

Jesus Christ: Captain of Our Salvation

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Recorded on March 2, 2019

Greetings once again—it is indeed a pleasure to be together. We always look forward to the Sabbath and the fellowship that comes with it, and the opportunity to share the occasion. The last time I spoke here was on the 26th of January and I discussed Jesus Christ as the firstborn among many, and as such He is the heir of all things. The reference there is Hebrews 1:2, and then in Romans 8:16-17, we noted we are children of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ, and then Paul says, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with Him. So it's a rather awesome calling and something that deserves our full, undivided attention as we pursue that over the course of our lifetime. Today, in a related subject, I would like to examine Jesus Christ as the captain of our salvation and you'll recognize the terminology. We'll start in Hebrews 2 where that term is used.

Hebrews 2:9 *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.*

10) *For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, ["Him" being the Father, and, in this instance, "for whom and by whom" is attributed to the Father] in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. (NKJV)*

There you have the statement. So this business of captain—all teams need captains, that's just the way it is, there's always a leader involved and of course this is what comes to mind when you think of a captain. In the verse in the King James and the New King James version it is translated just that way, as our captain. In the New International, the term author is used, as in the author of our salvation. The Revised Standard version has it as pioneer—the pioneer of our salvation. You kind of get the idea He was the first, blazing the trail, and indeed the Greek word that is here translated as captain or author or pioneer is *archégos* from Strong's #747. It means "a prime author or a chief leader or prince". This is from Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary. Barclay's Daily Bible Study Series adds an interesting note. He says in this case, the captain or the pioneer, as he translates it, "is one who begins something in order that others may enter into it, a trailblazer". So the one who goes first and paves the way so that others might follow.

You start talking about blazing trails and you think back at least in American history, one of the obvious examples of Lewis and Clark comes to mind; President Jefferson having brokered the Louisiana Purchase, now suddenly we've got a whole big piece of real estate we know little about, and so off they go, blazing a trail to the Pacific Ocean and back, and before you know it, we had a transcontinental railroad and we're flying coast to coast and so forth. Somebody has to start the process. Somebody has to be first—

pave the way for others to follow. So here we have described Jesus Christ in verse 10 once again.

10) For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. (NKJV)

There is a path, a trail that is blazed to a particular destination. The path oftentimes leads to perfection. Let's focus on the term perfection for a moment because in Jesus, His coming to perfection didn't mean He was imperfect, in the sense that something was missing or He was deficient personally or made mistakes that had to be corrected. The term perfect is worth a little closer examination. Perfect or to make perfect is the Greek word *teleios*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary says, you are made perfect by overcoming earthly limitations. There are earthly limitations that we all face because we're human beings. The Word became flesh, after all, and dwelled among us, and as such, He then had to deal with the limitations of human existence. So again, He wasn't imperfect in the sense of being deficient, in some way as we mere humans are, but nevertheless there were human limitations that had to be overcome. Let's notice verses 17 and 18 of chapter 2 of Hebrews.

Hebrews 2:17 *Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

18) For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (NKJV)

The course, the path, the trail that's being blazed is just getting through this human life, human existence, and attaining the goal which is eternal life; that's what we're looking for, that's what we're hoping for. He goes through all of this and He experiences these things not so He can be a strict and merciless judge but so He can have compassion on us and intercede on our behalf. Having suffered, He died and of course was resurrected and now serves, not to condemn but to aide and assist us in our life and in our own particular journey. It's comforting to know that one has paved the way and made it possible. There are difficulties that we experience from time to time, and sometimes we wonder, is it all worth it? What's going on here? Surely there are other things to be learned; what's going on, why are we having to put up with all of these various difficulties?

God has a destination. Indeed, if you read closer, you recognize you were told that the path to eternal life is narrow and straight and few find it. Broad and easy is the way, the path that leads to destruction. It's comforting to know that somebody has gone and blazed the trail and left a few markers along the way to keep us on the trail—providing assistance as we need it. In summary then, we have a captain, a pioneer, one who blazes a trail to a particular generation. Now the Word became flesh, He dwelled among us, He overcame the limitations of the flesh, doing His Father's will. Suffering even unto death and then of course resurrected to glory. So we have this path that

we're on and there is a destination; we're going to be led to glory, believe it or not. I look in the mirror sometimes and I wonder—I don't see anything glorious yet.

Let's turn to John, chapter 3, for a moment. Here in John 3 is probably the most quoted verse in all of scripture—at least in all of the New Testament—well, probably all of scripture. John 3:16 being that verse, let's go up and consider what's going on in chapter 3. There's a conversation taking place here between Nicodemus and Jesus, and we're looking for signs.

John 3:2 *This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."*

3) *Jesus answered and said to him, [this is an interesting answer to Nicodemus's observation] "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (NKJV)*

That's how we enter the Kingdom of God—that's the destination that we're on, and to achieve that destination we have to go through a process Jesus describes as being born again.

4) *Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"*

5) *Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. (NKJV)*

Oh, there are limitations; there is a set pattern or standard that we must meet if we're going to become a part of the Kingdom of God. It isn't something you just sort of assume by osmosis or something.

6) *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (NKJV)*

So here we are, in the flesh. We've all been born into the flesh—that's what happens to human beings, but going on, to be a part of the Kingdom of God we have to be born into the Spirit. At some point in time we have to lay aside the flesh and favor the Spirit. Flesh and blood simply have no place in the permanency of God's Kingdom.

7) *Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'*

8) *The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." (NKJV)*

Clearly, there's going to be a significant difference in composition, for one thing, between being in the flesh and being in the Spirit.

9) *Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?" (NKJV)*

Nicodemus was having a little difficulty grasping the significance of what's going on here.

Then Jesus says, rather straightforwardly, as he looks Nicodemus in the eye,

10) ... *“Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”* (NKJV)

“How can these things be?” There have been times in my personal experience and probably in yours as well where whatever mechanism God uses to reveal additional information or understanding to us—He turns up the wattage or something—the light shines brighter and we can see things now that we didn't see before. The focus becomes clear. I spent hours as a college student staring through a microscope—various classes that I took required it—and the tinier and the smaller the target, the more careful the focus had to be in order to be sure that one was tuned in to the right spot. You know, I've considered my own situation and my own journey in this business of coming to the Kingdom of God and now it's sort of, I would say, a personal enlightenment of sorts where you come to a deeper understanding. It's been going on for three or four years now and it's probably a good thing, or this would have been one of those knock-you-to-your-knees kind of moments. There was that moment when I looked in the mirror, as it were, and heard the words that Jesus gave to Nicodemus, when He said, *Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?*

There was that moment when I looked in the mirror, and said, I'm a teacher in the Church of God and I don't even know that information relative to the record of God and Christ in scripture, which seems to be, clearly, one of the more significant items under discussion at this time in history. There was a day and there was a time that I looked in the mirror and thought of Jesus saying to me, what?—you're a teacher and you don't know these things? I struggled then within my own self, my own experience and said, I would just as soon be done with this and turn the responsibilities of this sort of thing over to somebody who knows a whole lot more than I. Because when I look back on my training for the ministry, for forty-six years (and I've pointed this out to one degree or another in the past) I basically taught and defended a particular corporate narrative—pure and simple. I wasn't taught, really, the years I went to Ambassador College, real principles of interpretation, known as hermeneutics; instead we were taught to defend the corporate narrative. That's why we were sent into the field to “pastor” churches—here you are; sure, study, do your thing, by all means study the word of God, but don't come up with something contrary to the official narrative; don't look for evidence outside of the defined definition. That's interesting, isn't it? Then you come to grips with the fact that—wow—there are things we don't yet comprehend.

It's interesting, though, when you seem intimidated and you want to just run and hide and let somebody else take the responsibility, but it's comforting to know that ignorance is not a terminal disease. Ignorance can be overcome. How so? With education, so that's what we try to do. We want to be educated, we want to come to a deeper understanding. So from my own personal perspective, at least, I'm a little more careful

these days about what I say as I stand up in the position of a teacher in the Church of God. We need to be very careful, and if it isn't specifically and very clearly from scripture then just let it go. I find as I go from assignment to assignment, I spend more time just studying and thinking about it. If it doesn't come clear and I wrestle and wrestle with the material to make sure that it's clear, precisely clear, so that there is no problem with the way it's being presented at least (and I take a lot of time doing it that way anymore, remembering that you can run but you can't hide), I think about that—just turn this over to somebody else. Yeah right, remember Jonah and the whale and those kinds of things? So if it's your calling to do it, then just be careful and do it right. Let God reveal to you what needs to be said next.

So, again, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?"

11) Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. (NKJV)

It's interesting, over the years we've experienced certain things and as God shines additional light on the whole revelation of scripture, and we come to a deeper understanding of certain things, notice, it's testified that there are those who do not receive our witness. It's interesting that the ones who do receive the witness and a deeper understanding are thrilled to the core—what an exciting, new understanding they have, and their Bible study and relationship to God is being transformed. I won't say in a magical way because it's not about magic, it's about the intervention of God's Holy Spirit guiding us.

12) If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? (NKJV)

Here's verse 13 now; this was a show stopper, a pivotal moment that helped rearrange my Protestant narrative way back when. Jesus, continuing his talk with Nicodemus,

13) No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. (NKJV)

I was raised to believe that the reward of the saved was to die and go to heaven. Lo and behold, there's no one there but Jesus. You can read Revelation and there's lots of activity around the Throne of God.

14) And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up ... (NKJV)

Here's the course, here's the path, if you will, that Jesus trod, the trail that He blazed in going toward eternal life: He had to be lifted up. He lived in this life as a human being, went through the same trials and tests and experiences that we have as human beings, yet without sin, and so, it ended in His being lifted up, that is, crucified—nailed to a tree, as Peter put it.

15) *that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* (NKJV)

Eternal life is the destination. He has blazed the trail there. He's gone through the process, paid the price, made it possible then for others to follow. We have the opportunity to do just that. And it is an exciting one if we just will take the time to experience it and pursue it. Then of course, that famous verse, verse 16:

16) *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.* (NKJV)

So there again, we go through this life—the purpose is not to perish, the purpose is to eventually achieve eternal life. It's a gift from God.

17) *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.* (NKJV)

So we have this business of salvation and if you were to take your mobile microphone into the street or out here in the lobby, and say, hey brother, have you been saved, or, do you know the Lord?—what kind of answer do you suppose you would get? You might run into the occasional Christian, one who perceives himself or herself to be saved; he or she might say yes, but I think most people would look at you and say, saved from what?

One of the personal experiences that I had with this goes way back, to the summer of 1966. I'd just finished my freshman year at Ambassador College and I'm going to summer school at Modesto Junior College, and most of the people in the class were teachers getting additional course work for their credential requirements and so forth. One day, I don't know what it was about me that I was singled out, but this one fella—he was older than me, everybody there was older than me—he was a part-time teacher and a part-time Baptist preacher, and he comes up to me one day and he says, say brother, do you know the Lord? And I answered without pause, yes, I keep the commandments, and it was like I'd hit him in the head with a brick or something. He reacted like he expected a yes or a no; he didn't expect me to say, yes, I keep the commandments. Then I quoted 1 John 2:4, *he who says I know Him and does not keep the commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.* He didn't know what to do with that. He muttered something like, you don't believe like we do.

It was a perfect example (and it's been instructive to me ever since) that if we're not careful, we end up more concerned about the narrative. There was a Baptist narrative that he was associated with and that was his understanding, and so it didn't matter what the scripture said. Oh how painful it is to wake up fifty years later and realize you've got your own narrative that you've been quoting and living by, and suddenly it's revealed to you that, uh-oh, you didn't have it right, and, not only that, you've been teaching it incorrectly. Once again, we have to be very careful as we approach this calling that

God has given to us and what's presented to us. Again, the subject is captain of our salvation—Jesus Christ.

16) For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17) For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (NKJV)

That was a great concern. A lot of times when somebody sacrifices to achieve a certain something and you owe them for it, they lord it over you because you owe them. That's not the attitude Jesus takes toward us. He was willing to go to the extent that His Father desired, to blaze the trail, to suffer even to the point of death. He died, He was resurrected to glory, and He doesn't condemn us. It's not His desire to look for excuses to punish us. He doesn't hold the sword of Damocles over our head at the very first little adjustment or, shall we say, diversion from the straight and narrow, then take us out. It's about coming to our aide and to our assistance.

18) "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (NKJV)

When you look at Christianity from that point of view, and later in the book of Acts we see the statement, there's only one name under heaven whereby a person can be saved, where does that leave the non-Christians? Say what you will, Christianity, bottom line, is a bit of an exclusive organization. There are certain requirements God will require of us. This is condemnation, verse 19:

19) And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (NKJV)

What do we do when the light shines, and God reveals certain things to us and it's uncomfortable?—If I'm going to have to do that, that's going to cause great inconvenience. Think back to the days when you learned about the Sabbath or other things that were going to require significant change in your lifestyle. Significant change in the way you do business. Significant change in just about every aspect of your life. You have to decide, well, God has put me on a path toward a particular destination. Jesus Christ was the pioneer, the trail blazer, the captain of our salvation, and now I have to get on that trail and follow. So you think about it and here's the option.

19) And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20) For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. (NKJV)

That's part of the process of being a Christian—having our deeds exposed so that we can see clearly to make adjustments and get in harmony with the example that has been set. It can be difficult. It can be embarrassing and painful.

21) *But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, [transparency, you see] that they [those deeds] have been done in God.*" (NKJV)

There is a path that leads to destruction, there is a path that leads to life and it includes suffering. Back to Hebrews 2, verses 9 and 10, for just a moment: Suffered death for all; captain of our salvation; made perfect through suffering. Let's focus on this business of suffering for a moment because it's there—everywhere you look there's a reference to it, at least a good number of them, and I think an important one is 1 Corinthians 10; let's go there. Over the course of years in the ministry, a lot of times we run into people who are suffering. They have had severe trials, whether it's health or some kind of a relationship issue, or maybe it's finances, and they think that God is punishing them, that God is not pleased with them, that God doesn't like them or whatever. I suppose God might discipline us because He's not pleased with us, but bear in mind that with suffering, you can work hard to avoid it but you can also work harder to just yield to whatever it is God is revealing to you and deal with it.

1 Corinthians 10:11 *Now all these things happened to them as examples, [reference here of course is back to the Exodus, with Moses and the Israelites coming out of Egypt and they didn't set a very good example] and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.* (NKJV)

That's interesting, isn't it? Paul writes a letter to Corinth, roughly 1,900 years ago; he says the ends of the ages have come, and it's been another 1,900 to 2,000 years later, and we're still slugging away.

12) *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.* (NKJV)

We do need to take heed, and maintain a humble attitude. Notice verse 13:

13) *No temptation [no test] has overtaken you except such as is common to man;* (NKJV)

So the trials and tests that we experience, the difficulties that we encounter, they are myriad and diverse, they're the same kinds of things that happen—you're not being punished, you're not suffering because you are in the Church. Everybody who is human suffers. Just look at the world around us. The difficulties that people have, people are caught up in struggles and wars and violence and things. We look around the world at the cultural changes that are taking place in most nations, and you realize what we experience and the difficulties we have are not peculiar to us; it's not because we were called into the Church. The point is the sufferings that we have and the service to God lead us to eternal life.

13 continued) ... *but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted [or tested] beyond what you are able ...* (NKJV)

That's comforting. There are times that I thought (and you probably have too), I'm not sure I'm going to get through this one.

13 continued) ... *but with the temptation will also make the way of escape ...* (NKJV)

We like to stop reading there—*the way of escape*—yes, heal me of my diseases, send me some money so I can pay my bills, give me a way of escape so that the whole thing is behind me and it's no longer an issue. But notice, we have to finish the verse:

13 continued) ... *that you may be able to bear it.* (NKJV)

Oh dear—yes, that's the point, isn't it? Sometimes (and I've been there, I know most of us have) you face a really difficult trial and you just want it to go away, and it certainly isn't inappropriate to ask God to take it away but if He doesn't, then what? Can you trust God to know that what you're experiencing is for your benefit? And not only for yours but for someone who might follow after you? With the temptation, He will also make the way of escape that you may be able to bear it. So if God hasn't removed it, He will give you the strength to bear it and that's where your focus then is.

Many times we want to intercede for people out of pity, out of concern for people who are suffering; we want more than anything to see that person relieved of their suffering, and we have to be careful that we not interfere with God working with an individual, through their sufferings, to bring them to the place where they need to be to see life as God requires it. Sometimes that's a difficult proposition. Temptations, tests, and trials are common to all people. It isn't something that's peculiar to the Church of God and because I'm in the Church therefore I'm suffering. If I wasn't in the Church I wouldn't be suffering—I guess you know that's ridiculous. A lot of people have learned that lesson the hard way. Once again, suffering is common to us all. God uses our experiences to help us face the trials and the tests, and close the gap between the flesh and the spirit.

Let's turn to 1 Peter 4, again the business of suffering and how God uses it with the common experiences that we have.

1 Peter 4:1 *Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh ...* (NKJV)

Jesus suffered—He suffered for our benefit while He was in the flesh. So then,

1 continued) ... *arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin ...* (NKJV)

Now you see, Jesus didn't have any sins, even though He suffered in the flesh, so we're not talking about Jesus here. We're talking about human beings, those of us who are in the flesh. We suffer in the flesh, we resist sin even to the point of suffering, and what happens? The more we trust God, the more our suffering helps us to come to grips with our shortcomings, and then we cease sinning. The closer the situation is, arm yourselves with the same mind, as we arm ourselves with the same mind that Christ had—He was willing to go through whatever necessary to achieve His Father's will—and having done that, to the extent we're able to do that, our suffering (with the right mind and the right attention) leads us to abandon sin and to trust in God.

2) that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. (NKJV)

At some point in time, God, one way or another, focuses our attention in such a way that we set aside just the pure, fleshly existence in trying to achieve the benefits that we accrue as human beings; set that aside which oftentimes is simply described here as the lusts of men; we set that aside to pursue the will of God, and at some point in time that's what we all have to do and it doesn't change. Moving ahead now to verse 12; 1 Peter 4:12–19. Again, Peter is focusing here on this business of suffering. Jesus suffered, even to death and then was resurrected; He was the captain of our salvation. He set the pace, blazed the trail; we're going to be asked to follow in His steps and we're going to experience some of the same things.

1 Peter 4:12 *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; (NKJV)*

Okay, look around, we're all experiencing trials of one sort or another.

13) but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. (NKJV)

Now it's fast-forwarded to the Second Coming and Jesus has already been glorified. He's at the right hand of His Father, but the day is coming when He is going to come, and He's going to be revealed to everyone. It will be clear as a bell, as we say. His glory will be revealed, that you may also be glad with exceeding joy—we're going to share in the glory that Jesus Christ has now. It's good to focus on those things. It won't always be this way; the day is coming when it will all make sense, when we will set aside the struggles of the flesh and embrace eternal life.

14) If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you ... (NKJV)

Really? It can be hard for a person to consider themselves blessed when they are reproached for any reason. If in the pursuit of God's will and trying to take on the mind of Christ, we are subject to criticism and even persecution, Peter says here that we are blessed.

14 continued) ... *for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.* (NKJV)

I think back to my more serious trials and I must admit, I don't recall looking at the situation and thanking God for the spirit of glory that rested upon me. Over time, at this stage of my development or journey, put it as you will, I try to look at it that way. If I run up against a particular trial or test or difficulty, obviously I'm short of the demand being made. Can I then deliberately, rather than in hindsight, say this is a blessing from God? From my experience at least, it's always been hindsight. You got me through it, things aren't so bad, actually it turned out a little better than I thought. So you give God thanks, you bless God for having done that for you. How about I could focus my attention in such a way that I could consider the trial *in the moment* as a blessing from God, as God's attempt, if you will, to put the spirit of glory upon us and just let that be our guiding principle when we face the ordinary difficulties. The strange trials—they're not strange, they are for a purpose.

14 continued) ... *On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.* (NKJV)

There are those who will reproach you for the truth. In the sermon I gave (that I went back and listened to again recently), "Was Jesus Christ-Centered?", you'll notice that the more Jesus revealed about Himself and His purpose and His will, the more hostile the religious authorities became—picked up stones to kill him. Sometimes we run into those kinds of things because we've chosen to do it God's way, and bear in mind we just might be subject to some of the same kinds of things that Jesus Himself experienced in the course of doing the will of God.

15) *But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.* (NKJV)

You get the impression that maybe Peter was dealing with a few people who had engaged in this sort of behavior—murderers, thieves, evil-doers, busybodies in other people's matters. Just don't suffer for having done those kinds of things.

16) *Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.* (NKJV)

There again, from my own personal experience that's been a difficult thing to do, and I'm not sure to this day I do this correctly. When is the last time that, as I approached a trial or a difficulty, I just said glory be to God that I am able to suffer for Christ's sake? I just don't find that a very easy thing to do but I am determined that one of these days, I will face the trial and the test and try to take it from this point of view. God has set out a purpose, Jesus Christ has gone before us, the way is there; just get on the trail and follow suit.

17) *For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God;* (NKJV)

This could be encouraging. It's much better to make little adjustments along the way than it is to suddenly appear before the judgment seat and have all your dirty deeds laid out before you. That's a blessing that we can do it that way—as we learn more, more is revealed to us, so we can make smaller adjustments as we go, rather than having to make those huge, big adjustments because of having strayed off the path.

17 continued) ... *and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

18) Now *"If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"* (NKJV)

Wow. But the righteous will be saved, that's the comforting thing.

19) *Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.* (NKJV)

Let's turn to Hebrews 12. In chapter 11 you have this cloud of witnesses that is referred to in Hebrews 12, and you can go through the various witnesses, some of whom we call the heavyweights of the Old Testament period, going all the way back to Abraham and then following through. In Chapter 12, we're told this:

Hebrews 12:1 *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us ...* (NKJV)

So we're on the path and it's an endurance race, and sometimes when I think of endurance, I'm thinking pain. If it requires endurance there's going to be a certain amount of discomfort involved. I've been in this cardiac rehab thing for a couple months now, and I've got a month to go. They keep ratcheting up the level of resistance and the various exercise machines they put you on, and they measure your progress. They keep ratcheting it up and ratcheting it up so as to get you to make progress. Indeed it's an endurance race. Notice verse 2:

2) *looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ...* (NKJV)

Back in chapter 2, He's referred to as the captain of our salvation. He was made perfect through sufferings. Here He's referred to as the author and finisher of our faith.

2 continued) ... *who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* (NKJV)

The author of Hebrews makes a special point of Jesus looking ahead—for the joy that was set before Him. Jesus had been with His Father, as the Word, in a glorified state, giving up His glory, not His divinity, to become a part of humanity to set the pace for us, to (I suppose you could argue) learn a few things, too, about what it's like to be a human

being and how to help out. For the joy that was set before Him, in the midst of a trial that requires endurance, putting up with the pain and the suffering, the inconvenience, the uncertainty—it's kind of difficult under those conditions to focus on the joy that set is before us. But that's what we need to do, and I suspect the more time we spend meditating on those concepts—studying those concepts, asking God to reveal the joy that is set before us—makes it a little more tenable as we face the trials and the tests and the endurance that is required in this life.

11) *Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present ...* (NKJV)

No, it doesn't, and we are chastened, we are corrected, we are redirected from time to time, but it is painful.

11 continued) *... but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.* (NKJV)

I think of my days playing high school football, and the coaches—man, they could make life miserable for us. But they knew, that on game night, there is going to be a public examination. The high school players in their fine uniforms, running out on the field to the cheers of the crowd, were going to have a public examination as to whether or not they'd been doing the work they were supposed to be doing in making preparations to face their game opponents. God does have to chasten us, discipline us, direct us to achieve His purpose. We learn over time that it is a joyful thing to make the games necessary so that we can do the will of God.

We can follow the example set by the captain of our salvation. There have been those who have set the pace—we have the examples in scripture of those who were called of God, used by God in various ways. Let's turn to Romans 12 and we'll bring it to a close. This calling is specific and it's a challenging thing. God doesn't give us a lot of room to decide for ourselves how it's going to be. He calls us to the course and we run it or not. We need to take seriously that, yes, you start where you are. There isn't any other opportunity, is there?—God begins with us just the way we are. I think you probably know—I don't have to tell you this—that's not the way we're going to be when we're glorified. We're going to have to make some changes, we're going to have to grow and develop, to follow the example of Jesus Christ. In Romans 12, Paul is beseeching,

Romans 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.* (NKJV)

See, some of the trials, the tests, and the difficulties that we run into and encounter in life allow us to do just this. Here I am, Lord, do with me as you will. That takes a while to learn and to thoroughly appreciate. We have to be transformed.

2) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (NKJV)

God is in the process of teaching us these things, making these things clear to us so we can achieve the purpose. It's God's desire to share the inheritance that Jesus has with us. We need to recognize that. Once again,

Hebrews 2:9 *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.*

10) For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. (NKJV)

He is an example for us. Jesus Christ has run the course, He has set the standard and He's also given us the tools and the strength whereby we can follow as well. As we continue then and we're looking forward to the spring holy days—am I meeting the standard that God wants me to, am I putting forth the necessary effort that God asks me to put forth? I trust that we are and I trust that we will come to understand just how important it is, and that God really desires that we be a part of the Kingdom of God. Let's be encouraged by the testimony that we have, by the example of Jesus Himself, and others who are highlighted in scripture for us, to set our hand to pursue the course right to the very end. It's a great calling, so let's continue the effort, and we'll look back on it and be glad that we did, certainly. It's been good to be with you and we wish you well. Trust that we'll all see each other in the Kingdom of God.