



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Acts 1: 6-11

Acts

“The Mission”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are continuing our study in the Book of Acts. We began it last week, we looked at the first five verses and this morning we're going to look at verses 6 through 11. The last conversation that the apostles had with the Lord before He ascended. We read in verse 6, “So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, ‘Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them, “It is not for you to know the times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

“After He said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, it is a privilege to be together with the saints on a Sunday morning where we can gather together and open your word and study the scriptures and we look to you as we do that. We count it a privilege and a blessing to look into this great book of Acts. We pray that as we do so this morning and as we do so next week and in the weeks to come, that you would bless us with an understanding of this great history of the church, the early church, the acts of Jesus Christ through the Holy

Spirit in His people. And may we be instructed in all that you have for us to learn about your church and about the work of your son today in the midst of it, of the power of the Holy Spirit and all that that means for us.

We look to you to bless. We look to you to bless us with that this morning and may we enjoy our time together and benefit greatly from it as we are reminded by Luke as he quotes our Lord and tells us about the power of the spirit of God that we have. And so Father, we look to you to bless us and build us up in the faith and teach us your word. You have blessed us greatly with new life. We, through no work of our own, through no merit of our own but strictly by your sovereign grace have been brought to an understanding of the truth of Jesus Christ, have been brought to a saving knowledge of Him, brought to faith in Him.

And as we understand the picture fully, as we understand what you have done, we realize that this is a plan of yours, it goes back to all eternity. And you chose us before we had ever done good or bad. And you set your love on a people and sent your son to purchase them and your spirit to draw them to a saving knowledge of Him so that when we understand it all, we must confess with Jonah that salvation is of the Lord from beginning to end. And we praise you for that.

It is your work from beginning to end and it is a great work and innumerable multitude, Father. It's not a small number of people that you have determined would be your people but a vast multitude. And that gives us the encouragement to know that we are to go out and with confidence proclaim the gospel knowing that the spirit of God will use us to draw those people to yourself. They are there and it is for us to minister and to preach the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

May we do that. May we be moved to do that by our time of study together in this text. So bless us, Lord, spiritually, teach us, prepare us for the week to come and for the weeks and the months and the years to come if that be your will. And Father, bless us materially, physically as well. We are physical creatures and we have needs of a physical, material nature. We remember those who have asked for our prayers, who are on our prayer list and a number of people. We pray that you'd bless them. We pray that you would give encouragement, that you would give healing, that you would give restoration to health from surgeries or from various kinds of treatment that individuals have undergone and we pray that you would restore to health if that be your will.

That our health, Father, is in your hands. We enjoy it for the most part and oftentimes, because of that, we take it for granted. We take it as the normal course of events that we get up in the morning and feel free and complete a day of hard work and do that the next day and yet the reality is, Father, every day is a gift from you, every beat of our heart, every breath that we take is a gift from you and our health, our lives are in your hands. So we thank you for the health that you have given.

We pray for those that are not experiencing that now, that they would know that ultimately this comes from you as well and that difficult times, hard times, unhealthy times physically come from you for a purpose. And may that purpose be achieved in their lives, draw them close to you and encourage them. May their walk with you grow closer through a time of difficulty. And if it please you, we pray you'd raise them up to good health.

We pray that you'd bless us this evening when we return to celebrate the Lord's Supper. We do, as Mark said, that until our Lord comes, just as He instructed us and that reminds us, Father, that the savior who came a first time will come a second time just as the angels told the apostles there on the Mount of Olives that the same Jesus will come in the same way. He will return to this earth physically, He will return to this earth with great glory and may we look forward to that day and may we be moved and motivated to serve Him faithfully until that time or until we're brought into His presence. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] Most of us here or maybe I should say most of us men here have had some time in our life tried to skip stones across a lake or if we couldn't do that, tossed rocks into a pond and watched the ripples move over the surface of the water. It's the kind of thing that we do in an idle moment but it also gives a picture of God's plan and mission for the church. And what happened when it began carrying the gospel of salvation to the lost?

Began in Jerusalem, moved from there like waves over the world out to the four corners of the earth is what the Lord told His disciples to do in His last conversation with them before being taken up into heaven. But it wasn't what they were expecting Him to tell them. They were walking together up the side of the Mount of Olives. For 40 days the Lord had been giving them instruction on two main subjects: the kingdom of God and the spirit of God and He has only recently told them that in a few day they would be baptized with the spirit.

And so thinking that the outpouring of the spirit would occur when God established the kingdom and with some reason because the prophets of Israel associated the two, well, they naturally asked Jesus, “Is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” And they were excited in the question and we get a sense of that from the way Luke describes it. He says, “They were asking,” meaning they were repeatedly asking if this was the time for the kingdom to come.

The Lord quieted their excitement with an answer that redirected their thoughts from the future to the present and to the mission of the church in this age. “He said to them,” in verse 7, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.” Now some have taken the Lord’s response here as a correction of the apostle’s understanding of the kingdom. John Calvin, for example, commented that there are as many errors in their question as words.”

John Stott has written that their question betrays doctrinal confusion about the kingdom and that their error was that they were expecting a national, political, territorial kingdom. And it’s true, that’s what they were expecting. They were expecting a material kingdom, that’s very clear from the question, from the verb restore. Is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel, that are you restoring what was once present and is not now present?”

They were thinking of the Davidic kingdom, they were thinking of a national, political, territorial realm. And Stott goes on to suggest that all of this must have filled Jesus with dismay. Well, if it did, Jesus doesn’t express that dismay and it is very hard to imagine that after 40 days of teaching on the subject of the kingdom of God, the disciples have completely misunderstood everything that He said. But if they had, then why didn’t Jesus correct them?

If their question betrayed a misunderstanding of the nature of the kingdom, we would have expected our Lord to say something about that, say something like, “Have I been with you so long, have I spoken with you at such length on the subject of the kingdom all through my ministry and over the past 40 days and still you do not understand? The kingdom is not a territorial, material realm, it is spiritual. The kingdom is not without, it’s within. It is not to come, it is present.”

Well, we would have expected him to do that if they have misunderstood all of His teaching about the kingdom, misunderstood the nature of the kingdom, but He didn’t do that. He didn’t deny their expectation of a literal, earthly kingdom and

that’s significant. What He denied them was their request for the date of the coming of the kingdom. ““It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed,” He said. Fixed for what? For the restoring of Israel’s glory in the establishment of the earthly kingdom, the Messianic kingdom, what we call the millennial kingdom.

And Jesus had spoken often about the kingdom to come on earth. For example, in Matthew 19:28, He told the disciples that, “In the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, that they would sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” And then He added that everyone who left houses and family for His sake will receive many times as much and will inherit eternal life. Now that is a future glorious age that He is describing. It is an age when the earth will be regenerated, revived. It will experience great glory and that was Israel’s ancient hope, the Old Testament is filled with prophecies about it from Isaiah 2:1-4 to Micah 4:1-4 and it will happen.

The kingdom will come but it was not for them to know when it would come. No one knows the date except the Father in heaven. And the Lord had told the disciples that before. So if He is dismayed over anything in their question, what He’s dismayed about is that they would seek to know the date or the time. Matthew 24:36, He told His disciples, “Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. Therefore,” he said, “be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.”

Now there is a warning in that as well as an exhortation or as well as an encouragement, and the warning is this: we are not to be setting dates for the Lord’s coming. And it’s significant that the Lord would make that point, not only in the Book of Acts but in the Book of Matthew and elsewhere because that has been a problem down through the history of the church, people setting dates and people listening to them.

One author gives a list of ten dates between the year 1260 and 1834 when the second coming was expected and really, that is a conservative estimate. You can go before the date of 1260 and certainly after the date of 1834 and find many examples of people who have set dates for the coming of the Antichrist or the coming of the Son of God. So we could probably multiple that number many times over. We

cannot know when the climatic days of history will begin and when the Lord will return.

So whenever you hear a date for the second coming and you will hear a date for the second coming if you haven't heard it many times already, you can dismiss it as wrong and you can dismiss the one who set the date as completely false. Jesus said, “You do not know which day your Lord is coming.” And if someone says, “I know the date when the Lord is coming,” then he or she is denying the word of our Lord. What we do know is that He is coming.

And the exhortation to the disciples and to us is to be on the alert, it is to be vigilant. He may come soon and that should give us strong incentive to do the work at hand and it has given strong incentive for Christians to do that down through the ages. Historians have indicated that. The economic historian, David Landes, who describes himself as an unbeliever, points out that the main factors in the great economic achievement of western civilization are mainly religious and one of them, he said, is the Jewish and Christian sense of linear not cyclical time. Because linear time meant that there is progress to history. The pagan thought differently from that. The pagan thought of time as repeating itself, events reoccurred over and over again, time, history is cyclical, it's like a great windmill going around and around but going nowhere.

It had no final goal, no real direction. The Christian, on the other hand, believe that history has a goal. That goal is the kingdom of God and time is moving toward it. There is progression and purpose in time so that what we do in the present counts in the future. Those who live for the kingdom to come, who work for the kingdom to come will be blessed in that kingdom when it comes. A knowledge of the end affects the way a person lives. And our destiny, our glorious destiny should motivate us to live earnest lives in the present, not speculating about dates but devoting ourselves to our work which is kingdom work.

And that is what the Lord emphasized in His last conversation with the apostles. Our mission in the world in this present age, that's what He gives in verse 8. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” Until the kingdom comes, the apostles were to carry on His work in His absence by being His witnesses and that's what the Book of Acts is

about, Christ’s work and the power of the Holy Spirit through the church of Jesus Christ and that work was to be His witnesses by testifying to the truth. That’s what a witness does.

The word witness is from the Greek word *martus*. It’s the word from which we get martyr. And that’s what martyrs were, they were witnesses. Many of the early witnesses of Christ gave witness with their blood. Stephen was the first to be martyred and we read about him in chapter 7. He was martyred of his testimony to Jesus Christ. Later there was the apostle James who was martyred. In fact, the testimony of tradition is that all the apostles died a martyr’s death with the exception of John, in addition to them, many others in the early centuries of the church died in that way. They shed their blood in testimony to the person and work of Jesus Christ. But having said that, a martyr in the strict sense of the term is not one whose blood is shed, but is one who bares testimony among men to the historic facts to the life and ministry of Christ and to the meaning of it.

John began his first epistle in that way. He writes, “What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands concerning the word of life, we have seen and testify or we bear witness and proclaim to you.” In other words, he and the apostles testified to the reality of who Christ is and what Christ did in His miracles, in His crucifixion, in His resurrection and in His ascension and they could testify to that. They could testify in a very vivid way because they were there, they saw it all. They spoke with Him, they listened to Him, they touched Him. They were actually present when all of these things happened and in testifying to those facts of history, they then proclaimed the meaning of it all, they proclaimed the good news, that there is eternal life in Him for all who believe.

And that is our mission as well. We are to proclaim the life, the death, the resurrection and the ascension and the salvation of Jesus Christ, the God-Man. We are to be His witnesses. We are to witness to the truth of the testimony of the apostles, witness to the truth of the bible and the reality of that truth in our own lives. That’s our mission. And humanly speaking, it is a hard mission. In fact, humanly speaking, it is an impossible mission. Paul describes it in that way when he wrote to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 1:18, he called the word of the cross, “Foolishness to those who are perishing. The things we say, may they consider foolish.” But then

Paul added, “That to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.” And that’s the key. It’s the power of God.

The message that we are to declare which unbelievers cannot believe is true and they can understand what we’re saying, they can understand the words and the meaning, can understand that we believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God, that Jesus Christ became a man, that Jesus Christ died and satisfied the justice of God, they can understand what we say, but they cannot understand that it is true. Cannot believe that. They dismiss it as absurd. It’s foolishness and yet that same message, Paul says, that very message that they dismiss as foolish is alive and it is powerful.

Not because we are persuasive in speaking it, but because God makes it effective. It is the power of God. It is a supernatural work that we do, a supernatural mission that we have been given and that is what the Lord says. The power of our witness comes from the Holy Spirit. You shall receive power, the Lord said, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

The word power is in Greek the word dynamis and it is often pointed out that the word dynamite is derived from that word in order to illustrate the greatness of this power that we have through the spirit. It is great, it is explosive. It is the greatest power on earth but it is power of a very different kind from that which we think of when we think of dynamite. The power of the Holy Spirit is creative power, life-changing power, the kind of power that could make simple, fearful fishermen into mighty preachers. Men who became bold and stood before the rulers of the day, the powerful men of their day and fearlessly proclaim the truth to them with amazing results people believed.

The gospel spread and the authorities couldn’t stop it because it is a work of the spirit, not a work of men. It’s the greatest power in all the earth. It is like an explosive in that it does destroy. It destroys error. It topples false ideas. It takes captive the minds and the thoughts of rebellious men and having torn that down, it then rebuilds at the same moment with truth and life and joy. That’s what the apostles were equipped with, the word of truth in a spirit empowered mission. And the early church was so effective in that mission that Paul and his companions were accused of having turned the world upside down.

That’s what happens when God’s people obey Him and go out with the gospel of eternal life, the Holy Spirit empowers them to do a great work. And that’s our

mission. Not to alter the social order of the world, the apostles didn't do that, they didn't enter into gentile cities and call for political change or lobby to enact new laws or preach against the low moral conditions of their day. Now, there is a place today for that among citizens. But that's not the mission of the church. It's different. It is spiritual, it's not social. We are to preach the word, to proclaim the exclusive gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. We are to proclaim, we are to preach the cross.

That's an unpopular message. No one likes to hear that he or she needs salvation. No one likes to hear that he or she is bad, that we are guilty, that we are undeserving. No one likes to hear that we are unable, that man is by nature at birth dead in his transgressions and sins and in need of salvation. But that's the reality and that's what the apostles taught. And as they did and as we do, the Holy Spirit uses the gospel to regenerate fallen people and cause them to repent and believe and follow Christ and seek to live righteous lives.

And as people are changed by the irresistible grace of God as they are regenerated and sanctified, then society experiences change. But that's the effect of the mission which is to proclaim the word of God, which is to teach the word of God, to be Christ's witnesses. Now to be Christ's witnesses is not to be a witness in word only but to a witness in word and deed. We follow the example of Christ by speaking the truth in love and acting in love toward all.

Now that may mean giving up our time, our personal time, our free time. That may mean giving help with our counsel, it may mean giving help with our finances. It means certainly being faithful husbands and wives. It means being good providers for our families and it means burying the burdens of fellow believers. What will the world think of us and our message if we don't love and care for our own?

But having cared for our own, we're also to care and give help for those outside the church when there is opportunity to do that. It means dealing honestly and helpfully with all people, with our neighbor. We are Christ's representatives on earth. We are His witnesses and when the world sees us, it should see Christ. And that means it should see a consistent witness, one in word and deed. That's what upsets the world, that's what turns it upside down. And that is the object of our lesson, the world is the object of our mission. It is a worldwide work that we have been given to do.

Jesus said that they would be His witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth. And in giving the geography of the mission, Jesus gives the outline of the Book of Acts. In fact, the rest of the Book of Acts can be understood as a commentary on these words and these words in verse 8 can be understood as a summary of the book.

Chapters 1 through 7 describe events in Jerusalem until the martyrdom of Stephen. Chapters 8 through 11 cover the ministry in Judea and Samaria and then the rest of the book from 12 through 28 trace the progress of the gospel from outside Palestine until it reaches Rome. So from chapter 2 on, activity in the Book of Acts resembles outward moving ripples on a pond as the Christian witness moves out from Jerusalem and across the world. And it moved at an amazing speed.

We have testimony of that. About 150 years after Pentecost, around the year 200, Tertullian wrote, and you’ve heard me quote this before, but it’s an excellent quote. He wrote, “We are but of yesterday. And we have filled every place among you, cities, islands, fortresses, towns, marketplaces, the very camp, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum, we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods.” And soon those temples would be emptied.

Paul could write from Rome in prison to the Philippians that the household of Caesar greeted them. In 30 years after Pentecost the gospel had penetrated into the palace of Caesar himself. The church is to be a missionary church. And the mission given to it is worldwide in its scope. Well, this is the final message that Jesus gave to His apostles when we come to last words. We know there’s significance in them. These are serious words that one speaks, one of the last words that one will give and so this is a very serious word that the Lord has given to His apostles and to His church and having given it, having given the mission, He then ascended into heaven we read in verse 9.

“And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” John Stott wrote, “This is no embroidery such as find in legends. There’s no evidence of poetry or symbolism.” Luke writes a very simple account of an event and writes of it as literal and as an historical fact and he had many witnesses there who watched this unfold as our Lord physically, bodily left this world and ascended up to heaven.

It was a significant moment and I say that because we oftentimes pay more attention to the Lord’s birth and death and resurrection than we do to His ascension. Now we should certainly pay great attention to His birth, His death and His resurrection, but the ascension of our Lord is also very important. It is really the completion of the resurrection. The resurrection confirmed Christ’s victory on the cross, confirmed His victory over death and it is the proof that the Father has accepted His sacrifice for us. That’s what the resurrection did.

The ascension is the final proof of the Father’s approval of His son’s earthly ministry. As a result, He was received up into heaven and enthroned at the Father’s right hand. Not enthroned at the Father’s right hand in order to sit in some kind of celestial bliss and rest. He ascended to the throne in heaven to begin His heavenly ministry on behalf of His people. When He declared from the cross, “It is finished,” He meant that His priestly work of atonement was finished. It’s done. There’s nothing we can add to the work of salvation. It was completed at the cross, we can simply receive it.

So when He said, “It is finished,” He meant that His priestly work of atonement was finished, not His priestly work of intercession. And that is going on now. He is a divine priest. He is an eternal priest and in Hebrew 7:25, we read that because His priesthood is eternal and permanent, He always lives to make intercession for us. He’s unlike the priests of Israel, the priests of Aaron. They would minister for a time, for a few years maybe a decade or two or three and then they would die and their ministry would end. Another priest would come along and do the same thing. And then he would die and another priest would succeed.

And as the author of Hebrews points out, “Our Lord Jesus Christ is a high priest of a different order, the order of Melchizedek and His priesthood is different from the priesthood of Aaron, it is eternal, it never ceases. Don’t need to worry about our Lord’s priesthood ceasing at some point in our life. He ever lives to make intercession for us. He is a divine priest but He’s also a human priest. He is the God-Man and because He is a man, He can sympathize with us in our weaknesses.

This is the value of having Him as our priest, He understands what we do through. He, in His life as a man, suffered our afflictions, physical and emotional. He knows what it is to become hungry and tired, to be in want. He knows what it is to be exhausted after a day of labor and to fall asleep in that exhaustion. He knows

what it is to be rejected, to be despised of men. He's experienced all of that and He suffered our temptations yet without sin. He suffered our temptations but He never lusted, He never coveted. He suffered the full force of our temptations yet without sin.

And so He sympathizes with us in all of our weaknesses. He knows how to pray for us and how to give help at the right time and He does just that. His ascension assures us of the great truth that we now have a man in heaven. We represent Him on earth, He represents us in heaven and He intercedes for us, He ministers for us, He is doing that at this very moment for each and every one of His people.

So His ascension assures us of that, also assures us that He will receive us into that place with Himself. But the ascension was also the means for His even greater work on earth because having ascended to the throne of heaven, He was able to then send the Holy Spirit. He told His disciples that in the upper room discourse, you'll remember back in John 16:7, He said that before the spirit could come He had to go, it was to their advantage that He leave. They didn't want that, but His going meant He prepare a place for them and then receive them to Himself so His going is not a permanent departure. But His going was necessary in the meantime so that the spirit of God would come.

And through the spirit, though He is in heaven and in His glorified human nature, He is spiritually present everywhere in the world and in this church through the Holy Spirit. Because of His ascension, the extent of His ministry on earth is greater than it was when He was here present in body. His ministry was restricted to Jerusalem and Judea and through Samaria and Galilee, but now it's worldwide. It's to the four corners of the earth. So His ascension was a great blessing. But at the time the apostles were not sure of that. And not having fully grasped the blessing of His departure, they were still saddened by it.

Verse 10 states that they were gazing intently into the sky. Evidently straining their eyes to find Him, to get one last glimpse of Him, not wanting to let Him go, hoping that maybe He would reappear. He had done that during the 40 days following His resurrection. He would appear to them sudden as you'll remember in the room where the doors were locked and He'd pass through those doors and He'd be immediately in their presence and then He would disappear as He did with those two disciples with whom He had accompanied home. He sat down with them, broke

bread and disappeared. And then He would reappear. So maybe they were thinking that that might happen and that’s why it was necessary for Him to depart in a very definitive way. He could simply disappeared.

But in this way of departing, it was clearly signaled to them that that period of their physical association, that kind of relationship with Him was now over. This time His departure was final. He had returned to heaven. But they didn’t immediately get the message. They stayed on the Mount of Olives staring up into heaven until we read two men in white clothing, two angels, got their attention and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

In other words, His absence is not permanent. He will return and He will return in the same way that He departed which means He will return bodily, visibly and He will return gloriously. And He will return to the same place, in the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, it’s a particular geographical location where he will come and that’s what the prophet Zechariah has told us in Zechariah 14:4, “His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem and the Mount,” Zechariah says, “will be split in its middle from east to west causing a large valley in between.”

So there will be great topographical changes when He comes and He will come to that mount. Well, this in effect is the answer to the apostles question of when He would restore the kingdom to Israel. It will occur when He returns. That’s Israel’s hope, that’s our hope, that’s the hope of mankind, that Jesus Christ is coming again.

In the meantime, we are not to be gazing into the sky. We’re not to be idly waiting for Him to come back. We are to be active, we are to be carrying out the mission that He has given us to do by being witnesses throughout the earth, witnesses at home begins in Jerusalem and then to Judea and Samaria and to the outermost parts of the earth, we are to witness wherever we are. In your family, in your workplace, wherever you may be. And that witness is to go out. So that’s our mission. We are to be diligent in it. We are to be carrying it out.

But the bible makes it plain, we are to do that while keeping alert for His return, never losing sight of that great hope. We find that instruction in the parables that our Lord told about the kingdom. In Matthew 25:13, He said, “Be on the alert,”

and then He told him the parable of the talents, how a man went on a journey and gave his three servants talents, pieces of money to invest. Two were faithful, one was not. Then after a long time, he said, the master returned to settle accounts. The unfaithful servant had buried his talent, he put it to no good use and he was punished. But the faithful servants were rewarded. To each of them, the master said, “Well, done good and faithful slave. Enter into the joy of your master.”

Well, the master has been gone a long time. And He may return soon. Do you look forward to that day? Are you expecting it? It will come. Jesus said, “The Father has fixed the time.” That means it has already been determined. That means it is certain and that tells us about the nature of time and the nature of history. Time is linear. It is moving in the line that God has determined. It is governed and guided by Him. Life is not governed by blind chance but by divine wisdom. Our lives and our times are in His hands. Ultimately, they’re not in our hands.

And that’s good news because that means all of the events of your life, the good times, the difficult times, ultimately all of those come from the Lord. He’s managing the times of our life. He’s governing history. He’s in control of it all. He’s the creator of history and that is not only encouragement for life as it is, to live a faithful life, a trusting life, but that is encouragement for the mission that we are to engage in. We are to trust Him and we can trust Him. He’s the one who’s in control of all things. He’s the one who has set the times out. He’s directing it all.

So we can work diligently with the knowledge and the confidence that a sovereign God is Lord over all. And with a hope that He will bring it all to a glorious conclusion, bring it to its destiny, bring it to its end, and Christ will come and we can live in that hope and the hope of hearing Him say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master.”

Now that should serve as strong incentive to be active in kingdom work and labor for the things that last. In the last chapter of the bible, in Revelation 22:12, Jesus says, “Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to every man according to what he has done.” That should motivate us to redeem the time, to focus on the mission and to look forward to that glorious end. What a great life God has given to His people. We get to do His work, we get to do Christ’s work and do it in His power. And then after the most meaningful life that a person can have, a life doing God’s work, then we are rewarded for it, rewarded for what He has

done through us, rewarded for the grace of God that He’s produced in us and be blessed for all eternity.

That is a great life and that is motivation to be doing the work that we’ve been given and yet I would say it’s not the greatest motivation. The greatest motivation for service, the greatest motivation for faithfulness in the mission that’s been given to us is Christ Himself. Paul said that about himself, he told the Philippians, “That for me to live as Christ and to die is gain.” For him to live on, he was saying, meant to serve Christ and to serve his people. And he longed to do that because he loved the people of Christ, he loved those Philippians and he greatly desired to please the Lord and knew that it pleased him to render faithful service and bless his people. And yet Paul said to die, well, that meant to be with Him and there was no greater blessing than that.

Wasn’t that Paul was looking forward to the glories of heaven, no doubt he did, that’s something to look forward to, but that’s not the essence of it. The great blessing of it all is to be with Jesus Christ, and that was what motivated the apostle Paul, the Lord Jesus Christ. It was his love for Him that gave Paul the incentive to leave his home, to leave what possessions he had, to go out across the world preaching a gospel of eternal life and salvation in Jesus Christ.

And it’s the same for us. For us to do that, for us to engage in the mission that Christ has given us and to increasingly experience the power of the Holy Spirit in that work that we do, we must increasingly know Christ personally. We must fellowship with Him by reflecting on His person and His work, reflecting on His glory, reflecting on all that He is and all that He has done for us. Think about it, meditate upon it, rejoice in it. That leads to a life less focused on self and a life more devoted to Christ. Well, that’s what we all need.

But it may be that there are some here this morning who are here without Christ who have not believed in Him. If so, you cannot do His work which is the greatest work of all. You can do nothing to please Him and you cannot enter into His joy at the end of days. You are completely unprepared for the end. You’re lost. You need the savior and the savior of the world is Jesus Christ. The good news is that He came to die for sinners. He did that; He accomplished that work and God demonstrated His approval of His son’s sacrifice for our sins by raising Him from the dead, raising Him gloriously and enthroning Him in heaven at His right hand. There

is now a man in heaven which is the proof that He has opened up heaven for all who believe.

And so if you're here without Christ, if you've not believed, believe in Him. He is the door into heave, the door into eternal life. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ whose death was died for the sins of men so that all who trust in Him would have the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. May God help you to do that if you're here without Him. For all of us who have trusted in Him, may He help us all to become engaged in the mission that He has given us to do. Time is short, the mission is great, may God bless us with the incentive and the desire to do it, to be His witnesses. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace. We thank you for the mission that you have given us. What a great privilege it is to be witnesses of Christ in the world, to have the message of life and to take it to others. We confess that we fail to do that so often. We become content with life as it is, with our own routines and the things that interest us in this world, many of which are good or indifferent, not bad in and of themselves, but they can become a distraction. Father, free us from distractions. Help us to see the importance of the mission and to act in obedience and know that as we do so, we will be empowered by the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit to do a good and effective work, a work that has benefits of eternal value, lasting benefits. Father, may we do just that. We thank you for the salvation that we have in Him. We thank you for sending Him into the world to die for sinners and it's in His name we pray. Amen.