

On Being Forsaken – Part 2

Tom Beohm

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What I'd like to share with you today is a continuation of a study that we did a couple of weeks ago in which we explored some thoughts on what it means to be forsaken. Using the examples of Elijah, David, Paul and Jesus Christ, we spent our time examining characteristics of and conditions in which being forsaken—or being cast aside, being left alone, or worse, even openly persecuted—can take place and how our examples perhaps had some common points in our own personal experiences, and I shared a few of my thoughts and stories throughout.

We stopped in the previous study at what could arguably be the most intense and pivotal example of this in action, and that's in Christ's expression of being forsaken by His Father in His dying words, and we read that in Mark 15:34. In the context of the Passover season we take time to contemplate what this sacrifice means for us personally, and the opportunity it affords us to have a personal and intimate relationship with the Father. We took a few moments previously to reflect on the gravity of that circumstance—of Christ being left alone by all, forsaken by all, and the Father losing contact with the only other Being in all of creation on His plane. While we cannot begin to fathom the gravity of what was done for us, we try. We think about it but it's beyond us; we in our own personal experiences have had our own times of loneliness, being abandoned or perhaps being attacked for who we are and what we believe. Pretty heavy stuff, right?

Today what I'd like to do is focus on the “what's next.” If we find ourselves suffering, we find ourselves alone—attacked—we can look at scripture and see that others have had similar experiences, but that only goes so far. What I'd like to do is start covering today how we can cope and perhaps even grow and thrive in going through these experiences, and as we ended last time, we're going to divide this into two broad categories. We're going to talk about what we know and what we can do.

In preparing what I'm going to share, I discovered I had enough material to do another sermon, so today we're going to focus on only one of these two areas and that is the “what we know.” So Part 2 is what we know—what information we have at our disposal that we can take to heart, that we can rely on that will help us find comfort and strength. As we talked about previously we'll be revisiting some of our examples from last time. We're going to cover some passages—last time, I intentionally skipped some verses here and there—we're going to go back around and visit some of those verses to take these next steps. So let's begin.

Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 4:7-9 and I'm going to read this from the Amplified translation of the Bible. This is the verse—I have a countdown clock here which is

pretty slick, I also have one at home on the camera—this is where the clock was saying *you're out of time* so I had to stop last time, so I'm going to pick it up here where we left off and it dovetails in really neatly.

2 Corinthians 4:7 *However, we possess this precious treasure [the divine Light of the Gospel] [and this is key] in [frail, human] vessels of the earth, that the grandeur and exceeding greatness of the power may be shown to be from God and not from ourselves.*

8) *We are hedged in (pressed) on every side [troubled and oppressed in every way], but not cramped or crushed; we suffer embarrassments and are perplexed and unable to find a way out, but not driven to despair;*

9) *We are pursued (persecuted and hard driven), but not deserted [to stand alone]; we are struck down to the ground, but never struck out and destroyed; (AMPC)*

So there's a couple of "what we know's" in this passage, if you will. Let's talk about them. The New Living Translation translates the first part of verse 9 this way:

9) *We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. (NLT)*

Never abandoned by God, and hold on to this; we're going to revisit this towards the end, but very powerful, very encouraging. For now let's focus back on what we read in verse 7. Going back to the New Living, it renders the last part of verse 7 this way:

7) *...but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars [I'm going to mention that multiple times] containing this great treasure. (NLT)*

This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. To bring this into sharper focus, we're going to go back to one of our case studies last time and that is of Elijah. Turn back with me, please, to 1 Kings 19:4-7. You may recall we started previously in verse 1 and read to verse 3, so we're going to continue the story and we're going to fill in some of the gaps that we skipped. Remember leading up to this point we had the tremendous events on Mount Carmel and all the agitation and excitement, and then we had Jezebel threatening Elijah's life, so let's further explore Elijah's response.

1 Kings 19:4 *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers." (NASB)*

As we explored last time, we see here Elijah expressing his distress to the point that he didn't want to live anymore. It's a phrase used at the end of verse 4 that is an interesting and relevant acknowledgement. Keeping in mind this concept of being fragile clay jars, Barnes' Notes states Elijah's expression in verse 4 this way: *I am a*

mere man, no better, nor stronger than they who have gone before me, no more able to revolutionize the world than they.

Let's read on ...

5) He lay down and slept under a juniper tree; and behold, there was an angel touching him, and he said to him, "Arise, eat."

6) Then he looked and behold, there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. (NASB)

Let's notice here how Elijah's situation was initially addressed. He runs off into the wilderness, he's distressed—what is the first thing that takes place here—he's fed and he sleeps. Very base physiological needs being addressed here. There's a very real chance you read through this passage and this is extrapolation but there's a chance he went through all this exercise, all this excitement and activity and drama, and may not have eaten or slept in a while and he was working pretty hard—he was very, very busy. I think we've all heard of the concept of being "hangry"—where if you don't get enough to eat you get kind of grumpy and cranky. For me it's sleep. I don't get enough sleep and I get kind of sour; my kids are looking at me like, *yeah Dad*. This leads neatly into what we read in verse 7.

7) The angel of the LORD came again a second time and touched him and said, "Arise, eat, [notice this] because the journey is too great for you." (NASB)

Elijah, this is too much for you. What are we establishing here, what's the point, what's this first "what we know"? Quite simply, men are weak—human beings, fragile clay jars. We're filled with limitations—we have to eat and sleep, for starters, but we've got our faults, our shortcomings, our failures, our incapacities—we all have them. How is this "what we know" relevant to coping with being forsaken? This may seem straightforward to acknowledge academically—we can all say we are weak, frail human beings—but understanding, and in turn reacting, or responding to this fact, this reality that we're all fallible, can be a challenge in a couple of different, relevant scenarios: First, when someone you respect—someone you esteem as maybe having authority or position or power—turns against you, that can be pretty tough. Secondly, when met with the "everybody else is doing it, so why aren't I?" or, "everybody else is doing it so why aren't you?"—good, old-fashioned peer pressure.

It can be easy for us to lose sight of the reality of Romans 3:23; you don't need to turn there (I think we all know it). It says *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Everyone—one exception—has missed the mark. Everyone is inferior to the standard of godly perfection. Does this mean that we should be dismissive of the thoughts or perspectives of others? Absolutely not. But this "what we know" can provide us with some much needed objectivity. I think of what we can tell our kids. This has happened to all of us, happens to all kids at school, on the playground; kids get together, they're playing and invariably somebody's going to get teased, somebody's going to get made

fun of. You're going to be too skinny, you're going to be too fat, you're going to be too slow; maybe you're too good, and that becomes an object of attack. So what do we tell our kids? We say, just because *they* say that's so, doesn't mean it's right, doesn't make it so—something we can take to heart.

Another individual, from our previous examination into being forsaken, was Paul. Let's take a look again in context at his instruction in this regard. Turn with me to 2 Timothy 3:1-9. We read a few of these verses previously but we're going to take some time to expand and explore a bit more this time.

2 Timothy 3:1 *But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.*
(NASB)

Hold onto this thought—we're going to explore this more here shortly. But for now, verse 2.

2) For men will be lovers of self ... (NASB)

We could almost just stop right there because the rest of the descriptors that Paul uses really stem from this and what is this? It's idolatry. It's putting one's self, one's desires, before God, before His way of life.

2 continued) ... lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,
3) unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control ... (NASB)

I thought this was interesting so we're going to park on this for a minute. The Greek translated here, this phrase "without self-control", is actually a conjunction of two words that can be translated as the direct opposite of *vigor*. (We're talking about men being fragile clay jars, being without self-control—the direct opposite of vigor.) Strong's defines this Greek conjunction as *incontinent*. Again, men are weak to the point of—if left to their own devices—completely lacking any means of fortitude. I'll repeat that because that's a lot packed into a sentence. Men are weak to the point of—if left to their own devices—completely lacking any means of fortitude. I emphasize *left on their own* and *lacking any means* because it is only by the grace of God in the form of the indwelling of His Spirit that we have any chance to exercise this fruit of the Spirit—this concept of self-control, having vigor. Reading on here, finishing verse 3 ...

3 continued) ... brutal, haters of good,
4) treacherous, reckless, (NASB)

Strong's in the Greek translates this word "reckless" as *falling forward*, and thinking about this makes me smile. What comes to mind when I think of falling forward is a toddler and they're learning how to walk and they find a wall or a piece of furniture, and they grab onto it and they get up on those puffy little legs and take those unsteady

steps, and as parents, we hope happens—they take a couple steps and fall down on their diaper-padded rear ends or, just as often, face-plant into the ground. Their heads disproportionately weighted to their bodies—don't have the core strength, don't have the lower-body strength—they're going through this process, they're learning, they're falling down but that falling forward, that falling headlong with little ability to control the descent and subsequent impact (cue the crying) is the image that we can take away here.

As human beings we think we've got it figured out. We think we can just muster up the power and the strength and we can do this ourselves, but how often do we discover that we end up falling face first into trouble. This is key to keep in mind in the context of being forsaken, that our default, if you will, as human beings is to stumble around, headlong. Let's read on in verse 4.

*4 continued) ... conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,
5) holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power. Avoid such men as these. (NASB)*

The Contemporary English Version of the Bible renders verse 5 this way:

5) Even though they will make a show of being religious, their religion won't be real. (CEV)

The Amplified translates the last part of this phrase this way:

5) They deny and reject and are strangers to the power of it. Their conduct belies the genuineness of their profession. (AB)

I find the idea expressed of being “strangers to the power of it” to be the key. As we talked about, without that power—the power of God—without having that relationship in place, what's the best we've got? What's the best a run-of-the-mill human being has? Again, as the Contemporary English Version renders verse 5, it's a *show* of religion—that's about as good as it's going to get. I think a fair question to ask at this point is this: Okay, we know people are weak and fallible and they're downright nasty under Satan's influence, at times; how can we discern between someone who is genuinely on track versus someone who is not? I think if we read on, Paul can help us out with this.

*6) For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses,
7) always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (NASB)*

I've known, and I'm sure you have too, individuals who are very, very well-versed in the Bible or in Christianity as a religion or as a practice—both inside and outside the Church. For example, every school year, I would dutifully write out a note for my teachers saying I'm going to be going away for this religious trip, here's a scripture, I need my homework for while I'm gone—speaking of the Feast of Tabernacles. One year

I handed this note to my high school biology teacher, he read it and began to describe in detail the commandments of keeping the Feast of Tabernacles to the point where he asked me if I was building a sukkoth. I was shocked. He shared with me that one of his hobbies was studying religion—he studied all kinds of religions. I said Feast of Tabernacles and he said, oh yeah, I know all about that.

The question is, did having that knowledge, all that learning, impact his life? Did it bring conviction? At that point, I don't know, it was so long ago. The takeaway here for us is this: an awareness that mankind is, without supernatural intervention and calling, conversion, indwelling of the Spirit (rather the influence of Satan), drawn towards depravity, weakness and fallibility, and, certainly not saying that studying the Bible is wrong, by any stretch of the imagination, but the question we have to ask ourselves is why are we studying, why are we learning? The goal, the end state should be for truth, truth in building that relationship with God and Christ. Reading on in 2 Timothy 3:8:

8) Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith.

9) [Our takeaway here] But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes' and Jambres' folly was also. (NASB)

It's traditionally held that the Jannes and Jambres who are mentioned here were two of Pharaoh's magicians who countered Moses and Aaron when they were before Pharaoh—we can see that in Exodus 7:11, no need to turn—performing the initial signs before the plagues came on Egypt.

What makes these individuals' experience important for Paul to call out, and what can we learn from their examples, in the context of men being weak? In verse 9, first a lack of progress, and this actually goes back to verse 7 which we just explored—this idea that learning and studying and gathering information doesn't directly translate into a change in heart and a change in behavior. It can empower the process, certainly is key to it, but it's not the only factor. Mankind, even with the very best of intentions, will not attain to God's standard without God being directly involved in that process. There will simply be no progress. Secondly from verse 9, their folly will be obvious to all.

In the account found in Exodus 7 (we won't turn there), you may recall that Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh in the court and the staff turned into a serpent as a demonstration of God's power—this is serious, this is legit, this is real, here's evidence. Then Pharaoh's magicians, Jannes and Jambres, did the same; they threw their staffs down and then we got a whole floor of serpents going on. Then what happened? Aaron's serpent devoured the other ones—right there, right in front of Pharaoh, right in front of this Jannes and Jambres, a very real, obvious, literal demonstration that God's sovereignty (we're going to talk a bit more about God's sovereignty at the end) was very much in play and that there was an opportunity to do the right thing: Let My people go.

Along with Pharaoh these men proceeded down a path of having to endure the plagues. You could say, that's true—they could have made a different choice, but God made it pretty clear to Moses and Aaron beforehand that things were going to play out a certain way, and you would be correct. In this vein, this idea that God knows, in spite of the evidence, in spite of the opportunity, in spite of the best of intentions, that human weakness often takes the upper hand.

We're going to take a look at another example from another one of our case studies from part 1 and that's in Christ's own words. Turn with me to Mark 14:27-31. Recall that we explored previously how Christ went from being followed by thousands down to, in the end, dying on the cross, stating that prophetic, My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me. In Mark 14 let's notice Christ's interaction with His disciples and we're going to focus on Peter, our context being the frailty, the weakness of mankind.

Mark 14:27 *And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away, because it is written, 'I will strike down the Shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered.' (NASB)*

Hold onto this, we're going to explore this more, shortly.

28) But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.

29) But Peter said to Him, "Even though all may fall away, yet I will not."

30) And Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you, that this very night, before a rooster crows twice, you yourself will deny Me three times."

31) But Peter kept saying insistently, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" And they all were saying the same thing also. (NASB)

Peter was, as it says in verse 31, insistent, or as the Greek could be translated, very vehement. He wasn't kidding around, he wasn't mincing words, he was dead serious—even if I have to die with you, he states. What happened? We all know the story, we know that Peter succumbs to human weakness, to the pressure of the circumstance and as it's found in Luke 22:61-62:

Luke 22:61 *Then the Lord turned and looked at Peter ...*

I find that extremely powerful. The Being to whom you just said, if I have to die with you this is not going to happen, and He's dying and you're not, and He's looking at you—that's pretty powerful.

61 continued) And Peter remembered the word of the Lord how He had told him before a rooster crows today you will deny Me three times.

And what was Peter's response?

62) He went out and wept bitterly. (NASB)

We can see from these examples, and in our own times of being left alone or abandoned, that human beings are not perfect, and we respond and react imperfectly. Certainly foretold as a function of the end times, it's not limited to (and we've had a tendency to do this in our past) them or the world—they're all the bad guys and we're the good guys and it's always them and it's never us—we are *all* going through this process. We're all going through this learning and growing process and have our own times when we come face to face with our shortcomings, and perhaps realize, in tears as Peter did, how far short we fall.

As we close out this first “what we know” let's read the words that our other case study, David, recorded in the 118th Psalm. Turn with me to Psalm 118:6-9.

Psalm 118:6 *The LORD is for me; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*

7) *The LORD is for me among those who help me; Therefore I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me.*

8) *It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.*

9) *It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.* (NASB)

Men may be frail, weak, clay jars, subject to failure, but the LORD is not. It can be a struggle—people are real, it's flesh and blood, we're dealing with each other, all the senses are involved, it's very tangible, it's very in the present. If these people are princes in our eyes and we yearn for their acceptance, we yearn for their respect, but when people fail, our refuge is our God and our God transcends these shortcomings. Finally, lest we take upon ourselves too much credit, this concept that it's never me, it's always the other guy, let's not forget what it says in Jeremiah 17:9. You don't need to turn there, I think we all know it pretty well. I am going to read it from the Amplified Bible because it's got a neat little twist at the end.

Jeremiah 17:9 *The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly perverse and corrupt and severely, mortally sick.* (AB)

Questions? Pretty clear.

9 *continued*) ... *Who can know it* [perceive, understand, be acquainted with his own heart and mind.] (NASB)

My point in even calling this out is, as we think about how we're being treated by others, let's not forget that we are just as capable of acting or reacting in the same way. Taking refuge in, having that relationship with God and that relationship with Christ—it is the only way we can be different. It's the only way that that heart can be changed.

We've touched already on the second “what we know” concept. We're going to build on that next. It's most clearly articulated—we're going to go back to Jesus Christ as our case study for this—in Mark 14:48-49. Picking up here in verse 48, this is Christ in the very process of being betrayed and His words here.

Mark 14:48 *And Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as you would against a robber?"*

49) *Every day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize Me; [this is key here] but this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures."* (NASB)

While certainly not an enjoyable experience or close to ideal, Christ understood and we too can understand this is again a "what we know", and take a level of consolation in the fact that what we are experiencing—this state and condition of relationships extant, how we're treating one another—was prophesied to take place. It was prophesied, it was foretold to take place. Like we talked about with Moses, Aaron, Jannes, Jambres—that example. There may have been opportunity and here Christ knew the outcome, He knew that the Father had a plan for how events were going to transpire. Let's continue to explore this concept of knowing this was all foretold to take place. Turn with me to Luke 12:51-53. As we explore this second "what we know" we're going to focus on Christ's words.

Luke 12:51 *Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division;* (NASB)

I want to stop here and focus on this for a moment because I've heard this feedback fairly recently from several in the Church, but we tend to function under this assumption that doing what's right or practicing or living in the truth, following Christ's footsteps—however you want to quantify what we're doing and how we're living our lives—if we do this then peace and harmony are just going to break out and everything's going to be great, and our relationships are going to be great, and this light that's shining is going to be an inspiration and a guidance to others, and everything's going to break out roses. The reality is, and we read here from the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Gateway for and Forerunner of this way of life that we're leading, that peace is not the expected outcome, rather division—His own words. Christ goes on to make this very, very crystal clear to what extent this will take place. Let's read on.

52) *for from now on five members in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three.*

53) *They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."* (NASB)

What do we see here? These are not just friends, not acquaintances, coworkers or next-door neighbors—these are in-the-same-house relationships. Physical, spiritual, both—it's that closeness, that intimacy, that proximity—these relationships are at stake is what Christ is saying.

I call this out because this is tough—this is really hard. This can be disheartening, this can be disillusioning because we have this expectation that if I treat you with love and

respect and kindness, I kind of expect to get a piece of that back, that's kind of how this works, and when that doesn't happen we wonder what went wrong—what did I do wrong, or we question the process, or maybe we question the value of the process, or the effort in the first place. This “what we know” is that Christ has told us to expect otherwise. His way of life, the Father's way of life runs counter to human nature and people, going back to that fragile-clay-jars concept, may not respond in kind—it may not happen. Matthew 10:16-25, again Christ's words—what's foretold for us to read, to understand, and to take to heart:

Matthew 10:16 *“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. (NASB)*

While it could be argued this passage we're going to cover is in the context of the earlier verses referencing specifically the apostles, once we get to the end of this passage I feel this applies to all of Christ's followers throughout time. With that in mind, right off the bat, what does Christ say here? He says, hey, you're about to be put in a situation and a circumstance in which things are not going to look so good for you. You're going to have to be on your guard, you're going to have walk circumspectly or you are going to be lunch. The value in this is that we're going into this way of life, we're armed with this information, we have this—we've been told ahead of time.

*17) But beware of men, for they **will** hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues;
18) and you **will** even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. (NASB)*

I put emphasis on the word “will” in these two verses. We're told ahead of time that these things are going to happen, guaranteed. Christ starts to provide the good news at the end of verse 18. This bad stuff isn't just for the sake of bad stuff happening. Verse 18 gives this suffering and these difficulties purpose and that's really the key to this “what we know”, in that it's all been prophesied to take place ahead of time, but it's to take place with plan and with purpose. God is not interested in torturing us. He's not the little kid with the magnifying glass and the ants and the sun—we've heard that analogy before—not in the program. It's for the furthering of His plan, but that's not all. Let's read on ...

*19) But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.
20) For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. (NASB)*

These few verses—couple of my favorite in the whole Bible actually—to me, offer tremendous hope, tremendous encouragement. I'm going to share a story; I think I've probably shared it before but I'll share it again. A number of years ago I was called for jury duty and I wrote the requisite letter back to the county requesting to be excused

and here's the reasons why, and sent it off and I got a note back from the judge, saying, that's all fine and dandy—you're going to have to come tell me in person. I was nervous, I was young, this was a long time ago and the first time doing this, and I was nervous, but I read these verses and thought, okay, I'm going to put this in God's hands. I'm going before the judge; You're going to have to make this happen for me.

That experience is still one of the most surreal experiences I've ever had in my entire life. I have no memory what I said, at all. I remember going up to the witness stand, things came out of my mouth, the attorneys and the judge looked at each other and said, thank you very much, have a nice day, you are excused. That was it. It was unanimous, there was no penalty, that was the end. This was after sitting through an entire day of voir dire—of jury selection—watching all these jurors going up, trying to get excused, and I'm not an attorney but they seemed pretty legit, and they were all told no, you will be here; if you do not show up you are in contempt; I will send the sheriff to your house and put you in jail. It was about that harsh and I was the only one—the only one—that got out that day. I can look at that experience—it wasn't fun—but I can read these verses and that is a faith builder, that is tremendous. Very powerful in my life. Reading on here in Matthew 10 ...

21) Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. (NASB)

As we talked about earlier, close relationships—that's what's being talked about here, that's what's being compromised.

22) You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.

Notice again verse 22—*hated by all*—not a couple, not bullied by outliers; we are told the expectation we are to have is division, not peace.

23) "But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

Verses 24 and 25 are paramount—we are told we know these things and we know they're for a reason but why us—why us specifically?

*24) "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master.
25) It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household! (NASB)*

If the world treated the Master the way it did while He was on this earth in the flesh, or even how the world's going to respond to Him at His second coming (and we're not

going to go into it today but we can certainly read in Revelation it's not rolling out the red carpet, it's a blood bath—it's going to be ugly), the question is, why should we expect less? Here's a sobering thought: If anything, we are worthy of being maligned because we are imperfect—He wasn't. There may be legitimate justification for people to be angry at us because we make mistakes.

One of the biggest complaints about Christians and Christianity in general (I work with a lot of non-religious people) is that they're hypocrites—Christians are hypocrites, more so than any other religion in the world. While other religions have some pretty far-fetched ideas and teachings, their followers tend to be pretty consistent and zealous, and honestly I think the charge is pretty well-founded and not just in the context of mainstream Christianity, but in the Church as well. It's only through God's grace we're saved and it's not us—not our strength, not our inherent goodness. We know these things. These things are sobering, absolutely. But we should and can take tremendous encouragement in the fact that we know it in advance. We'll read Christ's words in John 16:32-33.

John 16:32 Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone;

As we talked about in Part 1, Christ was fully aware—fully aware of what was to take place. It wasn't a surprise to Him, and for us, when we face scattering, face being abandoned, face being forsaken, we too can understand and know it's supposed to take place. But notice, as we read on here,

32 continued) ... and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.

Hold on to this—we're going to explore this in more detail next.

33) These things I have spoken to you, [notice] so that in Me you may have peace. (NASB)

Not to strike fear, not to terrorize, not to scare us away, rather that we can have peace in knowing that there are no surprises—nothing is unplanned, nothing is beyond the view or the grasp of our Creator. We have these prophecies, we are foretold, this “what we know” we have so that we can have peace.

33 continued) ... In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.” (NASB)

The Amplified Bible renders it this way and I love how this is put:

33) In the world, you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration but be of good cheer, take courage, be confident, certain, undaunted, for I have

overcome the world. I have deprived it of the power to harm you and have conquered it for you. (AB)

Feeling alone, forsaken, persecuted—this world, from God’s point of view, is deprived of the power to harm you—done. Can this life and this world be distressing? Absolutely, but the great news is it’s been conquered—tremendously wonderful news. This folds neatly into the third “what we know” that we’re going to talk about.

For that, we’re going to go back to Elijah. Let’s go back to 1 Kings 19:14-18. We’ve talked about men being weak, we’ve said these things were foretold to happen and we can look to the fact that they were foretold as being a point of encouragement; now let’s build the third one.

1 Kings 19:14 *Then he said, “I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” (NASB)*

We actually started with these words last time from Elijah. Let’s notice the response, let’s read on.

15) The LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; 16) and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. 17) It shall come about, the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall put to death. 18) Yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (NASB)

What do we see here? What’s the “what we know” in this example from Elijah? In short, God is sovereign. Talking about God’s sovereignty—it’s a lofty word—what exactly does “God is sovereign” mean? The dictionary defines the word *sovereign* as possessing supreme or ultimate power—supreme, absolute, unlimited, unrestricted, boundless, ultimate, total, unconditional, full. In this position, if we think about these words—what they mean and what we’ve talked about—God has got a plan and He is in complete and total control of its successful execution.

The best news is not only is God in complete and absolute and sovereign control but He holds us so dear that He involves and shares His plan with us. Let’s look back here at Elijah—what do we see? God provides him with an action plan. We’re going to come back to this in part 3, so stay tuned. Not just for His nation—God’s nation—but for Elijah himself. He says, I want you to do this for Israel. Elijah, I’ve got a plan for you—I have a succession plan for you as well. God also shares with Elijah that Elijah is not

alone and that 7,000 are also faithful; not just observed as faithful, but as the Bible in basic English renders verse 18:

18) But I will keep safe, 7,000 in Israel ... (NASB)

God didn't just notice—no, He was very active, very interested, protecting those 7,000. In this light let's revisit Paul, and words we read previously about his experience, and how this concept of God's sovereignty fits in. Back to 2 Timothy 4:16-18.

2 Timothy 4:16 *At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; (NASB)*

This is where we ended Paul's words previously, but notice what he says next, right on the heels of this:

16 continued) ... may it not be counted against them. (NASB)

Wow, really? That's amazing—how can Paul say that? Everybody's left me but it's okay, it's all good.

17) But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth.

18) The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (NASB)

So Paul expresses here that not only was his life protected, but God for His sovereign purpose (preaching the gospel to the Gentiles and ultimately being brought to salvation's endpoint in resurrection) required Paul to endure some pretty extraordinary events—verse 17, out of the lion's mouth. Paul puts these pieces together and the conclusion he comes to is the actions or reactions of people abandoning him, deserting him, kind of pale in comparison because the sovereign God has got his back. We also previously read Paul's words back in 2 Timothy, chapter 1, regarding being abandoned by all who were in Asia. We're going to revisit Paul's words leading up to that statement, so if you turn a couple pages back in your Bible to 2 Timothy, we will do that—2 Timothy 1:6-12.

2 Timothy 1:6 *For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. (NASB)*

God willing, in part 3, the next time we explore this topic, we're going to dive more into what verse 6 is talking about here, but for now let's just focus on the idea of being reminded. This is something we know—that we have been given the greatest gift any part of creation could ever receive out the abundance of the sovereign God's love and care for us. Powerful, powerful stuff.

7) For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. (NASB)

Again, things we know to be true. That same power that inspired our existence—the existence of this entire creation—we have access to. I am firmly convinced, at least in my own life, that I don't give this reality, this fact, this "what I know" nearly enough credit. As a side note, I think of Christ being unable to do any work of power because of the unbelief of those in Nazareth, and we can read that account in the first six verses of Mark 6—we won't turn there. In that light, the question I have to ask myself is, am I limiting this power within me because of my unbelief? If I believe, truly believe, the things we've been talking about today, how should this change who I am? How should this change how I think, how I act, especially in times of trial, suffering, being forsaken. Let's read how *knowing* influenced Paul:

8) Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, (NASB)

As we talked about last time, in the context of being forsaken by all those in Asia, perhaps they were ashamed: Look at this Paul guy, he was great, but all this bad stuff happened to him and now he's a prisoner in Rome, and everybody else is walking away from him so why am I sticking around? This is rats off a sinking ship, if you will. Paul says here to not only *not* to be ashamed of him, but he says, join with me, join in my suffering, this is the program you want to be on!

9) who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace [this God-is-sovereign concept] which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, (NASB)

What do we know here, what are we reading? We are saved, we are called with a holy calling because it is His own purpose and grace. It has been planned and in motion from all eternity. If we really stop and let this sink in, this is epic—this is huge. These realities should give us hope, give us strength, allow us to tap into that power to which we have access. Reading on ...

*10) but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,
11) for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.
12) [This is the key] For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. (NASB)*

Knowing that God is in control and has called us for His purpose, and He will see to it in His absolute power and authority that His purpose will be accomplished, should make

us—like Paul—unashamed, convicted beyond a shadow of a doubt, unstoppable. No matter what other people may say, no matter how we're treated, being on God's side—that's what really matters.

Previously we dovetailed the end of Christ's life on earth and His expression of being forsaken on the cross with the words of David found in Psalm 22. What I would like to do now is go back to Psalm 22, and, as Paul Harvey said, get the rest of the story. This shows not only David's perspective but surely Christ's as well. We're going to read verses 24-28.

Psalm 22:24 *For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.* (NASB)

If we think back to the example of Elijah and how he felt, as a weak human being myself, I can look at an example like that, very superficially, and at Elijah's response and think, wow, really?—you see all of this power that God has demonstrated through you and that's your reaction? That's how you thank Him? He did all this for you and you go off crying in a corner. With my kids (I'm going to pick on my kids), this can be a challenge—feeling under-appreciated for the work, thinking of my wife and the countless hours and effort and energy she puts in, all behind the scenes, and they have no idea. Thanks be to our God for His loving kindness and His patience with us, His children. He does not despise our affliction or our perception of affliction. We think we've got some big hurts, but in the grand scheme of things, they're not that big—and He doesn't despise us.

25) From You comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him.

26) The afflicted will eat and be satisfied; [There is hope here, brethren] Those who seek Him will praise the LORD. Let your heart live forever! (NASB)

There will be tough times, there will be affliction in the context of our topic of relationships, but it won't last forever. We will be provided for, we will be satisfied because God is in control, and He has a plan and a purpose for us.

27) All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, And all the families of the nations will worship before You. (NASB)

A time is yet coming that all mankind will submit to and serve the LORD. We as mankind are being given latitude to fail at this point, with a select few being given the chance to understand these things today, but in the end, as we read in verse 27, all will remember and turn—that time is coming. Verse 28 is the capstone here:

28) For the kingdom is the LORD's and He rules over the nations. (NASB)

God is sovereign—complete, total control—not as an autocrat of terror, not as that little kid with the magnifying glass in the sunshine, but as a loving Father of His children. We have this iron-clad promise, the very same made to Ancient Israel. Turn with me to Deuteronomy 31:8—just one verse. This is instruction to Ancient Israel about the context and proximity of God’s oversight of them and His involvement with them.

Deuteronomy 31:8 *The LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. (NASB)*

In our context we have one who, as it’s put in Hebrews 6:20, goes ahead of us—our Forerunner who promised us, as we read in John 14:18, that He will not abandon us or forsake us. How can we be sure?—because the one who having lived eternally, being born, living a sinless life, being forsaken by those He created and served in the first place, all as a Forerunner, our advanced force, as the word Forerunner is translated in Hebrews 6:20—He died, and as promised, lives again for you, for me, for all of mankind, and this all possible through the Father’s sovereign faithfulness and His love for His son, His love for us.

We’ve covered today a few major aspects—coping with finding ourselves in circumstances of being alone, being forsaken, and exploring three main concepts that help define what we know. Mankind is weak, human beings are weak, susceptible to expressing that weakness in ways that are harmful to others, and it’s only through the power of the Spirit, made possible through grace and relationship with the Father and the Son, that we have any hope of overcoming those proclivities ourselves. Understanding that—you almost hate to say it this way, but we’re all just human, we are human beings—can help us take a level of personalization out of the situation.

We also know that what we are experiencing, as painful as it can be at times, was foretold to take place because of our commitment to the way of life to which we’ve been called. We also know that our Creator has complete and sovereign control over the entire universe and that we, in knowing, understanding and applying what we’ve heard here today, have a very, very special place in His plan.

We are not alone, we are not forsaken. People come and go but our Rock is forever. God willing, in part 3, we will explore how to cope with being forsaken, and what we can do. We’re going to talk about some very tactical, practical things we can do in our lives today based on what we know.