



Give Thanks & Praise To Our God
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Sabbath Sermon 11/29/2025

{NOTE: The actual oral sermon and video recording may vary significantly and even materially from these notes, but this “transcript” gives you a general idea of the direction of the message.}

{Title slide—1} Shabbat shalom, brothers and sisters. I pray you all enjoyed your Thanksgiving celebration with your families, as I certainly did with mine. For those who have been with us for a while, I’m taking a one-week hiatus from the sermon series we’ve been working on to present some Biblical concepts I’ve been meditating on this week in light of the holiday and where we’re at right now as a people and as a nation. I pray the LORD bears fruit in your hearts today on account of this Word I’m going to share with you, whether you consider First Fruits Ministries your faith community or not. — — — As you probably know, Thanksgiving is the only national holiday in the United States of America that sets aside 24-hours to give thanks and praise to the Judeo-Christian God for the great and wonderful things He has done for us, and this is a blessing that I hope will endure, but I also have my doubts. With our culture exceedingly slipping away from the firm foundation of our country’s Judeo-Christian heritage, the future may turn against such celebrations. Regardless of what happens, it’s critical for you and me to stand firm in our faith in Jesus and our obedience to God’s commandments because the LORD has promised everlasting blessings to those of us who endure until the end. Jesus promised His faithful followers: “I will raise you up on the Last Day.” We can only imagine what it’s going to look like when we live with the LORD eternally in His promised Kingdom, and I selected the image you see on the screen {above} for today’s message because it shows “a great multitude which no one could number of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes” (Revelation 7:9), or at least it’s the best artwork I could generate to give you an idea of the scene.

{New slide—2} At that time, according to Revelation 7:9-11, the resounding sounds of our voices will cry: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb,” forever linking the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together as the One God

whom we worship. And the heavenly host will cry out in agreement, replying: “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen!” We can only imagine what the scene is actually going to look like, and how we might personally respond, but the Apostolic writers of our New Covenant Scriptures recorded no greater promise of God for us to live for than this. Jesus Himself spoke of His Kingdom, which is not of this world, perhaps even more than anything else. He came to make a Way for us into His Kingdom—it’s why He was born into the flesh, why He taught us and demonstrated His law for us, why He suffered and died on the cross for our salvation, why He rose up again to go and prepare a place for us, and why He now sits at the Right Hand of Power interceding for us. He has invited you and me to live in the Kingdom of God with Him forever, and I can think of no other blessing more worthy of our thanksgiving and praise than this.

{New slide—3} Contemplate the promised Kingdom of God as I read Psalm 100 to you, which is “A Psalm of Thanksgiving.” We read: “Make a joyful shout to Yahweh, all you lands! Serve Yahweh with gladness; Come before His presence with singing. Know that Yahweh, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For Yahweh is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations.” Now, granted, we ought to come into the presence of our God to worship Him with thanksgiving and praise each week when we congregate, and I hope you’ve done so today, but this short Psalm is not referring to any place on the earth—it’s speaking about God’s Kingdom in the Heavens. I want to give you a few brief references related to the sermon series I’ve been going through, which is called “Who is Yeshua the Messiah?,” just to peel back this layer of this. In Romans 10:9, Paul said we ought to confess that Yeshua is Yahweh with our mouths, and believe in our hearts that He is risen to be saved. Remember what we read in Revelation 7:9: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.” Indeed, Yahweh lives! He is risen and He reigns! And John 1 explained that Yeshua is the Word who was God, and through Him all things were made that were made. He is also the Good Shepherd, according to His own Word in John 10, and all who hear His voice and follow Him are His sheep whom He invites to enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. We ought to bless His holy name Yeshua/Jesus, according to Philippians 2, for He is the mercy and truth of God Who endures to all generations and even into eternity. As John 1:14 explains, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” And because

the Father and the Son are One, we ought to “honor the Son just as [we] honor the Father,” Jesus said in John 5:23. And so when we read a moment ago in Revelation 7:11, “Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen!,” this Thanksgiving is given to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Who has invited us to dwell forever with Him in His Kingdom.

{New slide—4} It is for this very reason that Paul wrote in 1st Thessalonians 5, verses 16-18: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Don’t miss the last part here. He said that it is God’s will for you and me to rejoice always and give thanks for everything— —always! Why? Because of the promises that God has given to His people through Christ. He has called us to a life of faithfulness and trust. Now, there’s nuance here, also. We can certainly learn from the trials and tribulations of this life, and for that we can give thanks and even rejoice, but I believe God is calling us to look past all of the struggles of this world to perceive His invisible Kingdom in the Spirit as the promised Finale that we are living for. Our hope, our thanksgiving, our rejoicing ought to be focused on our relationship with Jesus, which will endure forever in the Kingdom of God. This is why we ought to rejoice always and give thanks in everything! Paul gave a similar exhortation to the people of Philippi, a place we’re going to study later on relative to the hardship the Apostle endured there. In Philippians 4, verses 4-7, we read: “Rejoice in the LORD always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The LORD is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” For what other reason might we be anxious or need our hearts to be guarded than the trials and tribulations of this world? I submit to you that there is no other way to rejoice in the LORD, to offer God thanksgiving in our prayers, and to experience a complete peace that surpasses all understanding than our faith in the promises of Messiah Yeshua, who guards our hearts with His Holy Spirit. The LORD is indeed at hand. If we have faith and trust in Him, and therefore follow the Way He showed us, He dwells within us and gives us the unparalleled peace of His eternal promises, no matter what we experience in this life.

{New slide—5} Next, I want you to see that King David understood these truths. In Psalm 34, verses 1-6, we read the following: “I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear of it and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together. I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me from all

my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, And their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, And saved him out of all his troubles.” Yes, it’s true that King David suffered through many trials and tribulations in this world, and the LORD delivered Him from those troubles during His life, but I want you to look past the written example of King David's life to the Spirit of what the LORD was teaching us through it. The King explained that He would rejoice in the LORD always and offer thanksgiving and praise, no matter what fears he faced or troubles he endured, because the humble who trust in God and exalt His name will endure into His Kingdom. Their faces will become radiant, shining with the light of God’s glory in His promised Kingdom. In Psalm 27:13, David similarly wrote: “I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD In the land of the living.” That's not the world he's referring to, but the Kingdom of God. There’s only one place where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob still live, according to Yeshua; it’s in the Kingdom of God, and David had the same hope of eternal salvation. According to Matthew 8:11, Yeshua said, “Many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven.” In Matthew 22:31-32, speaking of the same patriarchs, Yeshua added: “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Our thanksgiving and praise have their foundation in the eternal promises of God.

{New slide—6} But don’t just take my word for it. Take a look at what Paul wrote in Romans 8, verses 18-25, where we read: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, THE REDEMPTION OF OUR BODY. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.” Let me ask you: Is your body redeemed? Just open your Bibles to 1st Corinthians 15 for another reference to this same hope. It is the resurrection of Messiah Yeshua that gives us the promise of our own resurrection at His coming, when the Kingdom of God will come and put an end to all rule and authority in this world, which includes the primary enemies of God, and these enemies are identified there as sin and death. What greater hope is there? What greater joy? What greater peace?

What could we possibly be more thankful for than the promise of life in God's eternal Kingdom through Messiah Yeshua, where sin and death are no more? This Kingdom of God is that hope Paul wrote about that is not seen; that hope which we must eagerly wait for with perseverance. That hope that gives us joy and peace, and calls for us to express thanksgiving and praise to God, all while suffering trials and tribulations as we seek to share the hope that is in us with others.

{New slide—7} Now, some of you know that my Dad and I recently took a trip to New York City, and it was awesome! We had a great time, we saw some great sights, we enjoyed some wonderful music, we learned a lot, and I'm quite grateful we were able to enjoy each other's company together there. So I'm sharing these



images I took of New York City not as representations of that trip, but as representations of the world that we presently live in. You could replace them with a picture of Manchester, a photo of my house or your house, or really an image of anything in this world, but I thought these skyscrapers and all the lights and splendor of New York City would duly represent what I want to say. We're blessed, and indeed we ought to be thankful that we all have grown up in these United States during these times. I'm not going to discount the hardships some of you listening to me have faced in this world, because they are real, but overall, I believe it's fair to say that this time and place we're living in is one of the most peaceful and free of any time before it. Now, you might say, this peace and freedom has been protected by the blood, sweat and tears of many men and women who came before us, and you'd be right. The relative religious freedom we enjoy was a major part of that battle. For this also, we ought to thank God. And yet, Scripture is quite clear that this world we live in today is not going to endure. It's not going to last. Look at the skyscrapers in the photos that are on the screen and remember what Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 24 when they themselves marveled about the buildings of the temple in Jerusalem. He replied to them, in verse 2: "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down." It was only 40 years later in AD 70 when Rome destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and another 75 years after that when Jerusalem was destroyed. I certainly don't desire to see anything happen to my own country like that, but I can assure you that Yeshua's prophesy about

Jerusalem also applies to the whole world. He said so Himself as the prophesy in Matthew 24 continued.

{New slide—8} Rather than go through that whole chapter, I simply want to share with you a short passage from the Apostle Peter, one of Yeshua's closest disciples who learned from His Master this very Truth, which we read in 2nd Peter 3, verses 10-13. He wrote: "But the day of the LORD will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." Right before he wrote this, in verse 9 Peter explained that "The LORD is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Brothers and sisters in Christ, I'm going to tell you right now that this is the Gospel message. This is good news. The world we're living in and all its grandeur; all of the things we think are important in this life—every single one of them is going to be burned up completely, but before the LORD brings the promise of His eternal judgment to the world He is offering each and every one of us the opportunity to repent, which means to turn away from our sins and follow Him. He asked, "What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" And then He answered: "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." The eternal kingdom of God is the very promise that we ought to live for. It's the promise we ought to teach everyone we love and care about. There ought to be nothing more important to us than this, because it is the only promise of life that we have. Yes, we ought to enjoy each day and count each day as a blessing from the LORD. Yes, we ought to enjoy our lives here on this Earth, and we ought to celebrate this life with the ones we love. But there is no more important Truth to communicate to the ones we love than the ONLY WAY we can keep living when this life is over.

{New slide—9} There is a testimony of two needed in our lives in order for us to make it into God's Kingdom, and the LORD has made this clear in His Word. In John 14:6, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." We have to have faith that Jesus is God, that He came in the flesh, that He died for our sins, that He rose from the dead, and that He taught us the true Way

we ought to live in order to inherit eternal life. A few additional witnesses further clarify what the LORD meant here. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus warned, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘LORD, LORD,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” We can’t give Him lip service—we actually have to do His will. Toward the end of this section in verse 23, the LORD said those who “practice lawlessness” will not enter God’s kingdom. He confirmed this in John 5, verses 5:28-29, speaking directly about the End of the Age and the coming of His kingdom. We read: “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” The most important thing for us to do in this life is to put our faith in the redemption we have in Jesus so we can repent and live like He showed us to live. We have to endure in this, as John explained in Revelation 14:12 (LSB), where we read: “Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.” This is the testimony of two—mercy and truth—grace and righteousness—that gives us the assurance of God’s promised Kingdom. This should not cause anxiety and it should not cause fear; rather, this news ought to encourage you with thanksgiving and praise toward God, for He has provided us with a Way into His Kingdom and He has commanded us to share it with everyone we love.

{New slide—10} Right before He ascended into Heaven, “Jesus came and spoke to [His disciples], saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’” And then, in Matthew 28:19-20, He commanded: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” I can assure you this commandment applies to you and me, also, because in Matthew 10:28, Jesus also said: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” The point is this: How can we expect to live with God forever in His Kingdom if we are afraid to share the good news concerning His Kingdom with others. If we are ashamed of Jesus in this life, He will be ashamed of us in the throne room of God on Judgment Day. In Matthew 10:32-33, Jesus said, “Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.” And this may cause fear on its own, but Jesus’s commandment goes beyond sharing the love of God with those we love. In Luke 6:32, Jesus said, “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.” In verse 35, He added: “But love your enemies, do good, and lend,

hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons [and daughters] of the Most High.” I want to remind you how we started today’s message and bring everything full circle. It is God’s will that we “rejoice always” and “in everything give thanks,” especially when we’re praying through the difficult times in our lives that cause anxiety and fear. Our God of peace will be with us in the midst of the ministry that Jesus has called us into, and He will give us peace that surpasses understanding as we go about it. I wonder: Which unbelievers do you know who would take kindly to you sharing the Gospel message with them? Which of those people who say the Old Testament no longer applies do you think would throw a party when you tell them that Jesus taught us to keep God’s commandments? The reality is, they don’t want to hear it, but God commanded us to explain these things to them, at the risk of losing our relationships with them, our jobs, our homes, or even our very own lives. Do we fear the loss of temporal things, or the loss of our eternal relationship with God? Which are we more afraid of? The reality is that at the end of all things, everything around us is going to burn up with fervent heat except those who love Jesus and keep the commandments of God, and these will inherit the New Heaven and New Earth, which is the kingdom of God. Knowing this unseen hope without any fraction of a doubt, we can’t help but explain to others these things—and if we truly have faith, we ought to be doing these things while giving thanksgiving and praise to our God.

{New slide—11} In 1st Peter 3, verses 3:13-17, the Apostle wrote the following related exhortation to those who follow Jesus. We read: “And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?” In other words, are you concerned about being judged by God or by other people? He continued: “But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed. ‘And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.’ But sanctify the LORD God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. FOR IT IS BETTER, if it is the will of God, TO SUFFER FOR DOING GOOD than for doing evil.” WILL WE face persecution in this life for doing and teaching the commandments of God with faith in Jesus Christ as our LORD and Savior? IN AMERICA?!? Ask Charlie Kirk that question. Ask the abortion clinic protesters who sat in prison for several years until their recent pardon by President Trump. Ask Isaac Santiago, our brother who, while cleared in a recent court decision right here in New Hampshire, had to deal with more than a year of stress and thousands of dollars of legal fees fighting a hate-crime charge for explaining to an LGBTQ-affirming church in Dover that they need to repent or face God’s judgment. What about the cake makers in Colorado? What about the justices of

the peace who don't want to rubber stamp what is evil? What about the woman in Maine who was given a court order that she cannot teach her child about our God as He's described in the Bible? I could certainly give many additional examples. The bottom line is that we ought not only expect but also rejoice in the persecution that we face in this life on account of the Gospel. It is indeed good when we suffer for doing good. Now, we should certainly not go out seeking persecution, but we should go out seeking those who are willing to trust in Jesus and keep the commandments of God, and we ought to be willing to accept the consequences for doing so.

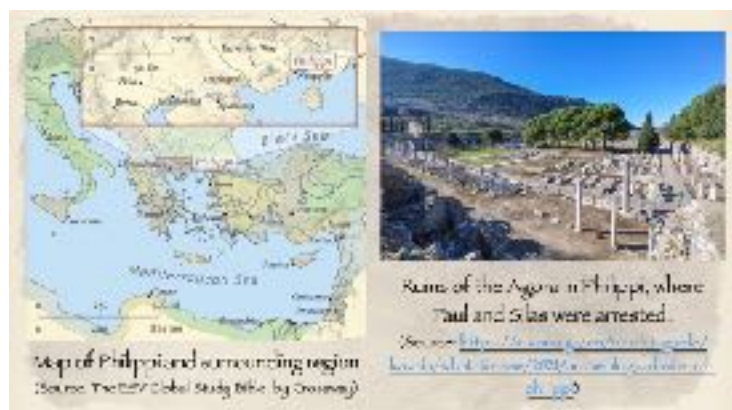
{New slide—12} I want to show you one additional passage from Peter, which explains the attitude we ought to have toward God and putting the Kingdom of God first in our lives, not out of blind obligation or fear, but out of love and joy, with peace and thanksgiving in our hearts. In 1st Peter 2, the Apostle gave some important instruction to servants. And before you say that the passage doesn't apply to you, I want to call your attention to how Peter introduces himself in 2nd Peter 1:1. There we read, "Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ," and then he carries on with his letter from there. And didn't Jesus Himself say in Matthew 23:11, "He who is greatest among you shall be your servant?" Indeed He did. OK, so that being said, let's take a look at 1st Peter 2, verses 18-25, where we read: "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for YOUR FAULTS, you take it patiently? But WHEN YOU DO GOOD AND SUFFER, if you take it patiently, THIS is commendable before God. FOR TO THIS you were called, BECAUSE CHRIST ALSO SUFFERED FOR US, LEAVING US AN EXAMPLE, THAT YOU SHOULD FOLLOW HIS STEPS: 'Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth;' who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, MIGHT LIVE FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." If we are sheep who have returned to our Good Shepherd, let us rejoice and give thanks and praise to God, for eternity with Jesus awaits us. If we have not yet returned, then today is the day to turn back to the Way of Christ, and live. If today you hear His voice, harden not your hearts in rebellion!

{New slide—13} And just as Peter instructed us to imitate Jesus by following in His steps, even unto death on a cross—if this is what God calls us to, I want to show you

that this is literally what Jesus Himself told us to do. Peter was a good disciple of his Master. He fearlessly taught us what Yeshua Himself taught Him, and instructed us to do the same. But here in Matthew 16:24-27, Jesus Himself said: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.” Please understand that everything we teach here is about the Kingdom of God; there is no life worth living, no house or job worth keeping, and no relationship worth pandering if it prevents us from being with Jesus forever. The Apostle John agreed, as we read in 1st John 2:6, where we read: “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” He who wants to live in the Kingdom with Yeshua ought to live just like Yeshua showed us to live, for this is what it means to have faith in Him. We can’t say we have faith, and disobey His Word. Even the Apostle Paul wrote in 1st Corinthians 11:1, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” In other words, trust in Jesus and follow His example in Scripture, for He has shown us the Way, the Truth and the Life, and for that we ought to be forever grateful. In today’s world, we ought to imitate those around us who are following the Apostle’s Doctrine in the New Covenant Scriptures and a spiritual understanding of the Old Testament through the lens of Jesus’s example. In his letter to the Philippians, Chapter 3, verse 17, the Apostle Paul said this very same thing. There we read: “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.” Do you see the pattern yet?

{New slide—14} If not, I want to show you an example, and this is the last segment we’re going to look at today before we close. I pray this brings everything together for you and sends you out with a new resolve to do the will of God in your lives, just like Jesus showed us. On the screen {see the image to the right}, you

can see a map depicting a good part of the Roman empire during the First Century, with a special focus on the Macedonian community of Philippi. You can also see a photograph of some Philippian ruins, specifically the site of the Agora where the



Apostle Paul and his disciple Silas were likely arrested and tortured for doing the will of God. Now, the world has continued to thrive even while the Roman empire has collapsed and communities such as Philippi have crumbled into nothing, but the Roman empire was once a power that covered much of the civilized world. There were buildings throughout the empire that must have looked just as awe inspiring as the skyscrapers of New York City today, though most of them were certainly of a different architectural character. Nevertheless, the civilization of Rome is gone, and so too are most of its buildings. Even the great colosseum in Rome lies in ruins. When Yeshua returns, as we've read in Peter's prophesy, so too will all of the skyscrapers of New York City and everything else in this world be turned to nothing. We need to decide today what really matters to our God, and give Him thanks and praise for the grace He still extends us.

{New slide—15} Malachi 4:1 confirms. If you want to open your Bibles to Malachi 4, you can mark the parallel verse from 2nd Peter 3. We read: "Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the LORD of hosts, 'That will leave them neither root nor branch.'" It continues in verses 2-3, "But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this," says the LORD of hosts." As Paul wrote in Romans 10: "All who call upon the name of the LORD will be saved." That is, those who trust in Jesus and therefore do what He commanded us to do will enter into the Kingdom of the Son of Righteousness. It's interesting to think back to the time of Paul and Silas, especially considering this consistent prophesy. These two men certainly called upon the name of the LORD and were saved. Like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David, they would have lost heart, unless they believed they would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. When Paul encouraged the Philippians afterward, imploring them to "join in following [his] example," I want to remind you what we covered. He wrote: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Messiah Yeshua." And so, I want you to understand that Paul and Silas and all the people they convinced to follow Jesus, including the prison guard and his family in this story, await their resurrection on the day of Yeshua's return into the Kingdom of God, while the prison itself and all the city around it is now at best a pile of rubble, and how many of the people who refused to believe will be raised to condemnation? One day soon, even the ruins of Philippi will

be left without a trace, while the men who followed Yeshua there will walk forever on top of its ashes.

{New slide—16} As we move into the story that begins in Acts 16, verse 9, I want you to recall Jesus's commandment to make disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them the commandments of God. Paul, who was tuned-in through faith with the Holy Spirit of Christ, was indeed obeying His Master's command. We read: "And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the LORD had called us to preach the gospel to them." Pause there. Paul and Silas, discerning that the LORD was sending them to Macedonia, IMMEDIATELY set sail to go there to preach the Gospel. There was no delay. The LORD said "go," and they were off. They had no idea what to expect, but their intent was to do one thing: "to preach the Gospel to them." As we read on, we'll understand a little more of what that actually means. Starting in verse 11, we read: "Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samo'thrace, and the next day came to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there." We ought to pause here again to ask: Why were people meeting down by the river on the Sabbath Day to pray? It's likely because there weren't enough people in Philippi to build a synagogue. Jewish tradition required 10 men to be present to build a synagogue, and the whole of Philippi was only a colony of Rome. There weren't a lot of people there. Whenever Paul went to any city, he went to the Jews first and then the Gentiles next. And so, as we read on in verse 14, it's unclear whether "Lydia" was a Jewess, but she was at the very least a God fearer, which means that she worshipped Yahweh and kept the commandments along with the Jews of the city. She was praying with the small community of Jews on the Sabbath. Continuing then, we read: "Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The LORD opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the LORD, come to my house and stay.' So she persuaded us." And here we can be certain: Paul and Silas preached the Gospel to this group, and Lydia heard them. She didn't just hear though, she acted. She and her whole household were baptized, and then she immediately invited Paul and his party to stay at her home. For what reason? To further teach her the commandments of God

according to the example of Christ. It's evident in the text that Paul was following the model of Christ.

{New slide—17} As the story continues in verse 16, it's unclear how much time passed between the initial passage and this next segment of the narrative. Nevertheless, the transitional phrase, "Now it happened," sets this section apart in time. And so, Paul and company were doing the work that Jesus had sent them there to do, and all had been going well, but that was about to change. We read in verse 16, "Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, 'These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.' And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, 'I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.' And he came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities." The text shows that the group continued to meet on the Sabbath down by the river week by week to pray, and one week a demon-possessed slave girl who made money for her masters as a soothsayer disrupted the work Paul and his disciples were doing. Now, how did the girl disrupt Paul's work? She spoke the Truth, didn't she? She said: These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim the way of salvation." Why did this "annoy" Paul to the point that he cast the demon from her? I ask you this? How many people would be saved if someone ran ahead of you with a megaphone, as you were interacting with people, saying the same thing this girl said? She was making it impossible for Paul to build rapport with people, to relate with them gently as human beings, and to minister to them as lost sheep of the Most High. But more than this, she was making it appear as though Paul and company were associated with a soothsayer, and this was forbidden. In Leviticus 20:6, the law makes clear: "the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people." While he initially showed restraint, it's clear that Paul's ministry was going nowhere so long as this demon-possessed girl was around. It wasn't just about continuing the work, though. What Paul did next was a testimony of his faith in Jesus as well as a testimony to his obedience to the law of God. In Mark 16:17, Jesus said, "these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons;..." As soon as Paul cast the demon out in Jesus's name, it was gone. This bold act of faith wasn't just happenstance, it was intentional and would bring justice to a girl who had been held in bondage to the evil one. Now, she would be

free to follow Christ. But those who had profited off of her abuse were livid. Paul and Silas were going to pay for doing the work of God's kingdom, as we will soon see.

{New slide—18} Now, the authorities in Philippi were Roman magistrates, an elite class of freeborn citizens elected to serve for a year at a time as prosecutor, judge and jury, and they weren't called only to determine guilt or innocence, but also the relative status of the defendant and plaintiff. If a person was a Roman citizen, the magistrates were called to collect evidence for a fair trial, but if not, the entire justice system was in their hands. In this case, they assumed that Paul and Silas were not citizens, and for better or for worse, God would use that false assumption for His glory! Starting in Acts 16:20, we read: "And [the girl's masters] brought [Paul and Silas] to the magistrates, and said, 'These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.'" Now, I want you to notice that the accusation against Paul and Silas was not that they were Christians teaching the Gospel, but that they were Jews, and the customs they were accused of teaching were the commandments of God. After all, they had cast demons out of a soothsayer, separating their Gospel ministry from such evil. Their faith in Jesus, while known by the girl's masters, was not a matter of contention here, and the reason for that is straightforward. They had a profit motive, and explaining how they had used the Holy Spirit's power to cast out a demon would have exposed that to the magistrates. Instead of going that route, they simply noted how Paul and Silas were trying to expand the Hebraic law from Scripture into a Roman territory. This antisemitic reaction was the same then as it is now in many parts of the world. We read, starting in verse 22: "Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks." This was a very harsh treatment. According to a study by Marvin Richardson Vincent, the Roman public prison had multiple sections, and the inner part called a "Robur" or "Lignum" had no windows, no light, and no airflow except the prison door. It would have been a place of "utter darkness, heat and stench." Prisoners often slept on cold floors with only their outer garments, and considering that Paul and Silas had been beaten with rods and had their feet fastened in stocks, infection risk was a serious concern. I want you to consider that death was not out of the question in this situation, which is what makes the events that followed so awesome.

{New slide—19} And this next part of the account, starting in Acts 16, verse 25, is the whole reason I brought you to this example. We read: "At midnight Paul and Silas were

praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” Indeed, just as David wrote in Psalm 34:1, “I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth,” so too did Paul and Silas have this same heart. And likewise, just as David testified, so too would the LORD answer Paul and Silas. We read in Psalm 34:6: “This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, And saved him out of all his troubles.” And so, as Acts 16 continues in verse 26, we read: “Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed. And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself. But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, ‘Do yourself no harm, for we are all here.’” Picture yourself in Paul’s shoes: You’re bloody, beaten, cold and lying in a foul pool of filth, and instead of crying, you’re singing praise and worship songs to Jesus. The other prisoners hear you. The prison guard hears you. And then a miracle occurs. The prison doors fall apart and so do your chains. You’re free to go, but you call out more concerned about the prison guard’s well being than your own. Asaph wrote about this very scenario in Psalm 50, verse 23, where we read: “Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; And to him who orders his conduct aright I will show the salvation of God.” Indeed, the LORD would bring deliverance to Paul and Silas, but also to the prison guard, as we are about to see, and this is because they gave thanks and praise to God in their troubles.

{New slide—20} In Acts 16, verse 29, we read: “Then [the guard] called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. And he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” So they said, “Believe on the LORD Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the LORD to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.” Brothers and sisters, this story is only real because Paul practiced what he preached. He rejoiced always and in everything gave thanks and praise to God, because he knew that the kingdom he would dwell in forever was not of this world. Paul and Silas weren’t running bloodied into the woods, trying to escape to some tepid freedom in this present world. They were fighting against every human instinct of the flesh concerned most about their enemy’s eternal soul. Only with true faith in Jesus Christ can anyone even imagine this scenario. Only with complete confidence in God’s eternal kingdom could anyone do what Paul and Silas did. I want you to really think about what I’ve shared with you today. What Kingdom are we living for? What are we really thankful for? Which God do

we truly serve? We can be thankful for the wonderful gifts the LORD has given us in this life, but when we're truly pressed between pursuing the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, the living God who created the Heavens and the Earth who has gone to prepare a place for us to dwell forever with Him, and preserving our own preconceived notions in this life, as temporary and fleeting as it might be, what choice will we make?

{New slide—21} There's so much more I could say on this episode of Paul's ministry, even on how it ends, but I'm going to leave you here for now. We know Paul lived on after he left Philippi to do ministry another day, and He didn't stop preaching the Gospel and teaching the commandments of God until the day Emperor Nero decided to take his head. But Paul still lives, just as we read earlier about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, about King David, about Peter who was crucified upside down, and especially about our LORD Jesus Christ Himself, who died as our eternal sacrifice, but then rose and now sits on the throne in Heaven, interceding for us. Are you ready to follow Him there? Want to do more research on this topic? Just do a broad search in Scripture for the following phrase: "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever." You will get countless testimonies that explain the very same thing I've brought to the table today. When we call out to the LORD with praise and thanksgiving, He will deliver us—He will bring us into His Kingdom. When we trust Him—in the Word He has given us, in what He has accomplished, and in what He has promised—and we demonstrate our trust through a life of faithfulness, He will bring us to the place He has prepared for us at the Appointed Time. Now, when thinking about your faith in our LORD Jesus Christ, I have to ask you one final question, and it might come to you as a surprise. Here it is: Do you have a testimony like Moses? Listen carefully to Hebrews 11, verses 24-26, where we read: "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward." There is no greater reward than eternal life with God, and no pleasure or treasure in this world that ought to keep us from it. Let the love of God and love of your fellow man lead you through through the Heavenly gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to God alone, and bless His name, Yeshua the Messiah, our LORD and our God! Shabbat Shalom!