THE DISCOURAGEMENT DRAGON

Mission Killers
Revelation 3:7-13 // Craig Smith
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Craig // Hey, why don't you go ahead and grab your Bible and make your way to Revelation 3. We are in week six of the "Mission Killers" series. I can't believe we are almost done. We are rounding the corner to week number seven. It's coming up really fast. Throughout this series, what we have been doing is we are taking a look at things that can take us off mission with Jesus. As I have said over and over again, you are probably getting sick of hearing it, but I'm not going to stop saying it because it's so important. When you say yes to following Jesus, you say yes to following him on mission. Following Jesus, and following him on mission in the world are two parts of the same coin. They are inseparable, but there are a bunch of things that the world sends at us to try to take us off mission, to kill that mission that we have with Jesus in the world.

So what Jesus says here in Revelation 2 and 3 as he writes to seven of his churches is he gives them some tremendous insight into what it looks like to overcome particular mission killers that they, and we, face. Today we are going to take a look at one that I'm going to call the discouragement dragon. I know that sounds just a little bit cheesy, but I want to make sure we don't forget it. The discourager. How many of you have ever been discouraged? My hand is way up high on this one. The discouragement dragon is probably the one I battle most frequently. Sometimes people are surprised to hear that. I have had people say that doesn't quite jive with my view of you, Craig, because I think of you as an optimist. The truth is, I am an optimist.

Like I have taken all kinds of surveys and tests, and in almost all of them, I'm right near the top. I'm a hard-core optimist. Any other hard-core optimists here? Yeah. But here's the thing, being an optimist doesn't exempt you from fighting the discouragement dragon. You know what an optimist is to the discouragement dragon? A tasty snack. Like we are the discouragement dragon's favorite target, right? You can be an optimist. You still face discouragement. You can be a pessimist and face discouragement. How many of us are pessimists? There's not as many hands. How many of us believe those kind of labels are just not helpful? Go ahead. See, there's your pessimists right there. I gotcha. I gotcha. Okay, it doesn't matter if you are an optimist or a pessimist, the discouragement dragon is something we face. What the discouragement dragon does, let me make sure we understand this, the discouragement dragon works by disconnecting courage from our lives, okay?

It comes in and it dismantles or disconnects courage. The problem is that courage is the engine that drives us forward, especially as we are following Jesus, and even more so as we are following Jesus on mission. You can't follow Jesus without courage, you hear me? You absolutely cannot follow Jesus on mission without courage. Courage is what drives us, so the discouragement dragon comes in, and it disconnects that courage from our lives. Doesn't matter if you are an optimist or a pessimist, we all fight the discouragement dragon, but Jesus gives us here in this letter to the church at Philadelphia, three powerful weapons that will allow us to fight this discouragement dragon. He says this, to the angel of the church at Philadelphia write --

And if you are just new with us, let me catch you up. In each of these letters he addresses the angel of the church because the angel is a personification of the message of that church. The Greek word, aggelos, literally means messenger. He writes to the messenger of the church to remind the church that they are a message. They have a message, what we call the Gospel, and they are on a mission to share that message, so he writes to encourage them, you have a message and a mission to share. He says these are the words of him who is holy and true who holds the key of David. Now in each one of these letters what he does, he tells the church something true about himself that's specifically tailored, specifically structured to help them overcome the particular mission killer they were facing. He says, I know what you're facing. This is what you need to know to fight back against it. What he tells the church at Philadelphia, he says two things. He's the one who is holy and true, it is only one thing, it's two sides of the same thing, and he's the one who holds the key of David. Both of those things, they are about promises. They are about promise keeping.

He says, he's holy and true. Holy, means pure, it means righteous it means perfect, but it also literally means set apart. What it means, it means different. It means not like the world you are used to, not like the people you are used to. Not like the people who give you promises. Jesus says, I'm going to make some promises in this letter. He has some very powerful promises, but he says you need to understand this about me before I give any promises. I don't make promises like the world does. The reality is that the world gives promises to us because they want something from us, right? So many times the promises the world makes to us, they are made to us because they are really looking for something from us. How many of you are in a relationship with the cable company? You are in the relationship because they made promises to you about what your rates would look like, about your monthly fees. You said, okay, I'm in. They made that promise to you because they wanted something from you. They wanted your money. How many of you are in that relationship, you are feeling the promise is not quite what I signed up for, right?
Sometimes the promises evaporate. It’s almost cliché to talk about politicians, right? They make promises to us -- so they can get something from us. So they can get votes. Then it seems like the promises evaporate. I remember in college, it was heartbreaking. I saw it over and over again. Guys would make promises to girls. I love you. I’m going to be with you forever. We are going to get married. I just want a little something from you in the meantime. It was a way to get something back. We have all had that experience where the world makes these promises to us to get something from us, but Jesus says, no, no. I’m set apart. I’m holy. I’m different. I’m not like that. I don’t make promises to you to get something from you. I make promises to you because I have something for you. I want to bless you and encourage you. Don’t think of me the way you think of promise makers in the world.

He also says the other side of the same coin. He says he’s true, which means he’s faithful. He doesn’t make promises and not deliver on them. He’s not capable of that. It’s all that promise keeping, and speaking of promises, he says, he’s the one who holds the key of David. That’s King David, David and Goliath. He was the great King of Israel. He’s the king of Israel when it’s at the height of its power and its glory. At that moment God came to David. He said David, take a look at your kingdom. It’s impressive, right? You have power, and you have authority, and the money’s coming in, and your borders are expanding, and you have won battle after battle, and I have been with you, and you’re pleased, and you are looking at it going this is pretty great. He said, hey, David, everything you see, it’s nothing you have compared to the kingdom I have coming.

You take everything you see here and you multiply that a thousand-fold over, you are not even scratching the surface of the kingdom I have planned. He made David a promise. He said David, one of your descendants will sit on the throne of this coming kingdom. One of your descendants is going to sit on this kingdom, and that’s a kingdom that will never end. He said, it’s going to go on forever and ever. It’s going to be so much better than you see now, and it’s going to last forever. What Jesus is saying, I’m that guy. I’m that descendant of David. I have the key to that promised kingdom. You see it’s all about promises. And this language about promises immediately begins to tell us that the church of Philadelphia had a promise problem.

Not that they had stopped believing the promises of God, but that they had stopped focusing on them. They were having a hard time keeping hold of and keeping their eyes on these promises that God had made, and they were doing that, they were forgetting those promises, they were losing sight of them because they were facing circumstances that were difficult. The circumstances they were facing, and how they felt about those difficult circumstances was beginning to overshadow the promises of God. How they felt about their present was overshadowing what they knew about the future. You know what we call that? You know what we call how we feel when the present overshadows what we know about the future? We call it discouragement. That’s what discouragement is. Discouragement is what happens when how we feel about the present overshadows what we know about the future. Do you hear me, church?

They were facing discouragement. Jesus just told them, we have to fix that. Here’s what you need to know about me. When I make promises, I keep them. Jesus can be trusted to keep his promises. He can always be trusted to keep his promises. So now he pushes in. He says, okay, here’s the deal. I know you are discouraged. I know you are facing circumstances. I know how you feel about them. You are in a difficult place and they have taken your eyes off the future. They have taken your eyes off the promises, and I get it. I know you are discouraged. The discouragement dragon is coming at you hard -- but your present is not the end of the story. He says this. What he opens, no one can shut. What he shuts, no one can open. Understand for the church in Philadelphia, this was really pointed encouragement. It was really focused because they were literally experiencing closed doors.

You understand, early on the followers of Jesus thought of themselves as Jewish people because Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. He was the one the Jewish scriptures had pointed towards. He was the fulfillment of the Jewish promises and hopes, and so the early followers of Jesus were Jewish people. They thought of themselves as completed Jews. We were the Jews that had been waiting for these promises. We had seen them fulfilled in our lifetime. Even the gentiles -- the non-Jewish people who decided to follow Jesus, they thought we are following a Jewish Messiah, so that makes us Jewish people, right? So they expected that they would become part of the Jewish community in the city. They expected they would become part of the worship services in the Jewish synagogues, but what was happening, the doors were being shut to them.

The ethnic Jewish people, the people who were descended by Abraham by blood, by family, but who didn’t trust in Jesus by faith, they didn’t think he was the Messiah, they were looking at these followers of Jesus saying, you don’t get in here. You don’t have any place in the synagogue. You don’t have any place in the community. You are not part of us, so they are having doors shut in their faces, and that’s discouraging, right? If you have ever had a door shut in your face, you know how discouraging it can be.

My first job, first real job, I was a market researcher at the Springfield Mall in Ohio, which is a really fancy way of saying, I would stand there terrified with a clipboard trying to get random strangers to give me their opinion about peanut butter, or some other random product. It was not an easy job because it’s discouraging. You get doors closed. They get shut in your face. Excuse me, sir, would you --

Ma’am, would you --

This is my favorite one, excuse me -- no! And that’s a door slammed in your face, and it’s discouraging because at that moment, courage gets disconnected. The engine is pulled out of the car and you are like I don’t want to try again. I don’t want to move forward. I don’t like where I am, but I don’t have what it takes to move on from here, and that’s true, whether you are standing there with a clipboard, or whether it’s a relationship
that you thought was going to materialize, and that door got slammed in your face. It’s an opportunity, a job you thought would happen and the door is shut in your face. It’s a promotion that didn’t happen. It’s a college you didn’t get into. It’s a scholarship you didn’t get. It’s a team you didn’t get on.

When the doors are shut in our faces, it’s discouraging. It disconnects courage from us, and we find ourselves stuck there. You understand what Jesus says? He says, I know some doors have been shut in your face, but listen to me. The doors I open, nobody can shut that. You don’t need to worry about that. The doors I open and call you through, don’t you worry about, nobody can shut that. The doors that I shut, nobody else can open. I’m really in charge of all of the doors that count, right? I’m in charge of the doors. I know you have been shut out of the Jewish synagogue. I know you have been shut out of the Jewish community. I know that’s disappointing. I know it’s discouraging. I’m sorry that happened, but I want you to know, for the doors that really matter, I have the keys.

Look what he says, he says this, he says, I know your deed, verse 8. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. An open door that no one can shut. I want you to notice it’s “an” open door. It’s not open doors. Sometimes people use this verse to talk about, this is how you know God’s will for your life. This is how you discern what God wants you to do. This is how you figure out what God wants you to do. You look for open doors. I’m not saying that’s not part of it because honestly, God is never going to call you to something that he doesn’t open the door for. He’s never going to stand on the other side of the door nailed shut and say come on through and just watch you bang your face into it. He’s not going to do that, okay. God will open whatever door he calls you to, but just because the door is open doesn’t necessarily mean Jesus is calling you to go through it, right?

I mean think about the internet. Let’s talk about the internet for a second. The internet has opened all kinds of doors you and I have no business going through. Just because you can get through the door doesn’t mean you are supposed to go on the other side of that open door. This isn’t about discerning God’s will. He says, it’s “an” open door. It’s one. He’s talking about one all-important open door. It’s the door to his kingdom. It’s the door to his presence. It’s the door to his family. He says, yeah, you might have been shut out of the Jewish community, but don’t you worry about that. Yeah, you might have had the door of the synagogue closed in your face, but don’t you worry about that. The door that really matters, it’s open in front of you.

What Jesus is saying, very simply is this, he’s saying I’ve got the only keys to the doors that really matter. That’s our first weapon to fighting against discouragement. It’s remembering no matter what the doors are, and you and I know what those are in our own lives, right? The discouragement, don’t worry about those because remember this, weapon number one, remember this, Jesus is the only one with the keys to the doors that really matter. If that door has been shut to you, as disappointing, discouraging as that is, at the end of the day, that door does not matter.

We always feel like that, right? Those doors along the way that get shut we go, but this is really important. Jesus goes don’t worry about that door. This door, it’s open. And this door is the only one that matters. We are a little bit like sometimes, like the little kid who’s got the balloon, and we are so upset because we let go of the balloon and it got away, and we lost that, but we are on our way to Disneyland, and we are crying along the way because we lost the balloon. We are like, you are going to Disneyland. That’s what Jesus is saying, hey, don’t you worry about those doors. I know they are discouraging, but you have to take a longer view. Remember, I have the keys to the door that only matters. Remember that, and you will be able to fight against discouragement.

He says -- he says, I know that you have little strength, and yet you have kept my Word and you have not denied my name. I love what he does here. Such a powerful weapon against the discouragement dragon. What he’s doing here, he’s shifting their focus. He starts off, and he goes I know where you are. I know what you are struggling with. I know what you are feeling about the present. He says, I know you have little strength. What that means in context is, it means I know you are not a big church. I know you are not a large group of believers in that city. There is not a lot of Christians there. You are not a church with a lot of numbers. You are not a church with a lot of power. You don’t have a lot of influence. I know that. The irony is, he’s just said, I know your deeds. Did you catch that a little while ago?

You might have thought when he said I know your deeds, there’s that word again. We keep seeing it over and over again. Jesus uses the word “deeds” to say, I know that you have been working hard to shine the light of the Gospel in the world. That’s what that “deeds” word means. You have been working hard to get the light of the Gospel up high for everyone to see. He’s told them, you have done a good job with that, but I know you have little strength. In other words, I know that your work to shine the light of the Gospel has not brought the results you were hoping for. You haven’t seen a lot of church growth. You haven’t seen a lot of new people coming to faith in me. You are working hard to do it, but you haven’t seen the results you are hoping for, and I know that, that’s discouraging.

It’s interesting; it’s almost opposite the exact opposite assessment that we got to the church we looked at a couple of weeks ago, the church of Thyatira. There he said, like, I know you have a reputation for being alive. From the outside everybody looks at you and goes, man, you guys are killing it as a church. Your numbers are going up. You are getting bigger. You have more power and influence, but inside, I know you are not alive. You are a zombie church. You have the appearance of life without the actual substance. You are not getting people across. You have more people from the world coming to church, but that’s not the goal, guys. The goal is not to get more people coming to the church, the goal is to get more people from the church out in the world. To the church of Thyatira, he’s says, you’re not doing that right, but here, he’s saying, you are doing your deeds. You are doing a good job, but I know it hasn’t produced the results you were looking for, and I know that’s discouraging.
And it is, right? Think about something you have hoped to see, maybe it’s in your marriage, maybe it’s your kids, maybe it’s in your job, or it’s in some circumstance where you think, I have some results. I would love to see that. I’m longing to see the results, I’m really hoping for it, and it just hasn’t materialized. That gets discouraging, does it? But I want you to notice what Jesus does. I want you to shift your focus. He says, I know you haven’t seen the results you are hoping for. He shifts their focus and says, yet, but -- you have kept my Word and you have not denied my name. Two things, really, they are two sides of the same coin. He says, you have kept my Word and throughout the Gospels when Jesus talks about his Word, he’s talking about his claim, who he is.

He claims to be the unique Son of God who brought salvation into the world, and by trusting in him we move from death to life. That’s his Word. We see it over and over again in the Gospels. Here he says you have kept my Word. You have clung to my claim. You have kept your faith in me. You are not putting your hope in anything else, and he says, you have not denied my name. To do anything in the name of someone in the ancient world meant to be publicly loyal to that person. He says, you have not denied my name. You have not stepped back. You haven’t pulled away from public loyalty to me. You are continuing on mission. You continue to live in such a way that people continue to know, you are with Jesus, right? You are one of those Jesus freaks, right? And they have said proudly—yup, that’s me.

He says, you have nailed that. I know you haven’t seen the results you are hoping for, but in terms of being faithful, clinging to my claim and publicly acknowledging me, in terms of my being faithful, you are killing it. Here’s the deal, that’s what you are really responsible for. What Jesus is doing is, he’s giving them the really important truth. Sometimes our eyes are on the wrong thing. He’s saying, God doesn’t focus -- listen to me, church -- God doesn’t focus on the results we are hoping for. His focus is on the faithfulness that we are responsible for. Do you hear me? He says, yeah, I see it. I know you haven’t got the results you are looking for. I get it. I know that’s discouraging. I’m sorry, but listen, I’m not paying anything attention to that. Here is where I am paying attention. Faithfulness you are responsible for, and you guys are killing it. You’re nailing it, and that’s all I really care about.

There is a truth implied here which is this, those results we are hoping for, they are not up to us. The results that we are hoping for, they are up to God. So what He gives us here is a powerful weapon to fight against discouragement. The reality is, if we focus on the results we are hoping for, when they don’t manifest, what do we end up with? Discouragement. It disconnects courage from our lives, and so He gives us that very powerful weapon, basically, it’s this: It’s focus on being faithful to the work we are responsible for, not the results we are hoping for. I’ll show you how this works in my life. I’m a results-oriented guy. I don’t think there is anything wrong with it. I’m not apologizing for it. Jesus was a results-oriented guy. He said the harvest is plentiful. The workers are few. We need more workers. Start praying for results. Get us more workers.

He said go into all of the world and make disciples. That’s results. Now he also cared about relationships. We have to do both. Value results and value relationships. Both of those are really important. I’m not going to apologize for focusing on results or caring about them. Where I know I struggle, though, sometimes I get so forced or so fixated on those results, and when I don’t see them manifest, I get discouraged. Like for instance, I know that the purpose of the Church is to hold the light of the Gospel up for the world to see. That’s why we are still here. I know therefore, that Mission Hills as the local church, the purpose of Mission Hills is to put the light of the Gospel up on the hill, or actually, multiple hills, we are Mission Hills, right? Get the light of the Gospel up in communities and shine it for the world to see. That’s why we exist.

But I’m also a data guy, kind of a data junky, and I have data that says 95% of the South Denver area, 95% of the people of South Denver are unreached or unengaged by the Gospel of Christ. 95%. Let me tell you what that means in practical numbers. That means in a five-mile radius around Mission Hills Littleton campus, five-mile radius around Mission Hills Littleton campus, 240,000 people unreached, unengaged with the Gospel. Five miles around our Dove Valley Campus, 214,000 unreached people. Mission Hills en Español, they are focused only, exclusively on Spanish speakers. In a five-mile radius there’s 12,000 unreached, unengaged Spanish speakers around our Mission Hills en Español. We are closing in on 500,000 unreached, unengaged people in just five-mile radius around our existing campuses. Understand, those aren’t just numbers. Don’t think of those just as statistics, right? Those are people.

Those are people made in the image of God that are far from God and they are facing an eternity in that same state, and I can get discouraged. Man, we are not making a big enough impact. We are not reaching the lost fast enough. We are not having the results of reaching the Gospel into the world and seeing our lives transform to the degree that I would like it, and what happens, when I focus on those results, I get what? I get discouraged. And Jesus says, why are your eyes on those results? You know those are up to me, right? You are not responsible for results. I know you are hoping for it. That’s fine. There’s nothing wrong with the hopes, but you are not responsible for that. You are responsible for faithfulness, and Craig, he said to me this week, this is what your faithfulness looks like. You preach the Word of God faithfully.

You preach the Word of God clearly. You lead the church with authenticity and vulnerability. You lead the staff with honesty and integrity and with humility. He said that’s what you are responsible for. You focus on that. Don’t focus on the results you are hoping for. You focus on the faithfulness that you are responsible for. I’m using an example from church life, but you understand this principle is true in every one of our lives. Your marriage doesn’t look like you want it to look like? Stop focusing on what you hope your marriage will end up looking like, and start focusing on what God has called you to do in that marriage right here, right now, what you are responsible for. How you are responsible for treating your husband or your wife, how you are responsible to love and to sacrifice and to be gracious.

You are frustrated with the way your relationship with your kids is turning out? Your kids are not exactly how you ordered them, right? You are...
looking at your kids going this is not the kid I ordered. I ordered a different one. Did Amazon prime get the order wrong? What happened here? God says stop. Stop focusing on the results you are hoping for. You start focusing on the faith you are responsible for. You love this kid the way that I have called you to love this kid. You serve this kid. You lead this kid. You discipline this kid. You do all of this in the way that I have called you to. Man, my word is clear on what you are called to do as a parent. You start focusing not on the results you are hoping but the faithfulness you are responsible for.

It may be, it's not a promise, but it might just be that, that faithfulness is what God uses to bring about those results that you long for, but that's in His hands. Incredibly powerful weapon to begin fighting against discouragement. I'm going to be honest with you, this is probably the one message I have ever preached in my entire life that I am likely to be a complete hypocrite, to say do as I say not as I do. Because I can lose that focus so easy. Well, this person, they left the church. I can ignore the fact that these hundred people came to the church, that we see salvations every week. This person doesn't like what's happened. This person doesn't like the message and how I feel about the present overshadows what I know about the future. My focus on results that I'm longing for begin to overshadow my focus on the faithfulness that I'm responsible for, and I can get discouraged. I struggle with it. I do. This is the Word of God.

It's true in church life. It's true in family life. It's true in business. It's true everywhere. Focus. Fix your eyes on the faithfulness you are responsible for, not the results you are hoping for. He says, I'll make those who are of the synagogue of Satan who claim to be Jews, though they are not, they are liars. That sounds antagonistic. It's not antagonist. It's ironic. He says, you have Jewish people, people descended from Abraham. They are ethnically Jewish. They ought to be my people. They claim to be my people, but they are not. They are a synagogue of Satan, which again, sounds antagonistic, but it's ironic because the Hebrew word Satan literally means adversary.

So he says to the Christians there, the Jewish synagogue, the Jewish community should have been your greatest advocates, but they have become your greatest adversaries. I know that's discouraging. The people you thought were going to help you out turned out to betray you. They shut the doors in your face. I know that's discouraging, but listen, I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Understand that's exactly what the Christians in Philadelphia are being told by the Jewish synagogues, by the Jewish community. You are gentiles. You're not descended from Abraham. God doesn't love you. You have no place in His promises. You have no place in His places. God says, no, no, no. They are wrong. You have faith in me? You're mine. My love for you is undeniable. They are going to see it someday.

Someday they are going to come and fall down and say we were wrong. God has loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the Earth. Oh boy. Some of you know. Listen, we need to deal with something here, but I don't want to get derailed by it here, so help me out. We are going to deal with it, but I don't want to get derailed. There is a phrase here that has become a battle ground for Bible-believing Christians. For people who are supposed to be on mission with Jesus, there is a battle here over interpretation over something Jesus says that's taken up way too much time and energy. I want to deal with it. I'm not going to skim over it, but I also don't want to get derailed by it.

The phrase I'm talking about is, he says, I'll keep you from the hour of trial that is coming. What he's talking about is a period of history, we see it described later on in the Book of Revelation in more detail. We find it in other passages of the New Testament. There is an hour coming, a time of history coming where following Jesus is going to be harder than it ever has in any other point in history. Following Jesus is going to come with more resistance, more pushback, more persecution than anyone has ever seen. I believe that period -- we call it the Great Tribulation. That's the technical term for it. The Great Tribulation. That period hasn't come yet. It's still in the future, so -- you're welcome. You might have to face it someday. What he says is a promise, right?

I will keep you from that hour of trial. Basically, he says, I have your back, okay? That hour of trial, you don't need to worry about that. Because you have endured patiently, and because you have dealt with all of these other setbacks and slammed doors and things like that, and because you have not allowed them to disconnect your courage, and you have kept moving forward with me, because you have done that, I have your back when it comes to this big one. I'm going to keep you from it. Here's where the debate comes in. I'm going to deal with it, but I don't want to get derailed by it, okay?

There is one view among Christians that says, when he says he will keep us from, what that means is he's going to take us from the Earth. He's going to remove us from planet Earth before we get to that really big tribulation period. This is called the pre-tribulation rapture view. Now we're preaching, right? Right? Pre--- before, tribulation -- before that big hour of trial, rapture, take them from the Earth. I grew up with that. I never heard there was any other option. That was the only thing I had ever heard, and I believed it because there is certainly Biblical passage that you can go to, to support that particular view. He said that's how God is going to protect us from the Tribulation. He's going to take us away from it.

Then I got to seminary, and we started studying this, and I had a moment of panic because I thought I had ended up accidently at a very liberal seminary because they said, there's another option, and I went, no, there's not. If there was another option, I would have heard about it. They said, no, there's Bible believing Christians for thousands of years that have believed in the post tribulation rapture. The post -- after, tribulation, that hour of trial, taking from the Earth. I said how would that work? They said, well, it's a little bit like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. You remember that story? Three followers of God, they were thrown into furnace and God kept them from harm. They didn't get thrown into the furnace and beep, they teleported away. Didn't happen. God protected them from harm in the midst of it.
Daniel – Daniel got thrown into the lion’s den. He didn’t beep, get teleported somewhere else safe. But God shut the mouth of the lion. The lion wasn’t able to harm Daniel, right? He protected him from harm in the midst of it, and so the post tribulation rapture view, on the basis of several passages in scripture says, we think what’s going to happen is God is going to protect us from harm in the midst of it, so which is it? Doesn’t matter. And I know I just made a whole lot of people really mad, because for some of you, that issue is way more important than it should be, okay? We are not going to divide the church talking about this. Bible believing Christians believe in the pre, and Bible believing Christians believe in the post.

I actually, I’m dealing with it. I don’t want to get derailed by it, but I don’t want to skip over it. I find myself kind of persuaded toward the post tribulation rapture view now, on the basis of my study of scripture. I’m hoping for pre. Don’t get me wrong. I’m hoping that, that particular view, I’m mistaken about it. I’m hoping I’m gone – I’m just not convinced, but it doesn’t really matter because at the end of the day, Jesus says, I’ve got your back. Because you have endured faithfully, I have your back on this big thing coming up. Don’t worry about it. Don’t get your eyes on it. Keep your eyes on the promises of God and keep moving forward with the courage. He says, I’ve got it.

He says, I’m coming soon, verse 11. He says hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown. What do we have? We have faith in a risen Lord. We have faith in a risen Savior right? You understand that Christianity is rooted in the resurrection. The resurrection is a fact of history. It’s not a matter of opinion. It happened, and that’s why they wrote the Bible. It happened. That’s why they wrote the Gospel is because Jesus didn’t just come and teach those things that were impressive and be like, we should write all of this down? No, they thought this is really good stuff and then he died and came back to life and they went, we need to go back and think very seriously about everything he said up to this point, because when someone dies and comes back, you suddenly like, we should give this guy a closer look, right?

This is a fact of history. He says hold on to what you have, hold on to a faith in a risen Savior because it’s that faith that leads to all of the promises of God in the future. Hold on to what you have so that no one will take those promises, that crown from you. He says the one who is victorious, I’ll make a pillar at the temple of my God, never again will they leave it, and that’s just so cool because understand the Christians in Philadelphia were being shut out of the synagogues. The synagogue’s nothing compared to the temple because for the Jewish people, the synagogue, that’s where the presence of God dwelt.

So people who are being shut out of the synagogues, there’s no way they were ever going to be allowed to go to the temple to go in the presence of God, right? They would have very clearly had that door shut in their face, and God says, no, no, no. I’m not just going to let you into the temple. I’m going to make you part of it. You don’t just get to go into the presence of God, I’m going to make you one of the foundations that manifest the presence of God in the world. You are going to go on mission with me, and other people are going to encounter the presence of God because of you. You don’t just get to come to God; you get to take God out to the world. You don’t just get to get in, I’m going to make you part of the temple itself.

He says I’ll write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of the heaven from my God, and I will also write on them my new name. Understand these are promises, okay? We have come full circle now. He said you can trust me to keep my promises. I’m holy and true. I don’t make promises to you to get something from you. I’m not like the world. I make promises to you because I have something for you. Now he says, here’s what I’ve got for you. Three things, I’ll write on them the name of my God. You got Jewish people who didn’t follow Jesus looking at these followers of Jesus whether they are Jewish or gentile say, you are not God’s people. You don’t belong to him. He says, no, no, no. I’ve branded them. I have written my name on them. They belong to me.

He says, second promise, I’m going to write on them the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem. See, they are set out of the synagogue. They wouldn’t have been welcome in the city. Jerusalem was the heartbeat. It was the center of Israelite religion and life because that’s where the temple was, right? He said that city’s not that impressive. There’s a new city coming, a new place of God coming. It’s going to come down out of the heavens, and it’s going to come to rest upon the Earth, and that city, you are going to get in. Why? Because you have the name of that city on you. You belong to God, and you belong in His city. That’s home for you. He says, and I’m going to write on them my new name. It’s an interesting one. Nobody is 100% sure what it means. Here’s what I think it means. Right now, those of us who cling to the claims of Jesus, put our faith in Jesus, we do so by faith, right?

It’s a matter of faith. It’s not -- it’s not something that everybody can say, yeah, there’s no question about it. There are people that don’t put their faith -- we do it by faith. It’s not a faithless faith. It’s not a faith that’s not based on any kind of evidence or reason. The reality, as I said earlier, the resurrection happened. We don’t even need the Bible to prove the resurrection, there is all kinds of other stuff from the first century. We know the resurrection happened. That’s evidence enough that Jesus is who he said he is, but the reality is, we still trust in Jesus by faith, but he says there’s a day coming where there won’t be faith necessary.

There is a day coming where Jesus will be revealed in all of his glory, and all of the questions will be wiped away and everyone will know, yeah, yeah. He is the Son of God he claimed to be, no question about it, but he says at that moment, those of you that put your faith in me now, I’m going to write my new name on you. You’re going to keep it right under the sleeve, and then one day when the mask comes off and the glory of God is fully revealed, and Jesus is shown to everybody for who he is, and everybody goes, yeah, that’s who he is, you are going to pull that up and go, yeah, I have had it there all along.
Because we belong to God. We belong in His city, and we belong with our Savior forever. These are the promises of God, and that’s your third weapon. Maybe it’s the most powerful weapon we have against the discouragement dragon. Focus. Focus on what we know about the future. Not how we feel about the present, you hear me? You hear me, church? This is so important. Like I know how discouragement feels. I know how hard it is. I know that in all of our campuses, many of us are facing deep discouragement. How we feel about the presence over shadowing what we know about the future and the promises we have from God, but Jesus says, you have to get your eyes off of the present. You have to focus on what you know about the future because of what you know about me, not on how you feel about the present.

Whoever has ears; let them hear what the spirit says to the churches. This is what I want you to do this week. I want to challenge you to memorize Revelation 3:8. It encapsulates in some way the essence of all of this encouragement on how to beat discouragement. He says, I know your deeds. I know you are on a mission with me. Look, I have placed before you an open door, the only one that matters, and nobody can shut it. I know you have little strength. You haven’t seen all of the results you are hoping for, but you have been faithful in what you have been responsible for. You have kept my Word, and you have not denied my name. I want you to write that somewhere, and I want you to put it somewhere where you can see it to help you memorize it.

I want you to memorize it. If you want to grab one of these cards, the greeters at the back of the worship center will have these in the way. Grab one. Put it somewhere to help you do this. I want you to memorize that first. I want you to wrestle with three questions. These questions are on here. You can get them online and on the church app too. Three questions to wrestle with this week. Number one, where do I need to shift my focus from the results I’m hoping for to the faithfulness I’m responsible for? Where do I need to shift focus? I believe God is calling you to shift your focus from something that hasn’t materialized to something that is absolutely certain, and to focus in the meantime on what you are actually responsible, the faithfulness that you are responsible for.

The second question is, what discouragement can I defeat? What little jab of the discouragement dragon can I fend off by reminding myself that Jesus is the opener of the only doors that really matter, and third question, what do I know about my future with God that gives me the courage to overcome how I feel about the present? Memorize Revelation 3:8. Write it on your heart, and then wrestle with these questions. I would like to pray over you right now. I believe in all of our campuses, including many of you watching church online, you are facing deep discouragement, and I want to pray a blessing over you. God of courage, God of promise keeping, God of hope, I’m going to lift up my brother and sisters right now, especially the many of them that I know are facing discouragement, something dismantling courage. It’s disconnecting courage from their lives, it’s making it hard to move forward, Lord. Their eyes are stuck on results they haven’t seen they are hoping for.

How they are feeling about the present is overshadowing what they know about the future with you. What they have seen closed doors, and they feel like those doors mean more than they really do in the long run. Lord, for my brothers and sisters right now, I want to beg you, would you pour courage into them? Would you lift their eyes off of the things that bring discouragement, and would you fix them on your face? Would you fix them on the promises? Would you fix them on the future that is certain because of their faith in Jesus? Would you pour courage into them to move forward? In the name of and in the promises of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.