

Pergamum: Faithful But Not Discerning

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Date: 05 February 2023

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore, repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it. May God bless the hearing and the preaching of His Word. In his memoir entitled, Shoe Dog, Phil Knight tells the story about the first days of his company, Nike.

[1 : 40] Knight, frustrated with the poor quality of running shoes, set out with the Oregon track coach, Bill Bowerman, to create durable, lightweight running shoes.

Early on, they worked with other companies, but in the fall of 1971, it was time for them to go out on their own. But first, they needed a name.

With only a few days left before the shoes were to be shipped out to the stores, they were still undecided on a name for this company. There were dozens of names thrown around, but two names stood out in the end, Falcon and Dimension Six.

Falcon and Dimension Six. Knight admits that he was the only one who was a fan of Dimension Six. And when the headline arrived, the team gathered around together and asked, what's it going to be?

And Knight said, I don't know. Well, he mentioned Dimension Six again, but everyone said it was bad, really bad.

[2 : 47] Not a good name for a shoe. Another team member said, an employee called me this morning and said they had a name that came to him in a dream last night. Knight said, what is it?

He said, Nike. Huh? Nike. N-I-K-E. Knight said he didn't know what to think.

He remembered that Nike was the Greek goddess of victory. And what's more important than victory if you're a running shoe? Perhaps he also remembered that the bronze victory medal awarded to the veterans of the World War II was the goddess Nike with a sword broken in two on it. Whatever else he remembered or whatever else he thought, he typed into the typewriter, the name of the brand is Nike.

Little did he know, Nike would go on to become a household name and the most successful sneaker in history. Well, interestingly enough, one of the words repeated throughout the book of Revelation is that same word, Nike.

[3 : 59] The word nikao in the Greek meaning conquer or overcome occurs 26 times in the New Testament, 17 times in the book of Revelation.

The book of Revelation is a book about how to conquer, how to overcome, how to win, how to gain the victory, the only victory that matters.

And each of the seven letters ends with this promise about conquering. You saw it as we read. But the way to conquer, according to the book of Revelation, is not in the way that we would imagine. In the book of Ephesus, the church that conquers will not just have the truth, but be united in love. The church of Smyrna, the church that conquers will not so much defend the truth, but hold fast the truth unto death.

And in this letter to the church in Pergamum, the church that conquers must be more than faithful. The church in Pergamum is facing fierce opposition that we'll learn more about in a moment.

[5 : 05] And it must be more than faithful in the end. It must be pure. It must be holy. It must be distinct and set apart. The old Southern writer, Flannery O'Connor, once said, You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you odd.

And that's the message that the Lord's trying to get to the church in Pergamum. That's it. The church that conquers will be odd. It must be different. It must be marked by a taste, a character, a habit of life that does not fit in with this world.

And isn't that what it means to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world? And so in this and every generation, the greatest thing the church can give to the world is holiness.

In a word, where we're going is it's not enough to be faithful. The church that conquers continually turns together from sin to Jesus. The church that conquers, not enough to be faithful.

In the end, the church that conquers is the one that turns continually from sin to Jesus. Break this out. Three points. The first one is the church is in the world.

[6 : 17] The church is in the world. Look with me in verse 13. The body of the letter begins in a way unlike the others, you know. Jesus began the other letter saying, I know your work.

I know what you're doing. But he begins this letter saying, I know where you live. Look in verse 13. He says, I know where you dwell.

I know where you dwell. Jesus is not merely saying, I know your address. I know where you stay at. Or I know where you sleep. This word refers to more than that. He's saying, I know where you live, eat, sleep, pray, play.

I know where you dwell. I know everything or the location in which you do all of life. I know it all. And he says, I also know it's where Satan's throne is.

Now, in the letter to Smyrna, he said the Jews there were a synagogue of Satan. Now, he says, in Pergamum, there's a throne.

[7 : 32] What does that mean? Now, in order to understand, we have to learn a little bit about the first century. The first century was very pluralistic. There were lots of different gods.

Lots of different people believed and held together. There were all sorts of gods and goddesses. Nike was a goddess. But Zeus, Athena, Ares, Artemis, as we saw in Ephesus, there was this worship of all these different gods.

Gods of the sea. Gods of the air. Gods of all these things. And there was also worship of the emperor. There was paying homage and making sacrifices to the Roman ruler.

And in this culture, they really didn't care what you worshipped as long as you worshipped everything. So, they were fine with addition.

And that's why you see, you're fine if you worship Ares and Artemis and the emperor. They were fine with addition. Just keep on adding these things. In fact, they encouraged addition.

[8 : 35] Because if you didn't worship all the gods, maybe one of the gods might break out his wrath on us. But they were not fine with subtraction.

And that's what the Christians did. That's the problem they have with these Christians. Christians refused to join in. Christians refused to worship anyone but Jesus Christ.

And the church of Pergamum was rife with it all. It was this pagan city worshipping everything but the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the same way that the name Vegas immediately connotes the idea of debauchery of all sorts. Well, Pergamum brought with it the reputation for this pagan worship of all kinds of gods.

Known for its major temples and cult. It had a hill behind the city. Overlooking the city with all these different temples there. But perhaps most importantly, it was the first city in the region to build a temple for the Roman ruler.

[9 : 47] It was a city devoted to the cult of the emperor. It was a city proud about Rome, proud about emperor worship. And so when these Christians came and refused to worship the gods and goddesses, the citizens didn't like it.

They pressured them. They opposed them. But when these Christians refused to worship and offered sacrifices to Caesar, they saw a way to get rid of them. You understand?

They reported them to the Roman authorities. They didn't have anybody that would crack down on people who refused to worship Zeus, but they did. For people who refused to worship the emperor. They turned them in. They turned them over. They were so locked in to the worship of the Roman ruler there.

The Christians that refused to do it. Were doing... And those who turned them in were doing the work of Satan himself. While we don't live in a culture hostile to Christianity in quite the same way, the Lord still says to us, the church is in the world.

[10 : 59] The church is still in the world. The devil still prowls around like a roaring lion. Sin still abounds.

The things of this world choke out the truth. The church is in the... You are in the world. Now that might sound a little bit like Captain Obvious, but the Lord is saying, I know where you live. I know what you are facing. And many people, because of the schemes of the devil, the wickedness of sin and reasons beyond our understanding, experience daily what might rightly be called a living hell.

I remember reading the story of a young child in this county being chained in the crawl space during the lockdown because her grandmother said she was too much trouble. I remember sitting in my office with a 24-year-old girl describing the abuse she endured for years while her parents turned a blind eye from her uncle to living hell.

This is east of Eden. We're not in Kansas anymore. Those who... And not to mention those who don't know where they will eat today or those enduring chronic debilitating pain, those staggering from sudden shattering loss, those who have experienced the gradual erosion of so many marital dreams by an arrogant, irritable husband.

[12 : 34] And we could go on. These words are ever important for us today. The church is in the world. Christianity does not bring a decisive end to our trouble. It's startling.

It doesn't make all our problems go away. Throughout many of his teachings and parables, Jesus says the church must remain in the world.

The world is like a field where the wheat and the weeds grow. That's where you live. Don't think it's strange.

The world is like a pasture where the sheep and the goats graze. Like the Israelites who rejoice in freedom from slavery in Egypt only to find the temptations of the wilderness.

We've been set free from slavery to sin only to find the world is still mad. This verse ends very soberly. Look there with me.

[13 : 41] He says, I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. Very end of the verse, where Satan dwells. Same word referenced for where they dwell. The church and their ultimate adversary live, eat, play, and pray in the same location.

Why is Jesus telling us this? I have a mug in my office, a rather large coffee mug that just says, keep going.

Keep going. Now, you that love history might know where this is going. But in the midst of World War II, Winston Churchill became the prime minister. In the midst of this war against that bad man, is what Winston Churchill famously called Hitler.

Peter, an inappropriate label. In his first address to the government of Great Britain, he said, I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.

I just love that. Here's your prime minister. I got nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat. As he famously said another occasion, when you're going through hell, keep going.

[14 : 55] I think in many ways that's the function of this text. It's like the Lord saying, yes, I know you are in a form of hell and you must keep going.

You must keep offering your blood, toil, tears, and sweat. But he continues, the church is in the world but belongs to Jesus Christ.

Look at the rest of this verse. He says, yet you held fast my name. You did not deny my faith, even the days of Antipas, my faithful witness who was killed among you.

Whenever believers were turned in to the Roman authorities, it wasn't like a Salem witch trial or anything like that. They were just asking a few quick questions, a few simple questions. Are you a Christian?

Will you confess Caesar as Lord? Will you offer sacrifice to Caesar? And if you refuse, you suffer.

[16 : 01] One historian I read this week, every Christian, this is a quote, secular historian, every Christian in the first century was by definition a candidate for death. You want to get in the water?

But the church in Pergamum had wonderfully not buckled. Satan's throne was there, but they wonderfully pushed back.

There's a powerful emphasis, and you probably saw it as we went through here, but it's even more in the original language. You held fast. My name. My name. The personal possessive pronoun is there.

My faith. He says, my faithful one, my witness. There's a powerful emphasis here, even though they are in the world experiencing all sorts of opposition, even though they're being ratted out by their friends, family, and coworkers.

The Lord is saying, you are mine. That's the startling juxtaposition of being a Christian. You are surrounded by hell, and you're right where I want you.

[17:08] You are mine. Interestingly, we don't know Antipas. It means against everyone, and so people assume he's just against everybody, you know, against all these other gods, and so he's a great martyr.

We don't really know if that's why he got that name. We don't know how he died. We don't know much about him, but we do know the Lord is pleased because he gives him his title.

From Revelation 1, we have this text for you. The Lord calls him my faithful witness, and he says in Revelation 1, that the grace to you and peace from God, who is and was and is to come from the seven spirits who are before the throne and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness.

I just love that. Antipas, all your friends have disowned you. They ran you out of town. They turned you over, but you are mine, and you are faithful. And for that, enter into my joy.

Second point, so the church is in the world. Second point, the church must not be of the world.

Obviously, these points are somewhat taken from John 17.

[18:16] The Lord's high priestly prayer. The church is in the world. It must remain in the world, even though the Lord is leaving the world. But it must not be of the world. Verse 14 through 16.

After Jesus tells them what he knows about him, he corrects them. And it's a doozy. He corrects them.

Look in verse 14. He says, I have a few things against you. You have some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak, Balak, I don't know, to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel so that they might eat food, sacrifice to idols, and practice sexual immorality.

You also have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. There's a lot going on here. Behind this Balaam and Balak is meant to remind us of an Old Testament story.

You probably remember some of it. Balak was the prophet of some kind as the people were wandering through the wilderness. And Balak is a foreign leader who tried to get Balak to curse the people of Israel.

[19:27] Remember that? Balak tries to get him to curse them, and he hires him for money. And Balak follows Balak and plans to curse the people of Israel.

But the angel of the Lord stands in the way. You remember that? They're kind of going down this path. The angel of the Lord is standing in the way. Three times the donkey, like, turns around or lays down or something like that. And Balak is beating his donkey.

Finally, the donkey gets fed up and talks back to him. I mean, this is a famous story. If for no other reason, then the donkey's talking. He says something kind of like, stop hitting me, you big dope.

I know how to walk. And we've been doing this thing for a long time. You saddle me, and I walk you. Have you ever thought that I might be stopping for a reason? And suddenly, Balaam's eyes were opened.

He saw the angel of the Lord with a sword. And with sword drawn, the Lord said, you can go with Balak. But you must not say anything more than what I've told you to say.

[20:34] Three times, notice the emphasis. Balak tries to get Balaam to curse the people of Israel. Three times, Balaam refuses and only says what the Lord said. So far, so good, right?

He's a hero, and that's kind of probably the way we end with it. But later, Balaam leads the people of Israel to sin against God. He leads people to sin against God in sexual immorality and idolatry.

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, places like Nehemiah, other places, and the New Testament in 2 Peter and Jude, Balaam represents, He's an example of what false teachers do. So He's not necessarily saying to the church in Pergamum, this is what the false teaching has done among you. He's saying, you just got another Balaam in your midst.

You got another person teaching false teaching. Leading people to think it's okay to be sexually immoral and eat feasts to all different kinds of pagan gods and the goddess of Pergamum.

[21 : 48] All right, so what about the Nicolaitans? I told you we were going to say that. One commentator said, There is frustratingly little detail on this group.

And I think that's exactly right. We got this and we got the letter to Smyrna. There's a reference that they hate. The Nicolaitans just like the Lord does.

I think the best guess is that the Nicolaitans has the same root word of conquer. I think the best guess for what the Nicolaitans, they were also false teachers.

They're thrown in. The Lord hates them. I think the best guess is they taught a higher life. So what like 1 John talks about, they taught that you can gain this status of perfection and be freed from willing sin and to conquer in this life.

I think that's the best guess, but it is just a guess. So don't hold me to it. But it's important to see that Jesus corrects them for two reasons.

[22 : 48] Corrects this church. First, for failing to discern the false teachers. There are some in the church teaching false doctrine and they haven't noticed.

Now remember, this is Pergamum. This is the church that's refusing to deny the name of Christ, refusing to deny faith in Christ, standing strong even unto death. But Jesus says, you fail to discern false teaching.

In the first three centuries of the church, the most widely quoted verse in the writings that are left behind is be shrewd as serpent and innocent as doves.

Why? Because we're in the wilderness. In a world that's gone mad, society filled with so many gods and goddesses, so many false teachers sneaking in, they need to be shrewd, they need to be discerning.

How discerning are we? Is theological, spiritual discernment, a category for the way we do life?

[24 : 04] Sometimes we talk a lot about discernment, about conspiracies, about seeing what's really behind, all the things going on in this world. But are we discerning about what we believe?

We talk a lot about the wrongness of transgenderism. Actually, we don't talk here, but Christians generally talk often about the wrongness of transgenderism, and I think that's rightly so.

But are we discerning in the way that individualism that fuels it shapes us? Now, transgenderism didn't fall from the sky. It can only come to pass in a culture where there is nothing more important than being true to yourself.

It can only come in a world where individualism is esteemed as the highest value, in a world where, it can only come to pass in a culture where everyone has a right to their own form of life.

Everyone has a right to define what is the right life for them, where they can define what is really important, valuable, and true to them. That's what fuels transgenderism.

[25 : 16] The doctor can't tell me what gender I am. My parents can't tell me what gender I am. My anatomy can't tell me what gender I am. Only I can tell what I am.

You see, completely unhinged from everything else, I am what I feel deep down I am. We reject that. I reject that. But the same individualism is affecting all of us.

This same individualism is seen when God's plan for my life becomes more important than God's plan for his people. Now this is not like an opportunity to prop up this church or anything like that.

When my relationship with God, my calling, my goals, my desires, become what drives my life.

Like it's really not much different. God didn't die for you so that you could be caught up with your plan for you.

[26 : 26] When I live with the conviction that it is God's plan for my life with little regard for God's people. And it's rife, I'm telling you.

It's everywhere. Everywhere. I think this same individualism is seen in what I'll call a spiritualized individualism when we say things like, God called me to do this or that.

God spoke to me and said, do this or that. God impressed on me to do this or that. All of these things being things not explicit in the Bible.

Not open to counsel. No one ever says, God called me to love my wife in that way. God impressed on me to rear my children.

It's always God called me to be a missionary. And that's great. God called me to sell my house. God called me to take this job.

[27 : 38] If I'm honest, it feels like a power grab to me. Even more, it seems that sometimes all this God told me talk is just a spiritualized version of individualism in which we write out our own plan for our life and write God's name on it.

Now, don't get me wrong. I believe in divine guidance. I believe the Lord guides our lives. But I also believe in human frailty. And that's where this comes together.

That's why callings and words and impressions and pictures and signs must be affirmed by the witness of Scripture and the sound counsel of church and friends. When we say, God called me to do this or that, we need people in our lives who will ask the right, the hard questions.

What does that mean about this? Does that enable you to serve? Does that enable you to throw your life into the people of God? Doesn't enable you to do this or that. I mean, we could just go on. This is the way it's designed to live this life, you know. In fact, last Sunday, hopefully illustrates that to some degree. Taylor came to me, I don't know, four or five years ago.

[28 : 45] I'm called to ministry. Taylor, I don't know about that. No, I'm just kidding. But, it's not my prerogative.

And nor should you accept just anybody who says, I am called. That's not the way it works, biblically. And so, yes, it seems like he's been our pastor for five years.

Why are you just not doing this? Well, because we wanted to walk this out carefully with counselors, with training, with examination, with much discussion, so that when we unleash him on you for good, you, as best as we know, are finding a man that we believe is called by God.

I can tell you another story. A couple years ago, when we moved down here to start planting this church, I never said, God called me to Athens. I refused to say it.

I said, it seems like God is calling us to Athens. I got a lot of people talk to me in my life. I still said, it seems. Now, four and a half years later, I think God called us here.

[29 : 58] You know? God called us here. You can see, I'm even hesitant to put that on it. So, don't say that. Don't say that stuff. It's not helpful.

It's not helpful. You know, you walk around saying, God called me to do this or that. No one's going to give you counsel. Who wants to be found opposing God? But what you're doing might be really stupid.

So, we've got to be discerning. Man, I could go on, but you don't want me to. They're failing to be discerning. And they're failing to do church discipline. Notice, Jesus doesn't just rebuke those who are in the church.

Jesus will do that in the next letter. But Jesus rebukes the whole church. He doesn't just rebuke those false teachers. He rebukes the whole church. Look at verse 16.

He says, repent. All of you. Repent. If not, I'll come to you soon and war against you with the sword in my mouth.

[31 : 03] Repent. Turn back. What he's saying is, confront sexual immorality. Correct idolatry. Remove those who practice such things from the church. Jesus threatens to come to the church with a sword.

With a sword from his mouth. Look at verse 12. He says, the angel of the Lord and Pergamum, the words of him who has a sharp two-edged sword. The Roman authorities carry a sword, but this is the sword they should worry about.

That's what he's saying. Just like Balaam was going down the road and was confronted by an angel with a sword in his mouth, so too Jesus is confronting this church with a sword in his mouth.

You must practice church and throw these guys out. Balaam, it didn't turn out so well. He was thrust through with a sword. The same fate is threatened to us here.

And so the marks of the church, the marks of a true church historically have always been the right preaching of the gospel, the administration of the sacraments, and the practice of church discipline.

[32 : 05] We affirm all three. However, I think this text is alerting us to some misunderstanding when it comes to church discipline. We often think about church discipline, and it is a hard reality, but it is a redemptive goal that there are moments when a church exercises discipline in such a way that someone who is willfully refusing to walk in line when what Scripture has said is right and true and good, must be removed from the body and treated like an unbeliever.

We will practice that. But I think what this text is alerting us to is that church discipline ought not just involve that final step.

That is, of course, church discipline, but our unity together is meant to involve so much more. I have a few New Testament texts for you. We must watch out for one another.

Philippians 2, let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others.

Jesus is rebuking them for not watching. He's saying, some of you think you're okay because you're

not sinning in this way, but it's precisely because you think you're okay that you're not sinning in that way and letting those others sin in that way is a precise reason and you're not okay. What he's saying is the purity of the church is a corporate responsibility. It's not okay for someone to sit in the back and you know they're not walking in ways that are right and good and true to just go home.

[33 : 43] Matthew 18, the calling of you is to go to your brother, go to your sister. If your commitment to a church, this church, is so low that you can't watch out for anyone but you, Jesus is rebuking you.

He's rebuking you. We must watch out for one another. It's a precious thing to watch someone else's back.

We must exhort one another. Hebrews 3, exhort one another every day as long as it is called the day that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. If you've ever been exhorted in a way that you needed, you want to do it for others and so often many times our attendance to church and community group will have little to do with us being fed.

If we get this right, little to do with us being fed or little to do with our desire to do it but because we want to be there to help someone else. We want to be there to exhort someone else. We're aware this is a corporate responsibility and we want to throw our lives into it.

Thirdly, we rescue one another. In a most precious text, the way the book of James ends, he says, my brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

[35 : 14] The church is in the world, must not be of the world. The church lives for another world. Verse 17, the letter to the church in Pergamum ends the same way every letter ends with a bit of a warning and a promise to those who hear.

Promise to those who persevere, those who conquer. The exhortation to hear comes first. It's from Isaiah 6. Or at least it's in a lot of places.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church. Not just saying like, it is saying, if you have ears, hear. But it's a warning too.

Some of the way Jesus said in other places, there are some who have eyes but do not see. There are some who have ears that do not hear. So listen up. Let your hearing be spiritual.

Let it be marked by repentance. There's a wonderful promise, look there with me, to those who hear, to the one who conquers. Nike, go home and use that with your friends. The one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna.

[36 : 36] I will give him a white stone with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it. There's a promise to those who persevere, the hidden manna. Now what's that mean?

The hidden manna? The manna miraculously came down from heaven for God to satisfy them when they were in the wilderness, to strengthen them, to give them all that they need. And so the Lord said in John 6, I am the bread from heaven.

I am the one who satisfies. I think the idea that it's hidden is that you are the people that are being thrown against the rocks, so to speak. You are the people that are being persecuted and yet you are the ones who are going to see the hidden manna.

These people think they got life figured out, but I am giving you that which will satisfy and I'll welcome you to the great wedding feast in the end and you'll eat and be satisfied.

He says, I'll give you a white stone. White is the color throughout Revelation for purity and for righteousness. But white stones, this is the best guess what this means, white stones were also used in Jewish trials to symbolize the innocence and the acquittal of a person on trial and so the white stones were given out to say that this person is innocent of the crime and I love this.

[37 : 55] I think this is why this is here. You may be found guilty in the kangaroo courts of Rome, but when you come to me, I'm reversing all verdicts.

I'm giving you the white stone, welcoming you into the joy of my marriage feast and my presence forever. That's a white stone given only because of the finished work of Jesus Christ to offer to you and to all.

Finally, he says, I'll give you a new name written on it that no one knows. Again, it's hidden.

Now, it's just going to be like Abram going to Abraham. Jacob going to Israel or something. I don't think so. It's the name of God.

Revelation 22 says, they'll see my face and his name will be on their foreheads and night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun for the Lord will be their light and they will reign forever and ever.

[39 : 08] So what he's saying is, I'll give them a new name. A name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.

It's the name of God. It's the name symbolizing ownership. The Lord's going to write a name that says, you are mine. It's a name that symbolizes acceptance.

The Lord is saying, you are welcome here. You belong to me. You belong. Here is a name reserved for those who overcome. And I find it striking that this name is given to those who have been slandered, to those who have been reported to the authorities, those whose names have been called out in trial, those who have refused to deny the name of Christ and for those who refuse to deny his name before men, the Lord Jesus refuses to deny their name before the Heavenly Father. Indeed, he gives them his name. Amazing. It's not enough to be faithful.

Church perseveres, tenderly turns from sin to Jesus. What do we do then? We gather.

[40 : 30] I think that's what he's saying. That's what it's pressing towards. We gather. We gather. We say, press on to one another as we wait for his return.

The past couple weeks, I have completely fallen in love with this band called the Grey Havens. I guess no one else likes them, so that's okay.

But one of the things that has affected me is I haven't listened to everything they've written, but the vast majority, it seems, of what they've written is about the return of Christ and about being with the Lord.

I find that it's affecting my soul.

And I don't listen to a lot of Christian music, but this is stirring my soul. I want to read you one song or part of one song that I think really fits today.

[41 : 46] He says, hope, hope in the furnace, you know, it's where this church was. Do we have that?

Maybe. It says, hope in the furnace, you know, it can burn away slow or it can come out like gold. And mine is walking the edge of the knife in the fire. Tonight in the fire, I fight. He's just saying, I'm in the fight that is the flame of tribulation and trial.

Tonight, with a song, he continues, carries on to the night of the future that's bright. The morning, we'll see. We'll find an end to all this. One day, when sorrows are gone, further down and along, we'll finally sing.

And it hits this chorus, we'll sing, gone are the days when we cry. Cry. Here are the days when we'll fly. I don't know about that, but you know.

[43 : 02] All our hopes will turn to sight beyond the veil and the morning light. We'll sing, gone are all the days. But he continues, and this is where I think it's very appropriate for us.

He says, I wait, but it's so hard, you know, to believe on your own that you'll be okay. So what's he say he does?

When sorrow keeps chasing me down, I run till my feet hit the ground when we gather to pray.

describing communion, he continues, as I reach for the bread and the wine for the comfort I'll find, picture the scene, one day to the table will come every daughter and son finally free.

I was just so affected by that. What do I do when the sorrow is dragging me down? I run to my feet, hit the ground to the gathering. Because there, I eat this meal that the Lord told me to eat and this would have been great to do communion afterwards, not that thoughtful, but I go and eat because he promised me that I'll eat this way until he returns and then I'll eat in an unending way forever with every daughter and son.

So let us do that together. Let me pray. Father in heaven, we cast ourselves onto you. offer ourselves to you completely.

[44 : 43] But we want to be a church that is pure and lovely and beautiful and joyful and happy.

A church that grips one another as we hold on and wait for your return. I pray God that you would do that solidifying work in our midst.

God, I pray that you would produce in us a deep conviction to know other people and to be known. To not just be a consumer, to be an exhorter, a helper, a watcher, a rescuer, a rescuer, that our

body might carry one another over the line, we pray.

In Jesus' name, amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.