

X. Eternity in Biblical Perspective
If I Should Die Before I Wake...
“To Be Earthly Good, You’ve Got to be Heavenly Minded”
II Peter 3:4–13
plus
Conversations with Harry and Bruce
March 28, 2021 • Sunday Evening Sermon

I’d like to start out by looking at II Peter and make a couple of comments on it before we get to the question and answer time. This is the second letter Peter is writing to the beloved and he is addressing the scoffing that had been taking place.

II Peter 3:4–13 says [4] *They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.”* [5] *For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the Word of God,* [6] *and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.* [7] *But by the same Word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

[8] *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* [9] *The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* [10] *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*

[11] *Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,* [12] *waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!* [13] *But according to His promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

We have been in a series titled *If I Should Die Before I Wake* so let’s put that in context. This series came out of the Apostles’ Creed series in which we found out that this creed honors the solemn promise that the Messiah will come, His body will go to the tomb but not suffer decay and His soul will go to the place of the dead, hades. This is the immediate place the believer (the place of blessing for the soul, Abraham’s bosom, paradise) and unbeliever (the place of torment, the abyss) will go after their death but it’s not the ultimate place they will go. The ultimate for the believer is the new heavens and the new earth and the ultimate for the unbeliever is Gehenna, the lake of fire of eternal judgment. The Apostles’ Creed shows Jesus had a true death with a human body and a soul which will do exactly what yours will do, but His body didn’t stay there for on the third day His body and soul were raised and united into that glorified body that we will have also in the ultimate dwelling place with Him.

So that is what started this series as this title was taken from the prayer most of us learned as a child – If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take. This does two things. You need to be saved and ready. We have to look back to when Jesus came the first time. He came to save His people from their sins. Christ’s first coming is the foundation of the Gospel and all of our confidence and assurance of everlasting life. Christ is our hope in life and death and on what He did to finish the work of redemption and what He doing with the work on His

redeemed to bring us to be with Him. We look back on His Incarnation, life, death and resurrection for our foundation and we look forward with anticipation. So I reject the notion that ‘Christians are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good’ for I don’t think you can be earthly good until you are heavenly minded.

John calls the second coming the blessed hope and the Blessed Hope is that which purifies according to I John 3:3. It doesn’t make us careless but it makes us careful. There are three parables that follow the Olivet Discourse that point you to the coming of the end of time. While no man knows the day or hour of Christ’s return as He comes like a thief in the night, that thief is more applicable to the unbeliever because they will be like those in the days of Noah, business as usual. They will be taken away in judgment when He comes while we will be left in the security of Christ to be deposited in a new heavens and a new earth. When He comes He finds His people waiting for His coming. They are ready, lamps are lit, but they are not unengaged.

Titus 2:11–14 says *[11] For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, [12] training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, [13] waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, [14] who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works.*

So the first coming of Christ is our foundation in life and death and the second coming of Christ is our anticipation. Right now in our culture the current dominate ideology in the culture elite that is shaping the thinking in our culture is based on this; there is chaos and problems but the savior is the government, the state and we will give you a utopia. While we want to bring the blessing of God to society through the Gospel, we know there will never be a utopia here. We will always be fighting the dystopia of sin and that’s why we’re able to live now because we’re anticipating the blessings that only Christ can provide when He comes again. We seek to impact this world for Christ so when He comes we are found faithful with the lamps lit as the Holy Spirit is filling us and the Word of God is coming from us.

Let’s hasten the coming of the Lord by staying on mission, on message and in ministry and then with anticipation let’s look forward to that day when He comes and we will be with Him in a new heavens and a new earth. So, let’s get into our question and answer time now.

XLI. Conversations with Harry and Bruce

Bruce: Before we get started in the Q & A, I would like to remind everyone about the devotional we have available for this week – Holy Week. You can either download our Briarwood app or go to our website at <https://briarwood.org/holy-week>. As people go through this week chronologically, pastor, can you give an overview physically what Jesus and the disciples did because it kind of repeats itself.

Harry: They probably stayed the night with Mary, Martha and Lazarus and returned the trip the next day when Jesus curses the fig tree in which He explains why He did that at the Olivet Discourse later. They will come back down and then on that day He will cleanse the temple. After He cleanses the temple there is a third day which will be full of teaching and He is also approached by Gentiles through Philip who had a Gentile name and he brings them to Jesus. As the Gentiles are brought to Him Jesus says in John 12:23, *[23] And Jesus answered them, “The*

hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.” Jesus was coming to His people in order to reach the world with the Gospel of peace.

I believe they then stay Wednesday night on the Mount of Olives in the Garden of Gethsemane and then I believe that’s when the Olivet Discourse is going to be given. On Thursday He institutes the Lord’s Supper – the last Passover, the first Lord’s Supper – in anticipation of the Lamb’s Supper. That night He has the prayer meeting, then He is arrested, will go through six trials – three Gentile, three Jewish – during that night. I have done a lot of research and the Via Delarosa that is advertised is not the real Via Delarosa for it actually starts up at the old Herodian palace near the tower gate of David from which He makes His way outside into the place and on the day of the sacrifice of the lamb, He will not only fulfill that day but fulfill the day of atonement which was months earlier, by what He does on the cross. Then He will rest in the grave on the Sabbath and will come forth on the first day of the week. In Hebrew cosmology the night starts the day. So Friday night is a day, Saturday is a day and Sunday morning is a day and that’s why it fulfills the three days and three nights as they are put together – any portion of one begets the whole. He will go to hades, paradise and then be raised with His glorified body in which He will minister in for 40 days before His ascension from that same Mount of Olives back into heaven. When He comes back He will return by way of the Mount of Olives according to the Zechariah 9 passage but it won’t be a north south valley, He will split east west on that day.

Bruce: If you ever get the opportunity to go to this area the Scriptures really begin to come alive and you won’t be able to do anything but talk about Jerusalem. As you go through holy week create your own chronology because what really matters is what Jesus teaches during this week. Jesus knows it’s His last week of teaching and when you realize that you begin to see His teachings take on a whole new meaning.

Harry: I do wish I could take everyone with me with I go to Israel because when you get on site you get insight.

Bruce: There is the instructions that Jesus gives the disciples about the Passover meal, but surely this couldn’t have been the first Passover meal Jesus participated in with His disciples, so the question is, are there any acknowledgments or other passages describing other Passover meals that Jesus would have celebrated with them and if so, how did He handle the focus on the coming Messiah in those meals?

Harry: If that was His first Passover meal then He couldn’t go die for my sins because He would not have a perfect righteousness because one of the commands was to observe the Passover. In fact, John records in Jesus’ public ministry all three times Jesus did the meal. It’s in John 2, 6 and then John 13. We do know from Luke 2 that His father and mother regularly whenever they could brought their family to the various feasts in Jerusalem. We know that when Jesus preached at the synagogue at Capernaum He opened the Bible as was His custom. The family of Jesus – Joseph took his family to church and took the church to his family. In fact in the account of John 2 is where His brothers first account their mocking of Jesus of what He should really do if He is the Messiah – like go show Yourself. They were right for it was at the Passover that He was going to show Himself but they just had the wrong one for it will be at His third Passover in His public ministry.

Bruce: What specifically causes Jesus to weep for Jerusalem?

Harry: It was because they had rejected the Gospel of peace and the passage is very clear. We're not sure if it was two times He wept that week or one but we do know He stopped and wept on the day of His triumphal entry. Luke 19:41–42 says [41] *And when He (Jesus) drew near and saw the city, He wept over it, [42] saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."* Jesus had appeared over thousands of years through Christophanies and now He was there in His Incarnate body and they rejected Him which tells us the thing that keeps us from coming to Christ is our self-absorption and our sin nature which is why He tells us you must be born again to see and enter the Kingdom of God. While God will be glorified in the punishment of the evil into the lake of fire, God takes no delight in the death of the wicked.

Bruce: That's a hard balance, even for us today.

Harry: Yes, you stand up, you fight and you hate sin but you realize you have to love sinners with the Gospel even as you hate sin. You have to speak truth in love and that's a hard thing to do but we can do this with the help of the Holy Spirit. We can bring a fierce adversity against sin and hate it. Billy Sunday, an American evangelist, said 'I'll beat as long as I have hands, I'll stomp it as long as I have feet and when I lose my teeth I'll gum it to death.' We hate sin – our sin and any sin that stands in rebellion against God, but we love and reach out to sinners. Jesus was not a friend to sin but killed, destroyed and conquered sin, death, hell and the grave, is also a Friend to sinners to save them.

Bruce: In the last few years it feels like we live in an environment of increasing tension, establishing a life view of "we/they" which kind of puts them as the enemy and in such contention now that we're against them as opposed to rescue the perishing.

Harry: We too readily let the world's identity markers become our identity markers. I see Christians dividing up on whether they are going to wear a mask or not. A man asked me today if I had received a COVID-19 vaccine and I said I did and then he said 'I didn't.' I said 'Well, praise the Lord, so can you praise the Lord for me?' He said 'Oh yeah, that's good, praise the Lord.' Our identity is Christ, for to me to live is Christ as Paul said. We understand these identity markers, ethnicity, demographics, social and economic are in the world and they have to be addressed by bringing the justice, grace and mercy of God to bear upon life but our identity in the body of Christ is neither Jew or Gentile for in Christ we are one. We love one another in the Lord and that ought to be seen. Our mission is the Great Commission and we have a culture called the Great Commandment and that's what needs to be developed in the body of Christ. We can't do it if we keep letting the world frame our identities.

Bruce: This next question speaks to Jesus going to the temple. It makes me wonder if Jesus were to come into the church today what would it be that He turns over or throws out or rebukes?

Harry: Why did God make us? He made us for the praise of His glory to worship. Why does God save us? To the praise of His glory and grace. Why does God sustain us? So that

everything that has breath will praise the Lord. Worship is a capstone of Christianity – gathered worship and life worship. Here was the presence of the Lord at the temple so declared but His presence, the glory of the Lord after Ichabod never returned to the second temple not even though refurbished was considered the eighth wonder of the world that Herod had created, but there they came to worship. It was structured to teach us how to worship. People came into the temple in various manners and there was a curtain that divided the latter part from the Holy of Holies. Somebody had to do something to bring that curtain down.

When a person went to temple mount for worship there was a process of arriving, of preparing, of the sacrifice and then the worship was to take place. What was done was the selling of the things of worship were done right outside the temple and they were supposed to be outside the city at the Mount of Olives. In the days of Jesus we know there was a large wooden bridge that went over to the Mount of Olives for that purpose of bringing those things there used for worship. They wanted to get close to the action and make money, so the money changers, the banks of the day, work their way into the temple. When people are bartering for lambs for sacrifice right there at the temple, what has that done to worship? That is why we get up early for Him to call us to preparation, to prepare our hearts to give praise to God. They had totally adulterated worship and it had become all about them. That is why God gives us the elements of worship so we know how to worship Him, not only in spirit but in truth as He says what pleases Him in worship. Look at our bulletin at church or online of how we approach, prepare and sing His praises.

The other reason Jesus is upset is that He had already done this when He came to the first Passover and cleansed the temple. Now at the end of His public ministry they are all back in place making money again. So, He cleanses the temple for the second time. I think the evidence is clear He cleansed it twice and I'm sure someone is thinking if He cleansed it the first time then why did He have to do it again. Have you ever sinned and then did it again? Here, we see the patience and persistence of Jesus and how His anger is against sin. He wants to drive out the sin that God's people might worship, but yet the people He weeps over, even those who would reject Him and His Word.

Bruce: Here is a powerful passage from Matthew 27:50–54 which says [50] *And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit.*

[51] *And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. [52] The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, [53] and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.* So the next question is did they have to die again?

Harry: It is obvious they have been in an intermediate state because their bodies are in the grave and these are saints so they have been with the Lord. This instance here doesn't happen until Jesus dies. Technically His body dies and His soul is separated but the soul never dies. His soul goes to paradise, the hades part of blessing. The text tells us there is an earthquake when He dies and the sovereign God knows exactly where He is going to send that tremor, straight to that temple and the curtain will be torn in two. Why? It is because now you have access to die and it's not by the sacrifice of bulls and goats but by the Lamb of God who has just given Himself. There is the declaration of the victory over sin and death. The stinger of death is sin and Jesus

has paid for our sins. Death is now conquered and He will demonstrate it three days later, but now He demonstrates it.

We see in the very next verse of Matthew 27:54 of a centurion witnessing this; [54] *When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"* This is one of the gatherings of the signs, wonders and miracles in these eight days that is absolutely extraordinary that is absolutely directed at something that is absolutely significant and that is Christ's victory at His death. Christ doesn't make victory possible, Christ is victory. Christ has won a victory and satisfied God's wrath to magnify God's grace to save us and the affirmation of it will be in His resurrection three days later, but right now He is giving some signals. One of those signals is tearing the curtain at the temple – no more sacrifices needed to get to the Holy of Holies. The Sacrifice has been given by the Lamb of God.

This is why I think this generation is judged. I believe the abomination of desolation is not me going to find some pagan general who did something in the temple, but what do the people there in Jerusalem do under their leadership? They put the curtain back. In fact, extra Biblical historians tell us they doubled the curtain – made it heavier and put in two of them. They also started the sacrifices back. That is the abomination of desolation, therefore this generation will come under His judgment in 66 to 76 A.D. Back to the text.

So after the curtain is torn in two graves are opened up. In other words, this earthquake also hit graveyards and those would have all been outside the city. Not all the saints but some of them are resurrected where their body and soul are joined together in a glorified body but the text indicates they are not seen until after the resurrection. So it seems as if they were raised at His death – a specific number of saints for a specific purpose – remaining outside of the city until the resurrection of Jesus and then they were seen.

I don't know what happened to them but I will be glad to give you my opinion. I think that Jesus sent them onto heaven because they have a glorified body now. I think Lazarus had a resurrection body but he didn't get a glorified body therefore he had to die again. So those that Jesus raised from death during His public ministry had to die again. I think that Jesus sent them to heaven sometime after His resurrection and prior to His ascension. He already has Elijah and Moses there so it's okay to send some more there and that's what I think happened.

Bruce: Now let's go to Jesus' glorified body verses His resurrected body and the question is why did they not recognize Him, like the women at the tomb and the disciples on the road to Emmaus? So, is it a different body that He is appearing in that they wouldn't recognize Him?

Harry: There are three accounts on that day where they don't recognize Him. Mary doesn't recognize Him and thinks He's a gardener. The disciples on the road to Emmaus don't recognize Him and then later when He meets the 11 Disciples at the Sea of Galilee, they didn't recognize Him.

He does have a different body that is a glorified body. I don't understand all of how the spiritual and the physical are united in this glorified body but I do know it's a glorified body. I do know it's recognizable. There are at least 13 appearances of Jesus after His resurrection. Now there is one instance where it tells us that He prevented them from recognizing Him. We know the others recognized Him because Paul tells us to go talk with them because they have seen Him (I Corinthians 15:3–8). How can they be witnesses to Jesus being resurrected if they didn't recognize Him? I think the not recognizing is not because the glorified body is not

recognizable but that God prevented them from recognizing Him in all three of those accounts.

So why did He prevent those from recognizing Him? He prevented Mary because He wanted to emphasize that she recognized Him when He spoke to her. That's where we are right now for we see Jesus by faith when we hear the Word so we see the importance of God's Word whereby we fix our spiritual eyes on Jesus. I think where the Disciples were concerned out on the Sea that part of it was due to distance, their age but when He spoke and the 153 fish appear in their net they know who is there.

Bruce: How old will a person be when they get to heaven?

Harry: Babies that die are not babies forever and old people that die are not old people forever but I do not know the answer to that. I do know it will be a perfect body for all eternity and no consequences of the corruption of the fall will be upon it. It will be a body that will be untainted by the consequences of sin in this world and a body in which we cannot sin. My guess is that whatever age God made Adam and Eve in the appearance of the world will be the "age" we will be but we won't age in heaven. I think the same thing about Jesus, for He was 33 when He received His glorified body so I think it's something around there, but that's speculation. What was the mature age? You couldn't be a priest until you were 30 and so I think Adam and Eve were made around that age, but those are my thoughts on this. I don't think there will be wrinkles (smile).

Bruce: We are saved when we admit to God that we are sinners and we repent from our sins, when we by faith receive Jesus Christ, God's Son and accept His forgiveness for our sins and confess our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, so what about the people who were born before Christ, like Abraham, Noah, etc., how were they saved?

Harry: I would like to start by working this backwards. Do you think anyone will be in heaven because they work their way in? We are saved by grace through faith in Christ and the same thing goes for them. They just didn't have the clarity of revelation that we have. We are saved because we realize we're helpless, hopeless and we need a Savior and God has promised salvation to all who call upon His Name. That promise is Yes and Amen in Christ. They didn't have the Person of Jesus but they had the promises. They believed in the promises of God that would be fulfilled in Jesus. So when Jesus did His redeeming work He retroactively covers the sins of all who have put their trust in God by grace through faith in His promises that God would save them and forgives all their sins as well.

Romans 8:33 goes for the Old and New Testament alike which says [33] *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.* God does this in Christ who wipes away all of our condemnation. They just didn't have the clarity we now have but they had the same Savior we have. They are clothed in the righteousness of Christ and forgiven by the blood of Christ. If you don't realize that then think of Abraham. What is the greatest movement in reclaiming the Gospel in church history? It was the Reformation. Who was the number one Reformer to lead it? It was Luther who read Romans 1:16–17 which says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

Luther also read from Galatians but the quote in this Romans passage comes from Habakkuk and Genesis 15 and Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Abraham was saved by grace through faith in the Lord and His promises that would be fulfilled in Jesus. The righteousness that God has marshalled to save us is in Christ. Abraham wasn't circumcised until Genesis 17 but was saved in Genesis 15. Abraham just didn't have the name and the Person who was coming in the Incarnation but he had a God who had made promises and he knew he needed a perfect righteousness that he didn't have and God is the One who gives it to him. That's why we have everlasting life.

I love the passive obedience of Jesus when He goes to the cross and takes upon Himself our sin and endures the wrath of God. I also love the active obedience of Jesus whereby His righteousness clothes us and makes us acceptable and takes us to heaven.

Bruce: Here at Briarwood we pray for a great spiritual awakening and a few years ago we emphasized that in a real focused time, then it seems that times get more difficult with more trials and tribulations. Can you share some thought about this?

Harry: The Lord is clear that we are to count it all joy when we encounter various trials (James 1:2) because He is doing a work in us. We are not sanctified masochists that go out and get trials. The Bible tells us to pray 'lead us not into temptation' but when the trials come God has purpose so I need to submit, surrender and realize He is polishing up His trophies. He is fitting us for something in the future. He is burning off the dross in our lives through these 'fiery trials' (I Peter 4:12).

In this world Christians are being targeted and I don't say persecuted because it's not our lives in this culture that is being targeted but our livelihoods are. I do a program Monday through Friday trying to address these issues from a Biblical world and life view and I don't glory in it for I don't want the society to be debased, turned and kill Christians but I do know that it seems when those moments come that is the sifting and the shifting. He gets His people ready and makes clearer who are His people who stay on mission, on message and in ministry as churches and individuals who stay fixed on Jesus. And as they persevere, they will not bow to the culture. I will not embrace sexual anarchy, idolatry or a homicidal culture. I will love the Lord and by the grace of God seek to keep His commandments as I am on mission to bring those who would persecute me to Christ.

This is what I ask God to do and then He has His churches who will nurture people as they stay focused on their missions so they turn out Christians. The church has its narrow mission of making disciples, teaching all that Jesus has commanded and then it turns out Christians who have a broad mission of being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Moments like this are going to present us with a lot of opportunities and it will be revealed at the judgment. Jesus will say 'Many will say to Me...' and then He will say 'Depart from Me...' and I think in that day we'll see many departing, even in the next years. We will see churches fold and become cultural accommodationists and we'll see professing Christians abandon the truths of God's Word. Those that fall away never knew Him. Those that fall down let's help them back up so that we can stand together in and for Christ.

Bruce: The next question has to do with the COVID-19 vaccine. Is someone wrong for struggling in getting the vaccine due to it being developed and tested using cells from a line of an aborted baby?

Harry: I answered this on my program Today in Perspective. I have done three programs on this. Three lines of this were not done on fetal cells. They were done from a synthetic DNA line. There was one very large group who did and I'll be glad to send you the links on it for we have done our research on it. The Pfizer and Moderna ones were done with synthetic lines. Perhaps you may choose not to have a vaccine but it's not because they had made use of aborted fetal cells and the one that did use it is actually using clones of the aborted fetal cells from the 1960s. That doesn't mean it's not an issue, I'm just saying that's the accurate part.

Bruce: We will end with a comment about the restrictions in our state regarding the corona virus and then Harry will close our time out. It was interesting when our Alabama governor announced when the mask mandate would expire in our state she had never used the term 'mask mandate' before yet seemed to keep repeating it in this announcement and other press conferences given at that time, so we knew she was saying something unique. We asked the people who worked for her if she just meant masks or everything that was in the order given for there are a lot of different aspect to the order. Clarity came back to us that said; 'at this time it is simply the mask.' So by her declaration the only thing that will expire on April 9, 2021 is the wearing of the mask. The key component to change that would help alter some things that we do would be the social distancing as well and not just the mask wearing and they are working on that to figure out other aspects of that. We continue as a church to track it and not guess, when we need clarity on this and then use that to make decisions. We have more plans that we may never use but some that may get used pretty soon to be able to transition us back.

One encouragement I would give with a bit of a caution, is that we are a big church family and it will take a little while for us not to just choose to come back together but to safely come back together. That's okay and we love each other enough to work through all that. I do believe by God's grace that we'll be able to do that eventually but we are continually working on this with our officers as to how to continue to proceed safely. Perhaps soon we will see some reducing of other restrictions as well which would be a good prayer as long as they are safe and it is allowed.

Harry: We actually found out through one of our elders who is an elected senator and we're grateful for his very strong leadership with this gambling thing recently from Dan Roberts. Dan passed it along to us. We have made very clear to the governor our declaration. We were glad to help flatten the curve because of the fear of hospital things for three or four weeks but believe in the gathering of God's church. We're glad to observe safety protocols but we believe the church must stay on mission, on message and in ministry. Our governor has declared that constitutional rights will not be taken away and that the church is considered essential and she wants it to continue to meet but has asked us to do so safely. I am asking for prayer on this that Bruce will be able to go down there and talk with them in the next week or so about a way to approach this safely in terms with medical advice but yet opens doors for people to accomplish what they need to do. Then pray for God to give Bruce some wisdom on this.

I realize that in this last year (2020) there are some on this side and some on that side that would quarrel with those on our leadership team of elders and deacons on decisions that have been made and the pastoral staff has tried to implement, but by in large I want to thank not only our leadership but the vast majority of the members of this church for their kindness, thoughtfulness, patience and willingness to do it the way we have asked to keep people working

together as we have tried to stay on mission, on message and in ministry, making adjustments along the way. Nobody longs to get back into the regular rhythm more than I do for I am a habitual person. I'm excited about the privilege to preach five times on Easter Sunday although I'm not sure I'm going to make it but we're willing to do whatever we need to do to stay on mission, on message and in ministry. And we are trying to do it as safely as possible. I also want to thank the various lay leaders of the ministry who have put our safety protocols to use regardless of their own views. Even though some of our members have died during COVID-19, thankfully none of them was traced back to Briarwood gatherings and ministries, although they are missed no matter what. I really do miss them. We almost lost our worship minister and I'm very glad the Lord saw him through that. I can't believe what the children's ministries and BYG have done with this as well for them to meet. Our own Briarwood Christian School has been a miracle this year, even though there were kids that had COVID there were no hot spots and we were able to maintain the school and our seminary through adjustments that were made. So I want to thank all of you who have done intercessory prayer, patient and supportive through this and maybe we're seeing a little light here as we transition under the guidance of our elders. I want to thank God and give Him praise and thanksgiving for His kind providence that we have been able to do all this and do it safely by the hand of His blessing. Praise the Lord!