abundantly to the Lord, and in the midst of many I will praise him. He's talking about the other faithful believers.

For he stands at the right hand of the needy to save him from those who judge his soul. So you have here a concept of blotting out, and there is a, as with a lot of poetry, there's more than one sense here. He's talking about being blotted out of the roster of the living in this life, but he's also talking about them being blotted out from the roster of the righteous, and taking away his white robe that is the righteousness of experiential faith, replacing it with the robe of shame.

And that is a possibility. Remember, David is living in the midst of Israel. He's not talking about Ammonites.

He's not talking about Amalekites. He's not talking about Philistines here. He's talking about fellow Israelites.

Read the story again of the Absalom Rebellion, and you'll get an idea. So we have these passages such as Psalm 109 and verse 13. Many things are recorded in God's books.

Psalm 139, verse 16. David says, as he speaks of the Lord, and he says, I will give thanks to you.

This is Psalm 139, verse 14.

I will give thanks to you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes have seen my unformed substance, and in your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were not one of them. The days of our lives before we were born, before we were fearfully and wonderfully made in our mother's womb, were written in a book in God's presence. Do you think that there's any circumstance that comes up that God did not carefully plan? It's amazing to me.

I've enjoyed studying in our Fundamentals series, looking at God's manifestation of himself in creation, and science has documented how carefully balanced and how sophisticated and complex the interactions of so many things are in our universe, the relationships of subatomic particles and protons and neutrons and electrons, and the fact that if those values were off by the tiniest percentage, we couldn't have a universe. We would have nothing but a vast vacuum full of hydrogen atoms, or we would have nothing but black holes. Our planet occupies in the solar system, and how God put Saturn and Jupiter out there with their huge gravity fields, sweeping the asteroids and the comets out of our path, and the space debris, so that we have relatively few impacts of any size on our planet.

The mind boggles looking at the universe and looking at the balancing of the galaxies. The galaxies are spread far enough apart that these huge monster stars and their intense gravity and the black holes at the center of these galaxies don't pull our planet out of its orbit around our little star. They have to be that far away to be what they are and produce the elements that they produce, and yet not disrupt our solar system and not destabilize our environment.

God balanced all of these things on a razor's edge and keeps them in balance for the entire span of human history. If he can do that, is it a stretch of the imagination to see that he has carefully balanced the circumstances and the details of the people that we encounter as we go through life? David says, look, God wrote down the days of my life before I was ever born. God mapped out the course.

He knew where I would fail. He knew the bad decisions I would make. He took them into account.

His grace was already in action before I was ever born. He made provision. He made sure as he balanced and orchestrated these various tests and these various challenges that nothing would be beyond my abilities, that I would always have the word of God taught ahead of time, that I would always have the opportunity to grow and to practice and to be built up in the faith and be ready for each successive challenge if I'm a growing believer.

He also foresaw those who fail and who are indifferent and apathetic and even rebellious in his

sight, and he made provision for them as well. He allows them to stay on the earth as tests for some of the faithful. Why doesn't he just open up the earth like he did for Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and some of those in Israel? Well, who would we have to challenge us if there was nothing but wonderful, likable, peaceable, fellow growing believers? You've got to have the ornery people to create a bad environment so that we get challenged and we challenge each other with our failures and God allows it.

People say, why doesn't God intervene from heaven? How could he allow these children to be so abused? How could he allow starvation and all these? How can there be a God and there be so much evil in the world? God is just and what may appear to be evil and unjust for the present is all going to be rectified. There is no injustice in the plan of God. It is perfect, it is complete, and you may see one half of the equation now and the other half in eternity.

Sometimes we see both halves of the equation in this life, but one thing is certain. God is light and in him is no darkness at all and vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord.

We have to have confidence. We have to have faith even when we don't see how it's going to work out. We see the afflicted.

We see the missionaries kidnapped and killed. We see Jim Elliot and Nate Saint and the others speared to death by the Akka's and you think these young men in the prime of life didn't even have a chance to have families, had loving wives left behind. How could God allow that? Well even in this life you can see the outworking of that.

Elizabeth Elliot has had a worldwide audience for 45 or 50 years now as a result of her husband's death and she is a gifted woman and she has said and done an awful lot of good and that's just a tiny compensation of what God can do. So when we see God talking about books, there are many books. There is the book of the days of our lives.

There is the book of the righteous. There is the book of the living. There is the book of the unrighteous.

There are many books that are opened at the judgment. Why do we assume when we see a name being blotted out that it can only be the book of those who are saved and not going to the lake of fire? It's really a reflect a lack of understanding of how many books there are and that life has in God's mind much more to do with production and fruitfulness than it does with who's going to the lake of fire and who isn't. Let me just commend a couple of other verses to your attention here.

Isaiah chapter 4 and verse 3, we always want to back up a little bit and get the context. He is talking about the judgment on Israel. Seven women will take hold of one man in that day saying we will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes.

Only let us be called by your name. Take away our reproach. In that day the branch, this is talking about the great and terrible day of the Lord when all of this judgment is coming on the nation.

In that day the branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel. This is the remnant of Israel. The word survivors is used in the New American Standard.

The New King James says those of Israel who have escaped. This is the faithful remnant. The fruit of the earth will be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who are the remnant who have escaped that judgment.

Why did they escape the judgment? For the same reason that those in the New Testament Church are delivered from judgment. We are going to see the Church of Philadelphia is promised that they will be delivered from an hour of testing. It shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy.

Why do you suppose that is? Because the only ones who escaped the judgment were the holy. So if you are left in Jerusalem, guess what? It is kind of like when God separates the sheep from the goats. If you are a sheep, guess what? You are holy.

You have already been separated out even before the pronouncement is made. Same thing here. If you are still alive and walking around in Jerusalem, you know what? You are holy.

Otherwise, you would have been caught up in the judgment. He who is left in Zion, he who remains in Jerusalem will be called holy. Everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.

And again, this has poetic overtones. Yes, it is talking about, the picture is you have survived a purge where many people were killed and you are still alive. But why are you still alive? Why are you living? Your physical life is a reflection of the fact that you have spiritual life, that you have fruitfulness.

When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, how did he do that? All of the people that were negative in the righteousness category have been purged. He has purged the blood of Jerusalem from amidst by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning. Then the Lord will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion and above her assemblies a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night.

Divine presence, divine comfort, divine guidance. The pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night, harking back, saying remember when God said, I will be with you, I will lead you, I will never forsake you, it is a heritage. This is the Old Testament blessing and reward package in the kingdom.

This is the, it is no slouch of a package to be an Old Testament saint. We often say, well the tribulational saints have the Old Testament, that is nothing to be sneezed at. It is a wonderful thing, it is just different.

Some people get a Ford and some people get a Chevrolet, it doesn't necessarily mean one is better than the other, they are just different. Above her assemblies a cloud and smoke by day, the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering and there will be a tabernacle for shade in the daytime from the heat, for a place of refuge and for a shelter from storm and rain.

This is comfort and encouragement and blessing and reward for the faithful, for those who have learned to produce righteousness by faith, who have been fruitful. It is the same story in any dispensation, and if you go on to Isaiah chapter 5, you will see the story of the vineyard. Remember that? My well beloved had a vineyard on a fruitful hill, he dug it up and cleared out its stones, planted it with the choicest vines, built a tower in its midst, made a wine press.

He expected it to bring forth grapes, good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes, bitter grapes, unusable grapes. Now O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge please between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? Now please let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard.

I will take away its hedge, and it will be burned. I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled. I will lay it waste, it will not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns.

I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it. The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant plant. He looked for justice, this is the fruit.

But behold there was oppression for righteousness, but behold there was a cry for help. Instead of just judgment, there were people crying out for mercy and for help because of injustice, the same that David prayed that imprecatory prayer about. And then finally, turn over to Isaiah 65, Isaiah 65, I permitted myself to be sought by those who did not ask for me.

Or in the New King James it says, I was sought by those who did not ask for me. I was found by those who did not seek me. I said, here I am, here I am, to a nation that was not called by my name.

I have stretched out my hands all day long to a rebellious people who walk in a way that is not good according to their own thoughts. A people who provoke me to anger continually to my face, who sacrifice in gardens and burn incense on altars of brick, who sit among the graves and spend the night in the tombs, who eat swine's flesh and the broth of abominable things in their vessels, who say, keep to yourself, don't come near me, for I am holier than you. They are smoke

in my nostrils with fire that burns all the day.

Behold, verse 6, that's our verse, it is written before me. That is all written down in the books. God says, behold, it is written before me, don't think that it isn't.

I will not keep silence, I will repay. Even repay into their bosom, your iniquities and the iniquities of your fathers together. How does he know the iniquities of the father? Because those were written down as well.

And it has become a pattern and in the Old Testament age, nations are symbolic of what happens with individuals today. And if generation after generation established a pattern of apathy, indifference, disobedience, rebellion, after about three generations, God would wipe it out because it was a pattern in the nation. The nations represent things for individuals today.

If in an individual life we develop a pattern of apathy, indifference, rebellion, disobedience, there comes a time when God says enough and severe consequences ensue. Well, there is a lot more we can say about that, but it's all written down. The good is written down, the bad is written down.

It says in Hebrews, God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love. It's written down. The days of our lives are recorded.

They were recorded beforehand. The structure, the opportunities are all written down. And then how we score is written in as we go.

How did we do on this test? What were we thinking about when we executed this task? What were our goals? What were our priorities? What were our values that went into play and shaped our decisions and our actions and our lives each and every day? It is like the, I always think of the transcriptions they used to make back in the 1940s and 50s. I've seen film of it where it was a giant 17-inch wax disc. And there's a thing that looks like a tonearm on a record player, but it's got a cutting stylus.

And you have this smooth, unblemished wax disc that gets put on there. And just before the band or the recording artist begins to do their thing, they put the stylus down on the wax and they start the turntable and it begins to cut. And whatever is played, whatever comes through the microphone is etched in that wax.

And that wax became a master from which they would press a steel master that would then be used to press the bakelite and later vinyl recordings. But once you make the noise into the recording, there's no going back. There's only this one wax disc.

And they didn't get to edit and produce and overdub and all of that. In the old days of recording, they said they turned on the red light and you had to do your thing. Sing your song, play your tune, and whatever you did, it was graven on.

You just had one shot and it was graven in the wax disc. That's what's happening in our lives. God has given us instructions.

He's mapped out the course of our lives, our opportunities. And what we do is written in the books and there's no going back and changing it. But we're still alive and breathing and there's a lot of our disc that is still left to be written.

So the encouragement is, forgetting those things which are behind, press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Remember that the rest of this day is still as yet unwritten. Tomorrow and whatever days remain to us are unwritten.

And it's a lot better to start poorly and finish well than to start well and finish poorly. And whatever our start may have been, whatever our track record thus far, the rest of our lives is an unwritten page. And we have everything we need.

We have the Spirit of God. We have the Word of God. We know who we are.

We know why we're here. We know what the call is. It doesn't depend on us.

It depends on God. The only thing that depends on us is recognizing the opportunity and reaching out and laying hold of it. We're going to see in this letter to Philadelphia in our next session that Jesus says, I put before you an open door.

All you've got to do is walk through the open door. It's that simple. And we say that, of course, the challenges of life don't always seem that simple.

But with the power of God, if we remember how the power of God comes into our life, it is basically a matter of putting one foot in front of the other until we go through that open door. So it's a wonderful opportunity. It's a wonderful encouragement.

I don't think of the books in heaven as a threat or as a bad thing. I think of them as a great thing because I know that God already knows the course of my life. He knows every challenge.

He knows every opportunity. All I have to do is be up for them, be ready for them, and lay hold of them by faith, whatever they may be, large or small. It's all in the books.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to begin our sixth of seven letters, the letter to the church in Philadelphia.