

As the People of God Age

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Last Tuesday when we were together, we studied Psalm 71 and I titled that message "Seeing Trials Through Seasoned Eyes." We saw a veteran of faith praying for help against his enemies. His spiritual maturity did not exempt him from trials even though his physical strength was dissipating along the way.

Sometimes, I've mentioned this to you many many times, sometimes the providence in the timing of messages or music is just astonishing. I had long planned to do a follow-up message to Psalm 71 because there were certain pastoral points that I wanted to bring out from the message and I couldn't fit them all in last week and so I'm going to do that tonight. I titled the message long ago "As the People of God Age." And if you are taking notes today, you could write that down as your title, as the people of God age. It is a follow-up to Psalm 71 based on various selected Scriptures. How was I to know with that title that today, tonight, my mother-in-law would be with us celebrating today her 84th birthday? How could that possibly work out that I would have a message titled "As the People of God Age" and not plan it out around her birthday? I know that seems impossible but that is the nature of the providence of God in preaching and so this message is not in honor of her birthday at all, that was not the plan, but we are very glad that you are with us, Ella, and we'll just go ahead and let God's word speak as we had planned for it to do so.

I wanted to linger over this theme of veterans in the faith approaching old age, I wanted to dwell on that for another week because I believe there is so much important for us here. Whether you are a graybeard or whether you are younger in life, there is very much for us to see here, and to ask and answer a couple of questions. What does happen as the people of God grow older, and as we age, what challenges and opportunities await us? You know, I realize there are teenagers in the audience here and you might be inclined to tune out, but please don't do that because what applies here in older age is also what applies to you in your own life, and here's the thing: you talk to anybody that's over the age of 40, perhaps even over the age of 30, and they will nod their head in vigorous agreement with this statement: life has a way of surprising us with how quickly it goes by. You blink and 10 years are gone and before you know it, you are starting to feel the creak in your bones and you're starting to feel the diminishment of your energy and all of that. What I want to do is I want to prepare you, even though many of you are much

behind me in age, I want to prepare you for that with some biblical perspective that informs the way that we live our lives because, as I've often said, if you keep in mind what the destination is, what the end is, that will help you determine the path that you take to get there. We live our lives that way. You know, you go out to drive, you don't just go out and drive randomly, most of you. You're going someplace. You know where you're going and so you choose a path that will get you there. Well, if you want your life to end in a realm of godliness, there needs to be a path to get there.

Now, the wonder, the beauty, the glory of it is that Christ has gone before us to make all of that possible. Christ in his life, Christ in his death, Christ in his burial and his resurrection, has reconciled us to God and these things of which we are going to speak tonight are an overflow of that, they are an outflow of the work of Christ on our behalf, and we start from a position of strength as we consider this momentous topic, based on especially as you consider the passage that I read earlier from Romans 8, that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. So even as our physical bodies begin to diminish, even as life brings the challenges that are inevitable for us, we are anchored in a solid rock who loves us, who has redeemed us, who has us in his hand, who indwells us and is seeing us through all of the way to glory.

We recognize those things. We are assuming them as we speak tonight. Reconciled to God in Christ, we certainly triumph in the end as Christians but I don't know how you would draw a contrast to that, but I'm going to. But here's the thing: you and I are frail children of dust and we are easily discouraged. As our health diminishes, as life does not work out the way that we wish, as relationships fracture that we didn't want to go that direction, and all of that tends to make us easily discouraged and so that creates a problem and sometimes we contribute to the problem because we are careless and thoughtless about the challenges that wait for us down the road. So somehow we end up being surprised when a loved one is in the hospital, sometimes we are surprised when it's us with an unexpected medical crisis, and that really shouldn't be the case. We should expect things to come, we may not know the details but we should expect, "Ah, there are going to be challenges that come my way as I advance in life."

That's one aspect of it, the challenges that we face, but here's another aspect and speaking to those of you that are a little further in your adult lives here. This is really important. Even more often than underestimating the challenges, I would say this, and one of the things that Psalm 71 brought out to my heart so much that I just had to emphasize to you, even more often I am convinced that we overlook the privileges of maturity. We overlook the opportunities that maturity bring to us. We overlook what can be done in older age that could not be done in a younger age, and that is where we want to spend some time later on in the message. So we want to look at this from two perspectives: the challenges of old age and meeting them with faith, and the opportunities of older age and meeting them with faith.

So with that background, let's turn back to Psalm 71 and if you weren't here last time for that, you'll just need to pick up the message. I'm not going to rehearse the things that we said last time. For our first point, we could just address the matter of meeting the

challenges with faith. As the people of God age, we need to meet the challenges with faith and in Psalm 71 beginning in verse 9, we saw the psalmist facing need in his physical weakness.

Look at Psalm 71:9. He says,

9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails.

You see, he knows that this is going to happen. He's anticipating it. He's in the midst of it and he says, "God, don't abandon me now."

Verse 10,

10 For my enemies have spoken against me; And those who watch for my life have consulted together, 11 Saying, "God has forsaken him; Pursue and seize him, for there is no one to deliver."

Now, for tonight, I just want to remind you of this context in Psalm 71. Life is catching up with him. The strength of his younger days is diminished, if not completely gone. He does not have the vigor of his youth. He does not have the strength of an old man and that would be enough, we know, don't we, from personal experience and personal relationships, perhaps even our own attitude about our lives, is that that physical diminishment alone can be discouraging and we wonder what happened to our youth and you start to look to the future and your shoulders start to sag saying, "It's not going to get any better." We can understand that and we recognize from that passage, we commented on it last time is this, and this is one of the things that we have to settle in our minds if we are going to approach the end of life, the latter years, I should say, with a sense of perspective that will allow us to glorify our Lord in the midst of them: the advanced years do not guarantee ease to us. Being a Christian does not exempt you from the diminishment of age. The advanced years may not bring you the ease that you had hoped and so we start with that premise and what I want to do here is to kind of give you an extended illustration in the life of David, King David.

King David was a valiant man. You remember in his youth he slew Goliath with a slingshot and boldly went up to challenge the champion of the Philistines and came out victorious, reigned as king for 40 fruitful years, although he compromised himself and brought trouble into his life with Bathsheba. But he was a valiant man. Strong. A leader of God's nation. The recipient of the Davidic covenant, no less. God promised him that through David would be the line of kings for Israel and that ultimately the ultimate King would come from his loins. He was the author of many Psalms. He was godly, if sometimes failing, so much so that Scripture describes him as a man after God's own heart. If ever someone short of our Lord Jesus was going to experience based on the way that he began, experience a golden parachute at the end of life, David would be a prime candidate, wouldn't he? But that's not the way it worked out for him.

Turn over to 1 Kings 1, going back to the left a little bit in your Bible. What was the end for this magnificent warrior for Yahweh? Well, it's kind of pathetic, actually. 1 Kings 1, beginning in verse 1. We read about him and it says this,

1 Now King David was old, advanced in age; and they covered him with clothes, but he could not keep warm. 2 So his servants said to him, "Let them seek a young virgin for my lord the king, and let her attend the king and become his nurse; and let her lie in your bosom, that my lord the king may keep warm."

So David here was a nursing home candidate and if you've never spent much time in nursing homes, that's not a bad thing to do for a lot of reasons. I have ministered in nursing homes a lot over the course of the years, and it has left an enduring impression upon me to be with these dear people, Christian and non-Christian alike, who have been vigorous at one point in their lives and now they are reduced to a mere shell of what they used to be, shivering and cold, diminished by age, humped over through the advance of the decline of their body, many, as you know, having lost most of their mental capacity. And that has a way when you see that enough, that has a way of impacting what you think and what you expect about the outcome of life. And here's the thing, beloved, I say this so often, don't I? That's reality. That's the reality that we need to be prepared for in faith that it might come to us as well.

This is what David was expecting. It's not what he was expecting, it's what he was experiencing, a different e-x-p word. So in verse 3 it says,

3 So they searched for a beautiful girl throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. 4 The girl was very beautiful; and she became the king's nurse and served him, but the king did not cohabit with her.

The idea being in those days where central heat did not exist, David shivering in his old age in a stone palace likely, there was nothing to keep him warm and so this was something that is attested in ancient literature that sometimes was done. There would be a younger nurse brought in and the body heat would keep them warm even though there was no kind of intimacy implied by the relationship.

So what we see with David is that he was physically weak and he needed nursing care even though he was king. Even though he had lived this triumphant and victorious life for Christ and for God, here he is at the end finding himself physically debilitated. That would be bad enough, the physical decline would be a challenge, but here's the thing, and for some of you in older age and you're in this sphere right now hopefully seeing the pattern in another man of God's life will be an encouragement to you: the physical weakness did not exempt him from the demands of his responsibility. He still had responsibilities of a magnitude that he still had to meet even though he was physically diminished in the process.

Look at verses 5 and 6. It says,

5 Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will be king." So he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen with fifty men to run before him. 6 His father [David] had never crossed him at any time by asking, "Why have you done so?" And he was also a very handsome man, and he was born after Absalom.

So what's happening here is that David's son, Adonijah, was using his father's weakness as his opportunity to maneuver for power in the kingdom and there was a crisis in the succession of the throne that was taking place. So here's David, physically diminished, weak, cold, shivering, and he has this monumental responsibility that he has to respond to. His prior faithfulness did not shield him from the immediate turmoil. His present weakness did not deliver him from the responsibility that he had to rise up and meet. David had to resist Adonijah even in his weakness because he had appointed Solomon earlier to follow him to the throne.

Look at verse 11 as you see the prophet Nathan speaking to Bathsheba outside of David's hearing. It says in verse 11,

11 Then Nathan spoke to Bathsheba the mother of Solomon, saying, "Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith has become king, and David our lord does not know it? 12 So now come, please let me give you counsel and save your life and the life of your son Solomon. 13 Go at once to King David and say to him, 'Have you not, my lord, O king, sworn to your maidservant, saying, "Surely Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he shall sit on my throne"? Why then has Adonijah become king?' 14 Behold, while you are still there speaking with the king, I will come in after you and confirm your words."

Here's the point: Nathan is plotting this out with Bathsheba to make sure that David's earlier wishes are executed, and if Adonijah had risen to the throne, the pattern was for new kings to execute their rivals, so Bathsheba and her son Solomon were at risk if Adonijah successfully ascended to the throne.

So here is David confined in bed, shaking with cold, and he has to receive Bathsheba to deal with this crisis in the kingdom. Verse 15,

15 So Bathsheba went in to the king in the bedroom. Now the king was very old, and Abishag the Shunammite was ministering to the king. 16 Then Bathsheba bowed and prostrated herself before the king. And the king said, "What do you wish?" 17 She said to him, "My lord, you swore to your maidservant by the LORD your God, saying, 'Surely your son Solomon shall be king after me and he shall sit on my throne.' 18 Now, behold, Adonijah is king; and now, my lord the king, you do not know it. 19 He has sacrificed oxen and fatlings and sheep in abundance, and has

invited all the sons of the king and Abiathar the priest and Joab the commander of the army, but he has not invited Solomon your servant. 20 As for you now, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to tell them who shall sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. 21 Otherwise it will come about, as soon as my lord the king sleeps with his fathers, that I and my son Solomon will be considered offenders."

Now, that's a lot of text to make this point. Sympathize with the position that David is in. He's old. He's weak. He's shivering. He's diminished and this great crisis in the kingdom has dropped into his lap and he has to deal with it.

Nathan, according to the prearranged plan, now arrives in verse 22. Look at that with me, and he says,

22 Behold, while she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet came in. 23 They told the king, saying, "Here is Nathan the prophet." And when he came in before the king, he prostrated himself before the king with his face to the ground. 24 Then Nathan said, "My lord the king, have you said, 'Adonijah shall be king after me, and he shall sit on my throne'? 25 For he has gone down today and has sacrificed oxen and fatlings and sheep in abundance, and has invited all the king's sons and the commanders of the army and Abiathar the priest, and behold, they are eating and drinking before him; and they say, 'Long live King Adonijah!' 26 But me, even me your servant, and Zadok the priest and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and your servant Solomon, he has not invited. 27 Has this thing been done by my lord the king, and you have not shown to your servants who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?"

So here's the point, beloved: is that as bad as it is, as difficult, as challenging as it is to recognize that there will be a diminishment of old age, there may be times where life brings you responsibilities in the midst of that that you still have to respond to and you still have to discharge, even though you don't feel like it, even though you don't seem to have the strength for it. David was in a position of weakness and now these demands are coming upon him.

I think that there is something encouraging for us, those of us as we get older and our families get older and the children become adults and they have children and things start to multiply and responsibilities and problems are just seemingly unsolvable, and maybe there are aspects of their spiritual lives that you would have been much different than what they actually are and you are dealing with some of the consequences of that, and you're saying and the thoughts in the back of your mind, "You know, I really didn't want it to be this way." I think from Psalm 71 from David's life, it's helpful to look at that and say, "Okay, do you know what? This is sometimes the way it is and in the midst of my weakness, in the midst of this challenge, in the midst of that which would have been a colossal headache in my strength, let alone in my weakness, I'm going to look to my Lord, I'm going to look to Christ, I'm going to realize that if he has brought this into my

life, that somehow he is giving me the strength to respond to it even though I don't feel like it." And that's what David did. He drew upon the faithfulness of God and he dealt with the situation even from his bed of sickness.

In verse 28, look at it there with me, he says,

28 Then King David said, "Call Bathsheba to me." And she came into the king's presence and stood before the king. 29 The king vowed and said, "As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my life from all distress, 30 surely as I vowed to you by the LORD the God of Israel, saying, 'Your son Solomon shall be king after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place'; I will indeed do so this day."

He's decisive in the midst of the crisis.

Verse 31,

31 Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground, and prostrated herself before the king and said, "May my lord King David live forever." 32 Then King David said, "Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada." And they came into the king's presence. 33 The king said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord, and have my son Solomon ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon. 34 Let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there as king over Israel, and blow the trumpet and say, 'Long live King Solomon!' 35 Then you shall come up after him, and he shall come and sit on my throne and be king in my place; for I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and Judah."

If Solomon rode the king's mule, it would show to all that David had permitted that; that Solomon was riding in the place of the king and that he was the heir to the throne, thus showing that David had designated by his kingly prerogative that Solomon would be his successor.

Here's what I want you to see: despite his age and despite his infirmity, he rose to the occasion and solved the crisis of succession. What can we draw from this from Psalm 71, from this example from the life of King David, and how can it help us? Well, first of all, we see this: we see that physical weakness and spiritual turmoil may be common for the people of God as they age. We are not exempt from that. Even in our old age, like David, we may face earthly adversaries.

Go back to Psalm 71 now as we go back to that original text. Psalm 71. Like David, we may face earthly adversaries and this veteran of the faith in Psalm 71:4 prays,

4 Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, Out of the grasp of the wrongdoer and ruthless man, 5 For You are my hope; O Lord GOD, You are my confidence from my youth.

He prays and he calls upon God and he is confident in God, but the thing for us to see right now is that here he is facing earthly adversaries, they would not leave him alone despite his weakness, and we realize that for some of us, that may be the appointed providence in our own lives, dealing with those kinds of struggles and that human opposition when we'd rather just be left alone and be able to rest. Like David in the ancient equivalent of a nursing home, you could say, like David we may face physical decline.

Look at verse 9 again, "Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails." For some, we may come to the end of life recognizing that we have a lot of unfulfilled ambitions. Our dreams did not come true. We were not characters in a Disney movie where everyone lived happily ever after and everything worked out the way that we wanted. Instead, we may be coming to the end of life facing some things that are pretty crushing and it just didn't work out the way that we had planned, the way that we had hoped.

Look at verse 18. You see this sense of ambition in the psalmist writing in verse 18,

18 And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come.

He says, "God, I've got more to say here. I've got people that I need to talk to and it hasn't happened yet. Give me strength that that might come to pass." What I want you to see for tonight is: here he is toward the end of life and he says there is unfinished business; there is work that is not yet done.

And for some of us, we may face turmoil and fear and a sense of abandonment, estrangement. Verse 21 of Psalm 71, the psalmist prays,

21 May You increase my greatness And turn to comfort me.

"God, here I am praying to you," and why would you ask for comfort except that you felt a sense of turmoil and distress? "God, I need your comfort here in my old age."

So we see the earthly adversaries, the enemies, the physical decline, the unfilled ambitions, turmoil and fear being the testimony of Scripture marking some of those in advanced age that have been faithful in their walk with the Lord through their life and they are not receiving their best life now. What can we say about this? If you've buried older loved ones, if you have been in nursing homes, you've seen this decline, if you look at those obstacles honestly, it can be intimidating. What happened to that easy retirement on the beach that my financial advisor promised me? What happened to the promises of

putting it away and it will be there in the end, but now it's not and financial reversal took away everything that I worked for, or some other crisis in the family emptied the bank account that we were planning to care for our long-term needs? What can we say about it? The truth of the matter is that God may not give us the illusions that our financial advisors promised us. God may not give us the easy life at the end that we had thought.

So we come back to this reality, that first of all as we think about the challenges that the end of life can bring as the people of God age, first of all, we remember something really critical that helps shape our perspective on all of it. Contrary to the best-selling book title, we realize the truth of the matter, that our salvation was not about having our best life now, that this life might bring still sorrow and sadness and turmoil to us, but we say, "I wasn't following Christ for this life primarily anyway." The whole point of salvation was the life to come. The whole point of salvation was the resurrection yet to occur, was to be with Christ face-to-face in his presence when this life was over. "I'm not banking," here's where it comes in, young people, in part for you as you set your perspective on life and your aspirations for what is to come, we are not setting all of our hope in what we're going to get out of this life. We remember something else. We remember that we're not entitled to ease at any point in life. That's not our birthright. That's not what's been promised to us. That's not what our sin deserves. Think about it with me: how could we seriously follow Christ with an expectation if not a demand, that it's going to be ease for us when the one in whose footsteps we follow was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? A man who felt the treachery of a Judas kiss, as one who had professed to be his friend betrayed him to his enemies. One who felt the pain and agony of the end of physical life even as he was bearing our sin and shame and bearing the wrath of God on our behalf. Where did we ever get the idea that we were owed something, a certain quality of life at the end when it was not the experience of Christ, it was not the experience of David, and the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy could say, "Only Luke is with me." He's alone. So many others had turned away.

So we view these things realistically so that if and when they come to us, we're able to rise to the occasion. We're able to remember that Christ said, "In this world you have tribulation but take heart, I have overcome the world," so that if and when this comes into our lives, we say, "Oh, I knew to expect this. I was prepared in advance by what Scripture teaches me, that old age will come, that it might be difficult, but that isn't the end of the story." Because if age brings its challenges, beloved, it also has its benefits, and this is the second point of our message here this evening: to meet the opportunities of old age with faith. To meet the opportunities of old age with faith, in faith, you could say.

Go back to 1 Kings now in chapter 2. 1 Kings 2 and I want to point out something really really sweet to you. David in the midst of all of this infirmity, had a privilege and an opportunity that was his that could not have been given to him in any other station of life. In the midst of his age and his physical weakness, David was in a position to talk to his son and give him his dying charge.

Look at chapter 2, verse 1. It says,

1 As David's time to die drew near, he charged Solomon his son, saying, 2 "I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man. 3 Keep the charge of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the Law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn, 4 so that the LORD may carry out His promise which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons are careful of their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'"

Beloved, this is really sweet, looking at it from the perspective that we are approaching it with this evening. David's position in his old age with his physical weakness, gave him a platform to say things to the next generation that no one else could say with the same level of authority, confidence, and assurance of faith. David's position gave him the opportunity to influence the entire kingdom after he was gone with the words that he was speaking to the incoming king. He tells Solomon, "You give priority to obedience." He lays duty and responsibility before him. He lays opportunity before Solomon with the promise of God's blessing upon him, and thus encourages him for the task at hand. "So Solomon, here's what you need to do. Solomon, remember the Lord in the midst of it. Remember his promises to you." One commentator says this about this moment as David speaks to Solomon, and I quote, he says, "David's word is both a promise and a warning. On the one hand, it promised that Solomon could be a key link in the chain of a grand royal dynasty. On the other, it warned him that disobedience would squander that opportunity."

Beloved, as you come to the latter years of life whether it be to your children, to your grandchildren, whether it be to associates or others that are around and look up to you, maybe a sibling that's a little bit behind you, beloved, don't stop running before you finish the race. You still have spiritual opportunity before you. You still have spiritual opportunity to give strength and challenge and help to the generation coming after you, and out of love for Christ, vertically speaking, and out of love for those who look to you for influence, who look to you for guidance, who perhaps will mourn greatly and feel your absence when you're gone, to strengthen them and to give them words that would echo in their minds. And that is the opportunity that you have, graybeards, gray hairs. I say it with respect. I truly do because you have something, even though our world doesn't value it. Within the kingdom of God, within the church of Jesus Christ, you have something. You have an asset to be spent for the glory of God and for the good of those who come after you. You speak, my Christian brothers and sisters, you speak from maturity. You speak from proven experience and your opportunity is to use that built-in respect for your age and your proven walk with Christ to have an influence for the kingdom after you're gone. So we approach our advancing years with this sense.

Let me remind you of something. 1 Corinthians 13, in that great love chapter. 1 Corinthians 13. And when you get to that position in life, you'll know it. I won't put a

number on it but you'll know when that time has arrived for you to start thinking in this way. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:11,

11 When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

Beloved, when you become that mature Christian woman, you've borne your children and you've raised your family; my brothers in Christ, when you become that man and you have pretty much completed your career, you are far along in it and your family is raised, and you are in a position of influence maybe in spiritual leadership in the church, that's the time for you to recognize, "Do you know what? The childish things, the immature things, the things of my younger days that I used to think was important, the things that I used to glory in, it's time for me to put those away, to put away the elements of entertainment and triviality and to step up to the plate and be a man because I'm not a child anymore, and there are people within the church of Christ, within the people of God, that are looking to me trying to figure out what this Christian life is all about." And you step up and say, "It's time for me to play the man. It's time for me to increase my faithfulness to Christ, to be even more considerate of the needs of the people of God in this position, because God has given me this experience, God has given me this gray hair, and there is an influence that comes with that." There is an opportunity for you even if you're not going to be around to enjoy the fruit of it, for you to be the influence that gives them the strength of the generation to come, that they would be able to rise up and fulfill their responsibility. And as our brother Dane said to open Sunday morning, to pass that baton. "I've had the baton. It was given to me. I ran for a while. I'm coming around the fourth corner on my lap. It's time to hand it off to somebody else who is going to run and I've got to finish the race. I've got to do it well. I've got to think beyond myself. I have to think beyond my weaknesses. I have to think beyond my own challenges and my own sorrows and rise up to the opportunity that has been given to me here as an older person in the church of Christ."

Go back to Psalm 71 with that. You see, there just comes a point where you say, "I've got to grow up. I've got to be the man here. I can't be the child any longer." And in verse 17 of Psalm 71 he says,

17 O God, You have taught me from my youth, And I still declare Your wondrous deeds. 18 And even when I am old and gray, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to all who are to come.

In Proverbs 16, you don't need to turn there, Proverbs 16:31 it says,

31 A gray head is a crown of glory; It is found in the way of righteousness.

There is a certain opportunity, a certain respect, a certain privilege that comes with age, recognizing that not everyone will respect it, but that doesn't change the approach that we

bring to the task. You see, as we age and we start to realize the clock is ticking on us, we're in the middle of the fourth quarter, so to speak, we're batting and it's in the bottom of the eighth, it's the top of the ninth, to use some sports analogies, you start to realize there is an urgency for me to declare Christ to the next generation and all of a sudden these advancing years have been greatly ennobled by the privilege that God has given to you in manifesting his faithfulness to you over decades of life, to give you voice and strength in mind to be in a position to do it, and to realize that this is given to me, this experience, this age, this gray hair has been given to me so that I would use it to whatever influence I could so that the next generation would be instructed, would be encouraged, would be emboldened to follow Christ.

I often think of the old Baptist pastor who has long been with the Lord, Art Martindale, who was with me in my very first Sunday school class that I taught many many years ago, and just how in his decline, he soon died of a brain tumor and really really lost all of the faculties that he had used to teach and study God's word for so long, but I remember and I won't repeat them, but I remember some of the words that he said to me. This old man that I had only recently met talking to me about teaching the word of God, this was the man who gave me an 800 book addition when he left his library to me and I still have most of those books in my study, and from time to time I'll go back to the books that he gave to me and I'll open them up and I'll see the extensive notes that he wrote in there as he was studying and making mark on it, and do you know what I feel even though he's been gone for 25 years? I feel a great sense of responsibility to him. I feel a responsibility to take the baton that he in part gave to me and to run with it; for me to be faithful to that because of the things that that man said to me in his final years, almost to his dying breath. As I knelt beside his bed a few days before he would die and he wasn't even able to speak, he had lost his capacity to talk, but there was that look of recognition in his eyes. He leaned forward to me from his bed and in an unspoken way we were saying goodbye. Well, that impacts me. That influenced me, his kindness, his words, his gifts, his dying example. He knew how to finish well and, beloved, we see that emphasis in Scripture as age brings urgency to us to declare Christ to the next generation.

I'm not as old as Art was then but I'm older than I've ever been before in my entire life, so are all of you if you think about it. Do you understand why so often I will look to the right to where all those people sit back there, look to some of you toward the front, and I'll call you out and I'll say, "You young people, listen to what I say." Why do you think I do that so very often? It's because I realize that I am moving into the latter part of life. I'm in the early part of the fourth quarter. I'm not going to be here forever to be able to say that to you and there is an urgency to it, to declare that to you. That you would hear. That you would listen as I plead with you, "Take the word of God seriously. Respond to Christ. Come to Christ, and if you are in Christ, to be faithful and to serve him," because I'm not always going to be here to do that. I don't think that's morbid to think that way. This is reality. This is my opportunity.

So this is how we think about it. We realize as life goes on, as the gray hairs start to come, we realize, "Oh, I may not have the physical skills that I used to have or the physical strength, and I may have lost some of my loved ones along the way, but do you

know what? I'm still standing in the smoke of battle here. I still have a voice. I still have people that will hear me," even if it's simply just the realm of your family. "I have people who will hear me and I will speak to them from this position of age and experience, trusting God that the life that he has given me, the faithfulness that he has shown to me, gives me a platform that no one else has and I'm going to maximize it and trust the Lord for whatever he does with it."

That's the opportunity as the people of God age. This is a cherished spiritual opportunity for us to take advantage of and we can embrace that and trust the Lord for what he does with it after we're gone to be with him in glory. But beloved, it's not simply the opportunity of old age that we have, there is also a very special provision that God has given to us in the latter years of our Christian life. We alluded to this last time, I won't dwell on it long here. Ultimately, beloved, the further you go along in your Christian life, more and more you have a lifetime of experience of the faithfulness of God to you personally to draw upon to strengthen your heart when your body fails you. To look back and you say, "I came to Christ in my early teens. I came to Christ in my early twenties and now here I am 50, 60, 70, 80 years old. And do you know what? I look back, I've forgotten 90% of the trials that the Lord has brought me through, the really severe ones, I still walk with a limp as Jacob walked with a limp after God pressed his finger, so to speak, on his hip. I walk with a limp from the sorrow of some of those things but do you know what? I'm walking. The Lord brought me through that and I look back over my life and I see in my twenties and in my thirties and in my forties and in my fifties and in my sixties, I see the big picture of how God's faithfulness is displayed in bright colors throughout the whole history of my own life." And you take that as a supplement to the promises of God in the Scripture and you say, "I am in a position of blessing and a position of strength. Whether my remaining years are many or few, I know from my own personal experience that God has a proven track record of being faithful to me."

And that, beloved, is something that the new Christian does not have. He has all the same promises. God will be faithful to him but the new Christian of a year or two doesn't have that track record of experience that you have, and you can rehearse in your mind, "Oh, I remember that one relationship and the Lord brought me through it. I remember that severe challenge at work, the Lord brought me through it. I remember a new course in life that came to me and I wondered what in the world was going to happen, and now I look back and I see the fruit of it in ways that I never could have anticipated. It was so much better than I thought. I look and I see how God answered my prayers for the salvation of so many in the circle of my loved ones and I'm grateful to him. I've seen God work in so many ways for so long." And that's one of the benefits of your advanced position in the Christian life. You can draw upon that to strengthen your own heart when your body weakens, and if turmoil comes and if enemies assail you and there are disappointments and headaches that come with old age, you step back and you remember Romans 8, where we started. Nothing is going to separate me from the love of Christ. Nothing ever has in these past 40 years of working with him. Nothing ever will. I can move forward even through this. Even as my body fails me, I know that the Lord never will. I can walk through this with confidence, with peace, with trust, with serenity, and deal with duty as the Lord gives me strength.

Look at Psalm 71:19. This is the whole perspective. I should have read this at the start but I didn't. Psalm 71:19,

19 For Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You? 20 You who have shown me many troubles and distresses Will revive me again, And will bring me up again from the depths of the earth.

"God, I have been down this road a thousand times before and a thousand times you have delivered me. Here is 1,001. Do you know what? You're going to deliver me again because that's who you are. You are righteous. You are faithful. You are good to your people and you never leave us or abandon us." As the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 28, "Lord, I know. Lo, you are with me always even to the end of the age." That's the voice of maturity speaking. That's the opportunity that you have in your advanced years. "God, you have done great things. You have brought me through trials. You have not changed. You will keep me to the end. You will continue to work even after I am gone. I have nothing to fear." So while age brings its challenges, it also affords you unique opportunities and benefits.

Beloved, let me remind you as we close: as we advance in life, we are following our faithful Christ who faced death itself and came out safe on the other side. This same Christ, this same Jesus, said in John 14:19, "because I live, you will live also." You are joined to Christ in perfect union with him and he is resurrected. He is raised from the dead. That means for those of us that are in him, the same outcome is ours as well and, therefore, we look forward to glory. We're not intimidated by old age. We're realistic with it but we are not intimidated. We look to Christ and we find our confidence.

So what do we do? How do we respond to all of that? Let me read 1 Corinthians 15:58 as we close. What does the man of God, the woman of God do in response to all of these things? Verse 58, the Apostle Paul said,

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, give us the grace and strength we need to run the race well and to run it all the way to the conclusion, Father, to never stop running that race unto you call us home. We'll need your grace. We'll need your strength. We'll need your comfort along the way but, Father, knowing that the Spirit indwells us, knowing that Christ has promised never to leave us nor to forsake us, that he is with us always even to the end of the age, that the one who suffered and bled and died on the cross did so in order to redeem us completely never to leave us, Father, we look to Christ and we say help us to be faithful until the end. Give us grace for the trials that await us. And give us strength and an eagerness and an

ability to meet the opportunities that will be ours later in life. We praise you for the comprehensive nature of our salvation, that in Scripture and in Christ we are sufficient for whatever may come. So we look forward to the future not with fear but with hope and confidence at the ultimate outcome. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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