



UNITED BY HOPE – Part 13

Christmas Hope: The Life That Counts

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open up with me 1 Peter 3. While you're turning there, I want to share an update before we dive into the Word. I want to reiterate my encouragement to our church family that gives over and above our regular giving here at the end of this year for the spread of the gospel in and through our church. I won't share the whole thing, but I've got to share with you that we've received a letter this last week from a local school principal. I'll just read the first part of it:

I would guess she was in her late 60s, frail. She stood there bleeding from her lip and nose. She had walked with a cart several blocks to pick up the box of food we were handing out and had fallen, busting her lip and causing her glasses to cut into her face. One of the volunteers from McLean Bible Church stepped in, grabbed a first aid kit, and began cleaning her wounds. She still had blood dripping down her face, despite our best efforts, and was clearly in crisis beyond her current predicament.

The food boxes did not fit in her cart, so the young volunteer offered to carry them back to her house, despite the risk of going to a stranger's home in a less than safe neighborhood. As this young volunteer began to pray with the still-bleeding lady, I turned and looked at the rest of the volunteers, leaning next to car windows, praying, carrying heavy boxes to car after car in a line that seemed longer than any we have had since the beginning of this pandemic, encouraging those who had arrived in need. Thank you for giving and coming to our neighborhood in a time of need like no other.

Church, I am so proud of you. Let's keep giving on line or otherwise. Let's keep going together into a world in need.

Today, I actually want us to start our time in the Word by asking one of our students here at MBC—Ava—to read the Word we're looking at today, from 1 Peter 3:13 all the way to 1 Peter 4:11. Before we do that, I want to remind you that we're getting close to the end of the challenge to memorize 1 Peter 1. So next week be ready; we'll see how much we can recite together. But this week we have a pretty long text, so follow along starting at 1 Peter 3:13:

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are

slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

^{4:1} Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, ² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. ³ For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. ⁴ With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; ⁵ but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. ⁶ For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The reason I asked Ava to read this passage is because I am really concerned about the kind of Christianity we are passing down to the next generation in our church and in the broader church. A couple weeks from now I'll be helping lead what's called the "Cross Conference" which I've been a part of for years. It's fully online this year. Anybody can participate, but it's specifically designed for 18 to 25 year olds. You can find out more at crossforthenations.org.

One reason I'm really passionate about this particular age group is because of how formative those years were in my life for setting the trajectory of my life. This week I was recording a conversation for this conference with John Piper that revolved around a sermon he preached 20 years ago when I was finishing college. I wasn't actually at the conference, but I heard this message later and it affected me in a way I still remember today.

Today, I want to do something a bit different. I want to share the first seven minutes or so of that message, because those seven minutes are still etched in my mind 20 years later. I believe they powerfully summarize the point of what Ava just read from God's Word. I invite you to watch this with me. You'll have to get past the feel of it being a couple decades removed from our day, but here is John Piper speaking to tens of thousands of college students gathered in a field 20 years ago.

John Piper: You don't have to know a lot of things in order to make a huge difference for the Lord in the world, but you do need to know a few things that are great and be willing to live and die for them. People who make a difference in the world are not people who have mastered a lot of things; they are people who have been mastered by a very few things that are very, very great.

If you want your life to count, you don't have to have a high IQ, nor a high EQ. You don't have to be smart. You don't have to have good looks. You don't have to be from a good family or a good school. You just have to know a few basic, simple, glorious, majestic, obvious, unchanging eternal things—and be gripped by them and willing to lay down your life for them. Which is why anybody in this crowd can make a worldwide difference. Because it isn't you; it's what you're gripped with.

One of the really sad things about this moment right now is that there are hundreds of you in this crowd who do not want your life to make a difference. All you want is to be liked. Maybe finish school, get a good job, find a husband/wife, a nice house, a nice car, long weekends, good vacations, grow old healthy, have a fun retirement, die easy—that's all you want. You don't give a rip whether your life counts on this earth for eternity. That's a tragedy in the making.

About three weeks ago, we got news at our church that Ruby Eliason and Laura Edwards were killed in Cameroon. Ruby Eliason—over 80, single all her life, a nurse—poured her life out for one thing: to make Jesus Christ known among the sick and poor in the hardest and most unreached place. Laura Edwards—a medical doctor in the Twin Cities, who in her retirement partnered up with Ruby, also pushing 80—in going from village to village in Cameroon. The brakes give way in their vehicle, over a cliff they went and they died instantly.

I asked my people, “Is this a tragedy?” Two women near 80, a whole life devoted to one idea—Jesus Christ magnified among the poor and sick in the hardest places, 20 years after most of their American counterparts had begun to throw their lives away on trivialities in Florida and New Mexico. They flew into eternity through death in a moment. “Is this a tragedy?” I asked. It is not a tragedy.

I'll read you what a tragedy is. I've got a little article here from Reader's Digest. This is a tragedy. The title of the article is, “Start Now; Retire Early,” February 1998. Bob and Penny took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30-foot trawler, play softball and collect shells. That's a tragedy.

There are people in this country who are spending billions of dollars to get you to buy that lifestyle. And I get 40 minutes to plead with you: “Don't buy it!” With all my heart, I plead with you, “Don't buy the American Dream—a nice house, a nice car, a nice job, a nice family, a nice retirement, collecting shells.” As the last chapter before you stand before the Creator of the universe to give an account for what you did, you don't want to tell Him, “Here it is, Lord—my shell collection. Look, Lord—my shell collection. I've got a good golf swing. And look at my boat, God.” Well, not for Ruby and not for Laura.

David: I share this video with you because I believe what we just heard is exactly what Ava just read. In 1 Peter, God is saying you don't have to know a lot of things in this world in order for your life to count. But you do need to know a few things that are great, being willing to live and die for them—a few basic, simple, glorious, majestic, obvious, unchanging eternal things—and be gripped by them.

Do you want your life to count? Children, teenagers, do you want your life to count? College students, young adults, do you want your life to count? Single women, single men, husbands and wives, moms and dads, do you want your life to count? Senior adults, do you want your life to count? Do you want to avoid wasting your life on what doesn't matter in this world?

We've seen this throughout this series, pictured in this rope that represents eternity past in that direction, eternity future in this direction, and life here, represented by this little blue section. We might have 60, 70, 80, 90 years—if God gives us that long—knowing that not one of us is even guaranteed tomorrow. Life is a mist, here one second and gone the next. It's going to be over soon.

I just did a funeral a couple weeks ago. It's always a sobering thing to see a coffin go down into the ground. All of eternity flows from that moment.

So how do you make this life count in light of this life that's coming and will never end? How do you make this life that will end count in a way that will never, ever end in the future? That's a really important question. Very simply, I would say God is saying to us in His Word, "Be gripped in this life by just a few things—simple, glorious, obvious, majestic, eternal, unchanging things—such that you live for them and die for them." What are they? Well, let's hear it from God. I'll summarize them, then I'll show them to you in 1 Peter 3 and 4.

1. Jesus is the suffering Savior, the risen Lord and the triumphant King Who alone is worthy of all your love, life and hope.

If you want a shorter version of this first point, you could say, "Jesus is Lord." My concern is that those words for many of you will sound dangerously commonplace in ways that lead to religious complacency, because you cease to feel the weight and wonder of them. That's what I'm after—the weight and wonder of the words Ava read in verse 15: "*In your hearts honor Christ Jesus the Lord as holy...*" I want so badly for us to feel what it means for Jesus to be the suffering Savior.

We read in 1 Peter 3:18, "*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh...*" Let's stop there. Especially for those of you who are not yet followers of Jesus, here's what that means. God created you and me to know Him, enjoy Him and have eternal life with Him.

But each one of us has turned against Him. We've sinned against God and our sin separates us from Him. If we die in this state of separation from God, we will spend all of eternity separated from Him; I'll talk more about that in a minute. God loves you so much that He sent His Son Jesus. This is the

meaning of Christmas. The Baby in that manger is not a fictional story. This is glorious, life-changing, world-altering reality. The Baby in that manger was God in the flesh, Who came to live the righteous life that none of us could ever live—a life of no sin.

He came to be put to death on a cross to pay the price for our sins, so that all who trust in Him can be brought back to God. Get the picture. Jesus was born to suffer and die on a cross so that we could be brought back into relationship with God and to have eternal life with God. We know we're talking about eternal life, because once Jesus died, He didn't stay in the grave. Jesus did what no one else in all of history has ever—He conquered death. He was put in a coffin, put in a tomb, then three days later He was made alive. He rose from the grave, alive in the Spirit, after which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison.

Now, that's where this passage gets really confusing. These words have baffled Bible commentators for 2,000 years. Some say Peter is referring back to the Spirit of Christ preaching to people in Noah's day, when people were refusing to listen. Others believe this is talking about Jesus' going to the place where fallen angels from Genesis 6 dwell, declaring victory over them. Then it's more confusing when it starts talking about baptism, which to be clear is a symbol of salvation. I'm not going to try to explain all the unique wording in a few minutes here. Instead I want you to see what is plain and obvious to anyone reading this passage. Whether you're a new Christian studying the Bible or an experienced Bible scholar, just look at the progression in this paragraph. It starts with Jesus suffering at the hands of unrighteous sinners, dying, then being made alive. Go on to verse 21—the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then it ends with Jesus going into heaven, where He's now at the right hand of God with angels, authorities and powers having been subjected to Him.

Feel the weight of that progression, especially in the shoes of His followers in the first century who were going through all kinds of suffering and persecution, experiencing harm and evil because they were followers of Jesus. They were tempted to lose heart, but the Bible is saying, "No. Don't lose heart. Look up." In the same way, brother or sister today who is walking through suffering and hardship in 2020, "Don't lose heart. Look up." Jesus suffered all the way to the point of death, then He conquered sin, suffering and death, rose from the grave and is now seated at the right hand of God. He has victory over all, the triumphant King, with all angels, authorities and powers subjected to Him.

See the suffering Savior, the risen Lord, the triumphant King. There is no one like Him in all of history, no one like Jesus. There is no one as loving as Jesus. There is no one as awesome as Jesus. There is no one as beautiful, wonderful and majestic as Jesus. No one as holy as Jesus. So if you want your life to count in this world, you will realize this. You'll waste your life in this world if you deny, ignore or pay religious lip service to the holiest being in all the universe. It makes sense, doesn't it?

If you want your life to count in this world, you will regard Jesus as supremely glorious, putting Him in the highest place in your life and in the world. You will assign Him the highest value in your life

and in the world. You will love Him far more than you love anyone or anything else in this world. You will cherish Jesus far more than you cherish anyone or anything else in this world. You will admire, exalt, bow down on your knees and worship Jesus as your love, your life and your hope.

This is why I have been so zealous during these last few months to plead with you to not put your hope in a person, a political party or even a country, because there is only one King Who is worthy of all your hope. We must never tie His church to any person, party or leader in this world. There's only one Name Who is worthy of that in the church and His name is Jesus. This is why in nine months of pandemic I've pleaded with you—and do so even now—“Don't put your hope in the economy, in a bank account, in a job. Don't put your hope in medicine. Don't put your hope in the things of this world. That's a recipe for a wasted life, because in an instant it's all going to be gone.”

The only thing that will matter at that moment is did you hope in Jesus? Do you see it? Students, high schoolers, middle schoolers, elementary school—don't live for love or hope in what your friends think about you. Don't live to be liked here. Don't live for this world. Don't do it. You will waste your life. Live for love and hope in Jesus. He's supremely better than everything this world offers you put together. See Him. Love Him. Live for Him. Die for Him.

Parents, show what this kind of love, life and death look like. Parents and grandparents, show what it looks like, not to live to accumulate bigger and better barns here, but to lay down your life in love and allegiance to Jesus alone. Show your kids and grandkids what a heart looks like that loves Jesus in the depth of your being. Don't show them a Christianity that merely consists of going to church on Sunday mornings or turning a service on in your home. Don't show them a weak Christianity and a puny Christ. Show them the supremacy of Jesus in your heart, in the way you pray, the way you love, study, read and memorize God's Word, in the way you talk about Jesus in the world and in the way you spend your money. In everything you do, honor Jesus the Lord as holy. Love Him. Live for Him. Hope in Him.

Let me illustrate what I mean by love and live for a hope in Jesus. Let me introduce you to Anna. She just finished our last Christianity 101 class in which she came to know Jesus. I asked her to summarize what has happened in her life.

Anna: Hi. My name is Anna and this is a small amount of my faith journey. I grew up in a family who believed in God. We went to church on Sundays. Then when I was 17 my parents divorced. The divorce was particularly painful and it shook my faith in religion. I continued to believe in God and pray, but I had no religion.

For about 17 years after that, I ran very fast, trying to fill this God-shaped hole in my life with anything and everything I could. I knew there was God; I knew that He was somewhere. I just couldn't connect with Him anywhere. I ran and ran, and my journey got darker and darker and darker. I did things I'm not proud of and I've been to places I had no business going. I experienced a dark night of the soul

when I felt like I was not redeemable, that the things I had done were not redeemable, that God would never forgive me.

Then I began to see that God was there with me. I realized that when I had turned from Him, He had never, ever turned from me—ever. He never left me. So by the grace of God I stepped into recovery almost eight years ago. I have been on a long journey with God.

At the beginning of this year I began to search specifically for Jesus. I had a peculiar dream with a very strange visitor and it sent me on a journey specifically for Jesus.

I went to the dentist and remember thinking, “I want my spirit guides to help me.” Instead of my spirit guides, when I closed my eyes I saw Jesus. I thought, “What is Jesus doing here? This is so weird.” But I just went to Jesus, had this dental surgery and it was very scary. But Jesus was there. So then I wanted to specifically find somewhere that studied the Bible. I knew about McLean Bible Church because of the crazy traffic.

I went on line and listened to the online sermons during COVID. It’s been such a blessing in my life. My journey specifically to Jesus and finding out Who Jesus is has been incredible. This is my first Christmas when I’ve really studied Jesus instead of just kind of God, which is what I called Him before. I’m learning about Emanuel—God with us—and what it means to have Jesus come to us and die for us. It’s blowing my mind. I’m learning this constantly with the Bible studies I’m doing through McLean Bible Church.

I’m so grateful for God redeeming me and not leaving me. He’s letting me know that no matter what I’ve done or where I’ve been, He loves me. It’s the love I think that I’ve always searched for my whole life. The love of God and the love of Jesus has specifically filled this hole inside me. Now I get to be a wife and a mother; I get to show up for my life. I’m so grateful for that. Thank you.

David: As I heard Anna’s story, I thought, “You know, every Christian has a different story with twists and turns, but they all end up at the same place—at Jesus. You heard Anna say how she has this spiritual sense of a God-shaped vacuum in her heart. She was searching in the world and even in spirituality, but ultimately she met Jesus, realizing, “This is the love I’ve been looking and longing for. The love of God, the love of Jesus, has filled this hole in me.”

Did you hear that line? “Now I get to show up for my life.” Yes! Yes, Anna, yes. Now with the love of Jesus in your heart, you get to show up for life.

God, help us to get the point here.

If you don’t love Jesus with all your heart, you will miss out on life. I’m urging you—every single person listening at this moment—don’t miss out on your life, a life that is only found in love for Jesus and setting apart Jesus as holy in the depth of your being. You will waste your life if you defy, ignore or pay lip

service to the most glorious Being in the universe. Life is found in love for Him, hope in Him. Life now—and life forever.

2. Heaven will be eternally satisfying; hell will be eternally horrifying. Every single person will go to one of these two destinations very soon.

This is the second reality that grips those whose lives count in this world. Men and women, students, your lives count in this world. Realize and be gripped by the reality that heaven will be eternally satisfying; hell will be eternally horrifying. Every single person will go to one of these two destinations very soon. If you let yourself be gripped by this, it will change the way you live in this world. Are you gripped by this?

Throughout this passage we see this contrast between two eternal destinations. Let's start with the eternally satisfying hope of heaven. Verse 14 says, *“Even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed...”* What does that mean? You ask, “How is it possible to be blessed in suffering? I thought blessing was the opposite of suffering.” Not when you know Jesus.

I think about our brothers and sisters in North Korea right now who are enslaved in labor camps because they are followers of Jesus. Barring a miracle, they will wither there until they die. Are they blessed? How is that possible? Follow this: they are blessed because they know that labor camp is not the end of the story for them. They know Jesus said:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven (Matthew 5:10-12).

Do you see it? Blessing in suffering is a reality because the Kingdom of heaven is coming. Remember, this is the constant theme throughout the book of 1 Peter, as we've already seen. Jesus suffered for righteousness' sake and now He's in heaven. This is why 1 Peter 4:1 says, *“Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking.”* How did Jesus think? Hebrews 12:2, also speaking of Christians in the first century who were being tempted to abandon their faith and suffering, says, *“Fix your eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who...endured the cross.”* How? How did He do it? *“For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

How did Jesus think about suffering and endure hardship in this world? By keeping His eyes fixed on the world to come, on joy to come that will last forever. This world right here is not easy. We know this. It's filled with pain and hurt. This picture in 1 Peter is that of persecution. God is saying to us in His Word right now, “The key to life in this world is keeping your eyes on another world.” Do you want your life to count in this world? Keep your eyes focused on another world.

Do you want to waste your life in this world? Look around you and live for what you see. Live for more stuff, nicer stuff, bigger stuff, better stuff. Live for more acclaim, more success in this world. When you get to this moment, in a nanosecond it will all be gone. All of it. What did Jesus say in Mark 8:36? *“What does it profit a man to gain the whole world?”* You can have it all and lose your soul, missing the whole point. Don’t do it, God says. Don’t live for this world. Look to another world.

This is why when we get to 1 Peter 4, Peter starts talking about people who are living it up in this world. They’re surprised when they don’t see you join them or live like them. They may even malign you. But, verse five says, *“They will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”* Did you hear that? You, I and every single person in the world will one day give an account before God. Feel the weight of this.

That shell illustration from John Piper is not made up. It’s coming soon for you and for me. We’re all going to stand before God to give an account. All who have loved, trusted in, hoped in and lived under the Lordship of Jesus will enter into an eternally satisfying future with Him. But for all who have rejected Jesus or toyed with Jesus in a life of religious motion devoid of relational intimacy with God, for all who have not loved, trusted in, hoped in and lived under the Lordship of Jesus, hell will be eternally horrifying, eternally hot. Jesus warns us in Matthew 13:40-42. Listen to His language, not my words. This is Jesus, Who loves us, saying, *“Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age.”* When it’s all said and done, *“The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

Do you hear that? People whose lives count in this world hear this and take it to heart. They don’t hear that heaven will be eternally satisfying and hell will be eternally horrifying, then think, “What’s for lunch today? I’m just ready to move on through the week as normal.” We stop and think about this. This is every single person. It’s our lives and the lives of every single person we know who will end up in one of these two places.

Feel the weight in 1 Peter 4:7. The Bible says, *“The end of all things is at hand...”* This is coming—eternally satisfying heaven or eternally horrifying hell. Every single person is going to one of those two destinations. That changes the way you live in this world. That changes the way you view this world and what’s important in it.

3. The purpose of your life on this earth is to proclaim the gospel while doing good.

This leads to the third thing that grips those whose lives count in this world. When your life counts in this world, you are gripped—in light of the two truths we’ve already seen—realizing the purpose of your life on this earth is to proclaim the gospel while doing good. We don’t even have to go to the Word to

see what it's going to say next. It's so obvious. If you hope in Jesus in a hurting world, then you point people to Jesus. You tell people about Jesus. If you know every single person in your family, every single person in your workplace, every single person in your neighborhood is either going to heaven or hell, then you proclaim this gospel. It all hinges on trust in, hope in, faith in, love for Jesus. You tell people.

This is why, right after verse 15, where we saw, "*In your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy*"—we now read, "*Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you...*" Don't miss this.

These followers of Jesus in the first century were facing persecution because they were proclaiming the gospel. Don't just jump to the "doing good" part. We'll get to that in a second. These brothers and sisters in the first century were not being persecuted, imprisoned, eventually killed because they were nice people doing good things. Our brothers and sisters in North Korea right now are not being put to work in labor camps just because they're nice. It's because they proclaim Jesus as Lord.

So we proclaim Jesus as Lord, all the more so in a place where, by God's grace, we have freedom, where we don't even have to fear imprisonment. There's not one single person you will interact with this week who does not need to know that Jesus is Lord. Not one single person you interact with this week does not need the good news of the suffering Savior, risen Lord and triumphant King. They need to know and God has put us in this world to proclaim this good news; God has put those people in each of our lives for this very reason. Be "*zealous for what is good.*" We've seen this throughout 1 Peter already.

Verse 15 says, "*always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you...*" That's proclaiming the gospel. Then right after that it says, "*Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good...*"

When we get to 1 Peter 4:2, the Bible talks about not living for passions of this world but for the will of God. Peter lists all the ways the world lives, saying, "You don't live like that anymore. You're living for another world."

As a side note, think back to Anna's story. Did you hear the way she talked about those dark years when she was running from God to places she is not proud of? I asked for her permission to share this, but Anna was addicted to alcohol and various drugs. Do you think Anna wants to go back to that life? No way. She's been saved from that life. She doesn't want to go back to that which leads to death, right? How much more so, Christian brothers and sisters, should we all be this way with sin? If Anna wouldn't go back to drugs and alcohol, why do brothers and sisters go back to pornography, back to a life of anger, gossip or slander, back to materialism? God has saved us to live a totally new life. Don't go back to that which leads to death. You've been saved from it for a new life. Leave the ways of this world behind.

Peter says in 4:7, "*The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded...*" knowing you will stand before God at any moment to give an account for your words, desires

and deeds. Be sober-minded, self-controlled, and in verse eight, *“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”* What a picture. Peter just keeps coming back to “love each other.” This world is not easy, so love each other here, with a love that covers over even offenses among God’s people.

One commentator said it this way. When I read this, I just prayed this over our church:

Where love abounds in a fellowship of Christians, many small offenses, even some large ones, are readily overlooked and forgotten. But where love is lacking, every word is viewed with suspicion, every action is liable to misunderstanding and conflicts abound, to Satan’s perverse delight.

No one likes being in a relationship where you’re always walking on eggshells, where you feel like somebody is ready to pounce on every word or even a wrong look. God says, “Don’t live like that with each other. Time is short here. Love each other earnestly. Give grace to each other that you’ve been given from Me.” This is the theme in the next couple verses. *“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”*

Do you see it? Put it all together. If Jesus is Lord of our lives, love and hope, and because heaven and hell are coming one day to everyone, then we realize the purpose of our lives is to proclaim this gospel while doing good. We should wake up every morning gripped by this purpose. I’m asking today, based on God’s Word, “Are you gripped in these ways? Are you gripped by these things?” What happens when an entire church decides these realities are going to grip us, then together we’re going to make our lives count for what matters forever?

In my conversation with John Piper this week, we got to talking about C.T. Studd, a man for whom my son Caleb is partially named. C.T. Studd was an extremely well-known, wealthy cricket player in England—which may not sound like a big deal to us here since most of us are not big cricket fans. Picture the Lebron James of English sports—he was at that level.

C.T. came to Jesus one day, put his faith in Jesus and his life was gripped. He sold everything he had. Imagine somebody like Lebron doing this. He sold everything he had and moved to China as a missionary. From there he ended up spreading the gospel in India, then when he reached retirement age, everybody told him to stop. He decided to go to Sudan where he died. His grave became a stepping-stone for missionaries across Africa, Asia and South America.

Now, I want to be clear and give this caveat. Whenever I use an illustration like this, I can see the objections rising. “Not everybody should be a missionary moving overseas.” I obviously know that; the Bible doesn’t teach that. I’m not a missionary overseas. Do I believe the Bible is saying many more should be? Absolutely. Three billion people have little to no knowledge of the gospel.

Let’s just put the objections aside. Let’s hear what the Holy Spirit is saying right now. The question is not where we go in our lives. The question is whether or not Jesus is actually Lord of our

lives—Lord over our future, Lord over our finances, Lord over our every decision, Lord over our jobs, Lord over it all, such that we go wherever and do whatever He leads us to do, no matter the cost. That’s the picture I want you to see in C.T. Studd. His biographer says his life was a sign to all succeeding generations that it’s worthwhile to lose all this world can offer and stake everything on the world to come.

His biographer went on to say, “Studd’s life will be an eternal rebuke to easy-going Christianity.” I pray that it will be said of your life and my life that we were an eternal rebuke to easy-going Christianity. The reason C.T. Studd came up in my conversation with John Piper this week was because of a poem he wrote about the life that counts. I think it would be appropriate to read it as we close this time in God’s Word, because I think it powerfully summarizes what God is saying to you and to me right now:

Two little lines I heard one day,
Traveling along life’s busy way;
Bringing conviction to my heart,
And from my mind would not depart;
Only one life, ’twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one,
Soon will its fleeting hours be done;
Then, in ‘that day’ my Lord to meet,
And stand before His Judgment seat;
Only one life, ’twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.

Only one life, the still small voice,
Gently pleads for a better choice
Bidding me selfish aims to leave,
And to God’s holy will to cleave;
Only one life, ’twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.

Only one life, a few brief years,
Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears;
Each with its clays I must fulfill,
Living for self or in His will;
Only one life, ’twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.

When this bright world would tempt me sore,
When Satan would a victory score;
When self would seek to have its way,
Then help me Lord with joy to say;
Only one life, ’twill soon be past,
Only what’s done for Christ will last.

Give me Father, a purpose deep,
In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;

Faithful and true what e'er the strife,
Pleasing Thee in my daily life;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Oh let my love with fervor burn,
And from the world now let me turn;
Living for Thee, and Thee alone,
Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one,
Now let me say, "Thy will be done";
And when at last I'll hear the call,
I know I'll say, "Twas worth it all";
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

If you believe that, it will change the way you live. I want to invite you to bow your heads with me. As you do, I want to ask you—no matter how old you are, from the youngest to the oldest—is Jesus the Lord of your heart? If the answer to that question is not a resounding “Yes”, I invite you right now in this holy moment, to pray to God in your heart, “O God, today I confess Jesus as Lord of my heart. Today I believe He died on the cross for my sins, rose from the dead, is exalted at Your right hand. Today I confess that Jesus is Lord of my life. I receive Your love and forgiveness of my sins. Today I receive through faith in You eternal life with You, based on Your love for me—not based on my works for You.”

That is a prayer God promises in His Word to answer. To all who say that to Him, and to all who have said, “Yes, Jesus is Lord of my heart,” we pray, God, help us to be gripped in these ways. I pray this in my life in a fresh way today. I pray this over every single brother or sister in Christ who knows you.

God, I pray that they would see Jesus as supremely worthy of all their love, life and hope. I pray that You would help us to see coming a heaven as eternally satisfying and a coming hell as eternally horrifying, then to live to proclaim this gospel here while doing good that brings glory to Your name. God, we pray that You would help us to make our lives—this short life, this little bit of time left that we have here—to make it count maximally for Your glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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