

9. Patient Hope

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[0 : 00] Page 556 in the Visitor's Bibles. As we've seen through this book, the preacher's message is a relentless one.

It's a constant reality check, isn't it? Forcing us to confront the hard facts of life, the facts that so often we really try to avoid. But the reality is that life in this world, life under the sun, as the preacher calls it, is both passing and perplexing.

Our world is ephemeral and passing, and therefore we have to come to terms with the reality of living with a mortality that we can't control. But life is also enigmatic and baffling.

And so we must also come to terms with living with mystery that we simply can't comprehend. And yet in the midst of this, the message of the preacher is not one of hopelessness.

That really is to miss his point completely if we think that. This is not a bleak book full of existential despair. In fact, it's quite the opposite. We've seen that, haven't we? His constant refrain is to come back to these words, rejoice.

[1 : 26] There's nothing better than to rejoice in our work. There's nothing better than to be joyful and to do good all the days of our lives. I commend joy, he says repeatedly.

Now, he's not a pessimist about life, but he is a realist. And his message is that you will never be able to find the deep joy that he's speaking about in life, the detached joy that can find contentment, whatever life's circumstances.

You'll never find that if you have failed to face the reality and to come to terms with it. The reality of seeing life as it truly is now, but also of having an eternal perspective.

And reality means having to accept the limitations of our mortality and give up trying to oppose these limitations and resist them. But of course, our problem as human beings is that that's what we so often do.

We live deluding ourselves. We live as if we were masters of our own destiny. But of course, in the end, of course, that delusion itself is dispelled, isn't it, by the cold reality of death.

[2 : 44] We're not immortal. That's why we saw last time in chapter 7, verse 4, that real wisdom is found at the funeral, not in the party, because at the funeral we're forced to face reality.

Real wisdom has learned to live humbly with the tension that the preacher spoke about in verse 11 of chapter 3, that God has put eternity into our heart, and yet, in such a way as we can't fathom it out.

That we simply can't, as mere mortals, get a complete grasp on what's beyond us, on what's infinite. But, if we will accept that it is beyond us to totally understand our existence, well, then, there is hope.

Look at chapter 7, verse 12. That wisdom, the preacher says, is a protection in life. But, the real advantage, the lasting gain of true wisdom, is that it does preserve the life of him who has it.

That's the lasting advantage, the lasting gain, that's been so elusive through this book, isn't it? It opens with the question, what gain, what advantage does man have by all the toil with which he toils under the sun?

[4 : 08] It's a repeated question, and the answer is always the same. None. Wealth, education, power, all of these things, in the end, end up in the same place, in the grave.

The wise and the fool go the same way, says the preacher. But, here is a wisdom that does preserve life beyond that. Here's a wisdom that does give real advantage, lasting gain.

Remember, we saw that it is clear that he does mean lasting preservation here, not just in the short term. That's obvious, if you look just down to verse 15, because he says there quite clearly, the righteous don't necessarily prosper in the short term.

It's very clear in chapter 8, if you look at verses 12 and 13, he speaks there, doesn't he, of the wicked man prolonging his days, and yet, ultimately, he says he will not prolong his days. Because that can't be for the man who doesn't fear God. Under the sun, yes, there may be, indeed, temporary prosperity, but not in the judgment. And that's what matters in the end.

[5 : 18] That's the clear focus of this book, isn't it? The very last verse of Ecclesiastes, chapter 12, for God will bring every deed to judgment. And real wisdom that comes from accepting the revelation of God is what enables you to stand in that day of judgment.

And that's the only thing that will preserve your life beyond it. And therefore, grasping that reality is, in fact, the only thing that can give you real perspective and power for living in the present day, in this life of perplexity and puzzlement that we have to live in.

We need this perspective of patient hope if we're going to live life in the present. There is a life to be lived now, of course.

There's a real life to be lived. And it is a life of ups and downs, of joys and sorrows. We know that only too well. But, friends, only the Bible's perspective of patient hope in the midst of the mysteries and the madness of life, only that will preserve us in this life.

And the second half of Ecclesiastes, chapter 7, is just more about what that really means. It's not an easy section, but again, it's all about facing reality.

[6 : 42] It's about facing the reality of a sovereign God. It's about facing the reality of a sinful humanity. But also, in all of this, it's pointing us to another reality, that of a saving hope.

Look first at verses 11 to 13. These verses urge us to recognize the inevitable mystery of a truly sovereign God. Real wisdom begins with taking God seriously.

It's what Psalms and Proverbs are always saying, isn't it? The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And that's what the preacher says here. Consider, verse 13, the work of God.

That is, don't be under some kind of illusion or vague notion of your own about what God is really like. Rather, acknowledge that He is the sovereign creator and ruler of the universe.

Not only is the universe created by Him, do you see? It's also cursed by Him too. Who can make straight what He has made crooked?

[7 : 50] Now, that's very hard for a lot of us to swallow, isn't it, that thought? But you know, it is the Bible's consistent message that this world is under a curse.

And it's God who has subjected this world to futility, to vanity. It's the very words Paul uses in Romans chapter 8. Go back to Genesis chapter 3.

You'll see it all there. And you'll see the reason for it all there too, God's curse. It's man's rebellion against Him. But it is God's doing.

And therefore, you see, all the beauty and the wonder that's in this world is God's doing. And we're to praise Him for it. But also, the confusion and the corruption that we see in our world, that also is God's doing.

He has made it crooked. I form the light and I create darkness. I make well-being and I create calamity, says the Lord in Isaiah 45, verse 7.

[8 : 58] And friends, unless we learn to digest that basic fact about the true sovereignty of the God of Scripture, we will never be at peace in this life.

we will never be capable of real joy. I promise you. Because, verse 14, the simple fact is that in your life and mine we shall face days of prosperity and days also of adversity.

And the key to life is to understand that God is sovereign and that God has a purpose in both of these things. and we simply have to submit ourselves to that reality that God has made the one as well as the other even though we can't fathom it.

And only in that submission is the way of blessing because, friends, only in that submission is recognition of reality. And that's the way of patient hope, of detachment in life.

Not detachment from reality but detachment for reality. that enables us to navigate life without despair. Now notice verse 14.

[10 : 14] Look at it. There is a time to rejoice. That's important. Some Christians seem to find that rather perversely hard. But Paul says to Timothy, doesn't he, God richly provides us all things to enjoy.

He tells us that we're to reject nothing that we can receive from him with thanksgiving in our hearts. And that is one part of recognizing God's true sovereignty. Recognizing his abundant goodness, his many gifts to bring us joy in the day of prosperity.

Christian faith is not kill joy. It's the very opposite. In the day of prosperity he says, be joyful. Let there be laughter and joy and gladness among Christian believers in the presence of God. There is a time to rejoice. Christ. But also, there is a time to reflect and to remember in the day of calamity that God is sovereign then too.

And we often need adversity, don't we, to help us to remember, to reflect on God, not to forget him. We were studying on Tuesday afternoon at Corn Hill, some of the early chapters of Deuteronomy, and there's a recurrent refrain there, isn't there, that God says to the people on the brink of the land, when your prosperity accumulates, be careful unless your hearts are lifted up and you forget the Lord your God who led you out of the land of Egypt.

[11 : 43] I was quoting to them something I read somewhere in John Piper where he says this, the Christian's greatest danger is not poison, it's apple pie. You see, sometimes God has to send us, doesn't he, the day of adversity so that we are forced again to consider him because we've forgotten him.

Isn't that true? That's true in my life, I'm sure maybe it's true in your life too. Charles Spurgeon said this, I'm afraid that all the grace that I've gotten out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny, but the good I've received from my sorrows and pains and griefs is altogether incalculable.

What I do not owe to the hammer and the anvil, the fire and the file, affliction, he says, is the best bit of furniture in my house. You see, that's a man who's come to terms with the true sovereignty of God.

It's so important to grasp it, isn't it, in the day of adversity, God made that too. It's so absolutely opposite though, isn't it, to so much of what goes for Christian teaching today, so focused on prosperity and blessing now, whether it's the health and wealth and happiness movement or whether it's much more subtle forms of it.

You get the bare, unadulterated, crass forms of it on the television in the United States. When I was there a couple of weeks ago, I was flicking through the channels. Every single Christian broadcast I came across had that message, prosperity now in answer to your prayers.

[13 : 20] There was one chap who was asking us to write in to get a green handkerchief and on that green handkerchief you could write the amount of money that you thought you needed from God and the other prayers that you wanted answered and you would write them on the handkerchief which had a verse on it and fold it up and send it back to him and he would pray for you and your prayer would be answered and the money would come.

I'm sure you probably had to put a check in also with the handkerchief to support the ministry but that handkerchief wouldn't look too good with verse 14 on it would it?

Have you ever seen verse 14 on a Christian calendar or on a card? Anybody sent you a card with that? You see, so often we think like that, don't we? We pray to God take away the adversity like Paul prayed take away my thorn until he realized that God is sovereign and that he had done that also for a purpose.

And we too, friends, must come to terms with God's real sovereignty over a fallen world. That any idea of constant prosperity now in this world is utterly at variance with the Bible's plain teaching. The New Testament is even clearer, isn't it? What did Jesus say to his disciples? In this world you shall have tribulation. but be of good cheer I have overcome the world.

[14 : 50] There is a future and that perspective of patient hope is what enables us to face up to the reality of life's experiences. The reality of what we see and hear and know that matches up exactly with what the Bible promises us and tells us to expect.

It's not just theology, is it? It's what we know. Look at verse 15. We know that. We've seen that. The righteous whose life ends prematurely and the wicked one who seems to go on and on forever having it all.

Think of Robert Mugabe. I was reading about him in the paper in his 80s living it up while the inflation rate is 3,700% and the country's gone to the dogs. I was reading about Robert Murray McChain just recently.

A wonderful, extraordinarily godly man and yet the Lord snuffed out his life at the age of 30. My very first week at university there was a young Christian girl in my halls of residence who was killed, knocked off her bike at a roundabout just near the halls just like that.

She was a wonderful person. Had a very profound impact I have to say on my own life. You see, in all of these things, in joy and in adversity, we're to remember God and to fear Him and to

acknowledge His total sovereignty in all the mysteries of life.

[16:16] And we can do so because we have a sure hope. Because we know He is sovereign and He is in control of it all. We know, don't we, as New Testament Christians, that all things work together for the ultimate good of those who love God.

We know the future. The problem is we don't know what tomorrow brings or next week. But that's what faith is, isn't it? It's trust in a sovereign God in the midst of all the mysteries of life and humble contentment, not resentment about these mysteries.

As we sang in that hymn, we take what He gives and praise Him still through good and ill whoever lives. But you see, so often we just find it so hard to live like that, don't we?

At least I do. And that's, you see, what the warning in verses 16 to 18 is all about. It's easy to misunderstand these verses at first sight as sort of advocating some kind of general advice about a middle way in living.

But that's totally to miss the point. He's warning us not to forget who God really is as an utterly sovereign God. A God who is sovereign in grace and in judgment.

[17:35] because even as believers we descend so easily into make-believe and into shallow understandings of God and therefore into a shallow understanding of what real faith is all about.

And that explains so much of the shallow religiosity and evangelicalism that we come across. You know, come to Jesus and everything will be fine. When you've got a problem, just pray about it and that'll solve the problem at your work.

or in your marriage or in your family or whatever. But of course we know that that's nonsense.

Reality isn't like that. Just praying about it doesn't make your problems go away, does it?

Well, it doesn't make mine go away. And yet we persist in a fantasy religion that reshapes God in our image and we forget that God really is a sovereign Lord beyond our human understanding.

We try, therefore, to manipulate God, don't we? To make God really our servant, the one who answers our prayers, instead of thinking of ourselves as God's servants, serving His purpose.

[18:49] And that means, you see, that unconsciously we fall into error. We can think that we can actually get what we want in life, either, either by earning God's favor by our own piety, or the opposite extreme, escaping God's disfavor by our secret rebellion in our hearts.

And that's what verses 16 and 17 are warning us against. See, verse 16 is a warning against trying to get control of our lives by earning God's grace and favor.

Don't be over-righteous. Don't literally, he says, try to be wise for gain or for profit. In other words, don't think you can earn profit from your own way of trying to impress God.

See, despite what you and I think we believe about the gospel of free, unmerited grace to us, there is a problem because your heart and my heart is hardwired for self-justification.

That's the very essence of sin. Our hearts, you see, are so easily deceived and we find grace as a concept such a difficult thing to really come to terms with and understand.

[20:05] And so easily we descend into moralism, into religion, into legalism. And we live as though it was our righteous doings that will really bring us blessings from God, the blessings that we want.

You see, the reality is that that kind of self-righteousness is actually what destroys our humanity. It's only grasping truly God's sovereign grace, His mercy, that liberates us to be the most truly human.

But you see, there's a graceless so-called righteousness that we can descend into that's actually so ugly, so destructive. Think of the Pharisees who hated Jesus so much.

Think of the elder brother in the parable in Luke 15. And you know, that elder brother spirit, that Pharisee spirit so easily lurks in every one of us, doesn't it? It's so easy to think that we believe the gospel of sovereign grace and yet actually live as though we're trying to control life by our righteousness.

righteousness. We think we can earn the fatted calf from God that way. And that's why we get bitter, that's why we get resentful when God doesn't give us the thing that we've asked for, that we think we've earned by our righteousness.

[21:30] It's all because we've forgotten that God is truly sovereign in salvation. We can do that, but we can also do the exact opposite.

Not having a legalistic spirit that destroys the real humanity that grace brings to us, but we can have a reckless spirit that rebels against the holiness that that grace demands of us.

So easy to pay lip service to God, isn't it? To God and the gospel, but actually to be living a lie, to be living a life of wickedness. You see, the preacher says that too is folly.

Don't be overwicked. Don't think God doesn't see. Don't think God doesn't know. He's the sovereign God. You see, both of these errors seem to be opposite.

Actually, at root, they're exactly the same. They fail to consider God properly. They fail to see Him as a truly sovereign Lord.

[22 : 28] A Lord who is sovereign in salvation and also a Lord who is sovereign in judgment. And that's why in verse 18 you see the answer to both is the same. Take God seriously as the sovereign Lord.

Fear God. the one who fears God, verse 18, shall come out, shall escape from both of these errors. Ultimately, you see, the answer to every single spiritual problem in life is really the same.

It's to understand God and the gospel properly. And that's because the root of every single problem in our Christian life is the same. We don't understand it properly. We've forgotten the true gospel.

We forget that He is the sovereign Lord and judge and that He will indeed bring every deed to judgment. We also forget so often that He is truly the sovereign Lord and Savior who alone is the giver of wisdom and knowledge and joy by His saving grace, by His mercy.

But you see, when we remember this, when we remember the true gospel, when we, as the psalmist says, rejoice with trembling, well then we will escape the snares of our deceitful hearts.

[23 : 48] We'll escape the crushing bondage of legalism that so blights our lives so often. And we'll escape the dangerous path of disobedience that so often deceives us and leads us to ruin.

We need to learn to live with a real grasp of the gospel, of a truly sovereign God and with all the inevitable mysteries that that brings to us and all the demands that that makes of us.

And that's the wisdom alone that gives us strength and power for life. But along with that real truth about God must go real truth also about man.

And verses 19 to 29 tell us that real wisdom not only dispels all fantasy and illusion from our view about God, it demands the same of our understanding of humanity.

It recognizes the inevitable confusion of a sinful humanity. See, verse 19 says that the wisdom of God will enlighten the one who accepts it far more than all the leaders and rulers of men because it accepts a reality that all of them in their different ways deny.

[25 : 02] the essential sinfulness of the human heart. He knows, you see, verse 20, that sin is pervasive, that there is not a righteous man on earth who does right and never sins.

And he knows, verse 29, that it has its roots in perversity, its rebellion against God who made man upright, but he has gone off in search of many schemes, asserted his autonomy against God's authority.

one writer says this, in that one word but, in verse 29, there is a recognition of all that we mean theologically when we speak of the fall of man.

It's just another foundational truth about reality that the Bible makes absolutely plain. Our world is a fallen world because of sin. And therefore, it is a confused world, a corrupted world, a chaotic world. world. And we are responsible, in fact. It's our fault, but God has done it. He is sovereign. He has cursed it. And therefore, we can't ever straighten out properly what he's made crooked.

[26 : 17] Only God can possibly do that. And when you understand that, you're wiser by far, says the preacher, that all the rulers of our city or of our nation or of the world, for that matter, because they don't grasp that.

They don't understand that in our city chambers in Glasgow or in the Scottish Parliament or in Westminster or in the United Nations, for that matter. Neither do the columnists or the social scientists or the philosophers or the scientists who offer some great scheme for saving our world, for solving all the world's ills.

It's a totally foreign idea to them. That's why all of their grand schemes are so often doomed to failure. The same writer says this, the rock on which many brilliant ideas conjured up by men founder is the fact that they are formulated on the premise that man is essentially good.

He is not. He is fallen. And that's why our present government can't fix our society. Nor will the next government, even if Mr. Brown spends even more money than he did when he was chancellor.

And nor will the one that comes after that. And nor will we be able to fix world poverty or provide world peace. You see, the Christian believer, above all, is a realist.

[27 : 40] He accepts the essential fallenness of this world order. And so he won't expect more from politics or sociology or psychology or anything.

more than they can realistically give in a world of twisted personalities and fractured minds and hearts. By the way, friends, if your job involves helping people or your time involves helping people with problems, so, so important that you accept that and realize it.

If you don't recognize a certain unstraightenable crookedness in the human heart that you yourself cannot possibly ever correct by human means, well, if you're in the kind of business of trying to help people, you'll very likely go mad with frustration because you cannot sort out what God has made crooked.

And we can't deny that reality. We just need to look at the world and it's so clear. Although we try to. We don't like this idea, do we, of a totally depraved humanity.

So, you see, the preacher presses at home on us very clearly, doesn't he? Look at verses 21 and 22. Might just seem like a good piece of advice, but, of course, in the context here, it's much, much more, isn't it?

[29 : 00] He's just using one example that shows immediately that we, too, belong to the people of verse 20. Those who don't do right and never sin. We've all heard things, haven't we, that we shouldn't have heard?

Things that people have said about us? Somebody cursing us? We've all heard things that have hurt us very much. Whoever wrote that nursery rhyme about sticks and stones harming but words not?

Well, they were wrong, weren't they? We've all been hurt greatly by things people have said. We say amen to that. But then you see, verse 22, quickly, he hoists us on our own petard.

We've all done just the same, haven't we, all the time? And if you can't keep your tongue from sin, a tiny organ, if such havoc can be wreaked just by that, then what hope have you to control the whole of your life?

Read James chapter 3 for more about that subject. And you see the point here of verses 23 to 28, between the brackets of verses 20 and 29, the plain fact of man's sin, the point of them is this.

[30 : 07] Because of the confusion caused by sin, there are always going to be many, many things that are elusive and totally beyond our grasp in this world.

We like to think that we can get control of it, we can grasp it, life, the universe, everything, but it's just total delusion. It's far from us. Verse 20, I said I'll be wise, but it was far from me.

Verse 24, it's a deep, deep mystery. Who can find it out? We just can't get a total explanation of the world. The natural world, the psychological world, the spiritual world.

And it's because of the inevitable limitations placed upon our world because of its confusion, its disorder, its chaos, because of sin.

Of course, our world doesn't believe that. That's why it's constantly searching for answers by empirical human means, through cosmology or physics or biology or economics or whatever it is.

[31 : 08] control is within our grasp. It's always what the newspaper headline says when there's some new breakthrough in a medical discovery. Cancer is going to be a thing of the past.

Or some new satellite in space. Or some new great idea of a politician that's going to solve everything. But we know the reality is very different. As human beings, we seem to be blind, though, to what we can't discover.

We constantly blind ourselves, though, to what we do discover all too easily about ourselves. We can't control and understand the world by wisdom, but we do fall constantly headlong into folly, right under our noses, really close to home.

You see verse 26, the realm of human relationships. He can't find out what's wrong with the world, but he can find out that he's got disaster in his human relationships. He is a great man, a great thinker, a great leader.

If it's not Solomon himself, then certainly he's Solomon-like in his wisdom. Yet all he discovers in his labors of greatness is the bitterness of a disastrous love relationship gone wrong.

[32 : 17] And he is bitter, isn't he, talking about the woman with her captivating heart leading to deathly entrapment, her hands are fetters, snares and nets. He's obviously had a very bad experience, hasn't he, for all his cleverness.

By the way, if you're worried that this is a bit misogynistic and unfair on the woman, note the end of verse 26. He fairly blames the man for his part. It's the sinner, he says, who's taken by her.

It's just so true to life, isn't it? So often the world's great ones, the successful ones, the intelligent ones, the achieving people, they've got disastrous domestic circumstances, haven't they? Not just the princes, the presidents, the high flowers in business. Think of those in the art, think of actors, think of actresses and their tally of husbands.

The politicians, too, the scientists. I was reading just the other day about that brilliant man, Stephen Hawking, you know, who's just been in space, wrote the great history of time, working on a complete theory of everything.

[33 : 22] And what struck me in this article was the total disaster, the chaos, the fallout from two disastrous marriages and more. It's just part of the course, isn't it?

It's extraordinary conceit, too, though, when you think about it, isn't it? That there are people who would have us believe that control of our world and control of our destiny is within our grasp, and yet they can't even control their own household relationships.

They can't even control their hormones. So what does the preacher find, verse 27, when he adds one thing to another, when he adds up all the complexities of life as we know it?

Well, says verse 28, despite repeated and exhaustive attempts, with hardly a man on earth of any help, and not a single woman, apparently, of any help to him, he does seem to have a bit of a scar in that area.

What does he find? Well, not the answers to the great scheme of things, the solutions, the control of existence. Now, only this unmistakable reality that stares him in the face, verse 29, though God did make man upright, all humanity has turned its back on him and rebelled in a state of willful sinfulness.

[34 : 45] He's forced to recognize the inevitable confusion of a truly sinful humanity. humanity. And that's what explains the folly of our world.

It's what explains, you know, the folly that we as Christians, as believers, alas, so often exhibit in our own lives. We begin to think that we somehow can control the world, we can control our lives, or we ought to be able to, searching this way or that of doing it.

All kinds, perhaps, of very pious sounding schemes. This blessing or that, this new way or that. But ultimately, it's all folly.

We forget the reality of a truly sovereign God. We forget the reality of our truly sinful hearts, which are deceitful to the core. And that's why we delude ourselves sometimes into making a mess of our Christian lives, isn't it?

If that's true for me, maybe it's true for you too. And the preacher wants to burst the bubble of our fantasy, to force honesty on it, whether we like it or not, so that we will see the right way.

[36 : 02] But is his message one of despair? It seems very despairing at the end of this chapter, doesn't it? Well, no, it can't be. We've already seen that, haven't we? But you see, by forcing us to confront reality, he's also forcing us to look out and to look up, to look beyond ourselves and beyond this world under the sun, to the inevitable need that we have of a saving hope.

We've seen again and again through his book that there is a way of joy and peace amid the confused corruption and the mess of this baffling life. Be joyful. It's not a cruel taunt.

It's real. It's the way, he says, of fearing God, verse 18. It's the way of pleasing God. That's the way of escape in verse 26.

It's the way of true wisdom that's received from God alone. And isn't that the cry of the whole Old Testament? Where shall wisdom be found? Where shall true righteousness be found?

True fear of the Lord? When we're all sinful in his sight. It's also the promise, isn't it, of the whole Old Testament? That there is one coming in whom all wisdom will be found.

[37 : 20] All wisdom will be given liberally to all who seek it. Isaiah spoke of him, didn't he? The shoot from the stump of Jesse, full of the spirit of wisdom, the spirit of knowledge, the fear of the Lord.

It's the Gospels, of course, isn't it, that tells the full story of a child born of Mary who grew in wisdom and stature. So that when he spoke to the people, they said, where did he acquire such wisdom? He's the answer. And on the mountain, remember, the voice from the glory said, this is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased. Listen to him.

That's how we fear the Lord. That's how we please the Lord. Jesus Christ is the promised one, the wisdom of God in the flesh. He's the answer, the only answer to a crooked and corrupted world.

Who can make straight what God has made crooked? Well, only God can. But he has, hasn't he? In the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[38 : 29] New Testament tells us God has made him our wisdom. He has made him our redemption, our escape at last from a world that is under the curse of God.

Without him, without Jesus Christ, the preacher's reality would leave us in despair, wouldn't it? A truly sinful humanity in the face of a truly sovereign God.

But with him, we have a truly saving hope. And so with him, we can face the harsh realities of life in this cursed universe with a steady eye, with a perspective of patient hope.

It's true. We don't know what tomorrow holds. We don't know what next week or next year holds for us, but we do know. We do know where it all ends. And when we know that, friends, that is a strength to live by more than ten rulers in any city, more than a million rulers in all the world.

Because we know the reality of a hope that is certain. Let me finish by reading some words of the Apostle Paul. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.

[39 : 47] For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved. You see, because we know that, although we don't know what tomorrow or next week or next year brings, we can say with Paul, we wait for it with patience.

That's the perspective of patient hope. That's the only way of living through a perplexing and puzzling and passing world without being destroyed by it.

So may God grant us his wisdom to live by that strength and power today and right to the very end. Let's pray. Let's pray.